



Digital
Camera
PRESENTS



How to shoot **JUST ABOUT ANYTHING**

The pocket book of photography field guides

- Birds • Buildings • Composition • Landscapes
- Nightscapes • Weddings and more



WELCOME TO...

How to shoot **JUST ABOUT ANYTHING**



The correct technique for shooting a series of images of a given subject is second nature to professional photographers. The pro landscape photographer, for instance, will instinctively know which part of a scene to focus on for optimum sharpness. He'll also know which focal length and aperture to use, which filters he'll need, and whether he'll need to bracket exposures. He'll work all this out in an instant without even thinking about it. This instinct and high speed can be a bit dispiriting for amateurs watching a pro at work, but in fact, it's all very easy to learn.

This book examines several key photography concepts and genres, and boils down the techniques you need to learn into easy-to-follow flow diagrams. These diagrams simplify what can appear to the novice to be complicated or confusing, and will enable even the greenest shooter to start taking better photographs of, as the title suggests, just about anything. Enjoy!

A stylized, handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Ben".

Ben Brain, Editor
ben.brain@futurenet.com

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Start taking better photos today with these easy-to-follow shooting guides

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MACRO

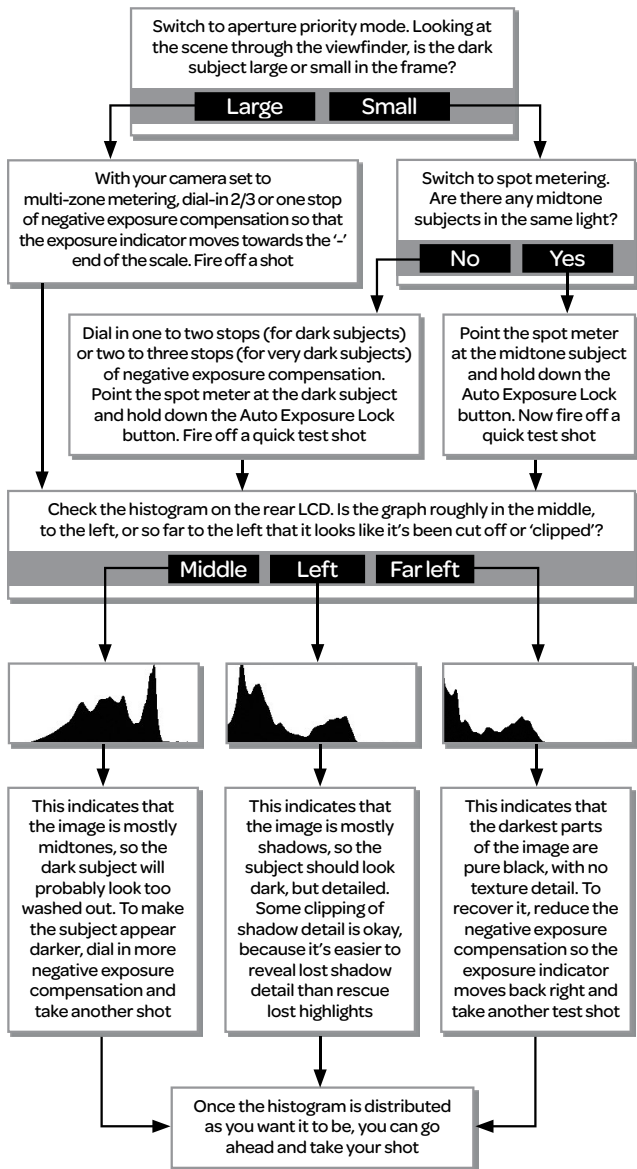
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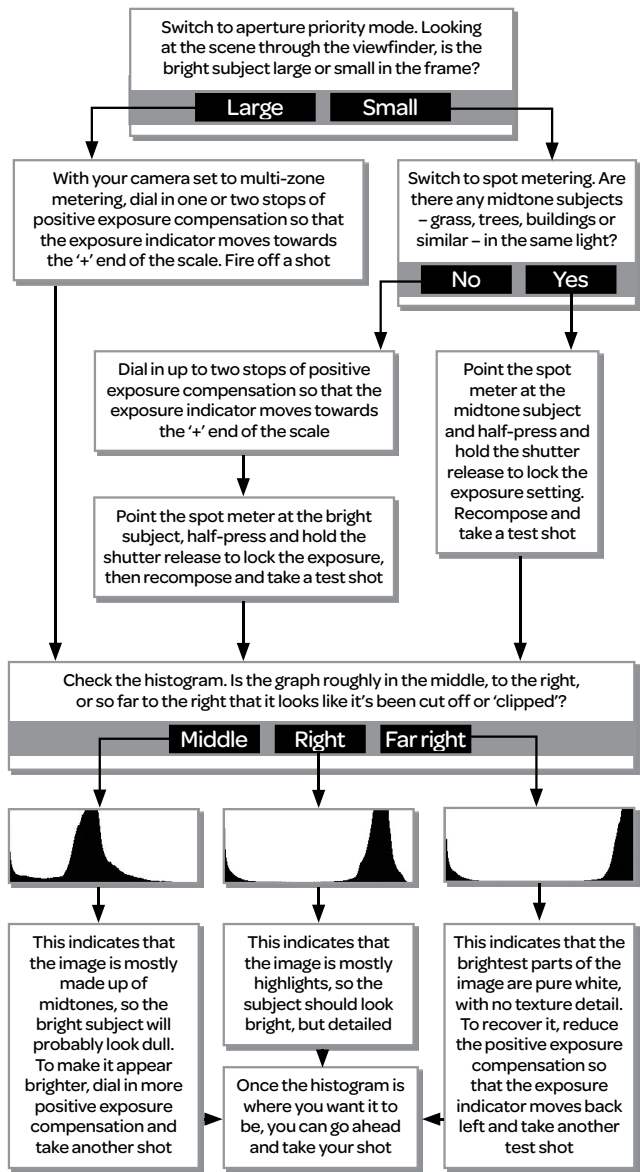
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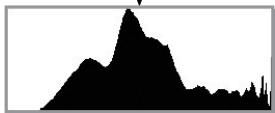


First, make sure you're shooting in the raw image quality mode, because this will give you a better chance of recovering highlight detail in raw-processing software later

Using your camera's multi-zone metering, take a test shot and review the image with the brightness histogram alongside. If the graph indicates that highlights are clipped, is this slight or severe?

Slight

Severe



Switch on your camera's highlight alert (found in the playback menu) and check the image again. Parts of the image will be flashing black and white

Dial in one or two stops of negative exposure compensation so that the exposure indicator moves towards the '-' end of the scale

Do the flashing areas correspond with specular highlights (those that you'd expect to see on shiny objects like metal, windows and water) or areas that shouldn't be over-exposed (like skin and clothes)?

Specular

Other

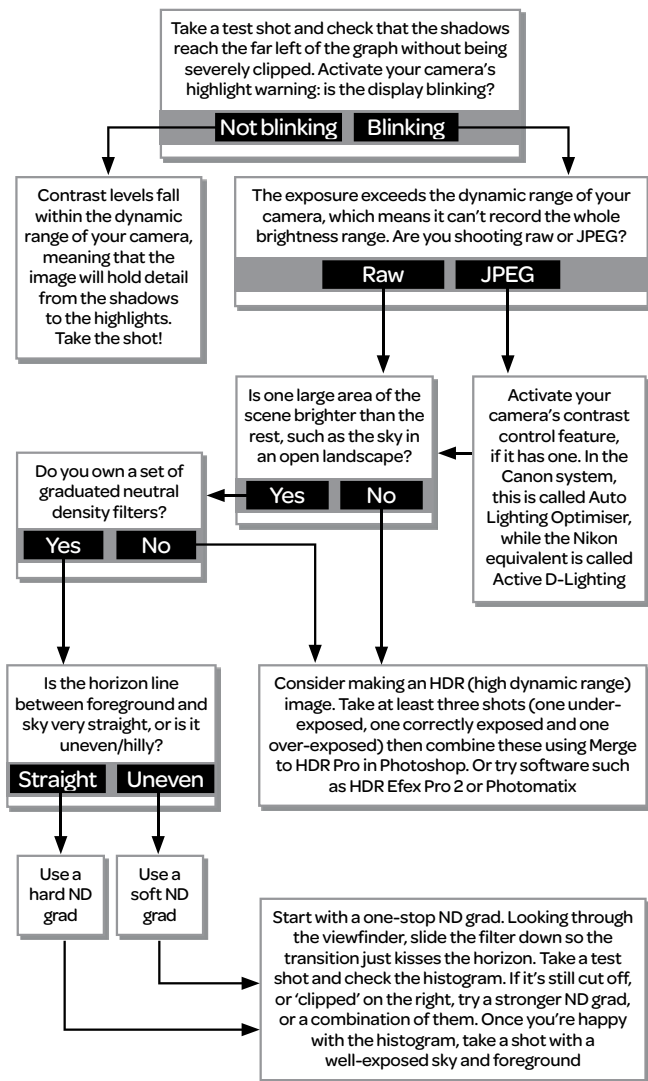


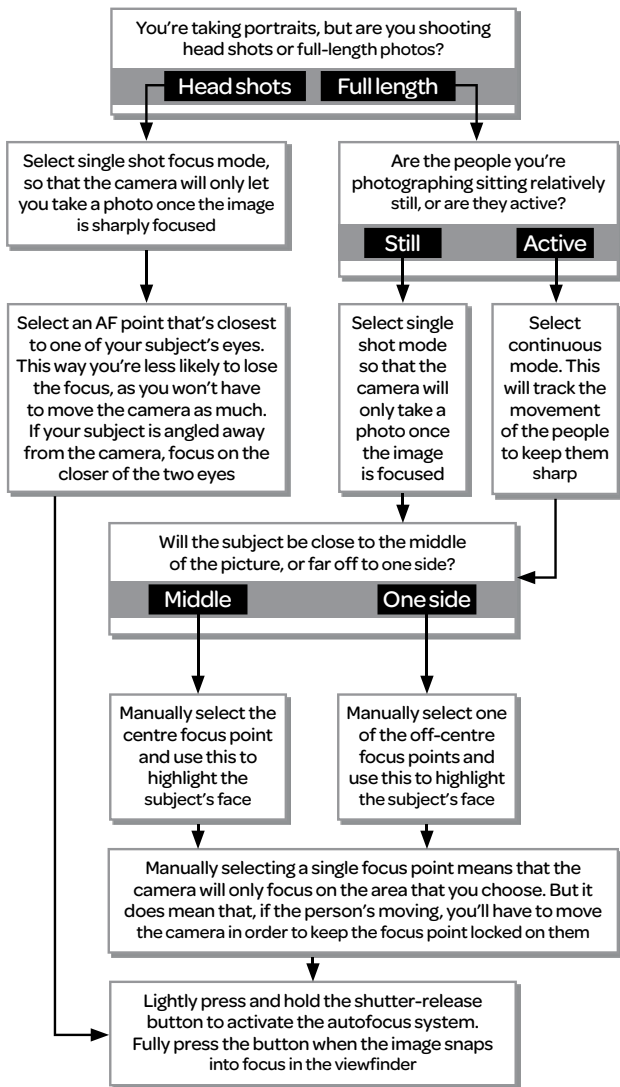
Highlight alerts warn you of areas that are at risk of over-exposure, rather than areas that are over-exposed, but it pays to be cautious. Dial in a little negative exposure compensation (try 1/2 or 2/3 stop) and take another test shot. Repeat until the important areas are no longer flashing

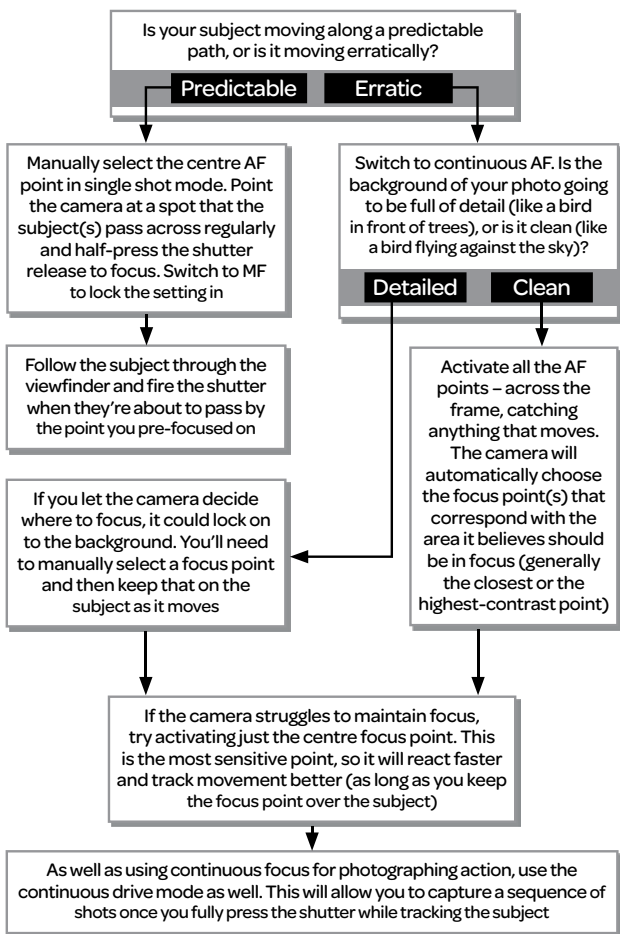


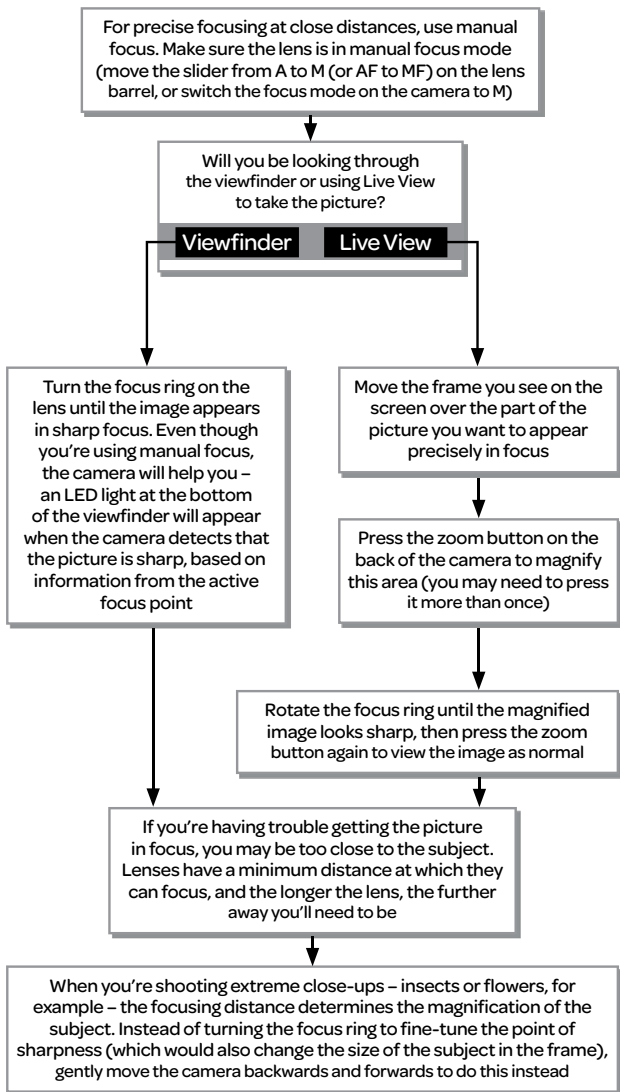
As long as the rest of the histogram indicates an exposure that's correct for the rest of the scene, you can ignore this clipping warning

