

Photography Quick Tips

A starting point for photography beginners

By Paul Darvell

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Online Stuff

I used to get a lot of feedback that people would like to train with me but were not able to travel to Berkshire in the UK to do the training.

To answer this, I created a few online courses that can be downloaded anywhere in the world.

The comprehensive course:

<http://www.hotphotowalks.com/photography-in-4-hours/>

The introductory course:

<http://www.hotphotowalks.com/pqs/>

Stop taking bad photos:

<http://www.hotphotowalks.com/stop-taking-bad-photos/>

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Introduction

This book is not designed to comprehensively cover each topic. The purpose of this book is to identify and introduce the topics that beginners should investigate further. The book does provide some options for further investigation, however, you are free to go your own way too.

The book is broken into two sections. Section 1 is Camera Quick Tips which covers the key camera functionality you need to understand to take great photos. Section 2 is Composition Quick Tips which covers composition techniques to make your photographs really stand out from the crowd.

Camera Quick Tips

Camera Quick Tips Introduction

This camera quick tips provides small bite sized chunks of information that hopefully will make you a better photographer. You can dip into the sections that interest you or read the whole thing, it is entirely up to you.

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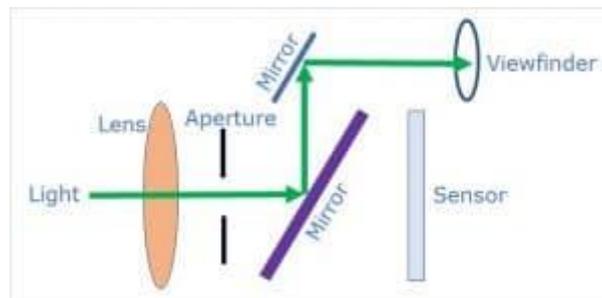
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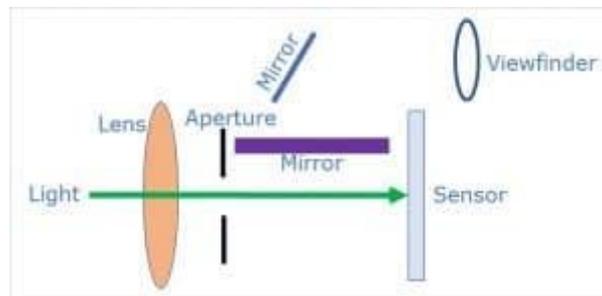
How a Camera Works

The word 'Photography' means drawing with light. It will come as no surprise that the main input for a photograph and a camera is light. Therefore, this first camera quick tips looks at how that light makes its way through the camera. The drawings below explain the key elements of a camera.

Before the shutter release button is pressed:



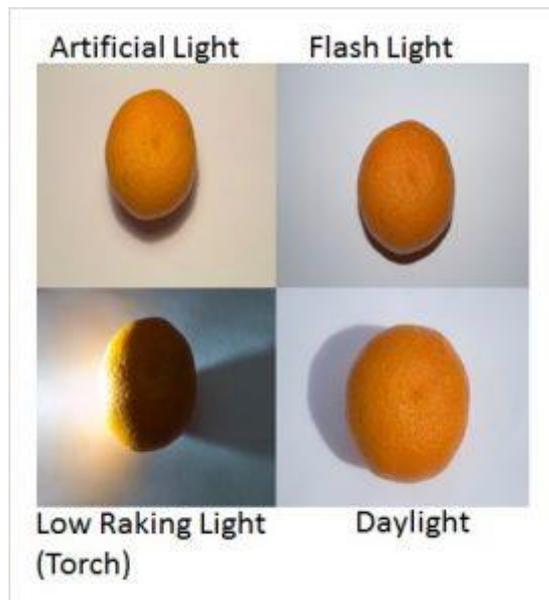
After the shutter release button is pressed:



Light enters the camera through the lens and then travels through an aperture (hole). Where it goes after that depends on whether you have pressed the shutter release button (the button you press to take the photograph). If you have not pressed the shutter release button then the light bounces off some mirrors to appear in your viewfinder. If you have depressed the shutter release the mirrors are raised and the light hits the sensor to capture the photograph. That is why, when you press the shutter release button it goes dark in the view finder, as the first mirror has been raised.

