

The Trifecta

The trifecta is what you can control for your image. An adjustment to one control means another control should be adjusted up or down. Play around with combinations to see what happens!

Aperture

How wide open or closed the lens is. A lower number/bigger aperture, like 1.8, indicates more of the lens is open and lets more light in. Aperture is also called f/stop and ranges from wide open [1.2] to pin point focused [22]. The larger the aperture [smaller the f/stop] the more blur or 'bokeh' you have in the background because a wide open lens creates a much smaller depth of field.

ISO

This number is the sensitivity of the sensor. These are my rules of thumb: Sunny afternoon - 200; Indoor afternoon 400-800; Low light - 800 or above.

Shutter

This is how quickly the shutter opens and closes. For fast moving subjects [babies on the move or children playing sports] use a fast shutter speed. If you need more light into the camera, slow the shutter speed down, but never set the speed to a number lower than the focal length of your lens. Example: If my lens is at 150mm, good rule of thumb is shutter speed should be faster than 150 to minimize shake and blur.

Camera

If you are thinking of buying a DSLR, that's awesome! Pick a budget and then buy whatever camera fits in that budget. Canon or Nikon, doesn't really matter as both lines have consumer and professional level cameras. I originally picked Nikon because of Nikon's history of optics. Canon and Nikon is a Coke v Pepsi debate. Test out both cameras and pick the one that you like better. B&H Photo online also has a great used equipment department and all purchases include a warranty. I've purchased several lenses from here.

Lens

If you are going to buy one new lens, buy the 35mm or 50mm* 1.8 lens. You can usually find on Amazon for \$200-\$250. The large aperture gives you that creamy bokeh blur in portraits.

* Most consumer DSLRS have a crop sensor. This isn't a big deal but professional grade cameras are considered full frame. All this means for you is with the cropped sensor, your 35mm lens will actually feel more like 50mm. No one will notice but you. I shot my first couple years of weddings on two crop sensor cameras.

Preset Settings

DSLR A, P, M and S modes - what exactly are these and which should you stay away from?

A: Aperture priority. You set the aperture and the camera will pre select [based on the internal meter] what to set the ISO and shutter speeds at. This is a great setting to use if you are taking portraits or close up photos.

S: Shutter priority. You set the shutter and the camera will pre select [based on the internal meter] what to set the ISO and aperture speeds at. This setting is a great standard setting and also really good for those sunny afternoons outside watching your kids play.

M: Manual mode. This means you set all three components in the trifecta. This is great to play around with, but is an advanced mode.

P: Program mode. This means that your dslr sensor will read and pick all three settings based on light. I do not recommend this setting ever because your camera doesn't know the subject you are shooting. It may pick a setting to slow to capture the game winning touchdown.

How'd I Get the Shot?

See how a difference in settings can create different aesthetics and moods in your photos.

Notice how her eye are sharp as a tack, but some of her hairs are super soft and blurred. This is because of a shallow depth of focus created by a very large aperture [1.8].



Scenario: Indoor with natural light
 Lens: 85mm
 Aperture: 1.8 or 2.0
 ISO: 400
 Shutter: 500

Fast shutter makes sure I freeze these candid moments.



Scenario: Dusk
 Lens: 24mm
 Aperture: 5.6
 ISO: 800
 Shutter: 160

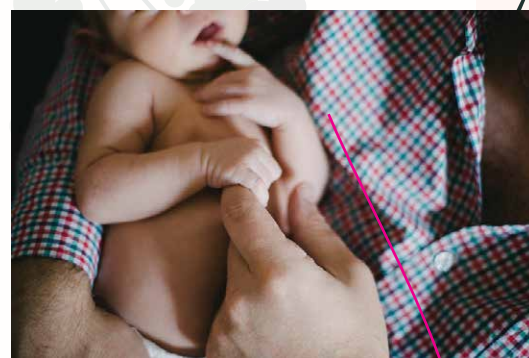
Because of the background, I wanted to make sure to show that detail so I shot with a smaller aperture. To let more light in, I compensated with higher ISO and slower shutter.



Scenario: Golden hour outdoors
 Lens: 50mm
 Aperture: 2.8
 ISO: 400
 Shutter: 320



Scenario: Indoor low light with flash
 Lens: 50mm
 Aperture: 2.8
 ISO: 400
 Shutter: 200



Scenario: Indoor with natural light
 Lens: 50mm
 Aperture: 2.8
 ISO: 400
 Shutter: 250

Ambient directional light is great for newborn details.

Pro Tips

If you notice in the above scenarios, I shoot with a very large aperture [1.8 or 2] for portraits. This allows me to focus on the eyes of the subject and bring the portrait to life. If you have 2 or more people, it's better to shrink the aperture, even by a little. This makes sure all subjects are in focus. Golden hour is the time right before the sun sets when the light is super warm and soft, which creates a beautiful setting for subjects.