Take the final shot. When you open the raw file in Adobe Camera Raw, Lightroom or similar software, use the Highlights or Recovery slider to restore further detail in the highlights









Most of the time when you're photographing landscapes, you're likely to want to get as much of the scene as sharp as you can – from the foreground right through to the distant horizon. Setting a narrow aperture of f/16 or f/22 in aperture-priority mode can help here, but where you focus within the scene makes a big difference. Using the hyperfocal focusing technique is the answer. First, does your lens have a distance scale?

Yes

No

Download a hyperfocal distance chart from the internet (try www.dofmaster.com) and manually focus at the distance indicated on the chart for the focal length and aperture of the lens you're using. The image through the viewfinder will look soft, but the image will be sharp

Switch to single shot autofocus and lightly press the shutter release to activate the focus system. Autofocus around 1/3 into the frame, then take your finger off the shutter release. Switch the lens to MF (or M) for manual focus, to lock the setting in. Focusing around 1/3 into the frame will ensure that you get maximum depth of field, so that the image is sharp from foreground to background

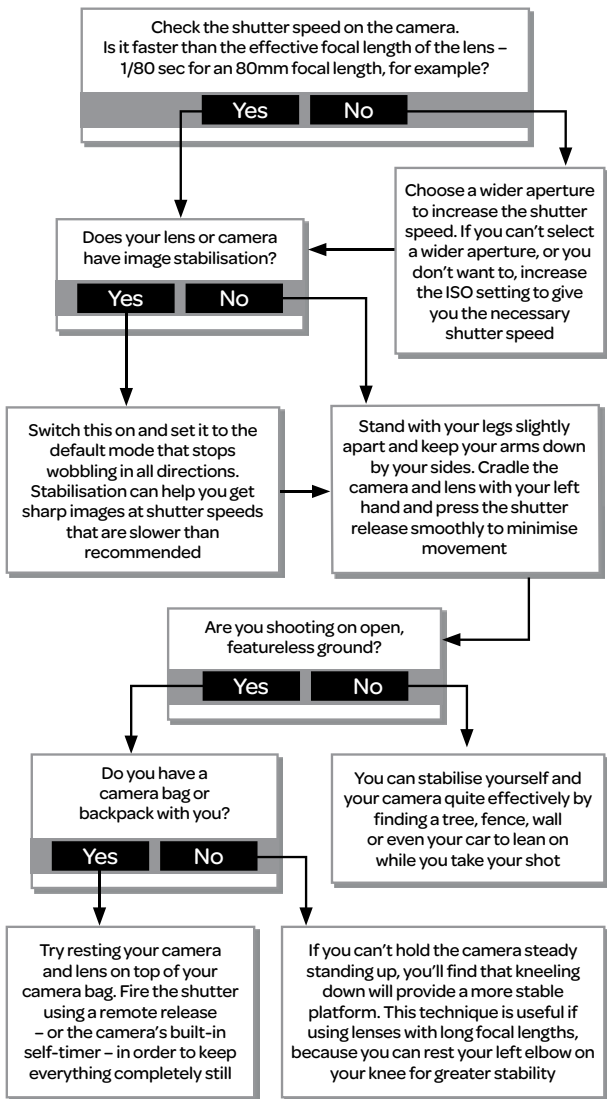
AF can fail when faced with low-contrast subjects, such as a green field or rolling hills. AF sensors use contrast to determine sharpness, adjusting the elements in the lens until they measure a high-contrast image. Low-contrast subjects provide little to lock onto, and lenses can 'hunt' for focus. Taking your finger off the shutter release and half-pressing it again can rectify this problem, but it's often easier to lock focus on a higher-contrast area at the same distance as the subject

When you use autofocus, is the lens focusing backwards and forwards, as if it's trying to search for something to lock onto?

Yes

No

To ensure you retain the sharpness that your careful focusing has guaranteed, fire the shutter using the camera's self-timer or a remote release



The key to getting the most from a monopod is how you stand and support the camera. You need to ensure your stance is balanced and comfortable, and that you use your body as an integral part of the monopod

Will you be using a short or long lens?

Short Long

When you're shooting with a wide-angle or standard lens, simply screw the monopod directly into the base of the camera

If you're using a large telephoto zoom, attach it to the tripod collar on the lens. This produces a more balanced setup

Will you be taking horizontal or vertical shots?

Horizontal Vertical

Stand so that you are comfortable and balanced. Put one foot in front of the other rather than standing square on to the subject, and place the foot of the monopod almost alongside your leading foot

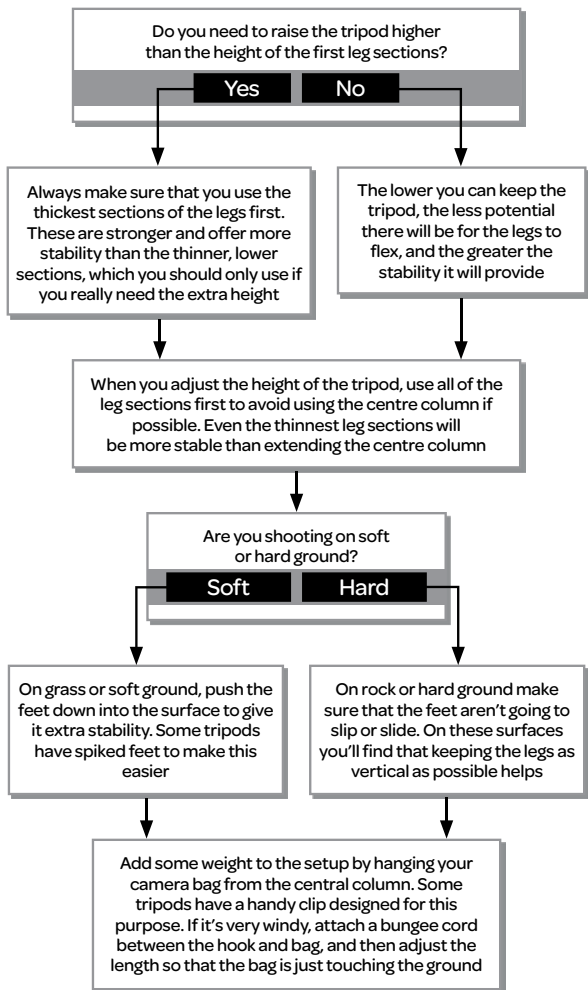
Many monopods enable the use of a moveable head. With a small lens you'll need a head to shoot vertically, but if you're using a large lens with a tripod collar it's easier to do it without

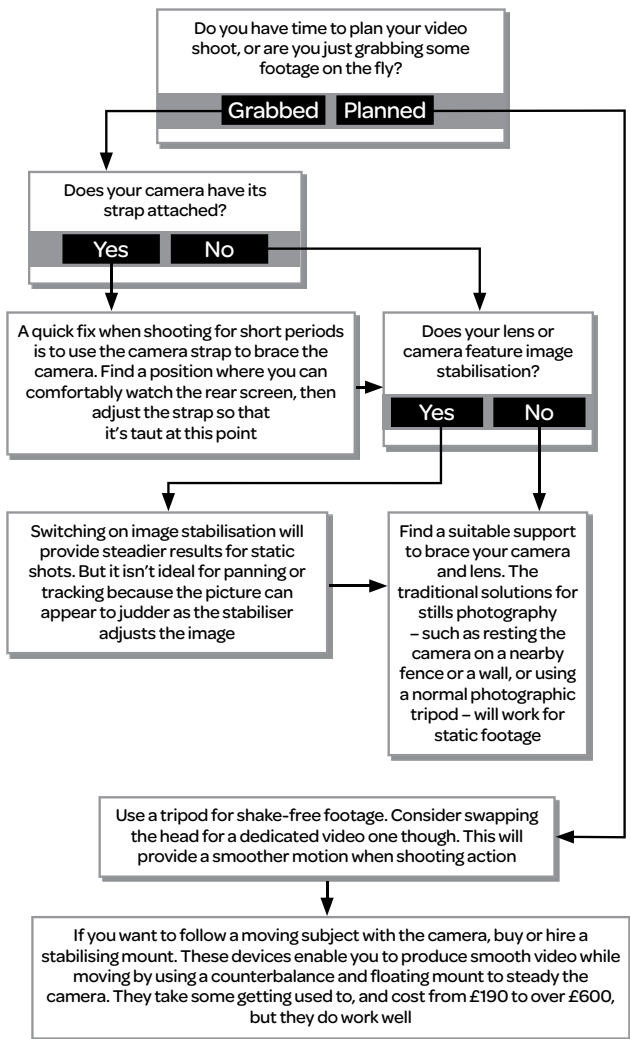
If your lens or camera features image stabilisation, activate it to reduce any slight shaking when shooting with a monopod. Will you be moving the camera to photograph a moving subject?

Yes No

Make sure that you are free to twist your body to allow you to cover the area the subject is likely to be moving through. Try to find a position where you can cover the greatest area without having to move your feet. Make sure the pan arc tracks the subject before and after the area you want to shoot, for smooth results

Press down on the monopod slightly by placing your hand on top of the lens rather than holding on to the monopod itself





Before you buy a graduated ND filter system, you need to know the diameter of your lens. If you're unsure, you'll find it printed on the inside of the lens cap, or look at the number on the front of the lens next to the small circular symbol

Finalise the composition of the scene and lock the camera on a tripod. Carefully screw the bracket onto the front of the lens and attach the holder. You should be able to rotate the main body of the holder once it's in place

Before adding a filter, use aperture-priority mode and point the camera at the foreground. Take a note of the shutter speed

Now point the camera at the sky and take a note of the shutter speed. How many stops difference is there between the two readings? Work this out by doubling or halving the shutter speed – for example, between 1/100 sec and 1/200 sec is one stop

Two stops

Three stops

Four stops

You'll need a 0.3 ND or ND2 grad

You'll need a 0.6 ND or ND4 grad

You'll need a 0.9 ND or ND8 grad

If additional filters are required then extra slots can be used to build up the effect. It's generally not a good idea to use multiple filters, because this can affect the quality and contrast of the image. Does the scene you're shooting have a clear, straight horizon, such as a seascape?

Yes

No

Choose an ND filter with a hard-edged gradient

Choose a filter with a soft-edged gradient

Slide the filter into the holder so that the dark area of the filter only just covers the bright area of the scene. Use Live View to position it accurately, or press your camera's Depth of Field Preview button to make the transition easier to see in the viewfinder

Use manual exposure mode and evaluative or matrix metering to take a test shot. Check the histogram to see whether the shot's too dark (the histogram is shifted to the left) or too light (the histogram is shifted to the right). Then adjust the exposure to retain the maximum tonal detail possible

Are you using a standard ND filter (which reduces the light levels by two or three stops) or a strong ND filter such as a Lee Big Stopper or Cokin Z-Pro ND8?

Standard ND **Strong ND**

These are much easier to use than stronger ND filters because you can still meter, compose and focus with the filter in place in bright conditions. Are you using one to allow you to use wide apertures in bright conditions, or for extending the shutter speed at dawn or dusk?

Wide aperture **Long exposure**

With the filter attached to the lens you won't be able to use the viewfinder to compose your image, so you need to set up your shot beforehand. With the camera on a tripod, compose your image, then lock down the tripod

Using aperture priority, dial in a wide aperture and set the lowest ISO. Check the histogram after taking the shot – you may need to add an additional ND filter if the shot's still too bright

Using aperture priority, use a narrow aperture and set the lowest ISO. Support the camera on a tripod (for landscape photography) or a monopod (for panning with moving subjects)

In many conditions, the metering in the camera won't be able to measure the exposure once the filter is attached, so you'll need to work out the exposure manually. Switch to manual exposure mode and meter for the scene

Attach the filter and adjust the shutter speed – for each stop of ND strength, you need to double the exposure time. For example, using a nine-stop filter like the Light Craft Workshop ND500MC, you need to multiply the original exposure time by 512 to get the correct exposure

Once the filter is attached, try using Live View to check your composition. Because the filter cuts out so much light, the image on the screen can be quite difficult to see clearly, but you should be able to see the general composition

NUMBERS EXPLAINED

Different manufacturers use different numbering systems to show the strength of their ND filters. Here's an easy-to-read conversion table for the commonly used systems...