The Impact of Light

To take great photographs you need to understand light and that is what this camera quick tips will cover. However, light can also be used to your advantage to create different moods and effects. We can manipulate light without the need for an expensive studio. The photos taken below were taken without studio equipment.



As we can see above, the position and type of light drastically changes the photograph. When you are taking a photograph, you need to think about:

- Direction of the light
- The strength of the light
- Impact of shadows

Light can be manipulated easily by added, changing and removing/reducing the light. There are many products on the market that will help you achieve this. Here is a [selection of photography lights](#) and a [selection of reflectors and diffusers](#).

Let's talk about natural light. We have all seen stunning photographs taken at Sunrise and Sunset. We can often use natural light to our advantage throughout the day and night. Yes, the lack of light at night can help us. Photographers often refer to 'golden Hour' being the time after sunrise and before sunset. It does not necessarily last an Hour but the result of the sun being close to the horizon is a reddish light. Below are some examples of photographs I have taken during golden Hour.



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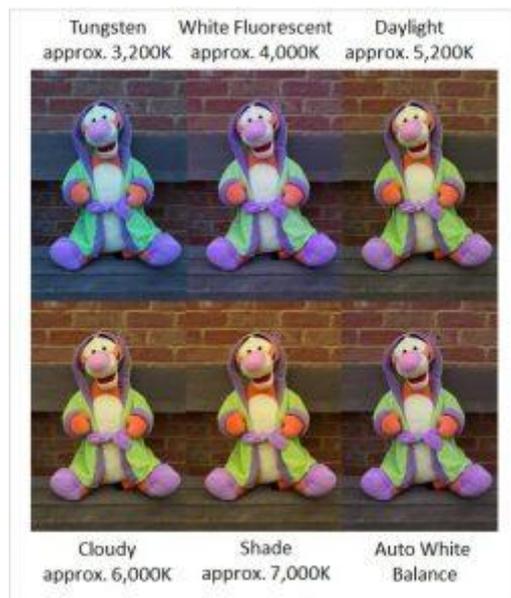
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White Balance

White light from different light sources is not the same colour, it has what is called a different colour temperature. This camera quick tips will look at this important element. Colour temperatures are measured in degrees of Kelvin (K) on a scale from 1,000 to 10,000.

Most cameras will let you set your own custom white balance but you don't need to get that technical to manage colour temperatures, if you do not want to. Most cameras come with Auto White Balance (AWB), the camera chooses the white balance for you. They also have settings for different light types, see the examples below which show the effect that a different white balance will have on your photograph.



In the example above, the colour temperature that gave the most realistic photograph is the Cloudy setting. As you can see, there is quite a difference in the colours between the Cloudy setting and the Auto White Balance.

If you want to experiment with custom white balance, [you will need a set of these cards](#). The way you set custom white balance varies from camera to camera, therefore, I recommend you look at your camera manual for the exact steps.

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Histogram

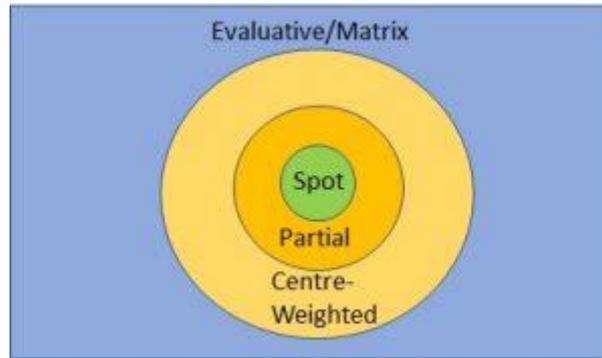
If you have ever wondered what a histogram is, this camera quick tips is for you. The histogram is a chart of the luminosity (brightness) of each pixel in an individual photograph. It is measured on a range of 0 to 256 with the darkest being on the left (0) and the brightest being on the right (256). The chart measures the number of pixels at each point in the range from 0 to 256. If there is a concentration of pixels on the far left or right of the histogram this may suggest that detail has been clipped (lost) and you may wish to adjust the exposure. However, some pictures will have clipping, for example where shot against a bright white background. There is no perfect shape of a histogram.

