



Using photography

Whatever amateur arts group you belong to – whether you're into music, drama, crafts or visual art – chances are you will want to take photos to record your activity and events. It's also important to have good quality photos for flyers, posters, your Facebook page and website as well as press releases that you might want to send. Good quality photography can make the difference between not being featured in your local newspaper, and getting a double-page spread! So here are some hints to help you make sure you end up with photos that you're pleased with and understand how to organise and use them.



Taking good photos

Equipment

You don't need expensive equipment to be able to take good quality and engaging photos of your voluntary arts group's activities. If you have some funds as a group, it is worth buying a digital camera. You can get a good quality point-and-shoot for under £100 or DSLR for around £500. Most mobile phones now have good cameras with quality lenses which will take photos suitable for use on the internet.

- Charge your batteries and have spares if possible
- Take a camera with built in flash or an external flash unit if shooting indoors
- Make sure you have a protective, waterproof case if you will be outside
- Take a notebook to jot down details of the photos as you take them

- Take a camera everywhere as you never know when a photo opportunity might arise

Preparation

If your group meets regularly, it might be worth appointing someone as the photographer who can document your activities over the weeks and months.

It's a good idea to have in mind what you want to use your photos for before you take them. Some good questions to ask are:

- Where will the photos be used (magazine, website, social networks, press release etc.)?
- What type of photos do you want (close ups, group shots, action shots)?
- Do you need to leave room for text over the photo?
- Do you need a mixture of landscape and portrait shots?



Portrait images are higher than they are wide.



Landscape images are wider than they are high.

It's a good idea to keep a note of the photo's details (who took it, where it was, names of people in the photo and anything else that might be relevant). This will help you when captioning the photo and crediting the photographer later.

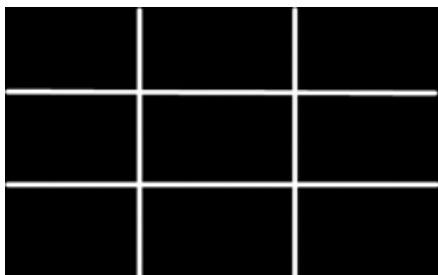
Composition

Composition is all about deciding what will be in your photograph and how you will frame it. It is usually best to keep the composition fairly simple and try and resist the temptation to cram too much in.

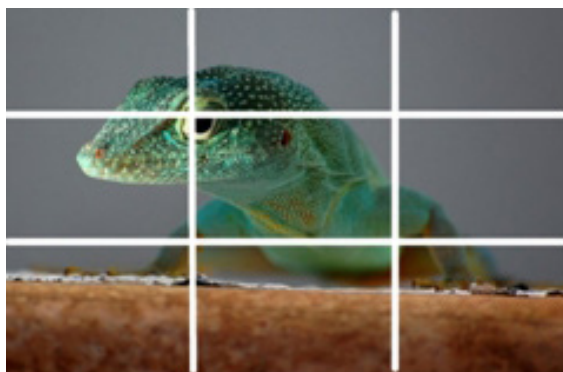
Although you can correct some compositional errors in image editing software later, it is much simpler to try and get it right at the point of taking the photo.

The 'Rule of Thirds'

This is a helpful technique for placing the focal point of the picture (the bit you want the viewer's eye to be drawn to) in the best place in the frame. Imagine the picture is divided into 9 equal parts by a grid:

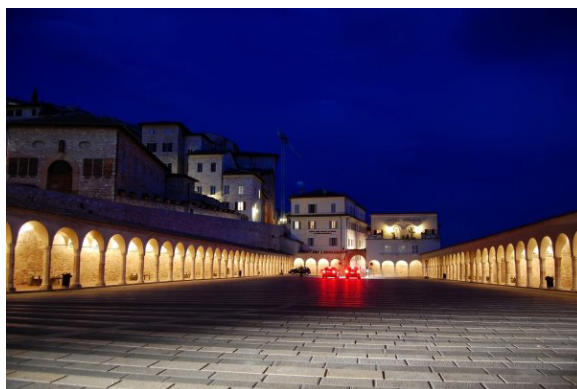


Now place the main subject of the picture (in this case the lizard's eye) on one of the places where the lines cross:



