Canon EOS Rebel T6s / T6i (760D / 750D)
From Snapshots to Great Shots

Get great detail in your subjects!

Jeff Revell
Canon EOS Rebel T6s / T6i:
From Snapshots to Great Shots

Jeff Revell
Dedication
For my family—I love you

Acknowledgments
Getting a camera book off my computer and into a store is not an easy task. There are tons of people behind the scenes who do so much work with very little recognition. From copy edits, to layout, proofing, indexing, advertising, selling…the list just goes on and on. Thankfully I work with a fantastic publisher, Peachpit Press, who employs some super-talented folks who make me and my books look so good. I’m just the words-on-the-paper guy but the Peachpit staff turns it all into something worth reading.

And while the publisher and author have a big part in bringing you this book, none of it would have happened without the assistance of my friends at B&H Photo. They worked with me to ensure that I had a brand-new camera in hand as soon as they started arriving on our shores. Of course, this doesn’t surprise me at all because I have been purchasing photography equipment from them for years. I can say without a doubt that they are outstanding at what they do. They are always courteous and helpful, their knowledge is second to none, and they always give me a great deal. They are my number one go-to resource for anything photographic, so check them out on the web when you get the chance: www.bhphotovideo.com.
The camera used while writing this *From Snapshots to Great Shots* book was purchased through B&H Photo.

www.bhphotovideo.com
INTRODUCTION

CHAPTER 1: THE T6S / T6I TOP TEN LIST
Ten Tips to Make Your Shooting More Productive Right Out of the Box
Poring Over the Camera
1. Charge Your Battery
2. Turn Off the Release Shutter Without Card Setting
3. Set Your JPEG Image Quality
4. Turn Off the Auto ISO Setting
5. Set Your Focus Point and Mode
6. Set the Correct White Balance
7. Adjust the Viewfinder Diopter
8. Turn Off the Touchscreen
9. Review Your Shots
10. Hold Your Camera for Proper Shooting
Chapter 1 Assignments

CHAPTER 2: FIRST THINGS FIRST
A Few Things to Know and Do Before You Begin Taking Pictures
Poring Over the Picture
Choosing the Right Memory Card
Formatting Your Memory Card
Updating the T6s / T6i’s Firmware
Cleaning the Sensor
Using the Right Format: RAW vs. JPEG
Lenses and Focal Lengths
What Is Exposure?
Motion and Depth of Field
Video and the T6s / T6i
Chapter 2 Assignments
CHAPTER 6: SAY CHEESE!  137
Settings and Features to Make Great Portraits
Poring Over the Picture  138
Poring Over the Picture  140
Automatic Portrait Mode  142
Using Aperture Priority Mode  143
Metering Modes for Portraits  145
Using the AE Lock Feature  147
Focusing: The Eyes Have It  148
Classic Black-and-White Portraits  150
The Portrait Picture Style for Better Skin Tones  152
Detecting Faces with Live View  152
Using Fill Flash to Reduce Shadows  155
People on the Move  157
Tips for Shooting Better Portraits  158
Chapter 6 Assignments  165

CHAPTER 7: LANDSCAPE PHOTOGRAPHY  167
Tips, Tools, and Techniques to Get the Most Out of Your Landscape Photography
Poring Over the Picture  168
Poring Over the Picture  170
Sharp and in Focus: Using Tripods  172
Selecting the Proper ISO  174
Using Noise Reduction  176
Selecting a White Balance  177
Using the Landscape Picture Style  179
Taming Bright Skies with Exposure Compensation  181
Shooting Beautiful Black-and-White Landscapes  183
The Golden Light  185
Where to Focus  186
Easier Focusing  188
Making Water Fluid  190
Directing the Viewer: A Word About Composition  191
Chapter 7 Assignments  195

CHAPTER 8: MOOD LIGHTING  197
Shooting When the Lights Get Low
Poring Over the Picture  198
Poring Over the Picture  200
Raising the ISO: The Simple Solution  202
Using Very High ISOS  204
Using the Multi Shot Noise Reduction 205
Stabilizing the Situation 208
Focusing in Low Light 210
Shooting Long Exposures 213
Using the Built-in Flash 215
Compensating for the Flash Exposure 219
Reducing Red-Eye 221
Using an External Speedlite 222
Flash and Glass 226
Chapter 8 Assignments 228