Metering modes

Your camera needs to measure the amount of light that is hitting the sensor so that it knows what setting to select. Cameras have a built in light meter.

The most common modes are Matrix/Evaluative, Centre-weighted, Partial Metering and Spot.

The diagram below summarises (and simplifies) the metering modes.



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Image formats

This camera quick tips topic is often overlooked, do so at your peril! The majority of DSLRs let you choose a file format or quality for the photographs that you capture. If you get this wrong, you will either fill up your memory cards very quickly, have photographs you can do nothing with or the file format and image quality results in you not being able to use the photo due to pixelation.

The photographs below are the same photograph but one is high quality (high number of pixels) and the other is low quality (low number of pixels). The low quality

one is an extreme example so that you can see the difference the number of pixels makes to the photograph.



The quality to choose will depend on what you will use the photographs for and how big you are likely to enlarge them.

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Memory Cards

Selecting the right memory cards are critical and will avoid frustration. This camera quick tips explains why. If you shoot in RAW like most professionals, the file sizes of each photo are huge! Therefore, they take up a lot of space on your memory cards. I hear you thinking, "that's OK, I will just go on Amazon and buy a massive memory card, that will do it!" - WRONG!

If you use settings like Continuous shot or you are a bit 'click happy' on the shutter release button, the camera is trying to record a lot of data. Most cameras have a buffer that temporarily stores the photograph's data while it is writing to your memory card, to free up the camera to take the next photograph. Depending on the size of the buffer in your camera and the speed that your memory card writes the data, freeing up space in the buffer, will determine how many continuous photographs you can actually take before your camera stops due to the buffer being full. The best way to find out your cameras limits are to just try it.

Buying a camera with a larger buffer is an expensive solution for taking more continuous shots. Cheaper options are to think about the file format you are recording. If you don't need RAW photographs, then use a JPG format which creates smaller files that are quicker to write to the memory card. However, be careful that the image quality will let you use the photo for what you want. Another option is when you are buying memory cards, [buy Class 10 memory cards](#) these have a faster write speed. I use Class 10 memory cards.

Storing and Rotating Memory Cards

Always carry spare [memory cards](#) and camera batteries as you never know when either will run out on you.

A lot of people buy massive [memory cards](#) and then keep them in their camera for months at a time. **There is a major issue with this**, memory cards do get corrupted and if they do you will lose your photos. There are software products that claim to recover the photos, none of the ones I have ever tried have worked. Therefore, when I am out taking photos I regularly swap my memory cards to minimise the loss from a corrupt memory card.

If this is too much hassle and you have the budget, buy a camera with dual memory cards so that the photographs can be saved to 2 rather than 1 card creating an instant backup. In my opinion, this is essential for wedding, news and sports photographers or anywhere scenes cannot be easily recreated in cases of card corruption. The camera options with dual memory cards from Nikon are [D7100](#), [D7200](#), [D500](#). From Canon there is the [EOS-1DX](#).

Something a lot of people overlook is where do they store the cards when out and about. Often it is bag pockets, jeans pockets etc - this is asking for trouble! I use a [memory card case like this one](#). It is a solid case with cut out foam for the cards and is completely water proof, I cannot recommend these enough!

How to Hold a Camera

The way that we hold the camera is important to minimise camera shake. This will improve the photographs that you take. Holding the camera like a pro is easy. Hold the camera with your left hand so that your fingers go around the lens and your palm is touching the bottom of the camera body. Make sure your fingers are not over the lens. Place your right hand around the right side of the camera so that your forefinger is on the shutter release. Keep your elbows tucked in tightly against your body, this will provide additional stability. Your feet should be apart a comfortable distance to give you a stable standing position.