EV or stops	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Lee	0.3	0.6	0.9	1.2	1.5	1.8	2.1	2.4	2.7	3.0
Cokin & Hoya	ND2	ND4	ND8	ND16	ND32	ND64	ND128	ND256	ND500	ND1000

Polarising filters are expensive, particularly those for the Cokin or Lee 100mm square systems. We'd recommend buying a screw-in polariser to fit the lens with the largest filter thread in your collection, then using step-up rings for your smaller lenses

Attach the filter to your lens. If the front of the lens rotates as the camera focuses, the effect will change. In this case, focus first, then adjust the filter. Don't overtighten the filter, because it can be tricky to remove later. Make a note of the direction you rotated the filter to attach it

Polarising filters feature two lenses that can be rotated to increase or decrease the strength of the effect. Turn the front element in the same direction as you used to attach the filter to the lens, otherwise you'll inadvertently loosen it

Are you using the polariser to darken blue skies and make clouds look crisp, or to remove reflections and glare in a scene?

Enhance blue skies

Reduce reflections

The effect will be at its most dramatic when you're shooting at right angles to the sun. Point your index finger at the sun and extend your thumb out at 90° to find the ideal position

Look through the viewfinder and rotate the filter to see how the image changes. Does one area of the sky look darker than the other?

Yes

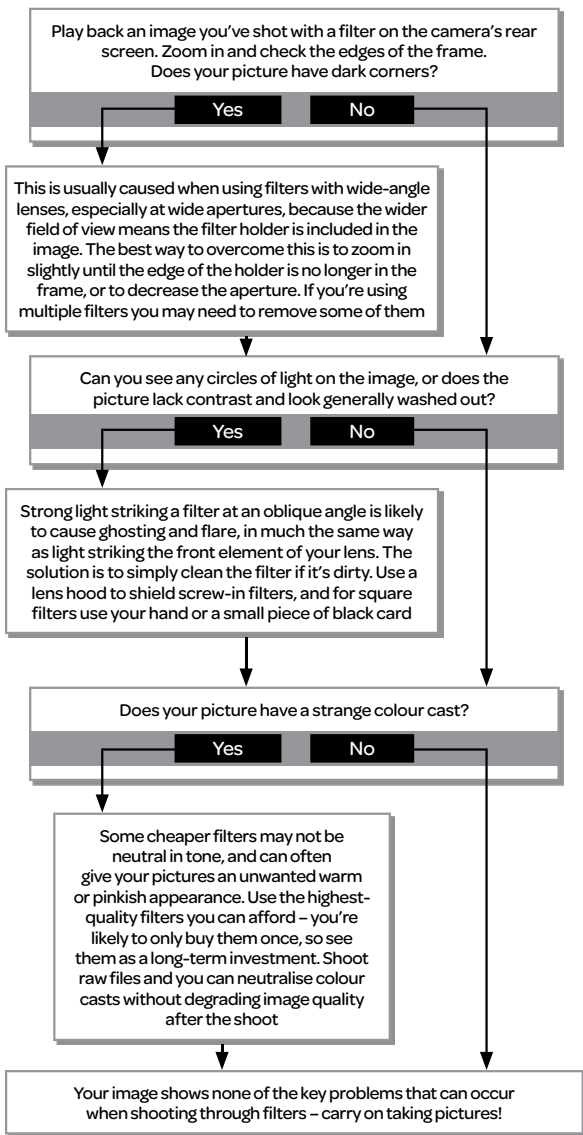
No

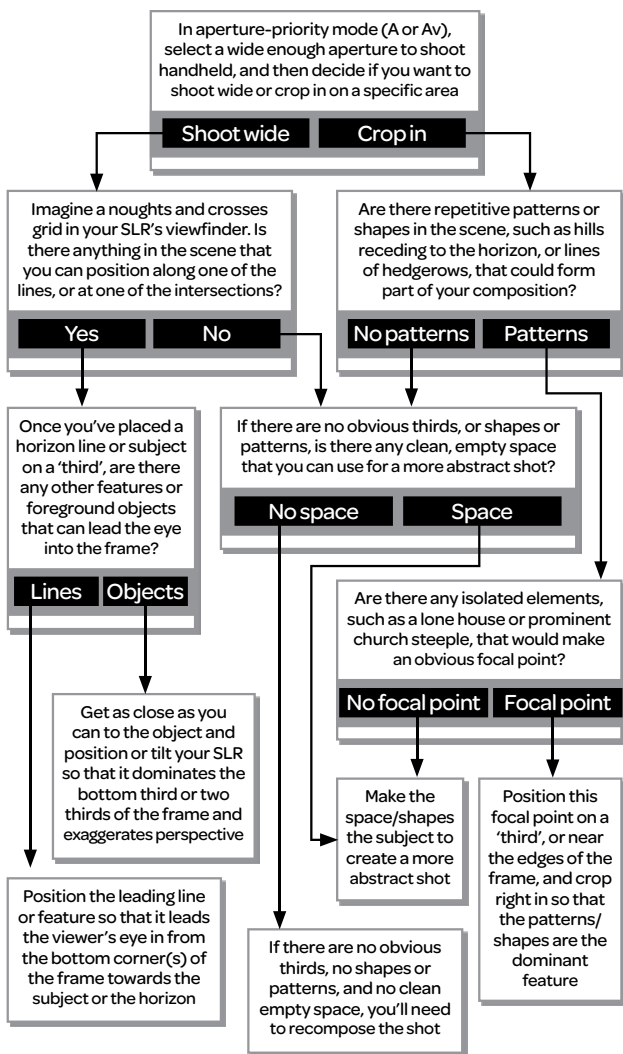
The problem with using these filters with wide-angle lenses is that the effect is quite direction specific, so one large expanse of sky tends to be much more heavily polarised than other areas. The answer is to switch to a less extreme wide-angle lens

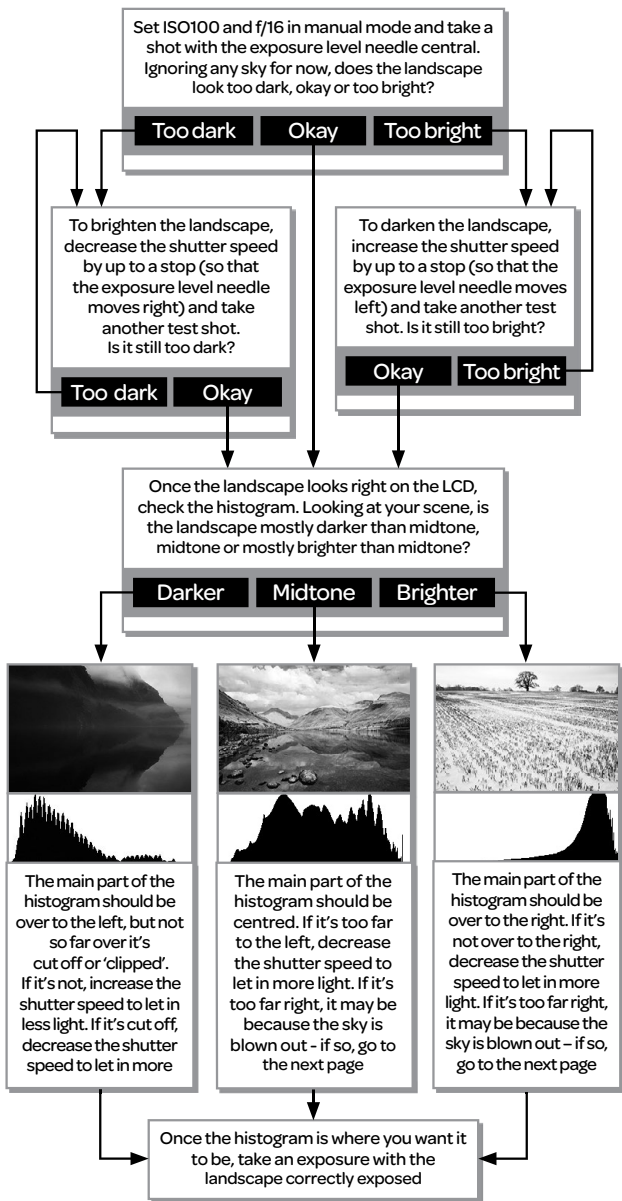
Adjust the effect to taste and shoot

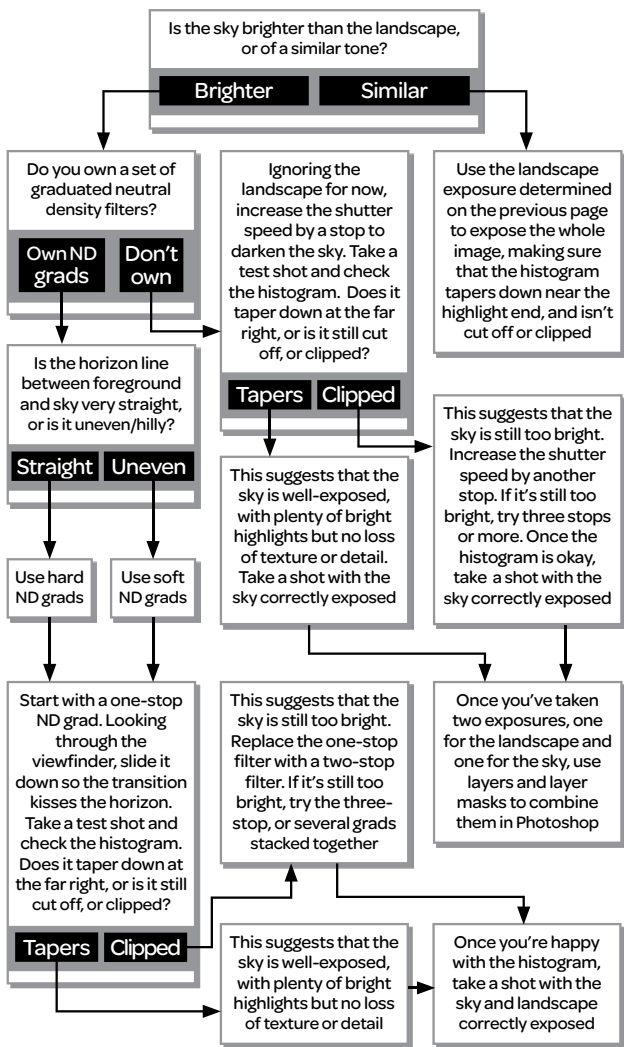
Look through the viewfinder. When it comes to shooting water, you'll see reflections in the surface disappear and appear as you rotate the filter, and you need to stop when the effect looks best. This can take a little practice because the changes can be subtle, so take your time

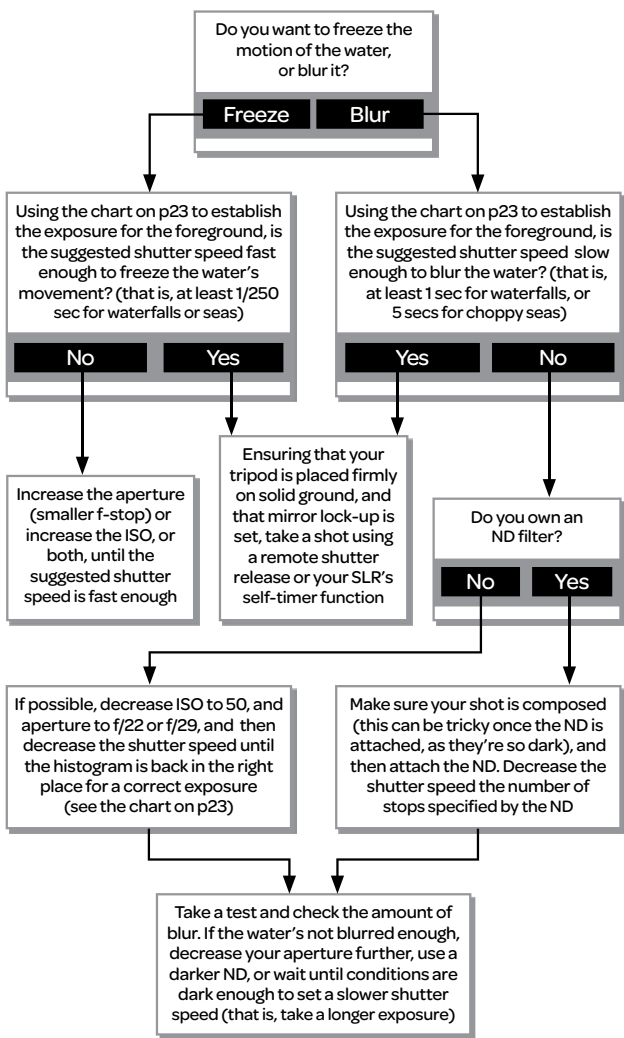
One final consideration is that polarisers can reduce the exposure by up to two stops, so it can have a similar effect to an ND filter, allowing you to use slower shutter speeds than without the filter attached. You may need a tripod if you're shooting in low light

