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CRASH COURSE

A 101 guide to taking great photos of your family



FOUNDATION

- LIGHTING
- COMPOSITION
- ANGLES
- COLOR

All of the images included in this packet were taken with natural light only. No flash, no reflectors, no assistants!



LET'S GET STARTED...

By Chelsea Raine Hickey, Photographer

You don't need a fancy camera to take great pictures of your family! You just need some basic understanding of the fundamentals of what makes a great photograph. Once you understand these key elements you can play with different combinations and really get creative! And if you don't have a camera there's no reason you can't use these techniques with your phone. If you are using a DSLR camera I'd stick with the automatic setting unless you are already familiar with some manual functions. We won't be talking about how to use your camera here, but instead, factors that contribute to creating nice images. I'm going to cover 4 topics in a simple, but helpful way! Consider these tips next time you pull out your camera and see what happens!

LIGHTING

Photography is ALL about light. It's how a camera works - by letting in light and allowing you to manipulate it in different ways. Without light, you just have a black picture. You could take course upon course to learn about light, and still not know it all, but I'm going to talk about a few factors that I consider important when thinking about light:

- **TIME OF DAY**
- **POSITION OF LIGHT**
- **CONSIDERING SHADE**
- **INDOOR LIGHT**

TIME OF DAY: When shooting outdoors time of day can make a big difference. You want to avoid mid-day when the sun is directly overhead. This is because, on a bright day especially, the harsh light will create dark shadows in unflattering areas of the face like below the nose, chin and eyes. It's better to go out in the morning or evening when the sun is lower and you can get the light to cast from the side.

POSITION OF LIGHT: This is important when trying to create an image with visual interest. Typically speaking, you want your subject's face illuminated. And you want that light to come from a flattering angle. I think one of the best angles is typically about 45 degrees to the front/side of the subject. It casts a nice shadow that will partially wrap the face creating dimension and visual interest. If you are outdoors take a look at the position of the sun. You don't usually want to face your subject into direct sun because it will cause them to squint. Try turning them and watch how the shadows fall across their face. Try to make sure there aren't any super dark shadows or bright pops of light on their face that are distracting. If the sun is too bright it may be helpful to move them into some shade. (see next section).



Can you figure out the position of the light?

GOLDEN HOUR

You may have heard the term "golden hour." Golden hour is the hour following sunrise or leading up to sunset when the light is low and gives off a golden hue. Photographers usually love it as it has a gorgeous flattering tone and can lead to beautiful images when used correctly. Golden hour light can be used in a few ways.

Simply put: it depends where you position your subject in relation to the sun. Each way is going to create a different effect. By facing your subject towards the light their face will be illuminated with an lovely warm glow and will not be bright enough to make them squint. If you place the sun behind them they will be more silhouetted. Play around and see what you can come up with!



LIGHTING

CONSIDERING SHADE: Shooting with diffused light (something over the direct light source like a cloud or a tree) certainly makes things less complicated. It decreases harsh shadows so there's less concern about where they might fall. It also eliminates squinting and sun flares (not to say those are always bad things....well squinting is not great).

Open shade is a flat area of shade without any pockets of light creeping in. If it's a sunny day you can often find it under large trees, in the shadow of buildings or on low land where the sun is blocked. It's basically a big shadow where you can hide your subject from harsh light. If you still want some of that light to appear in your photo, try placing your subject towards the edge of the shade, but not directly in the light.

Overcast days can be nice because the cloud cover acts as a huge light diffuser, eliminating the need to consider harsh shadows. It does make for flatter images, but that's not necessarily a bad thing. It can be good way to work on things like composition and background while not worrying about how the light is affecting your subject.



These guys were coming out of a wooded area and were still in the shadows. Notice the very soft shadows on their faces.

"I am forever chasing light. Light turns the ordinary into magical."

-Trent Parke



The light here is coming only from a window in front of the sink.

INDOOR LIGHT: When I say indoor light, I'm not talking about flashes or studio lights (That's a whole course in itself). I'm referring to the lights that are in your home, recessed, lamps etc. Generally speaking it's a good idea to turn off all of these lights and stick with any natural light coming in from outside. Natural light makes for nicer color (whiter whites and bluer/cooler tones) and can be particularly effective in shaping the shadows on your subject, especially if you place them next to a window, for instance.

You want to avoid overhead recessed lights because they can create harsh shadows from above, similar to mid-day sun. Also, lamps will create Tungsten light, which is a warm, orangish light. If you want this effect it can be fun to play around with them. Or if you possess any post process editing skills you can cool down your image later.

COMPOSITION

When it comes to composition it depends greatly on what you're trying to highlight with your image. Close up details, a wide shot that lets you take in the whole scene, etc. There are some general rules and guidelines to consider when composing your shot.

"RULE OF THIRDS". The general idea is that an image should be divided into nine equal parts by equally spaced horizontal lines and that the subject should be placed at the intersections. According to research this will create more energy and interest in the composition and leads your eye from one side to the other. Of course, rules are made to be broken and just because this is a safe way to compose an image, it is certainly not the only way. There is nothing wrong with centering your image as long as it's intentional.



NEGATIVE SPACE: Consider the nothingness. Maybe your subject is up against a white sky, or lying on green grass. The large areas of solid are negative space and can be a great way to bring the focus on your subject. If you place your subject intentionally in the frame the negative space can add a lot of visual interest.



All of the white space in this one leads your eye right to the baby's face.

BONUS TIP

Don't cut off limbs! Make sure your subject isn't cut off in a weird place, and isn't missing any limbs. There's a difference in cropping out a portion of someone's body intentionally (like a whole side) and chopping off their hand at the wrist, yikes! That's awkward.

