



Beckham Digital Tutorials



Photographic Technique and Manipulation

This disk is a different concept for us and it comes as a request from our customers. Many people, it seems, want to have a much better idea of what the technicalities and thought processes are up to the time we press the shutter button. We thought that was a valid area to cover in more detail, because unless we get that part of image creation right, the work in Photoshop we do is always going to be an uphill struggle. It is also likely to affect the quality of our images to some degree.

So, in this disk we are going to break down our projects into a BEFORE and AFTER situation. We will first deal with all our thoughts and the technicalities of exposure, exposure compensation and exposure bracketing. Along with, composition, time of day, subject etc etc, right up to the point where we fire the shutter. In the second video we will deal with the Photoshop manipulations of the image we shot.

There does seem to be a school of thought that says that in the digital age where we can shoot raw files for a greater exposure latitude, exposure is not quite so critical anymore. Well, it is true that Raw gives us a greater latitude, but any assumption that exposure is not critical could not be more wrong. We will explain and demonstrate why within the videos on this disk.

Does this ring any bells with you? :- You are out shooting images and as you look at the LCD on your camera, you are pleased with the results. The subject matter is interesting, you have good lighting and the thumbnails look pretty good on your camera. Later when you get the same thumbnails onto your computer, particularly if you are a Raw shooter, they just don't seem to have the same impact that inspired you to shoot them in the first place.

We know from other photographers that this feeling is almost universal and there are a number of reasons for it, but the most crucial one is that exposure is always a compromise and more importantly what we see with our eyes is not what we capture. So, there is a gap between what we saw and what we shot. Often you can add exposure errors to that and suddenly what looked great in a little thumbnail on the back of the camera now doesn't look quite so appealing. The good news is the appeal is probably still there and this disk will demonstrate how to get at it, but also how to make sure we get everything spot on right up to the time we press the shutter Button.

Prologue 1 - Exposure - understanding it better - Running Time 15:00



Thinking about our words above, this Prologue is a great way to start our disk. Until we really understand exposure and how we can use the controls in our camera to capture the best exposure, we are unlikely to be able to raise the standard and quality of our photography.

This sums up the approach we apply to our own photography and as such will feature a fair bit in this disk, so a great place to start.

Prologue 2 - Auto Exposure Bracketing - Running Time 14:32

As we will be mentioning this technique a fair amount on this disk, we need to be sure that all viewers appreciate what Auto Exposure Bracketing is and how we can use that as a way of elevating our photography.

We have created a few graphics too, so we can effectively look through the viewfinder of a camera together, as we talk about this subject. Once we have everyone on board we can launch into the first of our projects.



The Pelican - (Part One 14:32) (Part Two 32:24)

In these projects our videos will be in two sections, the before part is where we go through what we did and why leading up to making an exposure. All the technical details are available and we discuss lighting, composition, exposure everything that led up to the button being pressed. The after part covers the manipulation of the final image in Photoshop. Remember, we may have to select the best image from many that we shot, so picking the right one is important too.



In the second part we take you through the manipulation of our chosen file. We are looking to create an image of the highest quality, one that could be printed very large if that was required. We want to avoid excessive noise, poor colour balance and we want to arrive at an image that has impact and appeal. What version of Photoshop we are using is irrelevant. See over the page for our final image.



Our final image is a good example that if we start any manipulation from a great original, we don't have a great deal of problems in Photoshop.

Exposure Myths & Dull Conditions (Part One 13:36) (Part Two 30:33)

There are some myths regarding photography and exposure and one of those we have heard about a few times, involves a generic bias in the exposure for every image we shoot. Why?

We have heard many photographers say that they always underexpose their digital pictures by a third of a stop or maybe more. When asked why, the answer is generally that they are trying to reduce the risk of the highlights being burnt out. On nearly every occasion this idea came as advice of someone in their camera club or someone involved in photography.

It is not a good idea to make these blanket changes to your exposures because every image and the lighting conditions for each image will be different.

We can understand why a photographer may wish to avoid harsh highlights, but underexposing every shot is not the way to do it. You will end up doing more harm than good.



If we try to protect highlights with a deliberate underexposure we run the risk of making shadow areas far too dark. Now while we can often darken light areas quite effectively in Photoshop, we have far greater problems when we come to lighten dark areas.

There is no blanket exposure decision we can make to cover all eventualities, but there are some simple things we can do, which are especially useful in dull conditions. However, to some degree, the ideas we put forward here are valid for all lighting conditions, but tricky to do in harsh lighting like bright sun.

Night Time Photography (Part One 15:38) (Part Two 20:11)

Photography at night will generally involve long exposures and the technicalities of making those exposures can be a little different. Like any other form of photography there are a number of things we can do to improve our success rate.

In the first part of this section we deal with those technicalities and some of the pitfalls that may prevent us from capturing a good sharp interesting shot. We also need to develop skills in selecting the right image from the many we may take during this type of photographic session.



In the second part we demonstrate a number of small steps we can take via Camera Raw and Photoshop to produce the best quality image we can. Most of the manipulation work we do is a series of small steps, each one not too complex on its own. It is only when we see the finished result that the improvement is fully appreciated.

Low Light and High ISO Settings - (Part One 20:56) (Part Two 33:46)

Here we have a classic photographic issue.