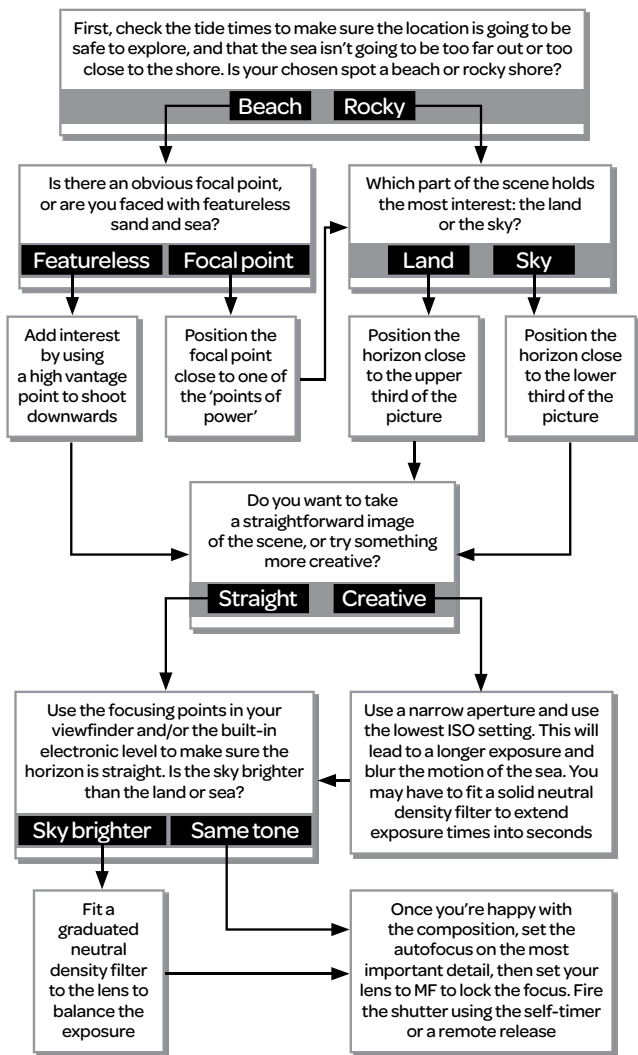












With your camera mounted on a tripod, set the ISO to 100 and select an aperture of f/16 in aperture-priority (A/Av) mode. Are you shooting within a forest, or at the edge?

Within forest

At the edge

Is there an isolated element you can use to provide an obvious focal point, such as backlit leaves, a flowering plant or a tree with interesting bark?

Yes

No

Position the camera so that this focal point falls on a 'point of power', according to the rule of thirds

Check the background for distractions: if there are any bright patches of sky visible through the trees, consider shifting your shooting position slightly

Use a polarising filter to remove distracting glare from shiny or wet foliage and saturate the colours. This will also cut the amount of light entering the lens, resulting in longer exposure times. On windy days, this may lead to blurred branches and leaves, so open the aperture or increase the ISO to get a faster shutter speed

Do you want to emphasise the height of the trees or their expanse within the frame?

Height

Expanse

Fit a wide-angle lens, rotate your camera to shoot vertically and then tilt it upwards, so that the trees appear to soar up through the frame

Zoom in to fill the frame with trees. Exclude the sky and forest edge to give an impression that the trees go on forever

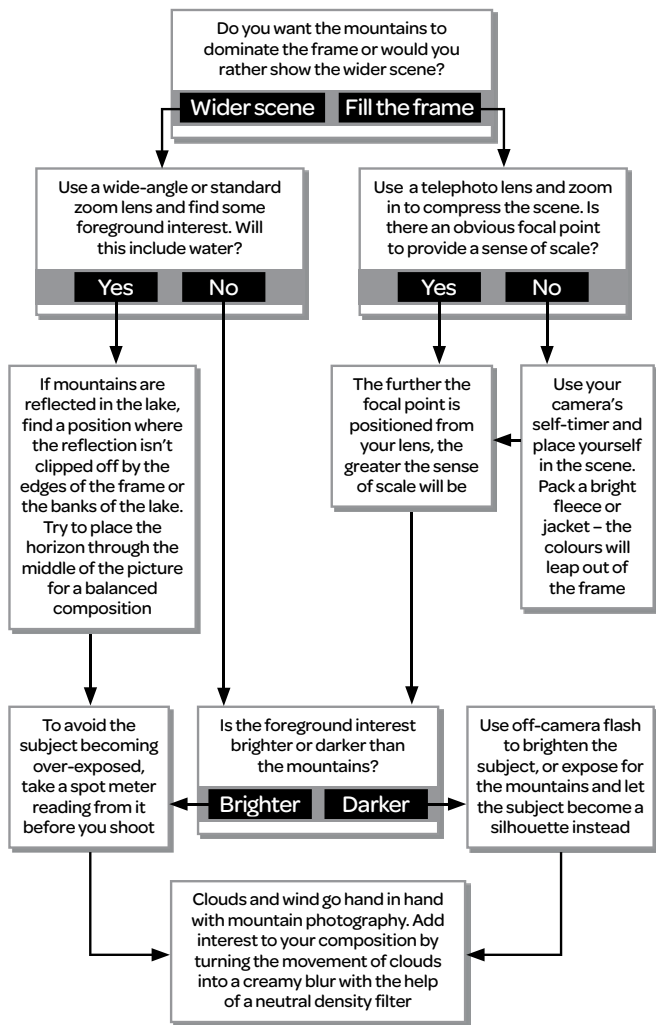
Are there any patterns or lines of repetition (such as rows of trees) that could become the focal point of your composition?

Yes

No

Shoot from a spot where the natural lines lead the viewer's eye through the frame. Alternatively, use a telephoto lens to compress the trees and add a sense of depth

Try looking straight up and shooting the canopy of the forest above. This can be a particularly effective technique when photographing deciduous trees in winter



With your camera mounted on a tripod, set the ISO to 100 and select an aperture of f/16 in aperture-priority (A/Av) mode. Find a focal point, such as a church or tree. Would the picture look more balanced if it was in the middle or off to one side?

Middle

Off-centre

Tall features such as church spires and trees often work best with the camera rotated to shoot vertically – there'll be less 'dead space' at each side

Frame it according to the rule of thirds. Activate your camera's Live View grid display or use the off-centre focus points in the viewfinder as a guide

Are there any roads, walls or streams that can be used to lead the viewer's eye through the scene?

Yes

No

Frame the scene so that the leading line runs into the picture, from the bottom corner(s) towards the subject or horizon

Is the sky overcast and featureless, or blue and full of white clouds?

Blue skies

Featureless

Fit a polarising filter to the lens and turn it to boost the contrast between the clouds and the blue sky. Avoid this technique with ultra-wide lenses, because the effect will be uneven

Consider cropping out the sky altogether. Try using a telephoto lens to pick out details in the landscape instead

If your camera's viewfinder gives less than 100% coverage (check the manual), zoom out slightly to check no distractions will creep into the edge of the frame, then zoom back in to take the shot

P R E S E N T I N G

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With your SLR on a tripod, set ISO100 and f/16 in aperture-priority mode. Looking at the scene through the viewfinder or in Live View, is it mostly snow-covered, or mostly land?

Mostly snow

Mostly land

Is the snow in the shot mostly in overcast light, or is it in bright sunlight?

Overcast

Sunlight

Dial in one stop of positive exposure compensation, so that the exposure indicator moves one stop to the right, and fire off a quick test shot

If there's no snow, or the snow is patchy, turn to the next page

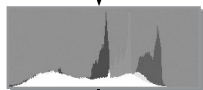
Dial in two stops of positive exposure compensation, so that the exposure indicator moves two stops to the right, and fire off a quick test shot

Check the histogram. Is the graph roughly in the middle, to the right, or so far to the right that it looks like it's been cut off or 'clipped'?

Middle

Right

Far right

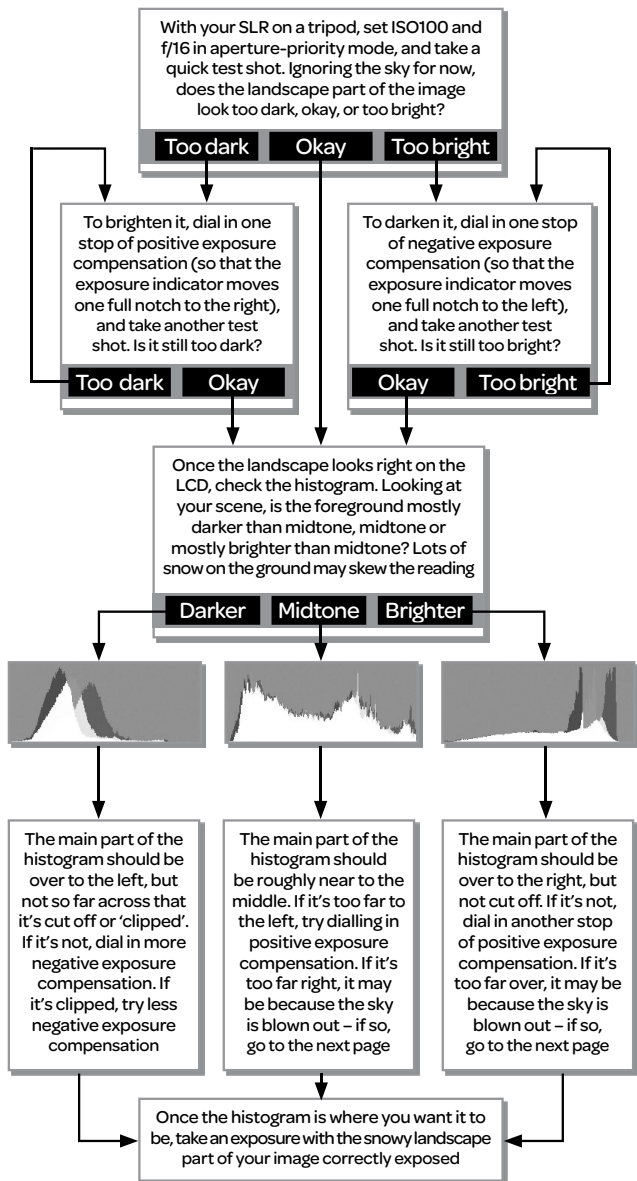


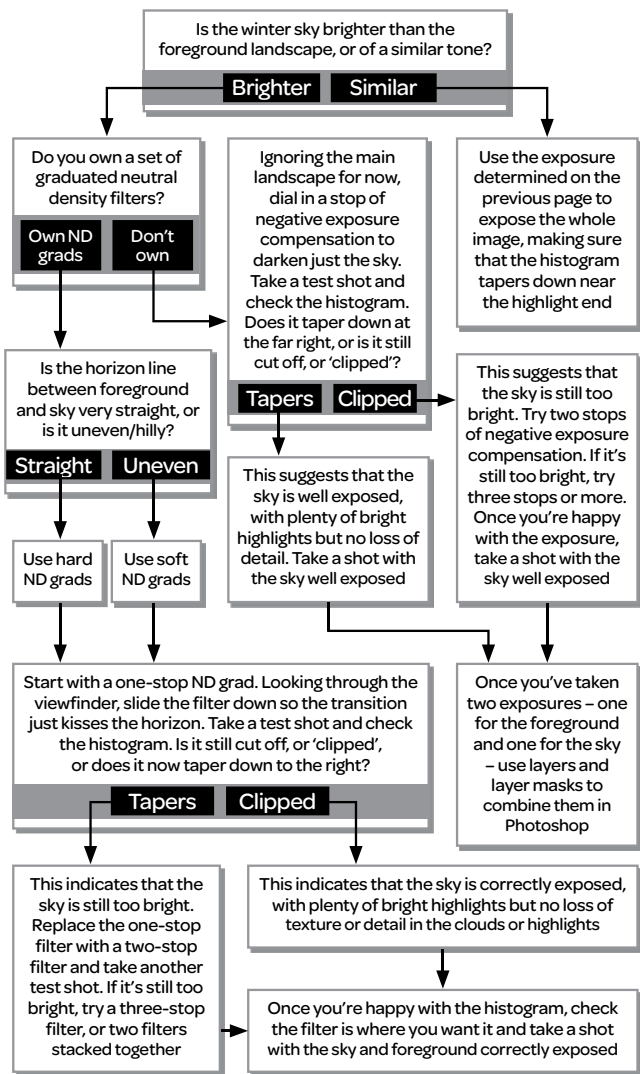
This indicates that the image is mostly midtones, so the snow will probably look grey rather than white. To brighten up the snow so that it's white, dial in more positive exposure compensation and take another shot

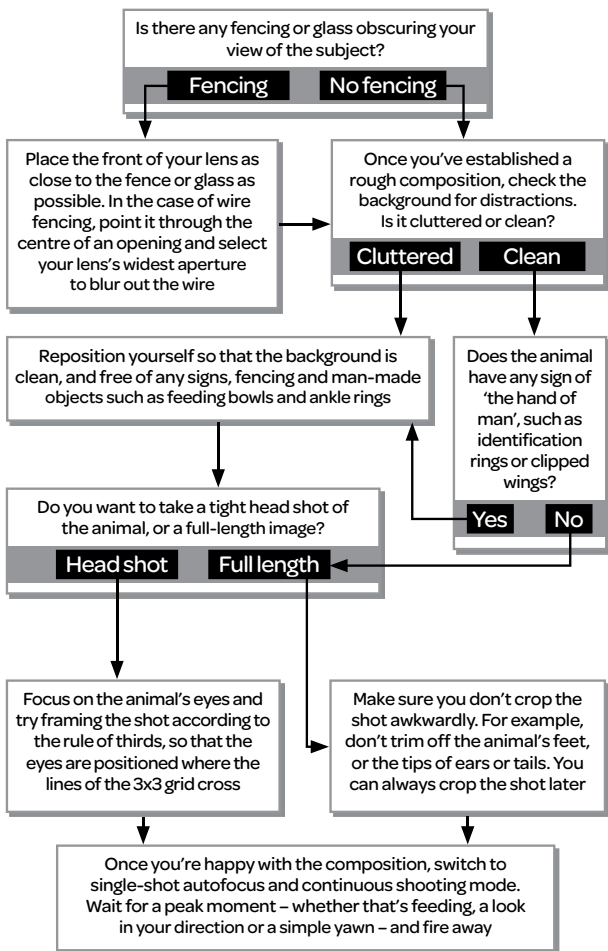
This indicates that the image is mostly bright highlights, so the snow should look white, but with plenty of texture

