



Taking a Good Picture

A good picture is a great tool to promote your 4-H program. With a strong photo, you can demonstrate 4-H in action on brochures, posters, newsletters, and Web sites. Don't forget to let your imagination guide you!

The best photos have:

- High-resolution
- Action
- Close-ups with emotion
- Good subject placement
- Sufficient lighting
- Lock focus and great sharpness

Below are some tips and tricks, along with examples from the online 4-H Photo Library, that will help as you start taking photos. Many of the following tips can be applied by any person, using any camera. However, the camera specific tips below are based on the use of a point and shoot camera, set to automatic, as this camera type is the most common in use today.

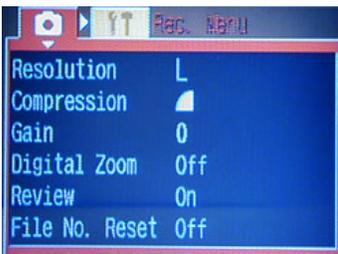


Many people make the mistake of thinking that, if the camera is set to automatic, they can let it do all the thinking. **Remember that a camera is only as smart as it is programmed to be.** Continue reading for some great tips and tricks to maximize the use of an automatic camera. Ready?

High-resolution:

In simple terms, high-resolution means high quality. When a picture is stored, it stores little pieces of information called pixels (picture elements). The more pixels in your picture, the more information it has about the scene you snapped. The more pixels, the larger a picture can be blown up and printed without becoming distorted or poor quality.

Even though high-resolution photos take up more space on your memory card, it is best to always take photos in high-resolution so you have maximum flexibility in how you can use the photos.



Sample menu for resolution and compression

To set your camera to take high-resolution pictures, refer to your camera's user manual. It is almost always under your camera menu and represented by the top two symbols (the L and smooth triangle) pictured in the sample menu at left. Make sure you select both the L and the smooth triangular symbols. Of course, setting the camera to take high-resolution photos does no good if the camera itself is not of a high enough quality. You must use a camera with no less than 2 megapixels and ideally, at least 4 megapixels to produce high enough resolution for prints and enlargements. Thus, cell phones, most being 1 megapixel, do not produce high enough resolution and should not be used to take photos that might be printed.



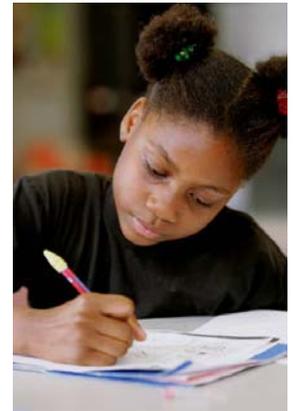
Action:

Catch that moment! The best action shots come with patience and can take more than a dozen tries. Don't be discouraged; they're worth the wait! These shots can have stopped or frozen action, blurred action, or an in focus subject with a blurred background. The difference between this type of blur and that of a non-sharp or out of focus photo (see lock focus) is that this blur is and looks intentional.

Close-ups with emotion:

Close-ups bring a feeling of closeness and focus attention on the subject. Thus, they are great for showing emotion. When the subject is farther away, the foreground is the emphasis and can be distracting to the viewer.

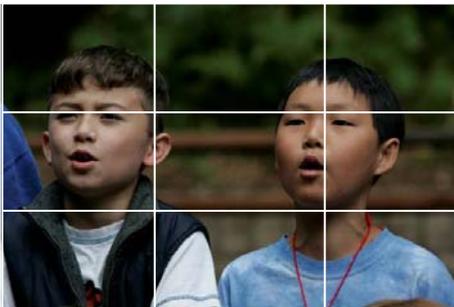
As you look through the viewfinder and move toward your subject to fill the frame, notice how you eliminate things that don't add to the picture. It's always best to intentionally compose your pictures.



Good subject placement:

Give your pictures a bold and dramatic arrangement.

Avoid putting your subject directly in the center of the picture unless you're shooting a formal arrangement in which the subject is the center of attention.



Rule of thirds:

In candid pictures, consider following the traditional rule of thirds. Imagine a pair of lines dividing the picture into thirds horizontally and a second pair dividing it into thirds vertically. Place the most important visual element—for people, usually the face or the eyes—on one of the points where the lines intersect.

Open space:

When a person is moving in your photo, the image will have more impact when the subject is off-center.

Leave the open space in the direction in which the subject is heading. Or, if the subject is looking off to the side, leave space in that direction.





Backgrounds:

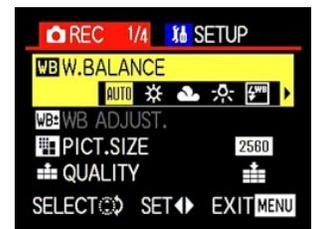
Whether you're outside or inside, a plain background will place the focus on the subject instead of on other things.

Indoors: Avoid distracting objects, patterned wallpaper, and bright lamps.

Outdoors: Be careful of tree limbs, utility poles, wires, signs, and other people that can take attention away from your center of interest.

Sufficient lighting:

Make sure that your picture is not coming out too dark. If it is, add more lighting sources to the picture, move the location to where there is more light, or use a flash. Natural light is best. Avoid fluorescent lighting, when possible. Two tricks when you have poor lighting: 1. Adjust the white balance under your camera menu to the appropriate type of lighting or auto, as seen on the right example menu, and 2. Use the focus trick described under lock focus.



Sample menu for white balance

Lock focus and great sharpness:

Other than intentional blur in an action shot, you should strive to make pictures that are sharp and have a locked focus. The two major culprits that prevent sharp and lock focus pictures are shaking the camera when taking a picture and focusing the camera on something other than the subject, which often happens when the subject is not centered.

To prevent camera shake and the resulting lack of sharpness, use a tripod or rest your camera or elbows on a stable surface, such as a table. If neither is appropriate, tuck your elbows and press them into your sides, stabilizing your camera. Taking your picture between breaths and making sure you've eaten recently (low blood-sugar levels can cause your hands to shake) can also help reduce camera shake.

Lock focus is the quality of having your subject perfectly sharp. In practice, lock focus prevents focusing on something other than your intended subject. Most cameras on automatic assume that your subject is in the center of your picture and thus focus on this area. If your subject is off center or your lighting is poor, use the following trick: Position your subject in the middle of your viewfinder or LCD screen and press the shutter button half-way down to trigger the camera on automatic to focus. Continue to hold the shutter button half-way down, but, at the same time, re-frame the picture to your desire. Once you are satisfied with your photo composition, press the button all the way to take the picture.