Composition tips

- Avoid wonky horizons
- Use lines that lead in to your photo to draw the viewer's eye into the picture:



- Check for unwanted elements like fingers, trees poking out of people's heads etc.
- Think about using the 'Rule of Thirds'
- Usually it's good to have eye contact when taking a portrait. Try and make sure the eyes are sharply in focus.
- Avoid bright red unless you want this to be a focal point.
- Don't use digital zoom (a setting on your camera) to get near to your subject as this reduces the image quality. Use optical zoom (zooming with the lens itself) if available or try moving physically nearer to the subject.
- Always shoot in colour, even if you think you might want black and white later. It's easy to convert from colour to black and white but not the other way round!

Photo editing

Photo editing doesn't need to be expensive or complicated as there are lots of free and easy to use tools. All the image editors listed below are free and will be able to perform the following functions and lots more:

- Crop photos (cut a portion out of your photo or trim the edges)
- Rotate photos
- Remove red eye
- Fix exposure (brightness, contrast)
- Sharpen
- Remove unwanted elements in photos (dirt, blemishes etc.).
- Convert images to black and white
- Filters and frames (applying different effects to your photos and putting borders round them)

Web based tools

- pixlr.com - Amazingly powerful photo editor offering many of the basics necessary to edit and save your images.
- photoshop.com - The photo-editing software giants offer some basic retouching and editing tools for free online.
- fotoflexer.com - Another basic online editor enabling you to edit photos from various social networks.
- phixr.com - Not overly sophisticated, but easy to use and probably has all the tools you'll need.
- lunapic.com - Basic tools in a web-based interface with upload and URL options to add images.

Downloads

- www.gimp.org (Mac and PC) – This open source program isn't very easy to use so not recommended for beginners, but it is very powerful and boasts many advanced features which can be expanded with an array of plug-ins (pieces of software that add extra functions). Great for more experienced image editors.
- www.photoscape.org (Mac and PC) – Easy to use, with lots of impressive features like a batch editing facility enabling you to edit lots of pictures at once. The new [Photoscape X](http://www.photoscape.org) is available for Windows 10 and Mac.
- photos.google.com (Mac and PC) - Google's free photo organisation software comes with handy tagging, editing and sharing features as well as significant storage space.
- getpaint.net (PC) – Simple editing tool with a thriving user community and useful tutorials.

Apps (search in the App Store or Google Play)

- VSCO - (Free, iOS and Android) Adored by mobile photographers, VSCO is easy to use and provides both quick, elegant filters and a range of detailed adjustments.
- Snapseed - (Free, iOS and Android) A popular editing app acquired by Google a while ago, Snapseed provides great basic editing tools as well as more in-depth controls.
- Photoshop Express - (Free, iOS and Android) The free mobile version of Photoshop provides many useful editing tools and quick filters to apply to the whole image.
- Autodesk Pixlr - (Free, iOS and Android) Like the Pixlr web app, the Android version allows users to make most common adjustments, crops and edits quickly and easily.



Editing tips

- Work on a copy of the file in case something goes wrong!
- Don't go overboard on the 'special effects'. It's always best to take the 'less is more' approach.
- Using 'Levels' or 'Curves' to adjust the brightness and contrast will usually vastly improve images that have been poorly exposed. (Some editing programs will have an 'auto-fix' option which might work adequately).
- Use the 'Crop' tool to improve photos that have been badly composed (eg. Where the subject is too small in the frame or there is unwanted detail at the edges or crooked angles).
- Do make sure that images are correctly compressed and formatted for the web (see page 4 for more information).
- Remember that it's better to get it right when you're taking the photo than have to spend ages editing afterwards.