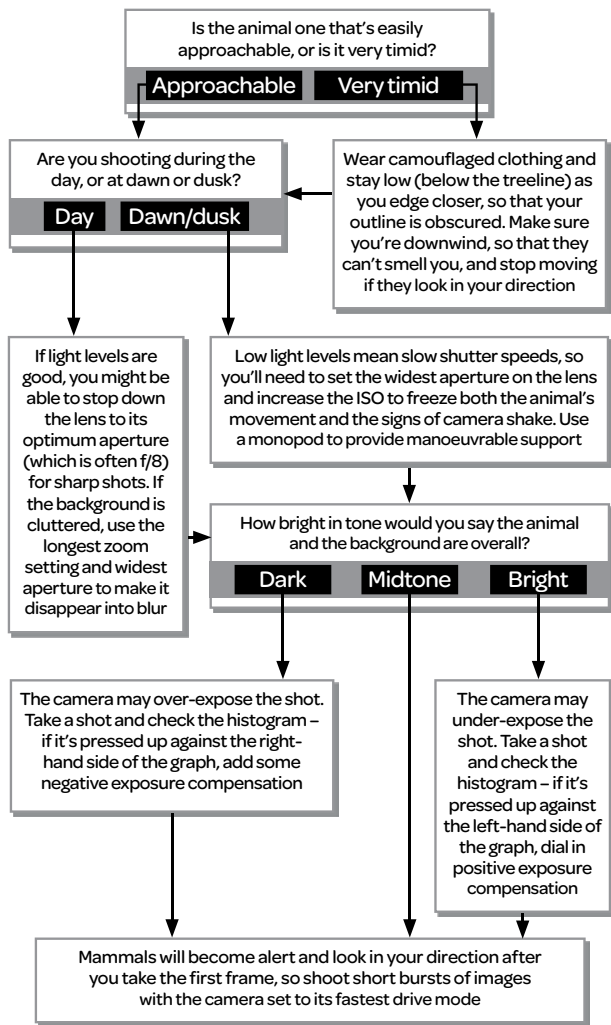
Once the histogram is where you want it to be, take your shot

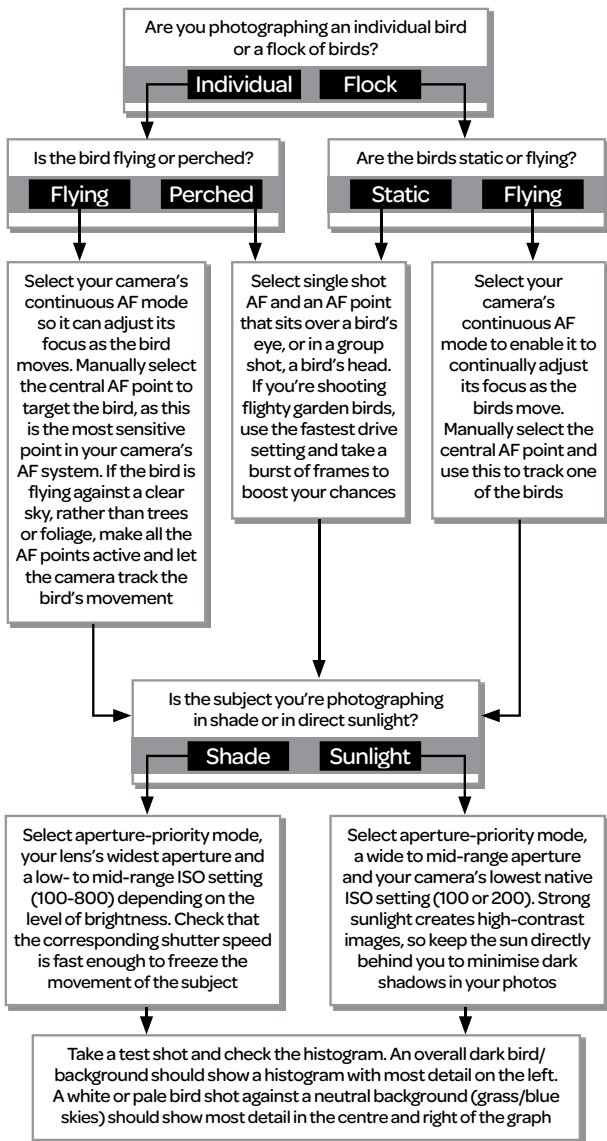
This indicates that the brightest parts of the image are pure white, with no texture detail. To recover it, reduce positive exposure compensation so the exposure indicator moves back left and take another test shot











Most insects, particularly dragonflies and butterflies, will only be prepared to 'sit and pose' for you when they're cool. In mid-summer, this means there's no alternative but to get out and about with your camera at dawn or dusk

Do you have a dedicated macro lens, or will you be using a different type of lens?

Macro lens **Other lens**

These lenses allow you to focus incredibly close to the camera.

Depth of field becomes shallower the closer you focus, so you're likely to be working with a depth of field that's measured in millimetres, even at narrow aperture settings

To enable your lens to focus closer than normal and achieve a greater magnification, fit extension tubes between the lens and the camera. The downside? They reduce the amount of available light, making shutter speeds slower

Focusing is critical in macro photography, and the tiniest movement of the subject or camera can make a massive difference to what does, and doesn't, appear sharp. Autofocus may struggle at such close range, so switch to MF and focus by hand to achieve the desired magnification. Now move the camera backwards and forwards until your subject is sharp

Working in aperture-priority mode, check the shutter speed that the camera has selected for the exposure. Is it fast enough to avoid camera shake if you're shooting handheld?

No **Yes**

If you want to stay mobile, fix the camera on a monopod. Alternatively, use a flashgun to allow you to use a relatively fast shutter speed, a low ISO and a narrow aperture. Firing the flash off-camera and triggering it wirelessly can produce a more interesting modelling effect

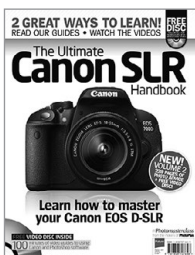
Check the frame for distractions. Press the Depth of Field Preview button to reveal background clutter you might have missed. Shift the camera position to get a cleaner backdrop if you need to – it may only take a micro-movement to get a better shot

Learn new SLR skills

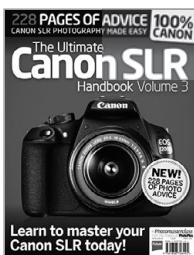
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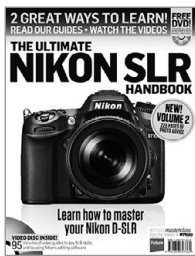
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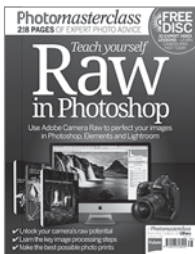


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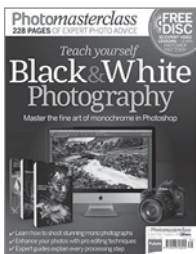
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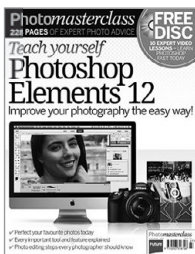
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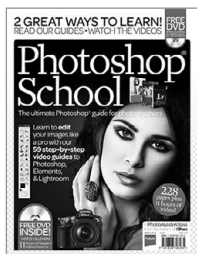
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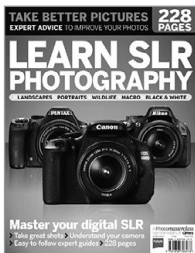
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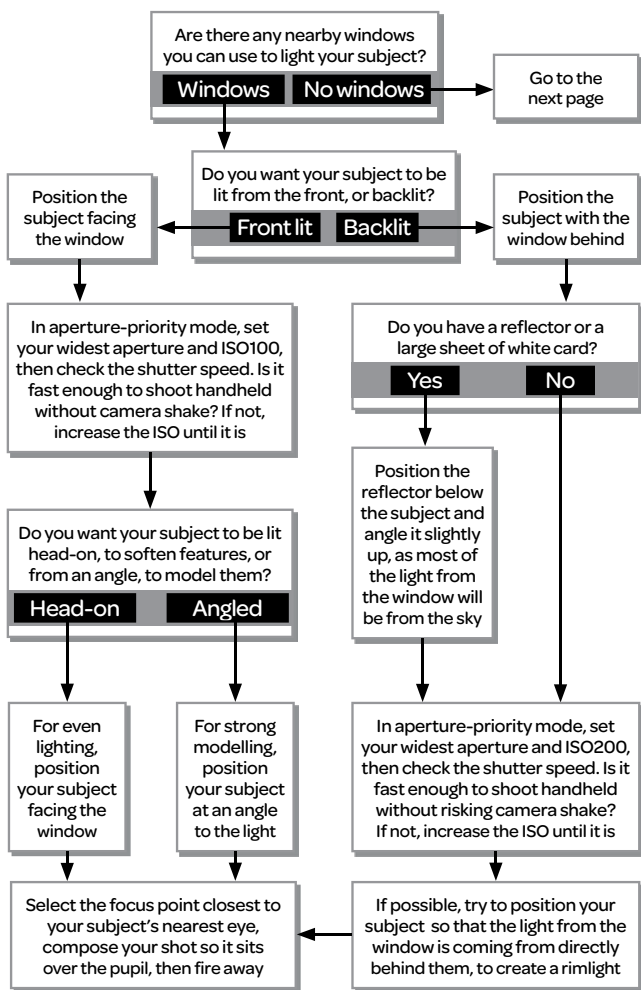
Teach yourself
Lightroom



Learn SLR
Photography



Practical Photoshop
Creative Projects
Volume 2



If there's not enough light, you either have to increase the ISO to get fast enough shutter speeds to shoot handheld, or use flash, or both. Do you want to keep things natural, or use flash?

Natural light

Flash light

In aperture-priority mode, set your widest aperture and ISO100, then check the shutter speed. Is it fast enough to shoot handheld without camera shake? If not, increase the ISO until it is

If flash isn't an option, the only way to get sharp shots is to increase the ISO as high as needed. This will mean increased noise, but better a noisy shot than a blurred one. On current SLRs, anything up to ISO1600 is fine

Select the focus point that's closest to your subject's nearest eye, compose your shot so that it sits over the eye, then fire away, keeping an eye on shutter speed, especially if the subject is moving or walking towards you

Before you even turn on the flash, you need to expose for the ambient light to avoid dark, featureless backgrounds

In aperture-priority mode, set your widest aperture and increase the ISO as high as you dare without adding too much in the way of unwanted noise/grain

Turn on or pop up your flash. Take a test shot and check the background. Is it still too dark, or is there enough background detail to give a sense of setting and/or ambience?

Too dark

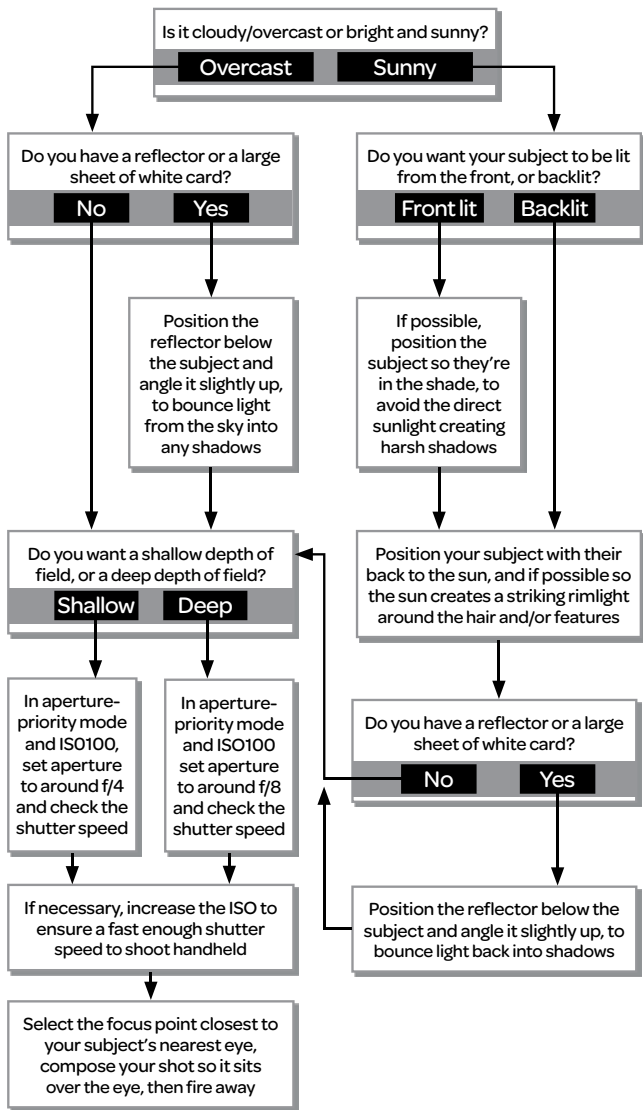
Enough detail

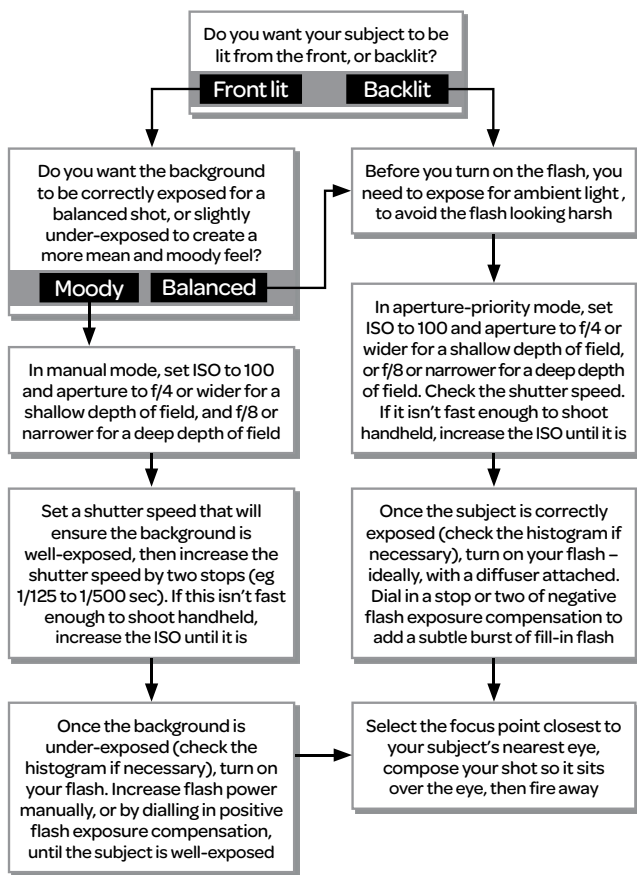
Check the subject. Are they well-exposed, or badly exposed?