CHAPTER 9: CREATIVE COMPOSITIONS 231
Improve Your Pictures with Sound Compositional Elements
Poring Over the Picture 232
Poring Over the Picture 234
Depth of Field 236
Angles 239
Point of View 240
Patterns 240
Color 241
Contrast 242
Leading Lines 243
Splitting the Frame 243
Chapter 9 Assignments 245

CHAPTER 10: ADVANCED TECHNIQUES 247
Impress Your Family and Friends
Poring Over the Picture 248
Advanced Techniques to Explore 250
Shooting HDR Images 254
HDR Backlight Control 257
Auto Lighting Optimizer 258
Handheld Night Scene 259
Friday Night Flicker 261
The My Menu Setting 264
Customize Your White Balance 266
Conclusion 268
Chapter 10 Assignments 269

INDEX 270
### BONUS CHAPTER 11: PIMP MY RIDE

11 – 1

Upgrades and Accessories to Expand Your Camera’s Creative Potential

Poring Over the Picture 11 – 2
Filters 11 – 4
Tripods 11 – 8
Cable Release 11 – 11
Macro Photography Accessories 11 – 12
Hot-Shoe Flashes 11 – 14
Getting a Grip 11 – 14
Diffusers 11 – 15
Camera Bags 11 – 15
Bits and Pieces 11 – 17
The Bottom Line 11 – 19

### BONUS CHAPTER 12: T6S / T6i VIDEO: BEYOND THE BASICS

12 – 1

Getting Professional-Looking Video from Your Rebel T6s / T6i

It’s All About the Lenses 12 – 2
Speaking of Filters… 12 – 2
Getting a Shallow Depth of Field 12 – 6
Using the Touchscreen for Fast Focusing 12 – 7
Giving a Different Look to Your Videos 12 – 7
Tips for Better Video 12 – 8
Watching and Editing Your Video 12 – 12
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Introduction

Walk into any bookseller, go to the photography section, and you will see countless books on the subject of photography. Look a little further and you will locate the camera-specific books. It is this divide between the camera-specific and instructional photography books that inspired me to write this book. What I was seeing in the store was a lot of books that were just sort of missing the mark—especially when it came to using a specific brand and model of camera along with actual photographic instruction. So with that, I set about to write this *Snapshots to Great Shots* book, not as a rehash of the owner’s manual but as a resource to teach photography with the wonderful technology present in the Canon EOS Rebel T6s / T6i. I have put together a short Q&A to help you get a better understanding of just what it is that you can expect from this book.
Q: Is every camera feature going to be covered?

A: No, just the ones I felt you need to know about in order to start taking great photos. Believe it or not, you already own a great resource that covers every feature of your camera: the owner’s manual. Writing a book that just repeats this information would have been a waste of my time and your money. What I did want to write about was how to harness certain camera features to the benefit of your photography. As you read through the book, you will also see callouts that point you to specific pages in your owner’s manual that are related to the topic being discussed. For example, in Chapter 6 I discuss the use of the Live View mode for shooting portraits, but more information is available on this feature in the manual. I cover the function that applies to our specific needs but also give you the page numbers in the manual to explore this function even further.

Q: So if I already own the manual, why do I need this book?

A: The manual does a pretty good job of telling you how to use a feature or turn it on in the menus, but it doesn’t necessarily tell you why and when you should use it. If you really want to improve your photography, you need to know the whys and whens to put all of those great camera features to use at the right time. To that extent, the manual just isn’t going to cut it. It is, however, a great resource on the camera’s features, and it is for that reason that I treat it like a companion to this book. You already own it, so why not get something of value from it?

Q: What can I expect to learn from this book?

