

# Photography for Dummies

## Learn Simple Tricks of the Trade From the DTH Photo Desk

### Photos Keep Memories, Moments

Most pictures fail because of bad composition or poor flash use, but a few tricks can fix those problems.

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Guest Columnist

What is a good picture? That is a question with many different answers depending on the context of the discussion. To a newspaper photo editor, a good picture is a moment, a slice of life that tells a story. To a parent, a good picture is often any good exposure of one of their children. To a midterm-weary college student, it might be a picture that reminds him of last summer when he was riding the waves off the California coast.

In general, a good picture is one that evokes a memory or an emotional response. It reminds you of good times, good friends and fond memories.

Regardless of how good a photographer you are, there is always a sense of anticipation and optimism when your photos come back from the processing lab. Unfortunately, this is often followed by an equal sense of disappointment when the pictures you remembered taking don't match the results. Fortunately, there are some simple guidelines to help you improve your photography skills.

Most photos fail because of poor composition, distracting backgrounds or poor use of flash. With a little help, you can easily overcome many of these problems and become a better photographer.

When composing pictures, always try to have your subject in the foreground. Empty space is boring. Even if you can't place your subject in the foreground, find something that is visually interesting to fill the empty space. Use other elements to frame your subject. It is helpful to integrate your subject with the relevant foreground and background. We call this context and it helps define the subject by providing a sense of place and time.

Just as relevant backgrounds are important, distracting backgrounds are annoying. There is nothing worse than having your favorite people look like they have trees growing out of their heads and electrical lines coming out of their ears. It is difficult to see in two dimensions, but that is essentially what your camera does. Even if a telephone pole is a block away, if it is lined up directly behind your subject, it will look like it is growing out of his head.

Before you take a picture, look closely through the viewfinder around the entire frame and in front of and behind your subject. Often a step or two to the side or a slight tilt of your camera makes the difference between a good or bad picture.

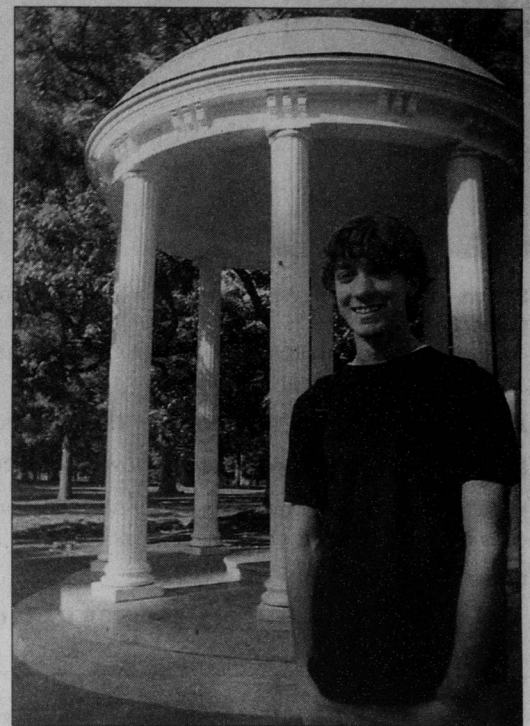
One of the easiest ways to ruin photos is by using flash. Most inexpensive cameras have a built-in flash that is directly above the lens. This type of light, called direct flash, creates dark shadows behind the subject, often causes red eye (regardless of what promises the manufacturer makes) and provides a very flat and bright light that illuminates your subject but not the background. Flash usually ruins the mood of the scene and makes pictures look very artificial. It is also important to realize that these small flashes are useless beyond about 20-30 feet. If you go to concerts or night sports events, you always see thousands of flashes going off in the crowd. These actually have little effect since the light is not strong enough to ever reach the subjects.

These few hints will make you a better photographer, but always remember, no matter how good your technique, it is the moment and expression that really makes a picture memorable.

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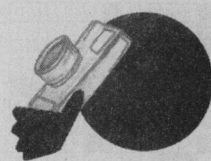


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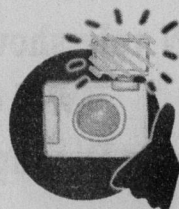
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**Monuments:** Whenever people travel, they love to take pictures in front of monuments and landmarks. It makes for great memories, but creates photo problems. Don't back away from the subject (the person) and make them too small, while creating too much space around the monument (below left). Instead, get closer. Don't be afraid to cut out a little or a lot of the monument, just frame enough to be able to tell what the monument is. Also, remember that cameras do work in the vertical position.



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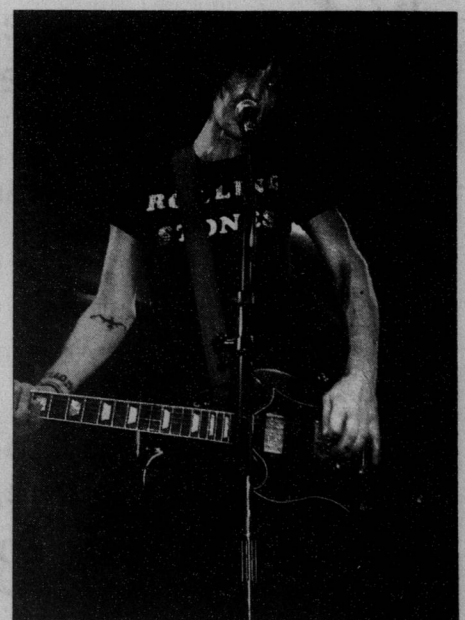
**Sunsets:** Who can resist taking pictures of sunsets? When shot by itself, the colors come out beautifully. But if you are placing a subject in the foreground, there can be a problem. The camera reads that there is enough light in the frame to take the picture without a flash, while in reality your subject needs additional light to illuminate the face. To correct this problem, simply make sure that the flash is on. This way you won't end up with a silhouetted friend against a setting sun.



**Concerts:** The best thing to do when taking pictures at a concert is to get to the venue early to get close. If your camera



does not have a bulb function, there is another technique to use to get better results. The nice thing about concerts is that there are colored lights that make for good pictures (when printed in color, the guitarist in the photo to the right is lit in red). Those lights are not bright enough to fully light the subject, however, so you need to use your flash. To keep the color from the lights in the picture, you need to make the flash softer by making a diffuser. Basically all that means is tape some tissue paper over the flash and shoot normally. This soft light from the flash adds just enough light.



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