

So you have a new camera! Now what?

by Ebony Logins



Congratulations on your new camera! This is such an exciting time because it's the start of an incredible journey. And since you're here at Clickin Moms, it's also the start of incredible friendships and your involvement in an inclusive and supportive community of inspirational people. We all started where you are, many of us are starting with you today, and we will continue growing together from this point forward.

I purchased my first DSLR, a Nikon D3100, in November 2011 and decided to learn Manual Mode right away. As soon as I realized I had no idea what I was doing, I scoured the internet for tutorials, which led me to join Clickin Moms in February 2012. Later that year, I became a Lifetime Member, and that was the best investment I ever made for my photography. I'd like to say I'm self-taught, but I am more Clickin Moms and "community-taught" if I'm really honest about it!

This guide will help you through some of the first things you should learn as a new camera owner: the exposure triangle, nailing focus, and the basics of composition and light.

First Things First

Every time you purchase a new camera or lens — as boring as it sounds — please read the manual. It's important to spend a few hours digesting the information. There is always something new to learn! Usually, you're upgrading your camera, so there will be new buttons and features that you want to learn and others that you are totally unaware of. You don't have to master the camera right away, but knowing that these new features exist will help you in the long run.



ISO 100 | f/7.1 | 1/200

Exposure

So, what is proper exposure and why is it important? Exposing an image properly means that your subject is well lit. In a properly exposed image, there is detail in the highlights, mid tones, and shadows. None of the visual information within the image is compromised, and your subject is able to stand out amidst its environment. If your image is not properly exposed, it might be underexposed or overexposed.

Overexposing means that there are areas in your image, most importantly on your subject or distracting the viewer from your subject, that are “blown out”. Blown highlights are areas that are so bright they do not render any pixel information. This is important, especially when printing images, because loss of pixel information means a loss of visual detail and those areas of your print will appear blotchy.

The same thing happens when your image is underexposed. This is when you have areas on your subject, or areas distracting your viewer from your subject, that are “clipping” your blacks. Blacks are clipped when they are so dark, they do not render any pixel information. Just like blown highlights, clipped blacks will create areas with a loss of pixel information/visual detail.

Your histogram (on your camera and in your editing software) shows information across the shadows, mid tones, and highlights and the shadows and highlights are not “blown” or “clipped”. I like to set my screen to display my histogram after a shot. I can see if the histogram is climbing up the wall to the left (clipped blacks) or to the right (blown highlights). Having most of the pixel information spread across the center of the histogram means you’ll have a lot more pixel information to work with when you’re editing.

The Exposure Triangle

There are **three components that make up proper exposure** in your straight out of camera (SOOC) images: ISO + shutter speed + aperture. Each of these has a specific purpose, is used in conjunction with the others, and can be used for technical or creative reasons.

ISO measures the amount of light sensitivity required to achieve your desired exposure and can be used to add grain.

Aperture is the size of the opening within your lens and can be used to isolate a focus area or capture a full frame of focus.

Shutter Speed controls the amount of time the shutter is open and can be used to capture movement or freeze motion.

These are important to master if you’re choosing to use your camera in a manual or semi-manual mode. When you adjust one of these components, the other two are affected. Your camera will adjust them itself in auto mode based on its perception of the scene.

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ISO 100 | f/7.1 | 1/200

This image by Chanel French has a shutter speed of 1/15 of a second. This decision allowed her to freeze movement in-camera. With a tripod or a steady hand, try playing with your shutter speed!



ISO 1600 | f/2.8 | 1/320

Kate Luber used ISO 1600 to properly expose the details in the shadows of this image.



ISO 200 | f/3.5 | 1/2000

An aperture of f/3.5 allowed Kristin Dokoza to blur the background while capturing all the important details of this adorable moment!

Nailing Focus with Your New Camera

The most discouraging thing about moving from an intuitive point and shoot or smartphone to a DSLR is missing focus. We can fix just about anything in post-production except for focus, so it's also one of the most important technical skills to master right away. There are a few reasons your images could be out of focus. Let's look at these reasons and how to fix them!

Your aperture is too wide.

This is quite common between apertures of f/1.2 and even up to f/4. If you're close to your subject, the slightest movements can impact focus within this range because the plane of focus will be quite shallow. If you're further away from your subject, you have a bit more leeway because the plane of focus will be deeper. Keep in mind that the depth of your focus usually falls behind your focus point, so you will have a bit more depth in focus behind your subject than you will in front of it.

You are moving too much or too fast.

If you're moving with your subject, even the slightest bit, you could be impacting the integrity of your shot. Learn to relax, take deep breaths, and compose yourself before taking each shot. Shoot through moments, but try not to overshoot! Taking time to think and breathe will help you think more about locking focus.