A: Hopefully, you will learn how to take great photographs. My goal, and the reason the book is laid out the way it is, is to guide you through the basics of photography as they relate to different situations and scenarios. By using the features of your T6s / T6i and this book, you will learn about aperture, shutter speed, ISO, lens selection, depth of field, and many other photographic concepts. You will also find plenty of large full-page photos that include captions, shooting data, and callouts so you can see how all of the photography fundamentals come together to make great images. All the while, you will be learning how your camera works and how to apply its functions and features to your photography.

Q: What are the assignments all about?

A: At the end of most of the chapters, you will find shooting assignments, where I give you some suggestions as to how you can apply the lessons of the chapter to help reinforce everything you just learned. Let’s face it—using the camera is much more fun than reading about it, so the assignments are a way of taking a little break after each chapter and having some fun.
Q: Should I read the book straight through or can I skip around from chapter to chapter?
A: Here’s the quick answer: yes and no. No, because the first four chapters give you the basic information that you need to know about your camera. These are the building blocks for using the camera. After that, yes, you can move around the book as you see fit because the later chapters are written to stand on their own as guides to specific types of photography or shooting situations. You can bounce from portraits to shooting landscapes and then maybe to a little action photography. It’s all about your needs and how you want to address them. Or, you can read it straight through. The choice is up to you.

Q: I don’t see any chapters devoted to video.
A: I know that one of the reasons why you might have bought the T6s / T6i was its ability to capture video. I have covered some basic video setup information in Chapter 2 but I really wanted the focus of this book to center around the photographic capabilities and possibilities. Don’t worry, though; read the next Q&A and I think you will be happy.

Q: Is there anything else I should know before getting started?
A: In order to keep the book short and focused, I had to be pretty selective about what I put in each chapter. The problem is that there is a little more information that might come in handy after you’ve gone through all the chapters. So as an added value for you, I have written two bonus chapters called “Pimp My Ride” and “T6s / T6i Video: Beyond the Basics.” The first chapter is full of information on photo accessories that will assist you in making better photographs. In it, you will find my recommendation for things like filters, tripods, and much more. The second chapter will lead you through some video tips and techniques to make your T6s / T6i movies even better. To access the bonus chapters, just log in or join peachpit.com (it’s free), and then enter the book’s ISBN. After you register the book, a link to the bonus chapters will be listed on your Account page under Registered Products.

Q: Is that it?
A: One last thought before you dive into the first chapter. My goal in writing this book has been to give you a resource that you can turn to for creating great photographs with your Canon T6s / T6i. Take some time to learn the basics and then put them to use. Photography, like most things, takes time to master and requires practice. I have been a photographer for 30 years and I’m still learning. Always remember, it’s not the camera but the person using it who makes beautiful photographs. Have fun, make mistakes, and then learn from them. In no time, I’m sure you will transition from a person who takes snapshots to a photographer who makes great shots.
The Creative Zone

Taking Your Photography to the Next Level

The Creative zone is the name given by Canon to the shooting modes that offer you the greatest amount of control over your photography. For anyone who has been taking photographs for any period of time, these modes are the backbones of photography. They allow you to influence two of the most important factors for taking great photographs: aperture and shutter speed. To access these modes, you simply turn the Mode dial to the Creative mode of your choice and begin shooting. But wouldn’t it be nice to know exactly what those modes control and how to make them do our bidding? Well, if you want to take that next step in controlling your photography, it is essential that you understand not only how to control these modes, but why and when to adjust them so that you get the results you want. So let’s move that Mode dial to the first of our Creative modes: Program mode.
I placed my focus point on the eyes so they would be the sharpest point of the image.

A large aperture setting helped to provide separation from the background.
It’s not necessary to go on safari to get great images of big cats, but it does help to have a great zoo nearby. I am pretty fortunate in that respect because I live near the National Zoo in Washington, DC, and I try to get there as often as possible. The key is to take a long lens to isolate the animals from their surroundings. Having a little patience in your camera bag doesn’t hurt either.

A 300mm zoom lens usually provides enough length to get good close-ups.

I waited to get a dark background for even more separation.

