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Night Photography Tips

Night photography is a “next step” for photographers.

Get started in night photography

There are three basic things that you need for night photography. From there, your experiences with night photographs will get wild and crazy.

Necessities

Some forms of night photography need the scene to be really dark.

You will need some form of light.

There are infinite ways to create light. Each one can alter your picture.

- natural light,
- artificial light,
- starlight,
- stray light,
- sparkling light,
- coloured light,
- tiny lights,
- big lights
- the list goes on.

You need some way to create a sharp picture. The more traditional method is a tripod and a remote shutter release mechanism. To create sharp, non-blurry pictures.

Photographing at night using strictly available light

Using moving light sources for creative effects

Mixing light sources

Capturing a good image with long exposures

The nighttime cityscape

Using road traffic for composition

Painting with light

The dusk mixed-light shot

Getting Started

If you're new to night photography, the cityscape is the most accessible picture opportunity

Equipment:

Camera: Any camera with a "bulb" setting and/or a maximum built-in shutter speed of up to 30 seconds.

Tripod: You'll need something sturdy. You can also get by with placing your camera on a sturdy surface, but that will be far less flexible.

Remote Shutter Release: You can also get by with your camera's self-timer, if you aren't using the bulb setting.

Lens: Ideally, a wide-angle or moderate telephoto (14mm-100mm). Depending upon the light level, image stabilization can be helpful.

Sandbag: You can use this to stabilize a tripod or support your camera if you place it on a sturdy surface. There are commercially available sandbags explicitly made for photography, or you can make your own.

Miscellaneous items: A flashlight or headlamp will help you figure out camera settings in the dark. A non-reflective 8-by-10-inch matte black card (available at any art store) will let you block light from entering the lens without having to touch the camera

The Best Conditions for Starting in Cityscape Night Photography

Pick a location that provides a beautiful view of the skyline and city lights

If possible, include a body of water in the foreground for reflections

Arrive at your location and get your gear prepared around 30 minutes after sunset

Start shooting while there is still some light in the sky

Set your camera to manual mode or aperture priority

Set the ISO to 400, or up to 800

Set the lens to manual focus

Set the metering mode to center-weighted

Compose using the rule of thirds

If possible, include a focal point

Begin shooting as the sky darkens, and the city lights turn on

Monitor the shutter speed: be aware of minor camera movement

Pro Tip: Your best shots will occur when the sky is close to the same exposure value as the cityscape. As the sky darkens, you will eventually lose a lot of detail in the shadows.

Using Road Traffic for Composition and Effect

Once you have a few nighttime cityscapes under your belt, the next step is to combine a cityscape with road traffic for a special effect.

Pro Tip: If you're shooting this late, compose your shot so that some bright object with lighting breaks up the black sky.

To include road traffic in your nighttime photos, follow the previous instructions with the following additions.

Pick a location that looks down onto the road (the higher the elevation, the better)

Use only manual mode

Set the aperture between f/4 and f/8 (you will need to experiment with this)

set your focus before it gets too dark

Take a camera meter reading, and then reduce the exposure from one stop to four stops, depending upon the ambient light surrounding your road; Depending on the traffic level, your shutter speed might be anywhere from half a second to 30 seconds.

Painting with Light

Painting with light can take many different forms.

Think of it as an artist with a blank paint canvas. They apply different paints to the canvas, and it comes to life as a complete image.

Crucial Thought: In nighttime photography, it's dark, and the darkness creates a blank canvas within the camera. In many places, it won't be as dark as you initially believe it is. That's why in the equipment section includes a matte black card in your kit. The card helps you to block any light that you don't want to enter the camera—without touching the camera. For example, let's say you're in the middle of a long-exposure cityscape shot, and a car with headlights on is approaching. You hold the card in front of the lens as the vehicle passes. When it is out of view, you remove the card and continue to expose the picture. This technique is one of the advantages of using the bulb setting instead of automated shutter speeds. You count the seconds with the shutter locked open. You can manually stop the exposure with the card if necessary.

Experiment with light painting.

Gather two or three light sources. They can be an electronic flash, a flashlight, a plug light, car headlights, etc.

Keep things simple to start. Place a model in a dark area and use one light to expose the model and the additional lamps to illuminate the environment around them.

Light Sources

Typically there are four light sources that are “painting” the black canvas of darkness.

The illumination in the sky is light source

A lantern inside is light source

An electronic flash positioned to illuminate the bushes

The headlamp on your head is light source

Key Point: Painting with light is an advanced technique,. Each light source has a different intensity and requires a different length of time to expose properly. This is where your black card comes in handy to cover the lens as you turn different light sources on and off.

The Dusk Mixed Light Shot

Outside exotic light sources can create other opportunities for nighttime photography.

Lightning can literally illuminate an entire landscape. Make sure you are a safe distance away. Follow all of the tips listed for capturing road traffic with these additions.

Use a wide-angle lens

Set the aperture between f/8 and f/11

Lock the camera shutter open using the bulb setting

Place your black card in front of the lens

When the lightning begins to flash, pull the card away—allow one to three flashes, depending upon how large they are

Close the shutter

When shooting at dusk and on into the night, there may be moments where you don’t have a tripod or cannot use one.

Pro Tip: Use the image stabilization option on your camera, if possible. Also, press your body up against a solid surface as you take the picture. This action will help you hold the camera steady at slower shutter speeds.

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Bio

My name is David Wright.

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My documenting skills are excellent paying attention to details satisfying the toughest ISO auditors.

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I am now at a point in life I would like to share my knowledge with the world and the best way I know how is by Print either electronically or Hard copy paper.

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