Organisation

Storage

If lots of people in your group need access to the images, you could try hosting them online. Popular services like Flickr (www.flickr.com), Google Photos (photos.google.com), Photobucket (www.photobucket.com) and Snapfish (www.snapfish.com) offer free accounts and allow you to set up private albums so that you only share photos with people you have chosen.

It's always worth storing your images offline as well, so you could perhaps invest in an external hard drive or USB flash drive. Ideally, it's best to have a back-up of all your material on another hard drive which isn't kept in the same location as the first.

Organisation

It's a good idea to try and keep your images organised on your computer, especially if you've taken lots of photos of different events, shows, rehearsals and people. Giving photos descriptive file names is a good idea and ensures that you and the rest of the group know what the picture is of. If you have edited a copy of the photo, you could give it the same file name but add a different version number.

One effective way of organising photos is using a folder system arranged by date. For example, you could have a folder for each year and then within that have sub-folders for months or specific events. You will develop your own system that suits your group and how you want to use your images. You can also use software to organise images by tagging them with keywords and giving them star ratings. This requires a fair bit of work, but is worth it if you have an extensive image collection. Some free software to help you organise your images includes:

Flickr - www.flickr.com

Google Photos - photos.google.com

Dropbox - www.dropbox.com

Amazon Cloud Drive - www.amazon.co.uk/cloudrive

500 pixels - www.500px.com

Windows Photos (PC), Adobe Photoshop Elements (PC and Mac), iPhoto (Mac) and iCloud storage also have their own image organisation facilities.



Types of image file and sizes

Unless you have a more expensive camera like a digital SLR (a more advanced camera with interchangeable lenses), chances are your camera will store photos as JPEG images. JPEG (or .jpg) is a 'lossy' file format which means that it throws some data away in order to make the size of the file smaller. JPEG photos can still be quite large, however, and you may need to resize them to make them suitable for use on the web, as having large photos on a website can mean that the page is very slow to load. You may also need to resize images if you are intending to email them to someone due to attachments size limits.

Resolution

The resolution of an image indicates how much detail is in it and is measured in 'dots per inch' (dpi) for print. Images for good quality print should have a resolution of 300dpi. There is a common misperception that web images are set to 72dpi. This is not the case as the resolution of an image on the web depends on the screen's ppi ('pixels per inch') resolution settings.

If you are sending photos off to be printed, for example in a magazine, the picture editor will need the original files so they can be printed at 300dpi. Most editing software will allow you to adjust the size and dpi resolution of an image before saving so you can see how large the image can be printed at 300dpi.

Image size

Digital image sizes are measured in pixels (px). Most cameras and phones produce photos that are several thousand pixels on its longest edge. Again, image editing software will enable you to resize your image. Make sure that you always choose 'constrain proportions' (sometimes shown as a linked chain icon) otherwise your photo could look unnaturally stretched by changing only the height or width.

Ideally the file size for an image on the web shouldn't be more than 150kb. Try using 'Save for web' options or reducing the image size to reduce the file size. Most web images don't need to

be above 1024px on the long edge unless they are for full-screen or banner use.

You could send larger photos by email, but it generally isn't a good idea to send emails over 2MB. If you do need to send big images (for example to be printed in a magazine), you could use a free service like YouSendIt (www.yousendit.com), Dropbox (www.dropbox.com) or MailBigFile (www.mailbigfile.com).

For a more in-depth guide to resolution settings and different image formats, see the Further Resources section.

Permissions, copyright and Creative Commons

Permission for photography

Many groups are rightly concerned about making sure that they gain the right permissions when taking and using photographs. There is often confusion over what the law does and doesn't allow. It is worth reading the UK Photographers Rights Guide linked to below for a good overview.