DEPTH: *Foreground/middle ground/background*

When taking an image you also want to consider your foreground (the closest elements to you, middle ground (somewhere in the middle, often the point of focus and background (the furthest points). Think about how all of these elements can work together and in which one of them you want to place your subject. It's generally nice not to have too busy a background as it detracts from your subject. If there's naturally a lot going on in the background crop in tight and fill the frame with your subject or consider ways to blur your background (this is where understanding your camera comes in handy).



Notice the part of a chair in the foreground, the boy in the middle ground and the chalkboard and shop in the background.

ANGLES

When thinking about your composition consider your angle. Both the subject's and your own. Think about how angles and distance can affect the story, add interest and be flattering.

FLATTERING ANGLES:

Some flattering angles to try can be slightly above the subjects eye level or right at their eye level with the right lighting. Have them tilt their head slightly to one side and lift their chin. Also, turning their body slightly can produce a more flattering shape. Having good posture also looks much better. If they are sitting hunched over, remind them to put their shoulders back.

GETTING LOW:

When photographing small children it's ideal to bring yourself down to their height so that your camera lens is level with their eyes. You can crouch down or sit on the ground.

INTERESTING ANGLES:

If you want to add visual interest to your composition the best thing to do is experiment! Try angles that you wouldn't see regularly in the world. Hold the camera right above your child's head or from down below. Re-position yourself. Get up high on a ladder or climb a tree. Or lie on the ground and see what the world looks like. Sometimes just switching up your own perspective can change the whole feeling of your photo.

WIDE ANGLES:

If you're trying to tell more of a story it can sometimes help to widen your angle. Stand back so that you not only capture your subject, but also their surroundings. Think about what things around them are important to help tell a story about what's going on. Are there other people or something they're interacting with? Are there colors that compliment their outfit? Is there something going on in the background that describes what's going on? All of these are visual story telling elements that create an interesting image.



I'm getting pretty good at balancing on the monkey bar ladder for these shots.



Notice the inclusion of the train and mountains helps tell a story about what what happening. (sidenote: this was taken with my phone!)



This is taken from above, standing on the bed above their heads.

"Consulting the rules of composition before taking a photograph is like consulting the laws of gravity before going for a walk."

-Edward Weston

COLOR

Here's another subject you can spend a whole semester on (and I did!). Color plays an important role in creating an interesting image. Consider your background, time of year, colors of buildings, signs, nature, etc. and how they relate to the colors in your subject. Think about how colors are working together, or not. What is your subject wearing and how does it look in the environment. Maybe you're shooting in winter and there are lots of browns, grays and whites outside. You probably wouldn't want your subject wearing brown or gray because they're going to blend in too much with the background. Or maybe it's summer and everything is green. You probably don't want your subject in green, but instead you may want to consider a "pop" of color. A pop signifies an explosion or burst. Think about ways color can burst through your scene. People often turn to red or yellow as pops - they are bright bold colors, often less likely found in your background.

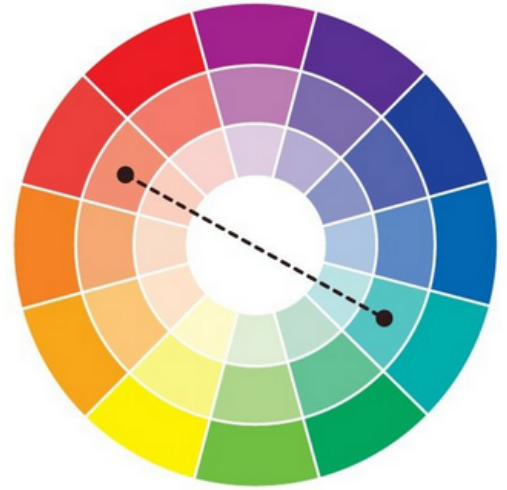
Color doesn't need to be dramatic to be effective though. Consider colors in nature and how they work together. Muted colors of the rainbow can also lead to beautiful results.



See how his red pj's really bring your eye straight to the subject, despite all the mess!



I've always liked the colors in this picture. The green leaves and orange flower picking up the slight orange in the boy's (fabulous) curls works so well together.



This is a basic color wheel. If you look at opposite sides those will be your complimentary colors.

Complimentary Colors:

A great way to create a pop or just make your subject stand out is to think about complimentary colors. The true definition of complimentary colors are colors that fall on opposite sides of the color wheel. There are some variations (secondary and tertiary) but to keep things simple just look generally at the opposite sides. Blue and orange, yellow and purple, green and pink or red. There's a lot of fun to be had with complimentary colors!

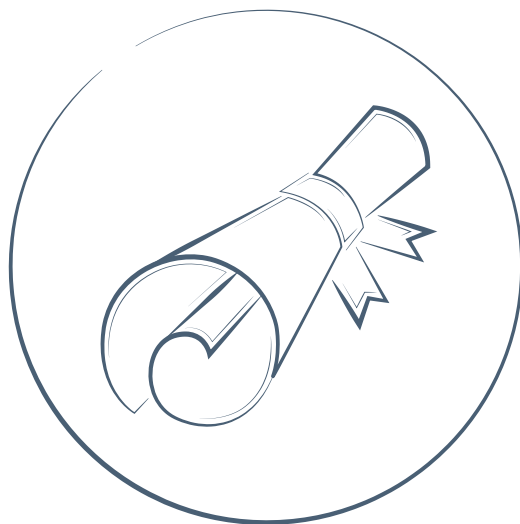


I loved this mom's choice of muted yellow shirt and how it tied in with the yellow in the boy's shirt.

Hooray

AND CONGRATS!

You've graduated from your first
Chickey Little Photography course!
Now get out there and put those new skills to use!



Have questions? Feel free to email me and I'll do my best to help you out!
chickeybrand@gmail.com