ISO 200 • 1/1000 sec. • f/4 • 280mm lens
I enjoy leading photowalks because I usually come away with some great images. On this particular evening, I was leading a walk through the monuments in Washington, DC, when we came upon the Martin Luther King, Jr. Memorial. It is one of the newer attractions on the National Mall and has quickly become one of my favorites, not only for what it represents but also for the numerous photographic possibilities that surround it.

The blurry people add a nice visual contrast to the towering statue of Dr. King.

The tungsten white balance added warmth to the statue while making the skies dark blue.

ISO 400 • 5 sec. • f/22 • 18mm lens
I used a tripod to keep the camera steady during the long exposure.

I used a simple rule-of-thirds composition for the image.
P: Program Mode

There is a reason that Program mode is only one click away from the Basic modes: with respect to apertures and shutter speeds, the camera is doing most of the thinking for you. So, if that’s the case, why even bother with Program mode? First, let me say that I rarely use Program mode, because it just doesn’t give me as much control over the image-making process as the other Creative modes. There are occasions, however, when it comes in handy, like when I’m shooting in widely changing lighting conditions and I don’t have the time to think through all of my options, or I’m not concerned with having ultimate control of the scene. Think of a picnic scene outdoors in a partial shade/sun environment. You want great-looking pictures, but you’re not looking for anything to hang in a gallery. If that’s the scenario, why choose Program over one of the Basic modes? Because it gives you choices and control that none of the Basic modes, including Creative Auto, can deliver.

When to use Program (P) mode instead of the Basic zone modes

Use Program mode in these situations:

- When shooting in a casual environment where quick adjustments are needed
- When you want control over the ISO
- If you want to use exposure compensation
- If you want or need to shoot in the Adobe RGB color space
- If you want to make corrections to the white balance

Let’s go back to our picnic scenario. As I said, the light is moving from deep shadow to bright sunlight, which means that the camera is trying to balance three photo factors (ISO, aperture, and shutter speed) to make a good exposure. From Chapter 1, “The T6s / T6i Top Ten List,” you know that Auto ISO is not a good choice, so you’ve already turned off that feature (you did change it, didn’t you?). Well, in Program mode you can choose which ISO you would like the camera to base its exposure on. The lower the ISO number, the better the quality of your photographs, but the less light-sensitive the camera becomes. It’s a balancing act, with the main goal always being to keep the ISO as low as possible—too low an ISO, and we will get camera shake in our images from a long shutter speed, and too high an ISO means we will have an unacceptable amount of digital noise. For this example, let’s select ISO 400 so that we provide enough sensitivity for those shadows while allowing the camera to use shutter speeds that are fast enough to stop motion.
With the ISO selected, you can now make use of the other controls built into Program mode. By rotating the Main dial, we now have the ability to shift the program settings. Remember, your camera is using the internal light meter to pick what it believes are suitable exposure values, but sometimes it doesn’t know what it’s looking at and how you want those values applied (Figure 4.1 and Figure 4.2). With the program shift, you can influence what the shot will look like. Do you need faster shutter speeds in order to stop the action? Just turn the Main dial clockwise. Do you want a smaller aperture so that you get a narrow depth of field? Then turn the dial counterclockwise until you get the desired aperture. The camera shifts the shutter speed and aperture accordingly in order to get a proper exposure, and you will get the benefit of your choice as a result.

Figure 4.1
This is my first shot using Program mode. Because I was pointing the camera at the dog lying inside the temple, the exposure was longer.
ISO 200 • 1/20 sec. • f/22 • 120mm lens

Figure 4.2
This zoomed-out view shows more of the temple and bright sky, which made the exposure shorter.
ISO 200 • 1/60 sec. • f/22 • 48mm lens
Starting points for ISO selection

There is a lot of discussion concerning ISO in this and other chapters, but it might be helpful if you know where your starting points should be for your ISO settings. The first thing you should always try to do is use the lowest-possible ISO setting. That being said, here are some good starting points for your ISO settings:

• **100**: Bright sunny day
• **200**: Hazy or outdoor shade on a sunny day
• **400**: Indoor lighting at night or cloudy conditions outside
• **800**: Late night, low-light conditions or sporting arenas at night

These are just suggestions and your ISO selection will depend on a number of factors that will be discussed later in the book. You might have to push your ISO even higher as needed, but at least now you know where to start.