We had beautiful light quality for taking pictures of animals, but very little of that light. The conditions were extremely dull, which gives us all sorts of problems.



So, there we were at the zoo needing long lenses and fast shutter speeds and although the quality of the light was great we did not have much of that light. This meant that we could not come close to achieving the shutter speed we needed. The solution? Raise the ISO setting from 100 to 1000.

If we raise the ISO to 1000 we then introduce noise that can often destroy any chance of creating a great image. In that case we need to know how we can raise that ISO, and still get a great quality image.

The key is in the technique and exposure long before we get our image anywhere near Photoshop, but Photoshop can help too as part of a wider process.

Now we doubt our thumbnail here will tell you an awful lot about how successful we might have been with this project, but the full sized completed image contained on the disk will.

Open it up in your version of Photoshop and see what you think.



High Dynamic Range Photography (Part One 17:05) (Part Two 34:06)

In this section we take a brief look at High Dynamic Range Photography. HDR fits into the subject that we are covering on this disk with regards to exposure balance and improving our images. Some of the later versions of Photoshop, particularly CS4 and CS5 will allow us to create HDR images. However, many HDR enthusiasts have turned to another piece of software called Photomatix.



The feeling is that it gives a more consistent result than the Photoshop option, but with each Photoshop upgrade that is likely to change.

Here we look at the theory of HDR and pass on many of our own experiences of the rights and wrongs. There are techniques applied at the taking stage that will certainly help us to achieve a better result.

We then select from a number of bracketed exposures and work an HDR image through both Photomatix and Photoshop CS5. The results from both are included on the disk, so you can review them on your own computer.

For those who want a more in depth tutorial on HDR just look in our web site menus for a disk containing over 5 hours of various videos covering many aspects of this subject. We think it is likely to feature more and more in the future.

Grab and Go Photography - (Part One 12:41) (Part Two 28:54)

With some of our photography we can plan the photoshoot. We can watch the light, the clouds, the weather and sometimes pick the right time to visit a scene or place of interest to capture our pictures. However, there are just as many times when we are far from home and passing through a place of interest where we cannot hang around till dusk or return to the place next week.

In those situations I call this Grab and Go Photography, we stop in the car and have 20 - 30 minutes to capture a few shots. The lighting may not be perfect, but its part of our holiday that we want to capture it.

In this section we take you through some things to consider before taking the shots and explain our methods of grabbing a varied set of images as quickly as possible. To do that in a limited time we don't want to be bogged down with exposure issues or sharpness issues. So, lets grab and go here with some ideas for the taking stage and then see what we can make of those images

The one thing that is vital is this. If the lighting conditions are not perfect, then we have to make sure that we do not make any errors that add to our problems. If we take away well exposed and sharp images, perhaps we can lift them in Photoshop to bridge the gap between the conditions we had and the conditions we would have liked.



When All Else Fails - (Part One 7:36) (Part Two 30:18)

Sometimes we make arrangements to go out shooting images and despite the best laid plans we don't have the best results for the subject at hand as you can see on the right.

Well, why not get creative and take some images anyway. This will obviously work better with some subjects than others. The point is, we need to be aware of what we can do to avoid coming home with a batch of disappointing images. We need to create the impact and appeal in the image ourselves. Forget about bridging the gap between what we saw and what we was able to capture, lets go well past that and inject our own creativity into the images we shoot. (See over)





With creative thought and Adobe Camera Raw we can make a difference

Finished Images

We have included all the finished images we created on this disk so you can evaluate them in your version of Photoshop. Please note that these are not copyright free images and they have been included solely so you can evaluate them yourself, on your own computer.

The most important part of any tutorial disk of this nature are the techniques we describe, because those same techniques can be used on a wide variety of subjects. This is an important point to keep in mind and as you watch how we go about our photography, think how those same techniques could help in your style of photography no matter what your favourite subjects are.

Tripod Tip

Even when we shoot from a tripod there can be conditions that will make that tripod less stable than it usually is and we describe one of those in a practical way on this disk.



For many years we have used a simple tip that will make your tripod rock steady, even in the most windy conditions. Many tripods have a centre column such as the one we show to the left. Usually there is a simple way to attach a ring or hook to the bottom of this centre column.

Once the tripod legs are extended, hang your camera bag from the hook beneath the centre pillar. The camera bag weight pulling down in the centre of the legs makes any tripod remarkable stable.

There is also an added bonus to this tip too. Some of our photography may be done in city centres at night and it's not a bad idea to have your camera bag right where you can see it and where it is far less likely to fall foul of an opportunist crook.

Camera Tip

Where is our camera's instruction book when we are out shooting pictures? Safely stored at home in many cases and when you need to find that elusive setting, the shot is missed long before you have found it by trial and error.

If you don't already do so, go and get your camera instruction book now and put it in your camera bag. Modern cameras are so complex and with so many different routes to similar functions we need that book close by.

The route, via our camera's menus, to some of the functions are difficult to remember and some we are going to need quickly or we will miss photo opportunities. One example may be setting up automatic exposure bracketing. We may need to locate the function quickly.

Highlight the vital parts of your instruction book with a highlight pen that shows you how to get access to these functions and mark the pages with a yellow post it note.

Once you have used these functions a few times, you may not need to refer to your book. However, if you do need the book, there is nothing worse than leafing through a complex instruction book, in low light, trying to find what you want.

