10 Tips For Creating Tack Sharp Photos

A photographer’s guide to sharper images

Focus Pyramid

1st Edition
Introduction

Ok folks... Let me start out by telling you what you will NOT learn from this eBook. You will not learn Masking, Unsharpening, Layering or any other Adobe Photoshop technique to help fool the viewer into thinking your image is sharper than it really is.

What you WILL learn is how to get razor sharp images in the camera at the time of capture. This will not only free up your time to take more pictures, spend more time enjoying the ones you have already taken, but inevitably be more profitable if you’re a pro.

GETTING STARTED

Some of the Top 10 Methods To Make Razor Sharp Photos may simply only be review for most photographers while others, a bit more obscure, will be worth learning and putting into practice immediately. In a Letterman-esque manner I’ll go through my top 10 picks!

The goal:

• Introduce to you techniques which will ultimately help you to create sharper images with little to no additional effort

• Highlight products that will not only help you to create sharper images, but provide you peace of mind when fast focusing is critical.
Method #10

Cut Back On The Joe

In many cases, blurry photos are a direct result from a shaky hand. Try laying off the caffeine, but if that’s simply not a realistic option, as in my case, and a tripod is not available, you can start out by trying these simple techniques:

• Hold your camera with both hands
• Widen your stance
• Bring the camera closure to your body
• Keep elbows tucked in
• Brace yourself against a wall or other solid object
• Don’t “PRESS” your shutter release, glide over it softly (be gentle)
Method #9

Lock It Down

If a tripod is available and can be used for the type of photograph you are trying to make … Use It!

Locking down your camera will take one of the biggest variables out of the equation and allow you to focus on composition and not camera shake. Of course, tripods are not for everyone and personally, I don’t like them and use them almost never. However, for a strong alternative which provides "similar" results I would recommend a mono-pod, carbon-fiber preferably. They are small, light weight, and easy to carry. Remember, if a piece of photo gear is hard to carry, bulky, or heavy it will certainly be left in the studio, don’t waste your money.
Method #8

HOW FAST IS FAST ENOUGH?

*We all know to freeze action we must use a fast shutter speed or strap on a flash. If a flash is not available try this simple rule of thumb when shooting handheld. Pick a shutter speed that is equal or greater than your focal length.*

Ok.. so what does that mean?

Here are a couple of examples:

- At 25mm set your shutter speed to 1/25th or faster
- At 50mm set your shutter speed to 1/50th or faster
- At 100mm set your shutter speed to 1/100th or faster
- At 200mm set your shutter speed to 1/200th or faster

If your camera can not shoot at these speeds, simply choose the next higher.
Method #7

Put your Aperture on a Diet

Is your camera’s aperture too fat?

We are told that “professional” images have beautiful bokeh (background blur) and to produce this we must shoot using the largest aperture that our lens allows. While partially true, the fact is the wider (larger) our aperture is, the softer the overall image inevitably becomes. There are exceptions to this, but I’ll have to expound upon these in a future text. For now, simply stop down your aperture “lean it up” a bit. If you were to shoot with a lens that allow for f2.8 try to use either f3.2, f3.5 or even f4.0 as an alternative and notice sharper images immediately.
Method #6

TURN UP THE VOLUME!!

What??? What did you say? I can’t hear ya, sonny!

NOISE plays an important role in image’s sharpness. Quiet, zen-like, images will generally be sharper than noisy more manic, photos! The cause of noise, in a nut shell, is ISO, the dark horse in today’s camera manufacture image quality race, and by far more important than megapixels and alike. ISO controls the sensitivity of your sensor. We are lead to believe that setting our camera’s ISO to it’s lowest possible setting i.e.. 100, 160, etc. will provide the sharpest images! WRONG! Each manufacture and for that matter each camera body has an optimum ISO which may not be its lowest possible setting. For example, our studio Canon 7D’s creates sharper / less noisy images when set to ISO 160 over the lower ISO 100 while our Canon 5D MarkII enjoys the lower setting. Research your camera body’s “native” ISO sweet spot and setup your camera accordingly.
Method #5

