

Answer Ten* Questions for Better Photographs

* Thirteen questions if you're an intermediate photographer.

The Essential Question

1	Is the light good?	Go to Jim's Cheat Sheet and to Beecher's Handouts (pages 5 and 11).
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For example—let's say you're photographing babies.

If you're able—use light that's best for what the photograph will "say" about each baby.



Crying Baby

The light is contrasty.

The light from the left is creating shadows.

The shadows emphasize the baby's expression.



Sleeping Baby



The light is low contrast.

There are no dark shadows on the baby.

The light is quiet for a sleeping baby.

Questions for the Exposure Mode Dial

This section is like a flow chart.

<p>2</p>	<p>Is the light dim? If no—go to #3.</p> 	<p>If yes—camera shake may occur—due to a slow shutter speed. Let's say you're at the Lincoln Memorial at night.</p> <p>Do the following.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Set your exposure mode dial to S or Tv (shutter priority). • Twirl the knob or ring to set the shutter speed to 1/60. On some cameras—you'll only see 60—not 1/60.
<p>3</p>	<p>Is your subject far away—and you're zoomed in on it? If no—go to #4.</p> 	<p>If yes—camera shake may occur—due to a slow shutter speed. Let's say you're photographing an eagle in its nest.</p> <p>Do the following.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Set your exposure mode dial to S or Tv (shutter priority). • Twirl the knob or ring to set the shutter speed to 1/1000 or faster. On some cameras—you'll only see 1000—not 1/1000.

More Questions for the Exposure Mode Dial

4 Are you close to your subject?

If everything in your viewfinder is more than fifteen feet away—go to #5.



More depth-of-field needed



Less depth-of-field wanted

If you're close to your subject—depth-of-field is important.

Let's say you're photographing Thomas Jefferson's polygraph (made a copy as he wrote).

Select A or Av (aperture priority) on your exposure mode dial.

You choose the aperture by twirling a knob or ring.

You want the entire device in-focus—more depth-of-field.

Select a physically small aperture—a large number (see below).

Let's say you're photographing President Kennedy in the oval office.

Select A or Av (aperture priority) on your exposure mode dial.

You want to blur the background—less depth-of-field.

Select a physically large aperture—a small number (see below).

More Depth-of-field

DSLR Cameras

f/16 or thereabouts:

- The aperture is physically small.
- Background is more in-focus.
- Subject is likely to be completely sharp.

Other Cameras

f/8:

- The aperture is physically small.
- Background is more in-focus.
- Subject is likely to be completely sharp.

Non-DSLRs often don't go beyond f/8.

Less Depth-of-field

DSLR Cameras

f/4 or thereabouts:


- The aperture is physically big.
- Background is out-of-focus.
- Subject may not be completely sharp.

Other Cameras

f/2 or **f/2.8:**

- The aperture is physically big.
- Background is out-of-focus.
- Subject may not be completely sharp.

More Questions for the Exposure Mode Dial

<p>5</p>	<p>Is your subject moving? If no—go to #6.</p> 	<p>If yes—shutter speed is important. Let's say you're photographing a presidential motorcade whizzing by. Select S or Tv (shutter priority). You choose the shutter speed by twirling a knob or ring.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1/1000 or thereabouts = Subject is frozen. The light must be bright. • 1/8 or thereabouts = Subject is blurred. The light must be dim. <p>As mentioned—some cameras don't display the numerator: 1/x.</p> <hr/> <p>If you're using 1/8—make sure you see 1/8 or 8. If you see 8 with quote marks—8"—it's an <i>eight second</i> exposure.</p> <hr/> <p>Can you hold the camera steady at 1/8th of a second? Nope. Use a tripod or set your camera on something.</p>
<p>6</p>	<p>If none of the above situations apply ...</p>	<p>... use P (Program). Your camera sets both the aperture and the shutter speed.</p>

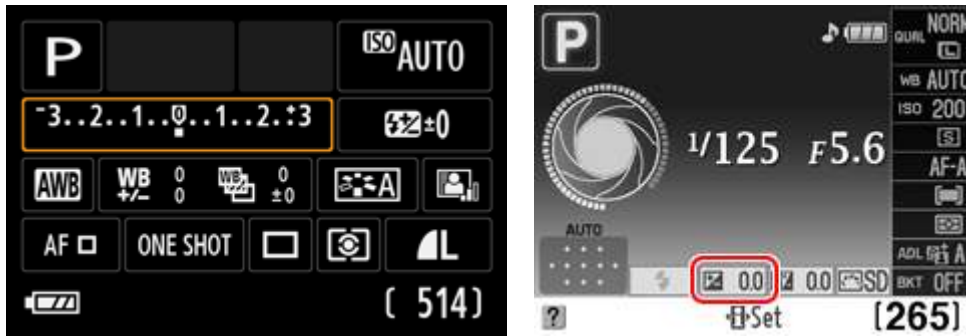
Exposure Compensation (+/-)

Exposure compensation allows you to make your photographs lighter or darker.

Press and **hold down** the +/- button.

This button is often near your forefinger or thumb.

A number line appears—or some numbers are highlighted.



Twirl a knob or ring.

+ = Brighter

You're overexposing the photograph.

- = Darker

You're underexposing the photograph.

Be sure to change the value back to 0.0.

Questions for Exposure Compensation (+/-)

7**Do you want richer color?**

If yes—change the exposure compensation to -1 .

Landscape photographers often leave the exposure compensation at -1 .

