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A simple guide on how to take more successful
photographs with your compact camera

Free sample chapter



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Have a Central Point of Interest

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Leading on from the last chapter, we can say that simplicity can often be the key to a more satisfactory picture. Giving a picture a specific central point of interest can be very important. Concentrating on one main feature in the scene, to the exclusion of everything else, can greatly improve the impact of the shot.

So try adjusting position and viewpoint to isolate the strongest object in the scene, such as selecting a single tree to photograph rather than a large area, a waterfall with the light sparkling on the spray, or a main feature of a street rather than including too much, which might only make the picture look cluttered. Of course, the object of our attention needs to be significant enough on its own to justify being highlighted in this way.



Just one tree under snow can convey the winter atmosphere better than a more general shot



The two strongest features of Piccadilly Circus are photographed here, while a shot of the whole area could look cluttered and would lose impact

Compact cameras invariably have a built-in flash which automatically goes pop when the light falls below a certain level. Sometimes they can be switched off, but not always. In taking the night shot of Piccadilly above, it won't really matter either way, as the range of the flash is too small to help or hinder. It would be necessary, however, to use a tripod or find some firm base on which to rest the camera.

When we look at a general scene where there is a great deal going on, the eye and brain discriminate and our awareness becomes very selective. The attention will move from place to place, taking note of a building, then a tree, then a car, then a particular person, and so on. The camera cannot discriminate in this way on its own, and without the right guidance, once the scene is photographed, every item can take on equal importance and the various objects in the scene can merge into one another. Because of this, a previously unnoticed object like a lamp-post or old carton might now take on a large and unwanted significance.

It helps to keep a wary eye out for that 'No Entry' sign, telegraph pole, old dustbin and general rubbish which the eye might normally pass over. Such items will stand out all too clearly in a photograph and spoil an otherwise attractive picture.

Similarly, it can be worth waiting for people and cars to move away before photographing a historic shop front, otherwise they can distract the attention in the final shot.



Attention is put on one aspect of a country cottage rather than on the whole building

At times the main subject of the picture needs something extra to help create more interest. Old Roman ruins can look rather dull in a photograph, unless you were actually there. Including that stray cat in the foreground, rather than chasing it away, can give the photograph a lift. A famous government building will be helped if a guard or two are seen marching across the front. But it must look natural and appropriate.

The picture of the North African fort below is given extra depth by having the wall lead the eye into the picture. On its own, such pictures often mean less once the holiday is over and we are back home. The inclusion of the donkey provides an added interest.



The building alone is unusual for most people, but the donkey as an extra bit of interest makes it a more complete picture

Photographs like the aerial shot on the next page are not so difficult to take, even with a basic camera, once you are up in the 'plane. The central point of interest is clear and taking it against the light improves the atmosphere. Diagonals can be strong and dynamic in a picture. If the roads had been absolutely straight either vertically or horizontally the image would look very static.



A central point of interest; against the light for extra sparkle; a strong diagonal across the frame is more active and dynamic.

Tips:

- ✓ Have a central point of interest
- ✓ Watch out for unwanted objects
- ✓ Diagonals can make a composition more active
- ✓ Include another subject to enhance the central point of interest

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