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Camera Lenses

A camera lens fits into the camera body and is used to focus the light that passes through it. There are many different lenses on the market, far too many to cover here. Here we will just look at the general types of lenses. Lenses are grouped into types based on their focal length. The focal length is simply the distance between the lens and the sensor. The closer together they are, the wider the angle of the photograph. The bigger the distance between the lens and the sensor, the narrower the angle, creating a telephoto effect.

The table below sets out the types of lenses. However, there is no hard and fast definition for which focal length fits into which type.

Focal Length	Lens Type	Common Subjects
4mm - 16mm	Fisheye	Wide panoramas & artistic effects
16mm - 30mm	Wide angle	Interiors, architecture, landscapes
30mm - 50mm	Standard	General purpose
50mm - 300mm	Telephoto	Portraits, candid, sports
300mm+	Super telephoto	Sports, wildlife, air shows

Buy with Caution

You do not need to rush out and buy one of each of those lenses. The lenses that you need will depend on the type of photography you want to do. Lots of new photographers rush out and buy the biggest telephoto lens they can afford. If you

have the cash and want to do that, who am I to stop you? However, I would actually recommend that you look at a wide angle lens either instead of the telephoto or if you have the budget, as well as the telephoto. Below are some links to lenses depending on your camera make:

[Nikon Lenses](#)

[Canon Lenses](#)

[Pentax Lenses](#)

[Olympus Lenses](#)

Accidents happen, lenses get dropped or scratched. Something I do and I know a lot of other photographers who do this, we put a cheap [Polarizer Filter](#) on our lenses. These will help your photos but also protect your lens from scratches and damage, I would rather have to replace a cheap [filter](#) than a lens.

Changing lenses

As we have seen above, different lenses have different uses. Therefore, we need to change lenses for different situations. Most cameras lock the lens in place and have a button to release them. Look at the manual for your camera to find out how to change the lens.

The key point here is to minimise the time that the camera body is without a lens or a cover. Keeping lenses and sensors clean and free of dirt and dust that will ruin our photographs is key. You can remove marks on photographs in post processing but it is better to avoid the issue in the first place.

It is a good idea to keep a [lens cleaning kit](#) with your camera to remove smudges or dirt from your lens. I [clean my lenses](#) every time I use them to avoid dust spots in my photos.

The other key point when changing a lens is to make sure you feel or hear it lock into place. You do not want the lens falling off.

ISO

ISO is the sensitivity of the sensor to light. It stands for International Standards Organization. It is an industry recognised scale for measuring light sensitivity. The lower the ISO number, the less sensitive the sensor is to light. The ISO can be adjusted on DSLR cameras, most cameras go down to 100, some even lower. At 100 the sensor is at its least sensitive to light. Most cameras go up to 6400 and some higher. The higher the number the more sensitive the sensor is to light. However, there is a downside to a higher ISO. The higher the ISO, the more noise there is in the photograph.

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Aperture

The aperture is the hole in the camera that lets the light through to hit the sensor. DSLRs allow us to change the size of the hole. The bigger the hole, the more light that gets through. Smaller holes let less light through. Nothing complicated there.

Apertures are measured in f-stops. The lower the f-stop number the bigger the aperture.

The f-stop has a knock-on effect on something we call the 'depth of field'. Depth of field is simply referring to the sharpness of the image away from the focal point. The lower the f-stop number, the lower the depth of field. The higher the f-stop number, the higher the depth of field.

