Taking photos

You will need to take a range of pictures using a digital camera. Think about the settings and the images you want.

Plan your photo - it may sound obvious, but it's an essential aspect of getting the image you want. Before you start work, note down what you want to achieve.

Getting to know your camera

Although some settings differ on the many different types of digital camera, most have the same basic functions. Look at the diagram and table below to learn about the most common components and functions.

Component	Function
On/Off button	Turns the camera on and off. Some digitial cameras will have a power-saving mode that automatically turns the camera off when it's not in use.
Shutter button	Press this to take a photograph. Many newer cameras have an auto-focus function that is operated by holding the shutter button half way down to focus on the object. There might be a beep or icon on the LCD monitor to let you know when it is focussed. You then press the button all the way down to take the photograph.
Mode switch	This allows you to switch between the different modes of the camera - still photograph, video clip, or view photos. Sometimes there's a dial instead of a switch, or buttons. Check the camera manual if necessary.
LCD monitor	Look through this to view your shot and playback photographs and video clips. You can also change the settings of the camera using the LCD monitor.
Viewfinder window	Instead of using the LCD monitor to compose your shots, you may prefer to look through the viewfinder (as you would with a non-digital camera). It saves power if you turn off the LCD monitor when using the viewfinder.

Ten tips for taking photos

1. Get in close

Close or tight shots are good for capturing expressions or atmosphere. Think about when you watch a sports match. When you are up close you can see the players sweating and hear the grunts as they immerse themselves in the game, which in turn arouses your interest. This also applies when capturing images, so focus on what you want to show, and eliminate distractions.

As these images illustrate, getting in close allows you to see people's expressions.

Always remember when taking photographs of people to get their permission first.

2. Fill the frame

To create interesting photographs, you need to fill the frame and minimise the amount of dead space. The first rule is to get in close, and there is no reason why you can't fill the frame with your focal point being taken as an extremely close-up shot. It will help you to capture emotion that wouldn't be detectable from far away.

3. Take action shots

Capturing action shots requires practise. You could practise capturing images of footballers in action, but make sure you have their permission first. Take lots of pictures to see if you can capture a player making contact with the ball.

With a digital camera you can take lots of pictures, view them on the LCD display, then delete any unwanted images. Some cameras have a function called continuous mode that allows you to take several photos in quick succession. This is great for taking action shots.

These photos were shot in continuous mode.

4. Choose a focal point

The focal point is the most interesting object/person in your photograph.

Any more than one focal point looks cluttered. If your photograph is expansive - for example, a sweeping landscape - you can choose a tree or small cottage as your focal point.

There are too many focal points (people, trees, bench) in the first image shown above, whereas the second image shows the tree as the clear focal point.

5. Arrange your subjects

Arrange your subjects to ensure you translate what you want the audience to focus on. Use plain backgrounds. Be selective. If your object is in front of a messy background, move it until you are satisfied with the shot.

In the first image above, the messy background takes the focus away from the iron.

6. Think about composition

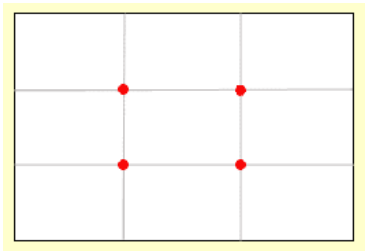
Have you ever taken a picture of a landscape and been disappointed when you have not captured the beauty of it?

There are several reasons why the camera views something differently from the human eye. We have the ability to interpret an image and enhance it, because the brain has the ability to process lots of different things at a time. The camera has a limited focus range whereas the eye is constantly scanning the scenery, recomposing it, and responding to changes in light conditions. The eyes work in conjunction with the brain to create the splendid image that you can see. A camera has a much narrower exposure range than the human eye.

Your role as photographer is to translate what you see and capture an attractive feature following the rules of taking good digital images. Once again, take lots of photos to ensure you capture one that is perfect.

7. Apply the rule of thirds

Photographs with the focal point exactly in the centre can lack depth and interest, so it's better to position your focal point off-centre. To do this, apply the rule of thirds. Draw two horizontal and two vertical lines through the picture you want to capture, to divide it into thirds.



The eyes are naturally drawn to the four focal points illustrated in red above, so place the important elements of your picture on one (or more) of these points.

Image 1

Image 2

Compare the two images above. A focal point placed in the centre (as in image 1, above) often just looks boring, so as a rule avoid placing your focal point in the centre. You will see this rule being applied in any magazine you look at.

8. Think about light

Most digital cameras have an automatic flash that is used when the camera senses there isn't enough natural light. It's good to keep the flash on automatic, to make sure your photographs are illuminated well. You need to experiment with your flash, to work out its depth or range. Generally, most flashes work up to 10 metres away - any further, and your subject is likely to appear dark.

Also think about natural light, especially outside. Try to make sure the sun/light source is behind you, or focussed on your subjects.

When photographing people, be aware that strong bright light will show up their wrinkles and blemishes, so you may need to adjust the light. Similarly, when taking photographs of landscapes, try to take them in the early morning or early evening because the light is softer then.

9. Vary your shots

Some scenes lend themselves to vertical shots, so experiment with using your camera horizontally and vertically. A photograph of Nelson's Column, for example, would be ideal for a vertical shot to illustrate the towering effect the column has on its surrounding scenery.

Nelson's Column is ideal for a vertical shot.

10. Know when to break the rules

Once you have mastered these rules, you can then begin to break them. With digital photography, it's easy to take lots of pictures, so don't be afraid to experiment. If you can create an unusual image, it's likely that people will be interested in it.

Transferring photos to a computer

The most common way to transfer photos from the camera onto the computer is through connecting the camera to the computer using a cable:

1. Plug the camera cable into the back of your computer. Make sure it is connected to the camera at the other end.
2. Once connected, turn your camera on at the power button.
3. On your computer, follow the on-screen instructions and choose the folder that you would like your images to be downloaded to. Normally, they will be saved as .JPG files, which is the best format to use for digital photographs.

There are other ways to transfer your photographs to your computer. You could take the memory card out of the digital camera and put it into a card reader device. Similarly, some new printers have an in-built card reader that allows you to copy your images to your computer or print them out directly.

Plug the USB lead from a card reader into a USB socket on your PC. Push your card into the right slot and copy the images across just like any other file. Buy a multi card reader in case you change cameras. You should get one for less than £15		Connecting a digital camera to a computer using a wire		A card reader in a printer