**LENS CANDY**

*Where is your lenses sweet spot?*

Each and every lens in your kit has what we call a sweet spot, a f-stop that produces the sharpest possible image. When light is not an issue as in shooting outdoors during the day, using a strobe or shooting at long exposure times while using a tripod, simply setting your lens f-stop to it’s sweet spot will go a long way to creating a sharper image! So okay... Joseph but I don’t know where my lens’ sweet spot is, you ask! :) Simply, photograph the sharp text of a magazine at a wide open setting say f2.8 then at it’s maximum setting say f32 and finally take two more shots in between the two. Example: f2.8, f8.0, f16, f32 As you get closer to your lenses “sweet spot” you can simply refine the f-stop to obtain the lens’ absolute sharpest spot.
Method #4

**TURN OFF LENS STABILIZATION**

*Your IS lens can use a valium*

If your camera does not have stabilization built into the body, chances are you may have lenses that offer this feature. Not to get into the inner workings of image stabilization (IS) but in short while (IS) will afford you 2-3 stops of hand holding latitude allowing you to shoot at slower shutter speeds. The problem comes in when shooting locked down on a tripod. Even though the camera is perfectly motionless, the Image Stabilization system continues to try to steady the already perfectly still scene causing less sharp images to be produced! Don’t ask why! ... Just believe! :) So, if you’re using an (IS) lens on a tripod, take a moment to turn off image stabilization and start making sharper images.
Method #3

ALL GLASS IS NOT CREATED EQUAL

Plastic, glass, or something in-between

We, DSLR users, both amateur and pro, absolutely love our high-end glass and rightfully so. The difference between the image sharpness of a Canon 50mm f1.8 Plastic Lens and a Canon 50mm f1.4 lens or a 28-135mm zoom and a Canon 24-105mm is quickly made painfully apparent during the most basic pixel peeping. Camera manufactures produce spanking NEW “must have” camera bodies nearly every year while lenses remain the same for many times longer. If you have a limited budget, I recommend purchasing a “cheaper” camera body that will do what you need it to do and spring for the more expensive higher quality lens which may very well last you a lifetime. More times than not, high quality glass will produce sharper photographs.
Method #2

The Diopter is your friend

Why is everything so d*mn blurry?

Okay. Truth be told, at 40, my eyes aren’t what they used to be. If you wear glasses, contacts or just don’t have spot on vision your camera’s diopter will work miracles for you! Normally you’ll find this little wheel of goodness on the right side of the viewfinder. Simply look through your viewfinder, turn your diopter all the way in one direction and allow your auto-focusing system to lock onto some clear copy from a magazine or another target. Even though you know the autofocus system has lock in and everything should be crystal clear it will not. Simply turn the diopter in the opposite direction until what you see is tack sharp. Easy… right!
Method #1

**AUTO FOCUS LENS CALIBRATION - PIÉCE DE RÉSISTANCE**

*That’s not where I was focusing*

The easiest and most consistent way of getting sharper images, bar none, is by calibrating your lenses. We all greatly rely on our Auto Focusing System to simply Get It Right! But … More often than not this system produces either Front Focus or Back Focus right from the factory.

Have you ever shot a portrait and specifically focused on the persons eyes only to find either the tips of their nose or possibility ears were perfectly in focus while their eyes were soft? This is a classic description of a Front or Back focusing problem.

Interestingly, from lens copy to lens copy the actual focus spot varies. For years there was absolutely no way to correct for this problem besides sending the lens back to the manufacture for calibration which was not only very costly but many times still did not solve the problem when using the lens on various camera bodies.

Finally there’s a solution! Most major camera manufactures, knowing this was a problem, have introduced “Auto Focus Micro Adjustment Calibration Custom Settings”.

With the advent of custom in-body lens calibration, a few products hit the market which would help photographers calibrate their lenses. These tools show the exact spot where your auto focus system “thinks” it should be focusing on which in turn gives you the ability to either
compensate for any discrepancy at the time of image capture or make custom micro adjustments within your camera body globally or lens specifically for each and every one of your lenses.

Hands down, being able to pickup your camera, strap on any lens and know that your camera body will automatically dial in the absolute perfect focus settings each and every time is not only amazing, but will provide you with the confidence and peace of mind in knowing that you are making the sharpest images possible.

As a way of saying thank you for downloading this eBook, we will provide a 10% discount for this quick, easy and cost effective Auto Focus Lens Calibration Tools. Click here to get yours today http://FocusPyramid.com/fpebook We are confident this new tool will become your favorite piece of photo gear!