

Digital photography: making memories magic

Last week, in part one of our two-part report on digital cameras, we went over the basic terms and features you want to keep an eye on when shopping for your own digital camera. This week, we're going to show you four "tricks" to getting consistently good photos out of your digital camera. They are:

1. Lighting
2. Know your equipment (and its limits)
3. Cropping
4. Red-eye and/or color correction

That's it. Once you internalize these four concepts, almost any in-focus picture can be made into a great picture. *Sounds simple, doesn't it?*

Lighting is Your Friend ... and Your Enemy

A little common sense goes a long way when it comes to lighting. As a rule of thumb, if your camera was inexpensive, it's probably best suited for sunny-day outdoor pictures and medium-shot indoor flash pictures ... and that's about it. The flash unit built into most digital cameras is best used on subjects that area about 4-8 feet away from you. Too close and you get washed-out glare – too far away, and you get darkness.

Don't be afraid to turn *off* the flash unit on your camera if there's sufficient lighting, but it's best if you can hold the camera steady by using a tripod or similar device. Without a tripod, there's a good chance that your picture will come out "shaky" without the flash, since the shutter automatically stays open longer.

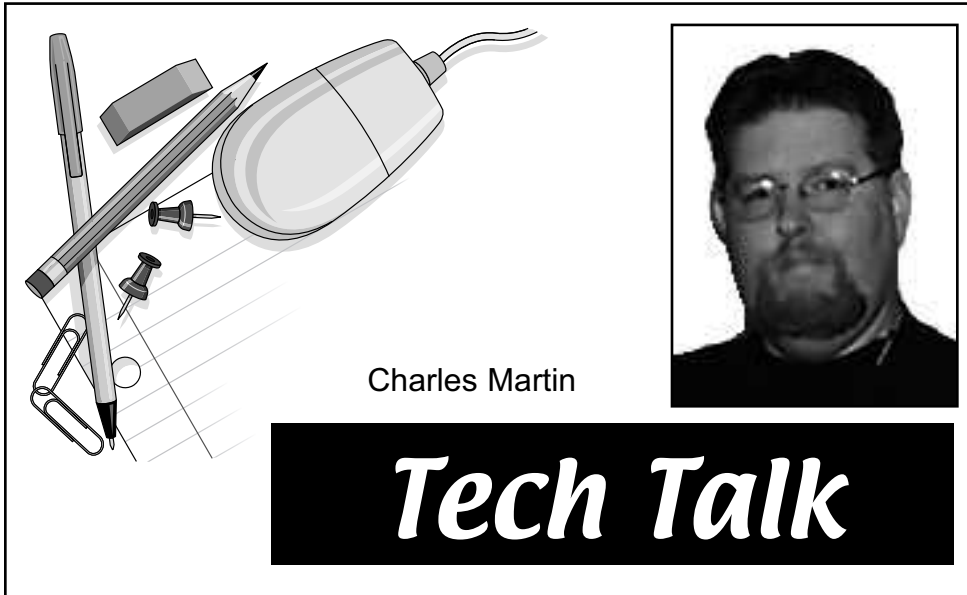
Ideally, you want a camera with a "shoe" that allows you to attach a separate flash unit, which can be pointed upwards to "bounce" the light of the flash off a ceiling or side wall. Not many consumer digital cameras are so equipped, but a few have a tiltable flash built into the unit.

Know Thy Equipment ... and Thy Limits

Digital camera owners tend to leave the camera forever set to "Auto," which really cheats them out of taking much better pictures than they otherwise would. That little dial on the top is usually left completely unexplored by the owners, but changing those settings will almost always give you better pictures.

Two of the cryptic symbols on the dial (apart from the "automatic" setting) are the easiest to figure out. One is the "running" stick figure, and this is meant to indicate a sports or "fast action" mode. Set your camera to this setting when you are going for medium shots at the soccer game, or something that is not too far away but moving fast (good for hyperactive pets, too!). The other is the "flower." As you might guess, this is meant to indicate a close-up or "macro" setting. This is ideal for anything you need to get close to that isn't moving.

Ever taken a picture of a breathtaking natural monument and been disappointed at how fuzzy or small the picture came out? That's because you didn't set the camera to the "mountain" icon, which is meant to tell the camera to keep the focus as far away as possible (infinity). This works best when shooting something that is greater than 20 feet away from you. It's ideal for shooting out your hotel room window, or large items far away.



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Tech Talk

The two most inexplicable of the dial settings are actually two of the ones you should use most. The "lady" icon (sometimes seen as a lady with a hat) is meant to represent the ideal setting for a head-and-shoulders portrait of someone. It tells the camera to keep the close center in sharp focus, while allowing for a good depth of field. If you are taking portraits of your loved ones, this is a setting you will want to use frequently.

Last, you may have a "moon and star" icon on your camera. This is meant for nighttime photography, or any sort of shooting when the subject is lit, but far away, and between you and them is darkness (such as a concert photo or school play). In this mode, the flash should be *off*, and the camera must be mounted on a tripod or steady surface, since the lens will be open a long time gathering enough light to make a good exposure. This mode is great for shooting nighttime Christmas light displays, particularly when the streets are wet and reflect the light.

A variation on this mode is the "moon and star with circle" icon, which is meant for photos where the flash will be on and the subject is close to you, but surrounded by darkness. This mode can be used for creative "blurring" if the subject moves slightly or if the light sources move (like headlights).

