

Some Photo Tips from Dr. Ellen



The following photo tips are offered for folks who want to make their digital photos better than ever. It takes some thought to make a good photo, so do think on these things!

01- always get as close as you can to your subject because the built-in flash on consumer cameras is not very powerful and it does not extend very far from the camera. Your backgrounds end up either dead or dreary at the very least.

02- in the case of the photo of Georgiana in Carolyn's pixs (shown on this page), you should have oriented the camera VERTICALLY and closed in on Georgiana for the better shot. Most folks just shoot [horizontal] photos because that is how they are used to doing it. GET OVER IT. Orient your camera to match the subject that you are shooting.

03- I think the shot of Fred and Debbie is great fun but it wasn't close up enough - MOVE IN CLOSE! Crop out the background with your viewfinder.

04- With small consumer point and shoots, forget the long table shots. I can add in light to those elongated shots that you cannot do because I have powerful professional flash units that

can extend 30–40 feet if need be. Instead of trying to take the whole table, focus in on several people with animated expressions. Then move to another couple or three folks with animated expressions.

05– If you can, move your subjects (or yourself) so that the [background] of the subject is not cluttered or messy. In the case of the shot with Fred and Debbie, for example, that bathroom door behind them should have been closed. I cleaned up the background a bit as you will see in the CLUB PHOTOS. If there is a vertical lamp behind your subject, move yourself or your subject so that the lamp is not extending out above their heads (unless, of course, your goal is to make them look like they are an alien from another planet.)

06– Always put some location information in the shot: picture folks in front of the restaurant you are about to enter; or in front of their Miatas showing where you are; at dinner with the name of the restaurant visible in the background, etc. It takes some thought to do this but your pictures will be much better in the end. And they will have a story to tell which is what photography is really all about.

07– **ALWAYS USE FLASH. ALWAYS.** I never shoot without using flash, even with my pro cameras. The use of flash improves color tonality, it adds zip to the image, and also depth. If people are wearing glasses, the flash will reflect back from their glasses so it is good practice to (in general) ask them to remove their glasses for the picture. You can ask them to position their head slightly downward but that can add some awkwardness to the picture unless done correctly. **ALWAYS** tell folks to remove dark glasses.

08– Organize people into **GROUPS** for your shots. Don't be shy, ask them to do this for you. Then close in (or zoom in) so that their heads and upper bodies are framed in – without all kinds of distracting things from the background surrounding them.

09- Speaking of zooming in – DON'T DO THIS ROUTINELY – your flash cannot reach as far as your camera lens can ZOOM IN and all you end up with is a group shot that is too dark and featureless. The idea is to zoom in less and (physically) move in as close as you can get instead.

10- I make it a practice to take at least one HORIZONTAL image and one VERTICAL image for each people shot that I take. Try it. Make it a practice. It will improve your images and you will find that some (many?) images actually look better when formatted vertically. I can always crop horizontal images later but you lose a lot of information when you do so and you often end up with a degraded photo as a result.

11- Get people to EMOTE in your photographs! A bunch of folks just standing there with their hands in their pockets will never be your best shot. On the count of three...SHOW ME SOME PASSION!

12- A bad photograph is not much better than NO photograph. Trash the bad shot and strive for a better one next time...that is one of the magical parts about being able to shoot DIGITAL these days.

13- Take pictures that tell an emotional story of some. No story, no picture...tell us by your picture what was going on when you took the picture.

14- Read your camera's manual. Study it. Get to know what your camera can do and what it can't do. Then PRACTICE, PRACTICE, PRACTICE.

15- Some folks are more photogenic than others. Focus on the photogenic ones, and the spontaneous ones. Maybe the others will be able to find jobs as cardboard cutouts somewhere.

16- for novices in particular, expect to get ONE GOOD SHOT for every hundred that you shoot. As you improve your skills this statistic will also improve.

17- BLURRY SHOTS of people do not work, ever. Trash them. Sometimes a blurry shot of a particular scene works, but then not always, either. Blurry is better left to the professional shooter.

18- When you take a picture with your digital camera, follow these rules: (a) hold your breath for 2 seconds when you click the shutter button (the image takes that long to resolve in your camera, otherwise if you move too quickly it will be blurry as a result); (b) lean up against something to stabilize your camera (and you) to get the best, most clear shot; (c) don't turn your camera off immediately after taking the shot - your camera needs a second or two to 'finish' the shot inside the camera otherwise you will find that your shot is truncated when you later put it into your computer to view it. MANY, MANY FOLKS TURN THEIR CAMERA OFF TOO SOON AFTER TAKING A PICTURE...and they generally lose the shot entirely [or] it has parts of it missing when viewed later.

19- When you have finished shooting or need to remove your digital media to install new digital media: REMOVE THE MEDIA CAREFULLY. SD and other small digital cards are very fragile and can break easily if not handled carefully. Put the media into your camera and pull it out of your camera V-E-R-Y slowly. Never force it.

20- Digital media does not last forever. If you use your camera a lot, I would get new digital cards for it at least once a year, and throw the old cards away because they will routinely fail after about a year. I always put the date on the digital media card so that I know when I can no longer trust them.

21- Learn how to manage your pictures on your computer. Too many folks send out HUGE images that cannot be easily downloaded by others. Look around, ask your friends, or do your research – but there are many free computer graphics applications out there that will at least allow you to resize the photograph before you send it on to others. Email applications allow you to format pictures to 4x6@300dpi or maybe 5x7@300dpi – but these files are *quite large* – better yet to send them as 5x7@96dpi which makes them shorter to download and they will still look great on your friend's computer monitor.

ENJOY BEING A MORE SKILLFUL SHUTTERBUG!

Dr. Ellen

Dr. Ellen K. Rudolph
PHOTOJOURNALIST
MM Board of Directors/Webmaster
2008 Highlander Green Grand Touring MX5

Portfolio Site: www.dellenrudolph.com