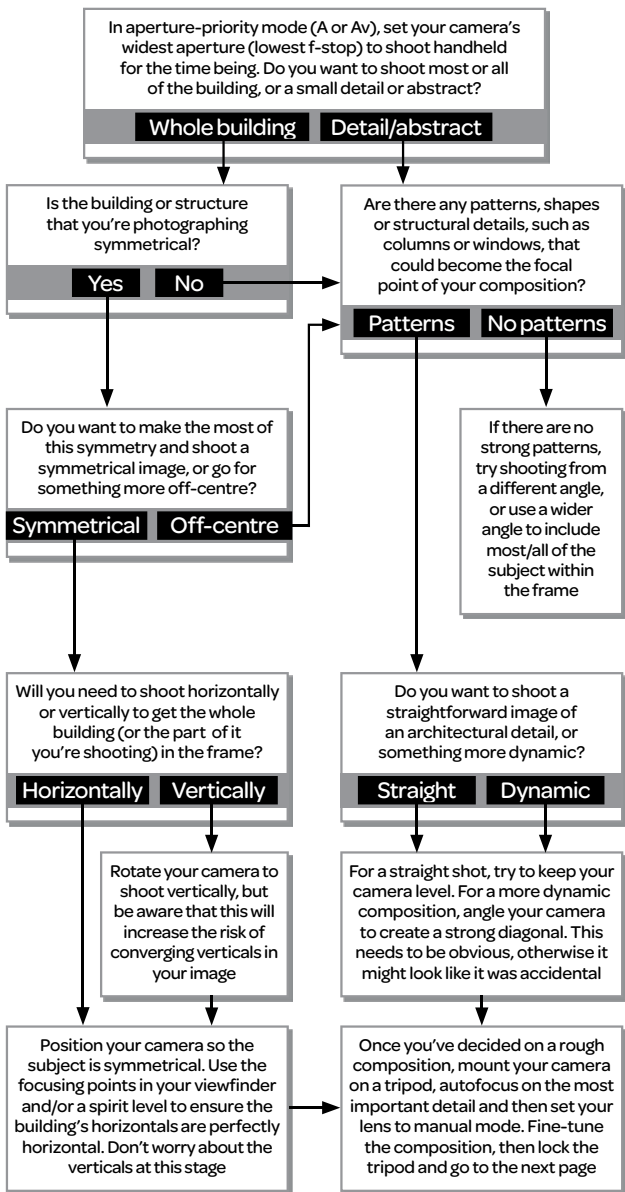
Well-exposed

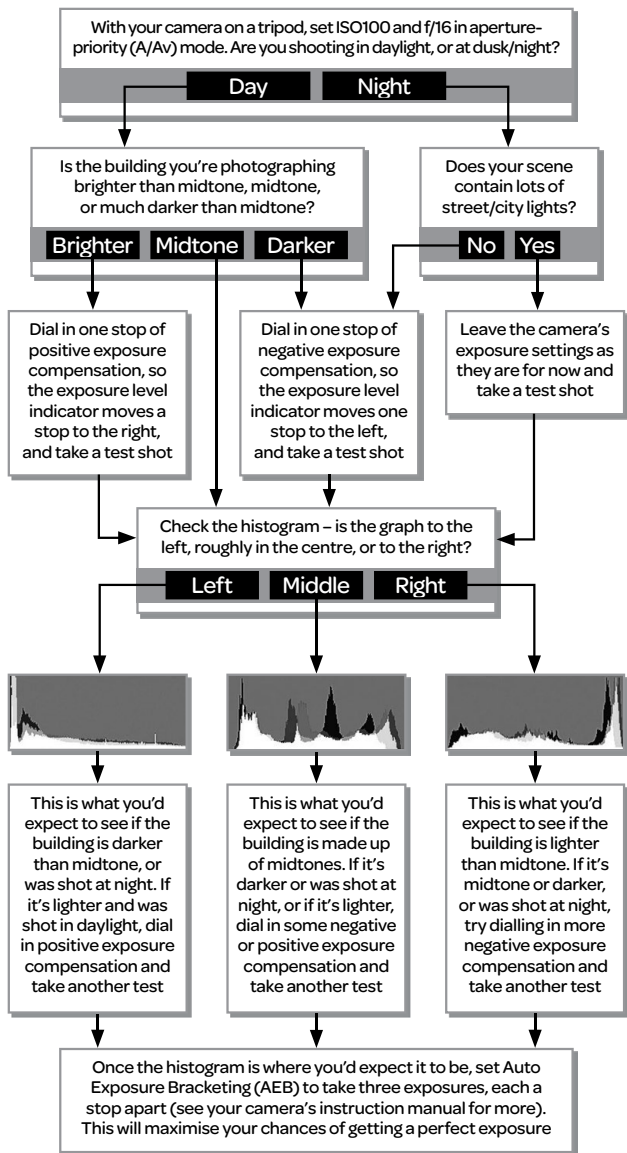
Badly exposed

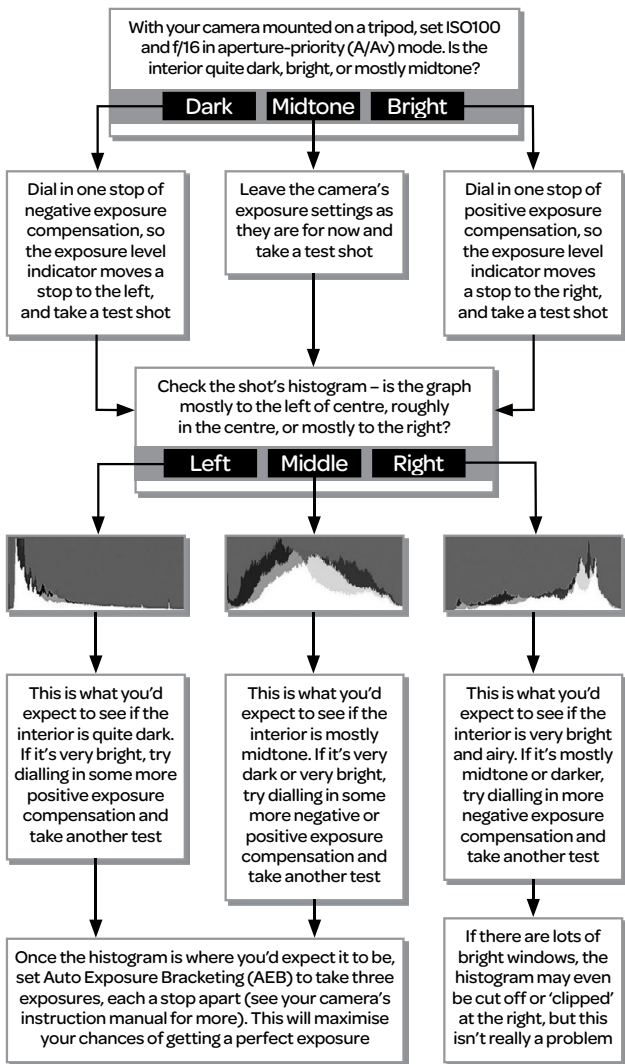
Using the relevant button on your SLR or flash, dial in positive or negative flash exposure compensation as required