Apertures, depth of field and f-stops is an area where people often get confused. If you would like more detail and a structured photography course that will give you all of the information you need in a variety of formats including a comprehensive book with loads of pictures, 50 videos, loads of exercises, my special knowledge checker tool, check out my Photography in 4 Hours course at

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Shutter Speed

The shutter speed is the length of time that the sensor is exposed to light. It is exposed when you press the shutter release button. The values for shutter speed look like 1/400 or 0"5 or 4". The ones with the '/' mean 'of a second', for example, 1/400 means 1 400th of a second. The bigger the number after the /, the faster the speed. The ones like 0"5 mean of a second, so this one would be half a second. The ones like 4" mean the number of seconds. Your camera may also have a BULB setting. This allows you to control how long the shutter remains open by keeping the shutter release button pressed.

Which Shutter Speeds?

Different shutter speeds are good for different situations. The table below gives some example shutter speeds for different subjects.

Subject	Shutter Speed
Freezing birds in flight	1/2000
Freezing fast moving vehicles	1/1000
Freezing airshows	1/750
Freezing runners & cycles	1/500
Airshows – blurred propellers	1/250
Freezing walkers	1/250
Children playing	1/250
Panning vehicles	1/125
Panning runners & cycles	1/60
Milky water effect	1"+
Fireworks	2"+

Remember, blurring is not always a bad thing, it shows motion in a photograph. Burring and sharpness are tools for the photographer to use to help get a message across. If you would like more detail and a structured photography course that will

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The Three Factors of Perfect Exposure

There are three key elements to any photograph, they are ISO, Shutter Speed and Aperture. These three things working together will determine whether your photo is perfectly exposed or under/over exposed. Under exposed will mean that the photograph is too dark. Over exposed will mean that the photograph is too light.

It is really important that you understand how ISO, Shutter Speed and Aperture works together. If you would like more detail and a structured photography course that will give you all of the information you need in a variety of formats including a comprehensive book with loads of pictures, 50 videos, loads of exercises, my special knowledge checker tool, check out my Photography in 4 Hours course at <http://www.hotphotowalks.com/photography-in-4-hours/>

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Drive modes

Drive modes set what will happen when you press the shutter release button. The common options are single shots, continuous shots, remote controlled or self-timer shots (with various delays). When using a tripod it can be good to use a remote control (wired or wireless) or a short self-timer delay (such as 2 seconds). This will ensure that any camera shake that is caused by pressing the shutter release has settled before the photograph is taken.

Under normal condition you will probably set the camera to the default of single shot. This means the camera will take a single photograph immediately each time you press the shutter release button.

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Manual mode

With manual mode you need to decide three factors:

1. F-stop (depth of field)
2. Shutter speed
3. ISO

Depending on the type of subject, you are likely to want a specific shutter speed or depth of field, for example:

- Shutter speed: fast to freeze a bird in mid-air or slow to capture a firework
- Depth of field: low for a portrait or high for a landscape

Once you have your preferred shutter speed or depth of field you can then adjust the camera to get the lowest ISO possible to reduce noise while having an acceptable final set of setting. You may need to try several combinations to get this right. There are formulas to calculate Exposure Values (EV) but there is a much simpler way to get this right. Most DSLRs in manual mode have a scale from minus 3 to +3 on their display, it will look like this:

-3..2..1..0..1..2..3

This scale is an exposure scale measured in stops. Minus 3 means it will be under exposed by 3 stops. Plus 3 means it will be over exposed by 3 stops. Zero means it will be about right (however, this is not a perfect science).

A stop is a doubling or a halving of light in a photograph. When you half press the shutter release a pointer will appear on the scale. This will tell you what the exposure will be if you took a photograph with that configuration.

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Bracketing

Bracketing allows you to take three photographs instead of one. It will take the photograph at:

- the exposure you have set
- one under exposed by an amount or fraction of stops that you have set
- The third photograph will be over exposed by an amount or fraction of stops that you have set.