There can be many other symbols on the control dial, such as *Tv* (Time value) for shutter priority, *Av* (Aperture value) for aperture priority, and *M* for manually setting exposure controls, but the settings vary by camera. Check your manual for details on how to fine-tune these.

Cropping

So now you've got the pictures, how to quickly get them out of the camera and into some useful form (like printed pictures, a Web album, even a book)? There are a lot of software programs that claim to make this easy, but there's really only one that lives up to the hype: Apple Computer's *iPhoto*, which runs on Macs only as part of their "iLife" suite (\$79), truly makes managing and producing useful photo results as easy as taking the pictures.

Coming up second is Adobe's *Photoshop Elements* (Mac and PC, \$99) and *Adobe Album* (PC only, about \$50). Most of the other low-end photo software is just junk and should be avoided. I've actually seen PC users buy inexpensive Macs *just* to use as a dedicated photo and audio/video workstation; the *iPhoto* software is *that* good.

Cropping a photo can do two important things: it can cut out areas of the photo that the photographer didn't intend to shoot (like another person walking into the shot), and it can "re-balance" a photo that accidentally had its subject too far to one side. You can also "zoom in" on just the most interesting part of a shot. This is one of those times when a high-megapixel count on your camera really benefits you, since it allows the luxury of cropping a photo even quite severely without losing so much "resolution" that you can't make a decent-sized print later.

Red-Eye and Color Correction

We're starting to get away from the basic level of point/shoot/crop, but I can't leave this subject without mentioning that *iPhoto*, *Photoshop Elements* and other photos software can often "rescue" an otherwise fine photo that is marred by "devil eyes" either in humans or animals. It's usually a simple matter of drawing a small box or circle around the affected eye(s) and hitting the "remove red eye" option in the program.

Sometimes, however, the computer can't make an intelligent choice about this, or the basic brightness/contrast/enhance modes such programs offer just don't do enough to make your photo "right." *Photoshop Elements* and its big brother, the \$800 *Adobe Photoshop*, have tools to go beyond automatic options and allow you to "paint" the black back on the eyeballs, or shift the "color cast" of the photo to compensate for poor lighting (like the cold blue of fluorescent lighting, which can be balanced by adding more orange to the picture).

Recent versions of *Photoshop Elements* have added sets of filters designed to automatically compensate for the most frequently seen "color casts" in digital photos, and practiced users can even select specific areas of a photo for brightness adjustment, which can help a lot when the subject was a little too close to the flash (or wearing too much white) but the rest of the photo is fine.

One of my favorite tricks in *Photoshop* is to bring new emphasis to the subject by slightly blurring the background. Used sparingly, this can really make a subject "pop out" of a photo and give a picture more "depth." Another is select and replace a dull or washed-out sky with a more vibrant sky from a different picture, but of course this takes practice to really make it look natural.

Software can do a lot to "rescue" flawed pictures, but fundamentally the more you have to work with, the better your initial shots will turn out and the less time-consuming "post-production" work you'll need to do to make your digital photos sing. Think before you snap! Set the camera dial to the right setting! Gauge the light and turn the flash off where possible! Get in close, hold your breath and ... click!

A tip o' the hat to Joe Josephs for providing some of the technical expertise used in this article.

Tech Talk will be taking a break next week so that we can expand our coverage of the Florida Film Festival. In the meantime, Tech Talk would love to hear from East Orlando Sun readers who have purchased a "hybrid" vehicle for a future "Tech Talk" article! E-mail us at arts@eosun.com or call 407-658-2404 ... and thanks for reading!

ANNE FRANK CONTINUED FROM B1

cast and crew learned more about the people they portrayed, better enabling them to impart the emotional impact of the fear and deprivation they endured.

UCF performance major Shannon Beeby stars as Anne, and does an excellent job communicating the energy and enthusiasm of an imaginative child who begins her confinement thinking of it as an exciting adventure, but who matures gracefully, finding love and acceptance in such cramped quarters.

Her relationship with her father, Otto (the only survivor of the war), is the anchor that holds the show together, and

Beeby and Tad Ingram seem to have a real rapport that endures even in the most improvised moment, or during the unusual intermission where the actors remain on stage working out the routine of their hidden lives.

Darlin Barry, who played Patsy Cline earlier this season, shows her range as Mrs. Van Daan, a woman who can be both superficial and strong. When the Van Daans get desperate enough for money to sell her heirloom fur coat, she wails not because the coat was valuable but because "it was the last piece of my old world" in an affecting scene, one of many such emo-

tional moments. This play will definitely put a lump in your throat, but it never feels forced or affected.

The other main cast members, Mark Brotherton as Mr. Van Daan, Danielle Sagona as Anne's sister Margot and Gary Norris as the "eighth guest" Mr. Duessel all make the most of their more limited roles, never slipping into parody or stereotype even in the most traditionally "Jewish" moments of the play (the arguing, the eating, the praying). The tension the actors create is so palpable that the audience audibly draws their breath every time a horn or siren reminds the hidiers of their risk.

In addition to drawing the audience into their lives of fear and danger, we also

see their religion and their humanity on full view – even in some more awkward or embarrassing moments. The candor of Anne's writing allows the people in the story to come alive much more fully than if she had glossed over their faults and flaws. With the help of her father's dogged determination to get Anne's story out to the world, her writing accomplished everything young Anne dreamed of and more – if only she were around to see it.

"The Diary of Anne Frank" runs through April 10th at the Orlando Repertory Theatre, 1001 E. Princeton Street (the old Civic Theatre in Loch Haven). For tickets, call 407-896-2501 or visit their web site, www.orlandorep.com.