You are moving during focus-recompose.

If you're toggling your focus point, you will likely have the focus right where you want it. On the flip side, with focus-recompose, there is always a chance you are shifting your focal plane with the added movement.

Your lens needs calibrating.

If your entire image is blurry or your focus consistently falls way in front or way behind your subject, it's likely that your lens and camera body aren't working in sync. You can try the RULER TEST to see if you need to calibrate your lens. With lots of practice and a calibrated lens, you'll be all set to take tack sharp photographs!

This forum tutorial by Sarah Carlson provides you with an in-depth look on how to go about calibrating your lenses: [Quick and Easy Lens Calibration Method](#)

What about photographing all your kids in the frame at once? Nailing focus can be even more difficult when you're trying to get multiple subjects in focus at once. Keeping them in line along the same plane and using a higher aperture is a good place to start. As you practice, note how your focal length and distance from your subjects effects what's in focus.

An aperture of f/3.2 allowed me to capture all the important details in this close up family moment:



ISO 250 | f/3.2 | 1/250

When you're aiming for tack sharp focus, you may want to **toggle your focus points**. By moving the focus point in your camera, you're telling your camera exactly where you want to focus. It's a great way to freeze the motion of your moving kids!

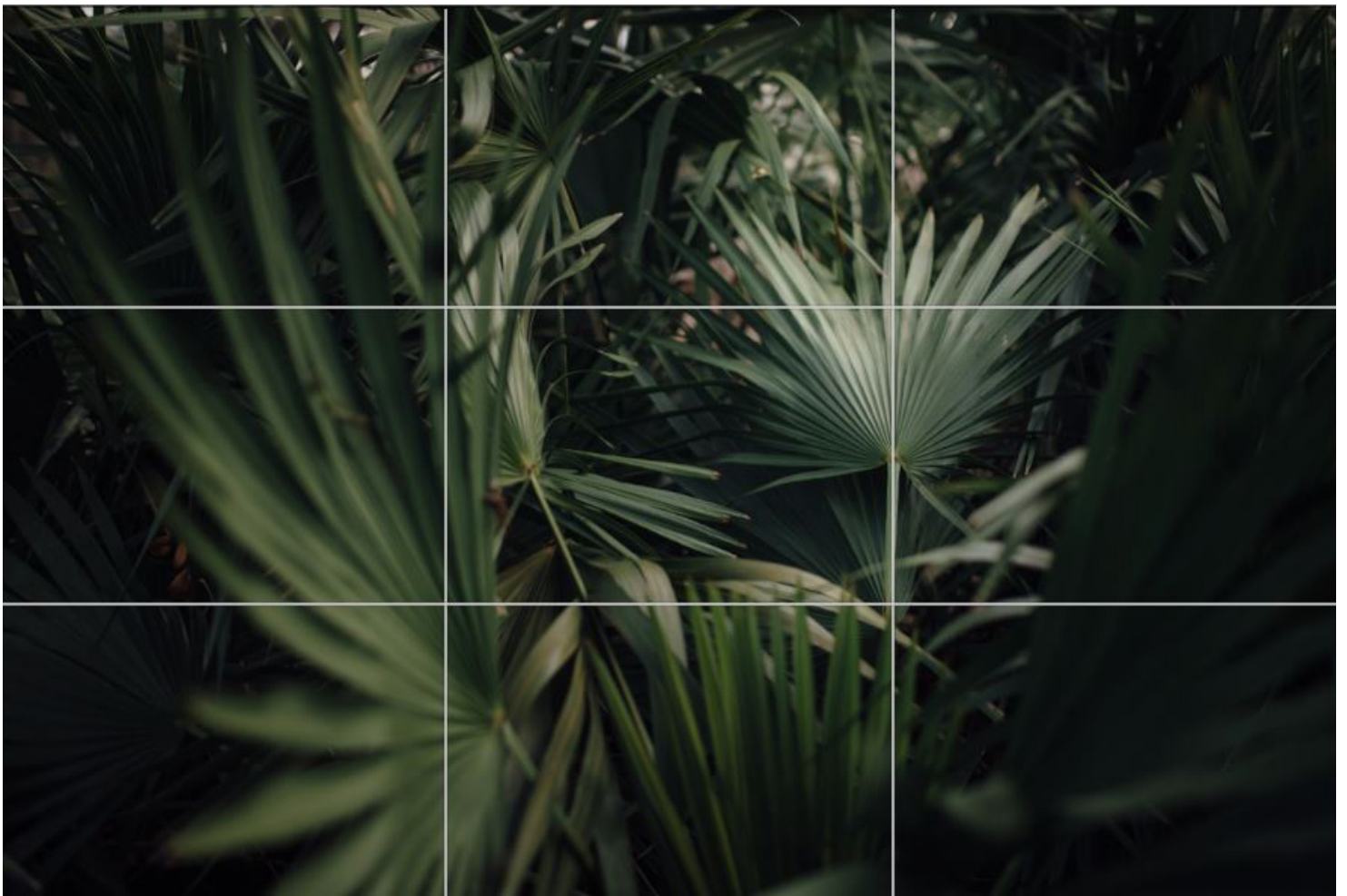
The Basics of Composition

Composition is the art of placing your subject within your frame. When you look through the viewfinder, you want to carefully consider where your subject is and if that location creates impact. Rule of Thirds and Center compositions are a great place to start. You may find that you were doing this before you even learned about compositions. This is because they are powerful and naturally pleasing.

The Rule of Thirds is made up of two equidistant vertical lines and two equidistant horizontal lines. The points where they intersect are the strongest locations to place your main subject or a point of interest.

In this composition, there are a few locations to place your subject, and each one has a different meaning or purpose. Let's say you're photographing a landscape. Consider where the land and sky are in your image and choose which one is most important to your story. Give that section $\frac{2}{3}$ of the frame and place the other section in the remaining $\frac{1}{3}$. The visual weight of the $\frac{2}{3}$ coverage tells your viewer which part is most important to you.

In this image, I used the Rule of Thirds, light, and aperture to guide the viewer to my subject:



ISO 160 | f/1.4 | 1/1250

This seemingly simple composition can actually be quite complex when used to tell a story. When you have a point of interest in your frame, place is on one of the four intersecting points. Placing a subject on the left side of the frame, facing the right, can be a storytelling composition that develops the moment and character. A subject on the right side of the frame is a “book end” placement, allowing the viewer explore the frame before landing on your subject. Because of these complexities, this composition gives you a lot of artistic options. You really can't go wrong with a strong Rule of Thirds!