Camera Quick Tips Summary

I hope you have found at least some of these camera quick tips useful. However, these camera quick tips are not designed to be a comprehensive photography course. If you would like more detail and a structured photography course that will give you all of the information you need in a variety of formats including a comprehensive book with loads of pictures, 50 videos, loads of exercises, my special knowledge checker tool, check out my Photography in 4 Hours course at <http://www.hotphotowalks.com/photography-in-4-hours/>

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Composition Quick Tips

Composition Quick Tips Introduction

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Fill the Frame

In this composition quick tips we introduce techniques to improve your composition of photographs. Grab your camera and take some photos. Fill the frame with the subject and do not leave loads of blank space, such as sky.

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Getting Closer

In this composition quick tips you move even closer to your subject. The reason for this is to be able to spot textures and patterns. Also, getting closer is a way of turning a boring photograph into a more engaging photograph.

Here are some examples of this composition quick tip being put into practise:





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Frames Within Frames

A frame within a frame is another composition method where you create a photograph by framing the main subject within the photograph. There are many ways to achieve this:

- a head sticking out of a window
- a person standing in a doorway
- a face surrounded by a headscarf

Below is an example of frames within a frame.



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Leading lines

Lines in photographs help to steer the eye, so using lines can be a good composition tool. See the example below of a photograph with leading lines.

The purpose of the lines in this picture are to lead the eye to the post at the end of the groyne and then out to sea.



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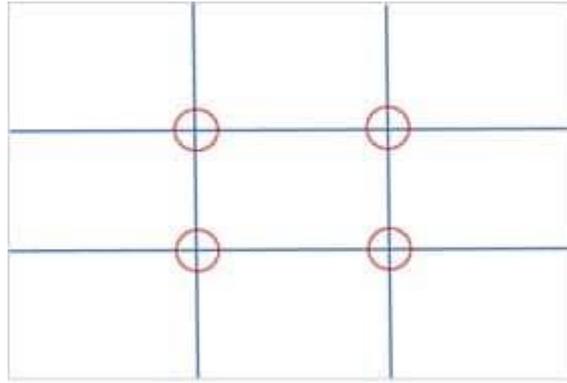
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The Rule of Thirds

The rule of thirds dissects a photograph as per the grid below.



With this technique have the points of interest along the grid lines or at the intersections (red circles).

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Changing Perspective

When we are composing photographs, it is easily to only look at a scene from eye level. However, what does the scene look like if you get down low or up high?

Change the angle so you are at a diagonal. Experiment with different positions and angles.

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Long Exposure

In this composition quick tip I will cover a couple of long exposure techniques. These are both great introductions to the world of long exposure.

Ghosting

This composition technique is easiest when you have a model. However, I have done this without a model on a busy beach. I have also been my own model by using the 10 second self-timer under drive modes.

Ghosting is a technique where you blur the models movement by using a slow shutter speed. This can create some great effects. Unless doing this in the dark, you may will need a neutral density filter. I recommend [this filter kit as it is cheap and does the job](#). It also gives you other filters to play with. [You will also need the holder](#) and depending on your camera, an [adaptor](#) make sure you pick the right size for your camera. If you want the best and have deep enough pockets, go for the [Lee Filters](#). If you go for the Lee Filters you may need an adaptor depending on the width of your lens, the adaptors are: [52mm](#), [58mm](#), [62mm](#), [67mm](#), [72mm](#), [77mm](#), [82mm](#).

Take some photographs of the model walking towards the camera. The ghosting effects should look like the photo below



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Milky Water

You may have seen the milky water effect like that in the photograph below before.



This is achieved using the same techniques as in the Ghosting exercise. It just requires a shutter speed slower than 1" (the example above has a shutter speed of 10"). To do this use a neutral density filter. I recommend [this filter kit as it is cheap and does the job](#). It also gives you other filters to play with. [You will also need the holder](#) and depending on your camera, an [adaptor](#) make sure you pick the right size for your camera. If you want the best and have deep enough pockets, go for the [Lee Filters](#). If you go for the Lee Filters you may need an adaptor depending on the width of your lens, the adaptors are: [52mm](#), [58mm](#), [62mm](#), [67mm](#), [72mm](#), [77mm](#), [82mm](#).

Composition Quick Tips Summary

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