It's not illegal to take photos of adults or children in a public place, but it's advisable to use common sense about what's appropriate and be aware of the risks involved, especially in taking images of children. The best thing is to have a clear photography policy that everyone in your group understands and agrees to. The policy should include:

- Not naming a child in an image caption or description
- Making sure the child is appropriately dressed
- Guidance as to how external photographers / press need to behave when they visit the group
- Guidance on gaining consent for photography. It is best to get written consent wherever possible if the photos are intended for publication (print or web). Consent for children under 18 years of age needs to be given by a parent or guardian.

The NSPCC has very good guidance on photography policies and safeguarding: <https://www.nspcc.org.uk/preventing-abuse/safeguarding/photography-sharing-images-guidance/>

Copyright

Copyright is an automatic right of the creator of a work, so in this case it would be the person that took the photo. They may transfer copyright to an organisation, or simply grant a non-exclusive licence to the organisation to use the work, whilst retaining the copyright themselves. The latter will usually be the case in a voluntary arts group.

It is good practice to credit the photographer wherever possible. If you have used a professional photographer, it will usually stipulate in their contract how they would like their credit to read. If the photo was taken by a member of the group, your credit can simply read 'Photo: John Smith'. If you have the image editing skills, you can overlay the credit on the photo. If not, then it's acceptable to display the credit underneath. It is also a good idea to caption photos properly so that people know what's going on.

There may be occasions when you need a particular image for your website, leaflets or posters and you don't have a suitable one in your archives. It can be tempting to do a Google search and use other people's images, but always make sure you don't take and use images from the web without permission from the copyright holder. Often, people are happy for you to use their images if you have asked them first, and they may ask you to credit them, or link to their website.

Another option is to use stock photography. You can buy stock photographs, but these often require subscriptions, so a better option might be to search on a free stock photo site. Pexels.com, Pixabay.com, Stocksnap.io and freeimages.co.uk provide thousands of high quality images with usage guidance.

Creative Commons

Creative Commons is an organisation that promotes sharing of digital works, such as photographs. It has developed six Creative Commons Licences which are free for the public to use and govern how other people may copy, share and use your work. This page explains more about the licences and what they allow: creativecommons.org/licenses.

A number of popular photo-sharing sites allow for the sharing of material under a Creative Commons Licence and this can be another good source of photography that you have

permission to use in your own materials. The Creative Commons section on Flickr is a good place to explore; www.flickr.com/creativecommons.

Further Resources

Taking and editing photos

Beginner Photography Guide is a good place to start - www.beginner-photography-guide.com/photography-wiki/
Digital Photography School is a great resource with lots of tips and tutorials on shooting photos, choosing equipment and editing photos - www.digital-photography-school.com
PictureCorrect has lots of great tips and tutorials for the slightly more advanced photographer - www.picturecorrect.com/tips
Expert Photography has a beginner's guide to DSLR cameras: <https://expertphotography.com/a-beginners-guide-to-photography/>

Organisation

OrganizePictures.com - www.organizepictures.com

Image formats

CreativeBlog's guide to image resolution - www.creativeblog.com/graphic-design/what-is-dpi-image-resolution-71515673
Understanding DPI, resolution and Print vs Web image - www.vsellis.com/understanding-dpi-resolution-and-print-vs-web-images/

Permissions, copyright and creative commons

The NSPCC have useful guidance on photographing children, as well as a sample photography policy and parental consent form – <https://safeguardingtool.nspcc.org.uk/resource-library/>
Creative Commons - creativecommons.org
The UK Copyright Service (especially fact sheet P-16) - www.copyrightservice.co.uk
There is also some advice on the Metropolitan Police website - <http://content.met.police.uk/Site/photographyadvice>
UK Photographers Rights Guide - www.sirimo.co.uk/2009/05/14/uk-photographers-rights-v2/

Photo credits:

p1: © Damien McGlynn

p2: © Frome Amateur Operatic Society, © UC Crew, © Anne Witton, © Anne Witton

p3: Max Pixel, CC0 Public Domain

p4: Pixabay, CC0 Public Domain

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