Center compositions can also be a natural draw for us as photographers. You might see a lot of close up portraits with eye contact that are centered in the frame. That's because this composition loves balance. It's also a very impactful composition, making the viewer focus directly on your subject before noticing anything else within the frame. If you're shooting and there is balance to both sides of the frame, it's likely that a center composition will work in your favor. You can also **strengthen a center composition** by using different elements such as light and framing.

Susan Watson Bahen beautifully balanced the frame in this center composition:



ISO 200 | f/6.3 | 1/125

The Basics of Light

Light is a journey all on its own. Understanding light and how it impacts your camera settings is very important. Working in Manual Mode will help you better understand how this new tool of yours works with light and it will give you the tools you need to manipulate light to create your vision.

Kristin Dokoza chose to use shadows and light to create a mood in this gorgeous image:



ISO 500 | f/3.5 | 1/125

To start, analyze the light inside your home. You may find that you're most attracted to the softer light in certain areas of your home. Figure out what times of day the light is best and try to use it as much as you can. At the same time, try not to get too comfortable with beautiful light. Explore the harsh light that streams through your windows during the brightest part of the day. Practice taking a self-portrait or a still life shot in the harsh light and the soft light. Use the direction of light to create different moods. Light has a huge impact on the mood of our photographs.

There are several types of **lighting techniques** to be aware of for both natural and artificial light:
Split, Butterfly, Loop, Rembrandt, Short & Broad

Light can also have **different characteristics**, which can be used to create different moods.
Backlight, Rim light, Side light, Ambient light, Soft light, Hard light

I used light to frame this adorable family of Canada Geese:



ISO 250 | f/3.5 | 1/125

You will soon begin to notice how the light falls in your home and around your most frequented locations. Start to use light to your advantage! Have you driven past the same location at golden hour and noticed the rays of sun streaming through the trees? Does your living room window provide captivating harsh light mid-day? Does an overcast day make your backyard the perfect location for photographing catchlights in your child's eyes? Or are you drawn to those dark bedtime moments that force you to bump your ISO?



As you learn your new camera and work to master focus, composition, and light, you will have many successes and challenges. Keep track of your successes and manage how you process your challenges. It's easy to fall into the trap of self-doubt. Just know that we are right there beside you! That's one of the best things about Clickin Moms — we have been, or we currently are, in your shoes. Ask questions, voice your frustrations, and don't forget to share your pride and joy when you nail that shot!

About Ebony



*Ebony Logins is a natural light, emotive wedding photographer located in Sooke, British Columbia, Canada and the owner of Red Cedar Photography. She is a **Clickin Moms** Mentor, a **Click Photo School** Teaching Assistant, and a **Click Away 2019** Instructor.*

Do you have question for Ebony?

Head over to the forum to chat with Ebony about this eGuide. This dedicated Q&A thread will remain live on the forum throughout the month of January!

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