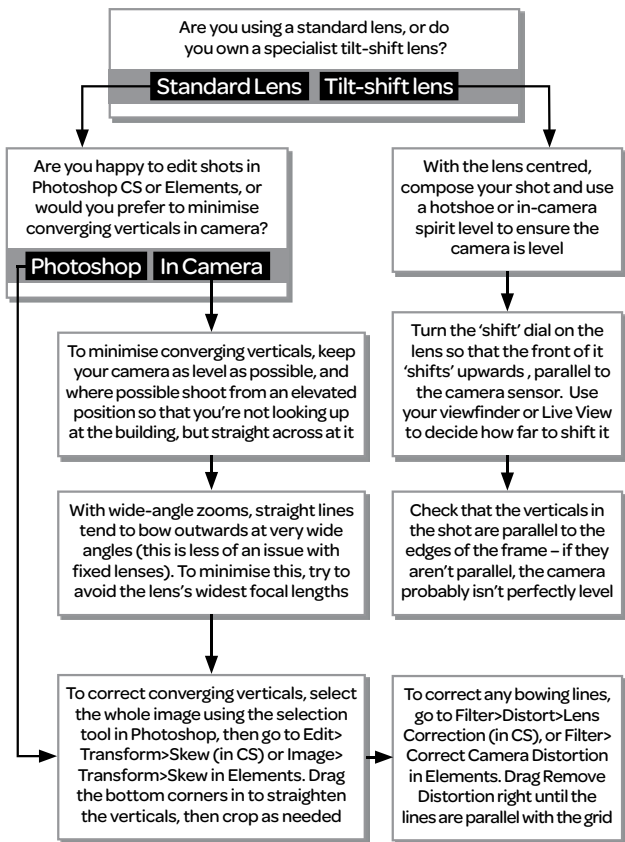












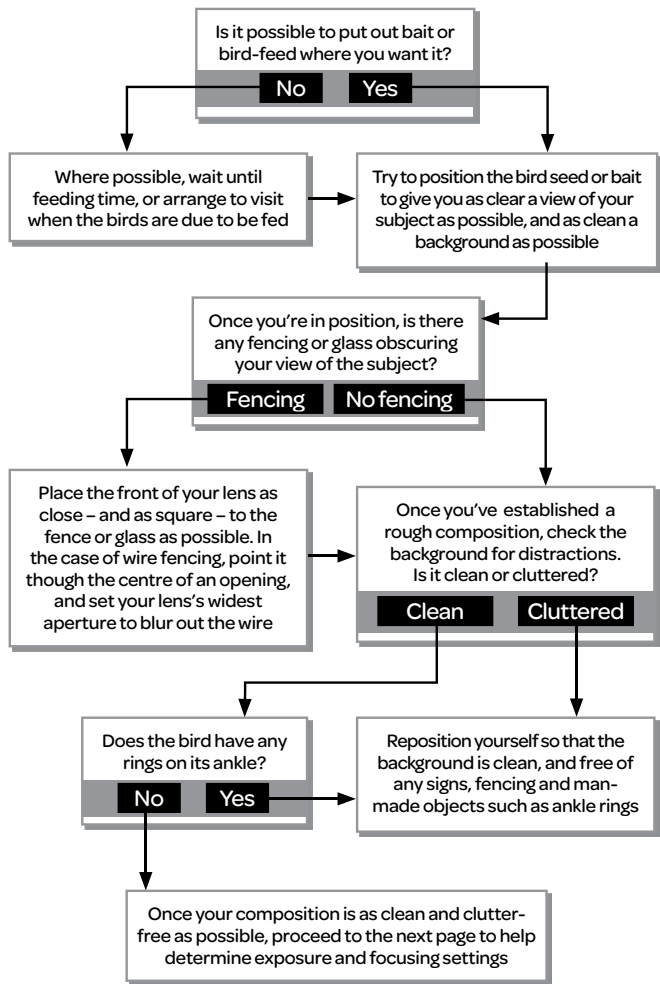


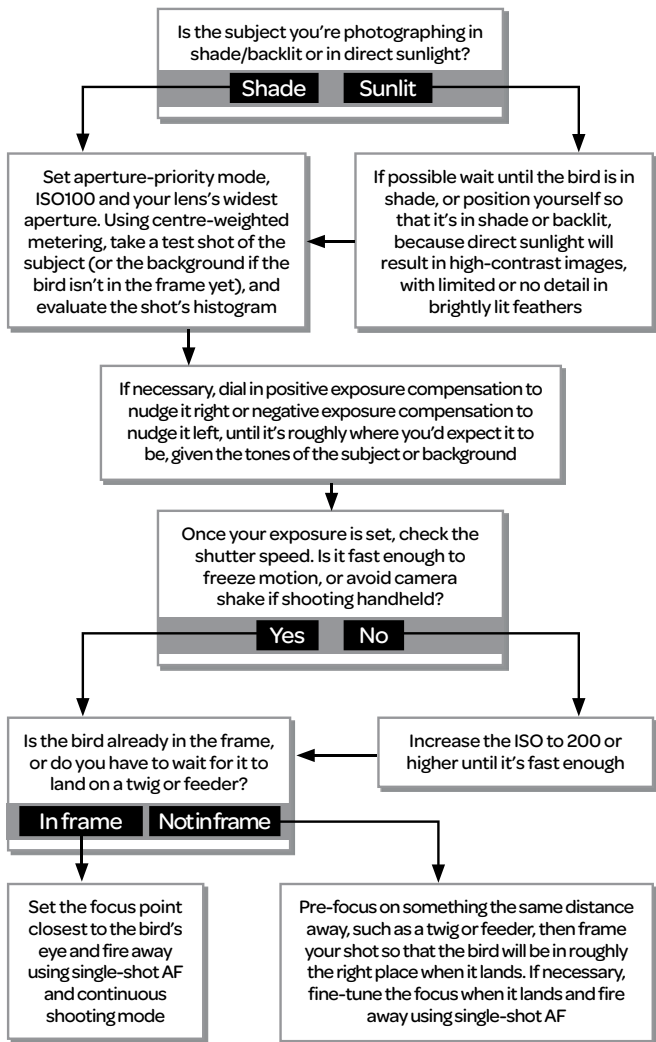
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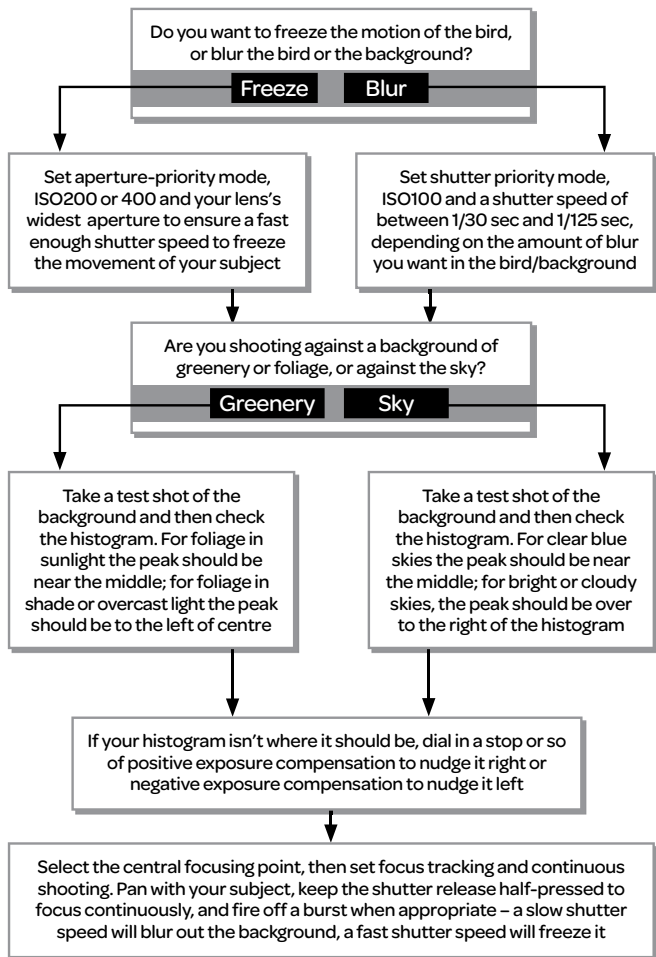
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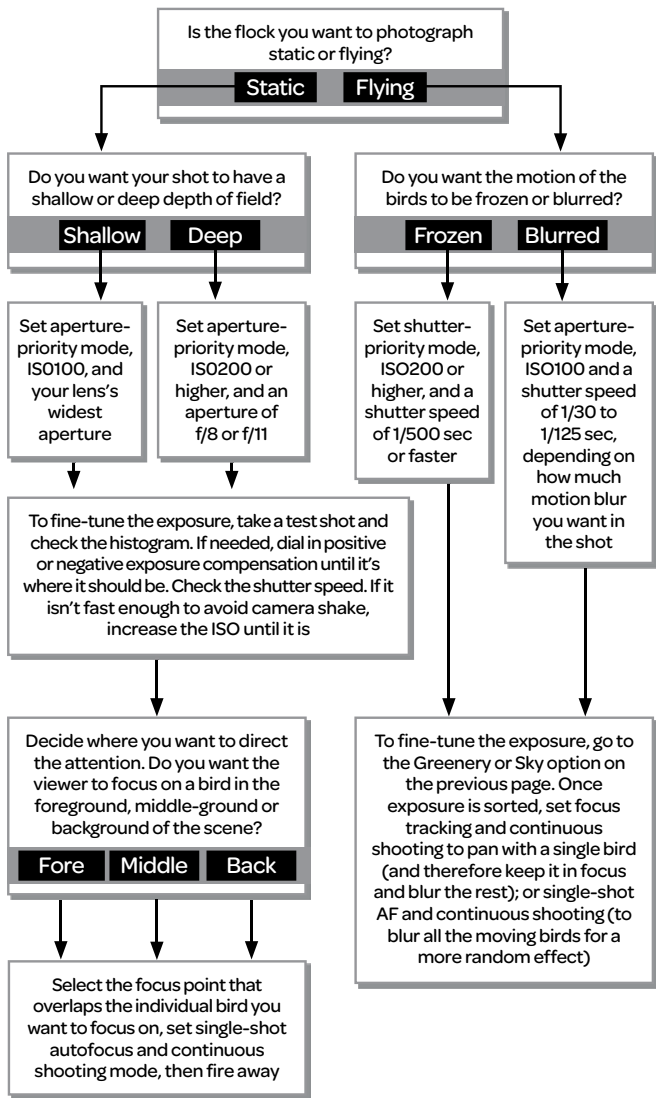
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Find the best specimen of your chosen subject and study it from every angle, including above and below, to work out the angle that best captures its colour and form

Once you've decided on the angle, do you want to fill the frame or crop in even tighter to isolate a specific part of the subject?

Fill the frame

Crop right in

With your SLR on a tripod, roughly compose your shot using the viewfinder or Live View, making sure the subject fills the frame, but still has room to 'breathe'

With your SLR on a tripod, roughly compose your shot using the viewfinder or Live View, making sure your crop is tight enough that it doesn't look accidental, and that there's still a suitable focal point for the viewer's eye to latch on to

Before going any further, check the background. Is it clean and free from any distractions, or does it look fussy or cluttered?

Clean

Cluttered

If possible, reposition the subject, the background or the camera so that the background is clean. If this isn't possible you'll need to set a wide aperture

Set the AF point closest to the part of the subject you want to focus on, half-press the shutter release button to focus, and then switch your lens to manual focus

To fine-tune the focus so that it's precisely where you want it to be, turn the focusing ring back and forth until the edge that you want to be sharp snaps into focus. If your camera features Live View, magnify the preview to focus even more accurately

Set your SLR to spot-metering mode, aperture priority and ISO100. Do you want a very shallow depth of field, or do you want as much of the subject as possible to be sharp?

Shallow

Deep

Set your lens's maximum aperture to blur out all but a very narrow band, take a test shot, and then check the histogram on the LCD

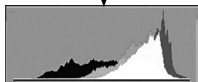
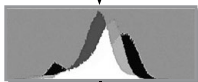
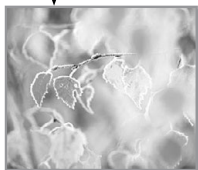
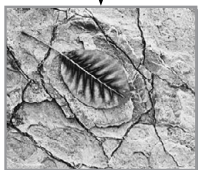
Set an aperture of say, $f/8$, to get more of the subject in focus, take a test shot, and then check the histogram on the LCD

Looking first at the scene you're shooting, is it predominantly darker than midtone, mostly midtone, or mostly lighter than midtone?

Darker

Midtone

Brighter

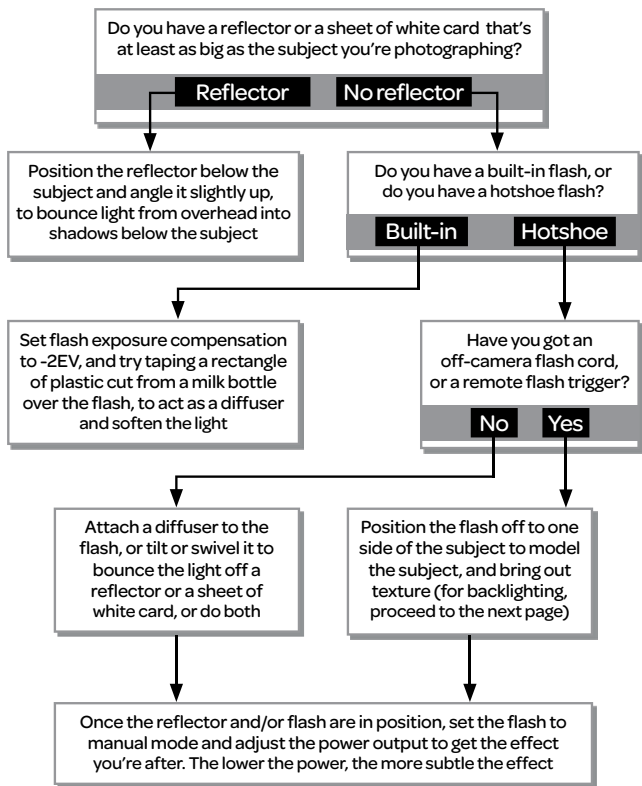


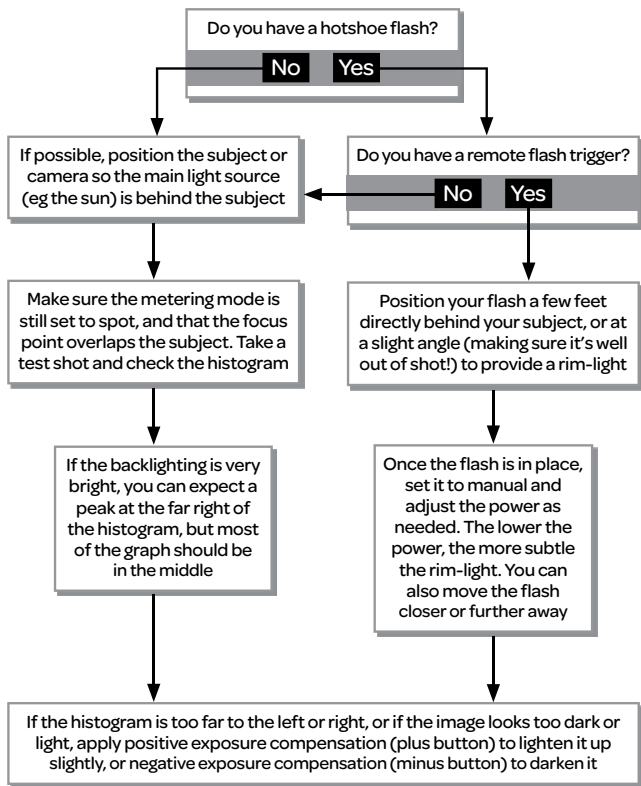
The histogram should be over to the left, but not so far over that it's cut off or 'clipped'. If it's not over to the left, use negative exposure compensation (the minus button). If it's cut off or clipped, try positive exposure compensation (the plus button)

The histogram should be central. If it's too far to the left, apply positive exposure compensation (plus button); too far right, try negative exposure compensation (minus button)

The histogram should be over to the right, but not so far over that it's cut off, or 'clipped'. If it's not over to the right, use positive exposure compensation (plus button). If it's clipped, try negative exposure compensation (minus button)

Once the histogram is where you want it to be, take your shot, or turn to the next page to fill in any shadows





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Look out for street lamps, light trails from cars and sunsets that will add colour and interest. Head out when it's been raining, as lights reflected in puddles can double the impact of your pictures. Will you be using a tripod?

Yes

No

Tripods help you to consider image opportunities more carefully. As long as you're not worried about subject movement, you'll be free to use low ISO settings, narrower apertures and slower shutter speeds

The amount of light generated by shops, street lights and signs can deliver a fast enough shutter speed for holding your camera. Increase the ISO setting and use your lens's widest aperture to get faster shutter speeds. Brace your camera by leaning against a wall or similar, and turn on the high ISO noise reduction feature

Would you like to capture light trails as part of your picture?

No

Yes

In manual mode (M), choose the widest aperture (lowest f-stop) to give you the fastest shutter speed. Increase the ISO to between 400 and 800 and take a test shot

Find a good spot near traffic lights or where the volume of traffic increases. Choose the lowest ISO setting and use manual mode (M) to dial in a shutter speed of ten seconds. Take some test shots and view the results on the LCD – using the histogram to check exposure. Are the light trails long enough?

No

Yes

Choose a slower shutter speed (try 20 secs) and take another shot. Repeat until you're happy with the length of the trail

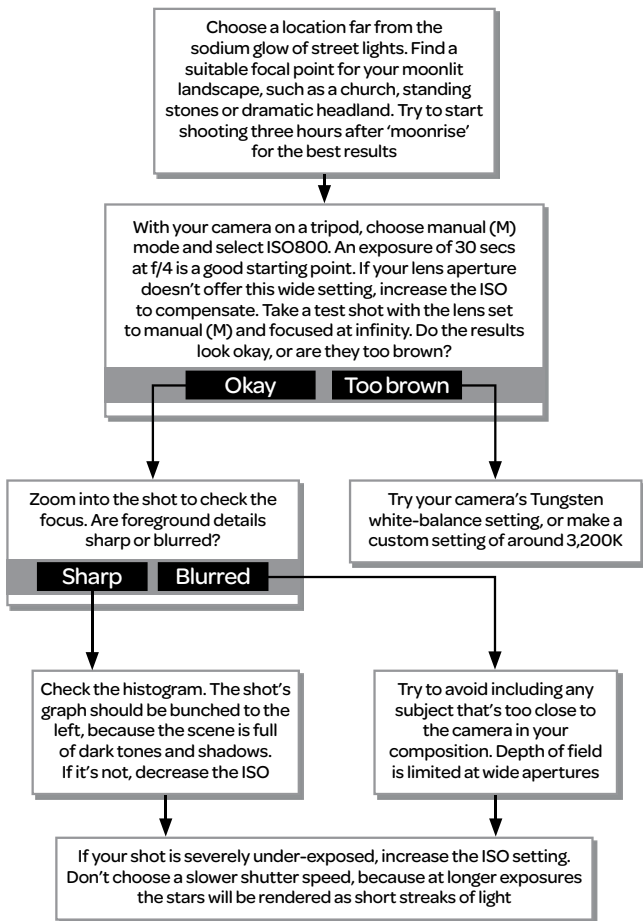
Are the results too bright (with the histogram bunched to the right) or too dark (with no detail on the right of the graph)?

