

How not to get bogged down on your photographic journey

Everyone, at some stage, is a beginner. In work, a hobby, life in general. We look at those who have more experience and expertise than us and feel inadequate. Photography is the same. You pick up this amazing photographic machine [Point & Shoot OR DSLR camera] in a shop, feels its weight, see all the buttons, dials, windows, switches..... we know it's capable of lots but it's easy for us to fall into the trap of feeling incapable.

If you have felt like this, you are not alone. Nearly everybody gets over those hurdles, though - mainly by not being distracted by some thoughts that beginners always have, like:

1. “My Photos Are Bad”

It's easy to feel like your photos are junk. Everyone starts at the beginning; not knowing a thing. Learning about your camera can be a bumpy road, and there will be lots of bad photos for every good one you take. That's the nature of learning. Each time you take a photo though, you'll get a little bit better. Don't fall into the trap of feeling like you should be taking perfect pictures right away. The manual itself may as well be written in Greek for all the sense you make of it (unless, of course, you're Greek). But use the manual as your reference book - when you find something in photography that sounds great but you don't think you understand, pull out that manual and find out how you can do the same thing - you'll be surprised at how much your camera is capable of. You just needed to know which buttons to use! You'll gradually learn how to get the best out of camera - focusing, keeping the image sharp and in composing your photographs. Take every opportunity to look at websites, galleries, magazines etc with photographs - lots of those pictures could have been taken on your camera - so what makes them special? In 99% of cases, a successful picture is a *well composed* picture - so take note of any hints on composition, decide what it is about a picture that makes a good composition. Some of this is 'learn-able', some is down to experience - very little is down to luck.

2. My Gear Isn't Good Enough:

Expensive gear doesn't necessarily equal good photos. If you don't know how to use a camera to its full potential, the most expensive gear in the world won't give you great photos. Bear in mind that a lot of the 'top-end' features of expensive cameras are for professional use - which means burst shooting, extra tough bodies, powerful batteries, high sensitivity sensors so they can shoot in the dark (just about). Most of those features are irrelevant to most of us. That said, fantastic photos can come from all ranges of equipment. I'm now equally at home with my small point and shoot as with my (now ageing) DSLR. I've taken successful pictures with both.

3. I'm Doing This All Wrong:

There is no “wrong” way to take a photo. Many beginners feel like they are inadequate because they don't understand manual settings, and can't effectively use them. Don't fall into that mind-trap! Auto isn't a bad setting. It is a great place to begin your photography

journey. The Priority modes on DSLRs are designed to offer a transition from Auto to full Manual settings, when YOU are ready. Advance at your own speed. Remember, great photos are what count. The settings you used to capture the great photos aren't important. Like in golf - it's not "how?", it's "how many?"

*Don't let the fear of progressing past Auto hold you back, though. It's a scary world at first, but there is no reason not to take the leap. In the digital world, there's no consequence for taking hundreds of photos, even if most turn out horrible. Who cares? That's what the DELETE button is for! Once you've mastered Auto mode, practice using the other settings. Research how they work and what they do. Play around with them. They are conquerable and you WILL succeed. It's all about learning and practice. You may eventually be experienced enough to go to a photo location, get your camera out, decide that "it's going to be 1/125th @ f.8 on ISO100" (and set that on, manually) but, frankly, who cares? (And if you do get to that stage, don't go telling everybody around you that "I'm on manual, and I'm set at blah blah blah" It's boastful and boring!)

4. I'll Never Be Able to Take Photos Like the Pros

Remember - the pros were beginners once too!

Everyone has to start somewhere. Learn from the pros. Study their work. Use them as inspiration to practice and grow.

5. I Can't Afford Any Editing Programs:

Photoshop might not be in your arsenal right now, and maybe it never will be. Have no fear! There are plenty of other choices out there, many of which are free. Creative control over your photos is at your fingertips!

Check out these free options:

- Windows Photo Gallery
- Gimp
- iPhoto
- Picasa
- Picnik

If you'd like more editing capabilities but still don't want to invest in the full Photoshop suite, Photoshop Elements is a great alternative. PSE has most of the best features of Photoshop, for a fraction of the cost, and in a slightly less intimidating form. Adobe also has the Lightroom software; an organisational and complete editing package, for less than the Photoshop bundle. Then there's PaintShop Pro Photo, a very good program, or PhotoPlus.

It's easy to let these mind-traps seep into your consciousness and get you down. They might even make you second guess your photographic talent. Don't let them! Don't give up. Keep shooting and watch yourself and your photography grow.