When they do a portrait—they put it back to 0.0.

More Questions for Exposure Compensation (+/-)

8 Is the photograph too light or too dark?



If yes—do the following.

Let's say you're photographing the space shuttle on a 747.

Press and hold the +/- button.

Twirl a knob or ring.

Change the exposure compensation value.

+ = Brighter

You're overexposing the photograph.

- = Darker

You're underexposing the photograph.

Be sure to change the value back to 0.0.

More Questions for Exposure Compensation (+/-)

9 Are you photographing someone against a bright sky?



If yes—they're apt to be a silhouette.

Don't set your exposure compensation to plus—to brighten the person.

Instead—pop your flash up.

What?

Don't use exposure compensation set to plus?

Let's say you're photographing Aunt Tilly against a sunset.

If you brighten her with exposure compensation:

- She'll be brighter—that's good.
- The sunset will be washed out—not good.

Set the exposure mode dial to P—and pop your flash up.

There's often a button with a flash icon—press it.

Pop up your flash up when photographing someone—with a hat—in the sun.

The shadow under the brim of the hat will be brighter.

The statue may be too far away for a pop-up flash.

Pop-up flashes only go about ten to twenty feet—depending on the aperture.

Beginners should return to the following three questions later.

More Questions for Exposure Compensation (+/-)

10 Are you photographing something that's light colored—or dark colored?



Normal exposure



Underexposure

Light meters “think” everything is medium colored.

When you photograph something that **isn't** medium colored—the light meter makes the subject medium colored.

In a photograph:

- A glacier in the sun becomes a gray glacier.
- A dark maroon car becomes a red car.

If you're photographing:

- A light-colored subject in the sun—set the exposure compensation to about +1.7.
- A dark-colored subject—set the exposure compensation to about -1.7.

Let's say you're photographing the Vietnam Veterans Memorial.

Depending on the light—and the reflections on the wall—you may have to underexpose.

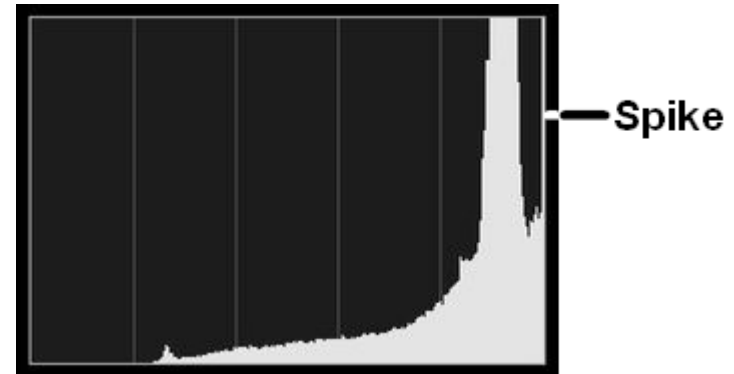
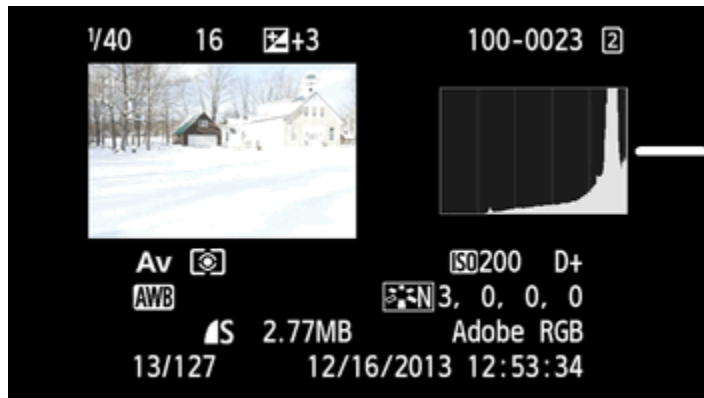
Set the exposure compensation to about -1.7.

Be sure to change the value back to 0.0.

More Questions for Exposure Compensation (+/-)

<p>11</p>	<p>After you take a photograph—is your LCD blinking?</p>	<p>If yes—the blinking areas are overexposed. You can't darken these overexposed areas. The “blinkies” feature is often called <i>highlight alert</i>. Search the PDF of your camera manual for the feature (Ctrl + f or Cmd + f). If your camera doesn't have this feature, use its histogram feature (see below). If you get the blinkies—use a minus setting on the exposure compensation.</p>
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If you see a spike running up the right side of the histogram—your photograph is overexposed.



ISO

ISO is how sensitive the sensor is to light.

Your camera is probably set to Auto ISO.

Auto ISO works well.*

If you want—you can set the ISO by using the values below.

Sun	100 or 200
Cloudy or shade	400
Indoors	800, 1600, or higher

You can also change the ISO if there's:

- Too much light
- Too little light

When there's too much or too little—cameras will blink the numbers or displaying Hi or Lo.

Hi = Too much light

Lo = Too little light

* Auto ISO doesn't work well when you're photographing in dim light on a tripod.

Set the ISO manually.

Questions for ISO

12	Are you photographing in dim light?	If your camera displays Lo—change the ISO to a higher value.
13	Are you photographing in bright light—and want to use a slow shutter speed?	If your camera displays Hi—change the ISO to a lower value.

Credits

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- Human-Male-White-Newborn-Baby-Crying.jpg by Evan-Amos

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- Bald eagle pair in nest (cropped) by Wknight94

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