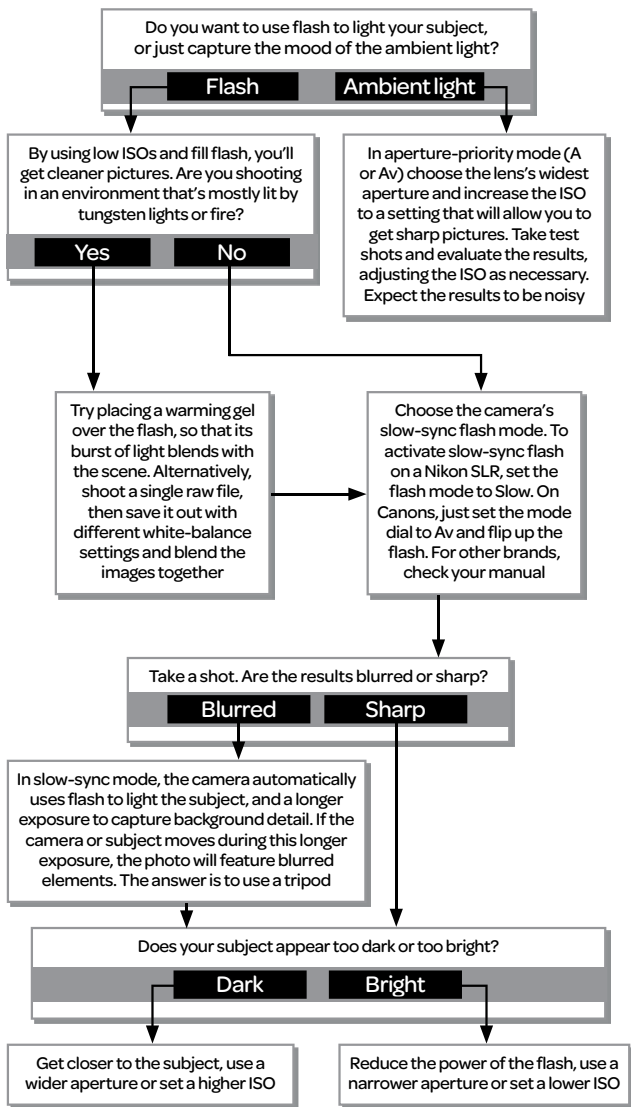
Too bright

Too dark

Choose a narrower aperture setting (higher f-stop) and take another shot. Check the histogram and repeat the process until the highlights can be seen to the right of the graph

Choose a wider aperture (lower f-stop) and take another test shot. Check the histogram and repeat the process until the histogram just touches the right of the graph





With your camera mounted on a tripod, manually focus on the subject. Switch to manual (M) mode, then set the ISO to 100 and aperture to around f/8. For the shutter speed, choose the camera's Bulb setting. Using a lockable remote release, lock open the shutter and 'paint' the subject with a strong spotlight torch. Try a 120-sec exposure, unlocking the release to close the shutter. Check the results on the rear screen. Is the image too dark or too bright?

Too dark **Too bright**

Use a wider aperture (lower f-stop) or try a longer exposure time. Take further test shots until you're happy with the exposure

Use a narrower aperture (higher f-stop) or try a shorter exposure time. Take further test shots until you're happy

You've probably been wandering around the scene with the torch still switched on. Make sure you switch it off when you're not 'painting'. Take another test shot

Are there flares or streaks of light throughout the frame?

Yes

No

Are some parts of the subject much brighter than others?

Yes

No

You need to keep the torch beam in motion, just like painting with a brush, otherwise you'll have patches and blotchy lighting over the subject. With this in mind, take another test shot

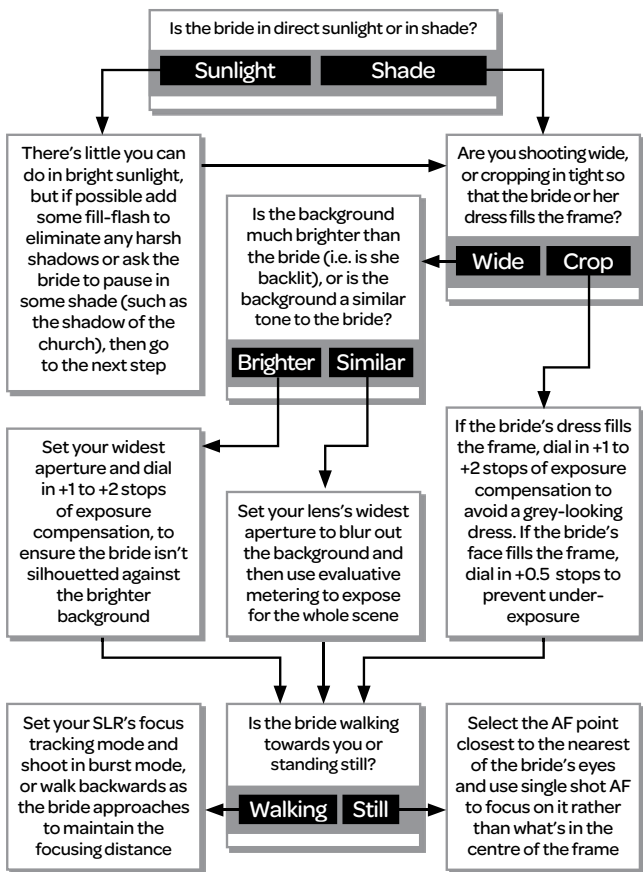
Zooming in on the image, does it look blurred?

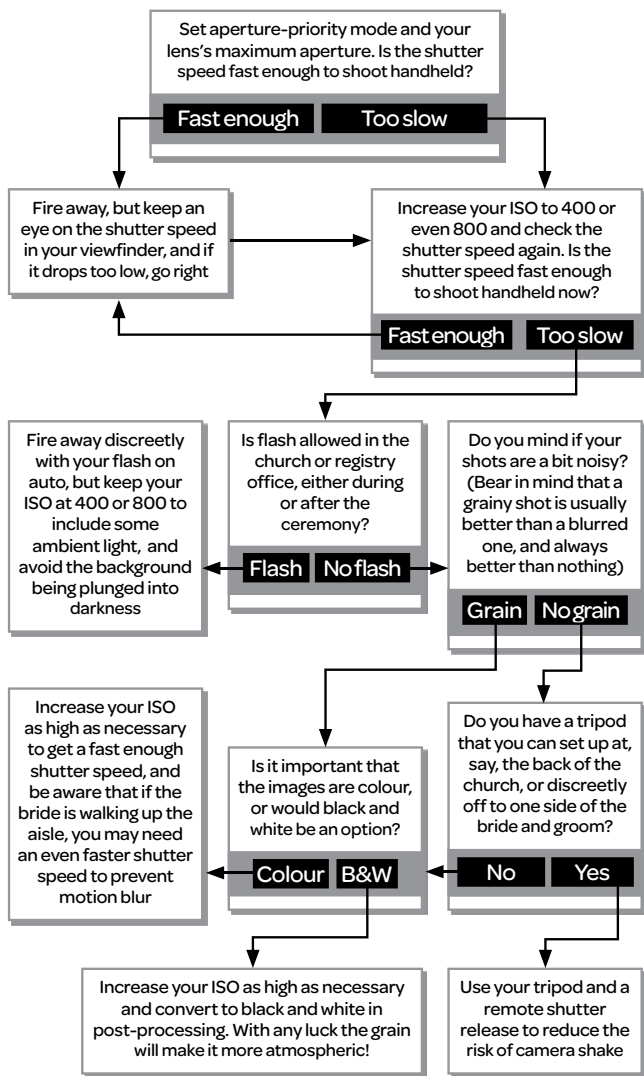
Yes

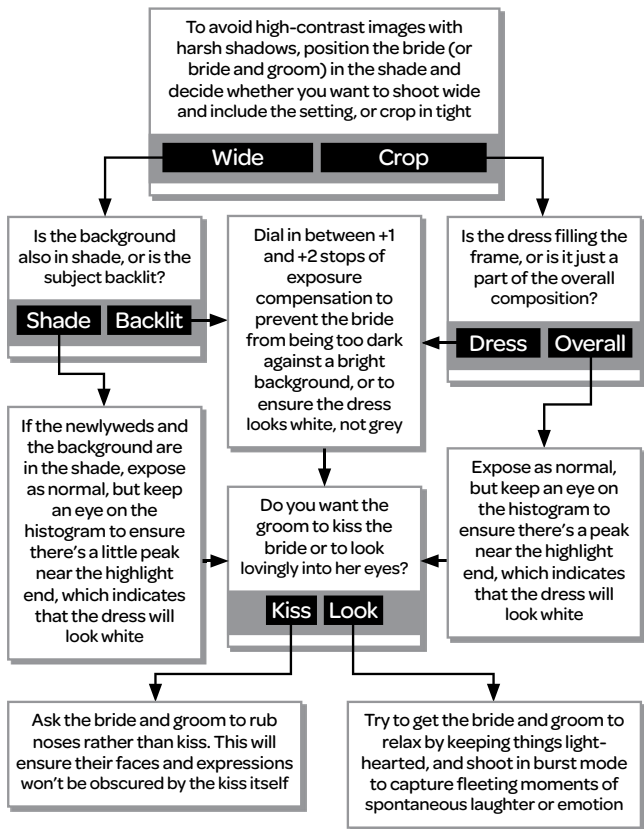
No

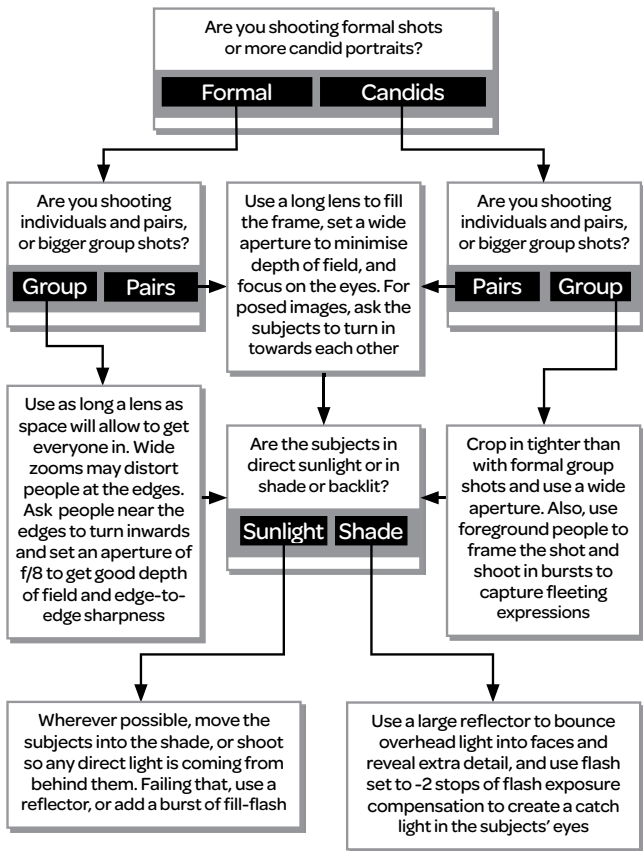
Your tripod isn't sturdy enough. Long exposures and wind are a volatile mix, so try hanging your camera bag from your tripod or weighing it down with a jacket to keep it rock steady

Take your shots. Don't take risks while working in total darkness. Arrive in daylight so you can check out the terrain, keep another torch handy and carry a phone for emergencies



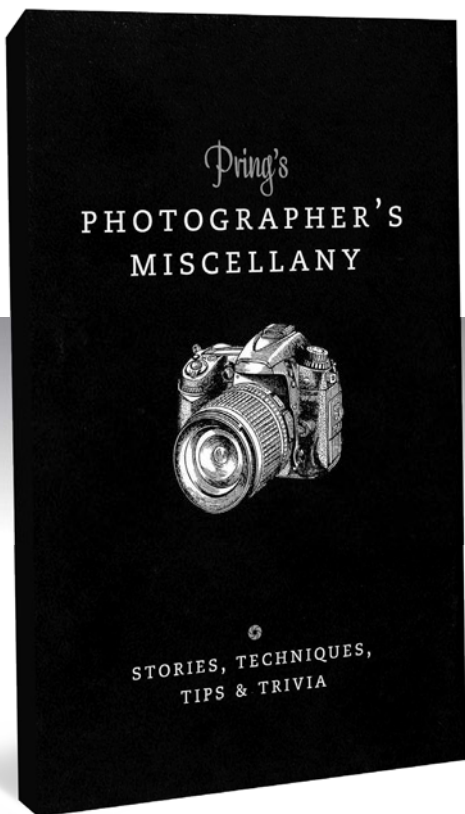






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