Let’s set up the camera for Program mode and see how we can make all of this come together.

**Setting up and shooting in Program mode**

1. Turn your camera on and then turn the Mode dial to align the P with the indicator line.
2. Select your ISO by pressing the ISO button on the top of the camera, and then turning the Main dial to the desired setting and pressing the ISO button again (the ISO selection will appear in the rear LCD panel).
3. Point the camera at your subject and then activate the camera meter by depressing the shutter button halfway.
4. View the exposure information in the bottom of the viewfinder or by looking at the display panel on the back of the camera.
5. While the meter is activated, use your index finger to roll the Main dial left and right to see the changed exposure values.
6. Select the exposure that is right for you and start shooting. (Don’t worry if you aren’t sure what the right exposure is. We will start working on making the right choices for those great shots beginning with the next chapter.)
**Tv: Shutter Priority Mode**

Tv mode is what a lot of photographers refer to as Shutter Priority mode. If you dig deep in your manual, you will see that Tv stands for “Time Value.” I’m not sure who came up with this term, but I can tell you that it wasn’t a photographer. In all my years of shooting, I don’t ever recall thinking, “Hey, this would be a great situation to use the Time Value mode.” However, you don’t need to know why it is called Tv mode; the important thing is to know why and when to use it.

Just as with Program mode, Tv mode gives us more freedom to control certain aspects of our photography. In this case, we are talking about shutter speed. The selected shutter speed determines just how long you expose your camera’s sensor to light. The longer it remains open, the more time your sensor has to gather light. The shutter speed also, to a large degree, determines how sharp your photographs are. This is different from the image being sharply in focus. One of the major influences on the sharpness of an image is camera shake as well as the subject’s movement. Because a slower shutter speed means that light from your subject is hitting the sensor for a longer period of time, any movement by you or your subject will show up in your photos as blur.

**When to use Shutter Priority (Tv) mode**

Use Tv mode in these situations:

- When working with fast-moving subjects where you want to freeze the action (Figure 4.3); much more on this is in Chapter 5, “Moving Target”
- When you want to emphasize movement in your subject with motion blur (Figure 4.4)
- When you want to use a long exposure to gather light over a long period of time (Figure 4.5); more on this is in Chapter 8, “Mood Lighting”
- When you want to create that silky-looking water in a waterfall or fountain (Figure 4.6)

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**Shutter speeds**

A slow shutter speed refers to leaving the shutter open for a long period of time—like 1/30 of a second or longer. A fast shutter speed means that the shutter is open for a very short period of time—like 1/250 of a second or less.
Figure 4.4
Slowing down the shutter speed allows your photographs to convey a sense of movement.
ISO 400 • 1/25 sec. • f/32 • 130mm lens

Figure 4.5
A long exposure coupled with a small aperture and a steady tripod helped capture this late evening image of the Martin Luther King, Jr. Memorial.
ISO 400 • 5 sec. • f/22 • 18mm lens
As you can see, the subject of your photo usually determines whether you will use Tv mode. It is important that you’re able to visualize the result of using a particular shutter speed. The great thing about shooting with digital cameras is that you get instant feedback by checking your shot on the LCD screen. But what if your subject won’t give you a do-over? Such is often the case when shooting sporting events. It’s not like you can go ask the quarterback to throw that touchdown pass again because your last shot was blurry from a slow shutter speed. This is why it’s important to know what those speeds represent in terms of their abilities to stop the action and deliver a blur-free shot.

First, let’s examine just how much control you have over the shutter speeds. The T6s / T6i has a shutter speed range from 1/4000 of a second all the way down to 30 seconds. With that much latitude, you should have enough control to capture almost any subject. The other thing to think about is that Tv mode is considered a “semiautomatic” mode. This means that you are taking control over one aspect of the total exposure while the camera handles the other. In this instance, you are controlling the shutter speed and the camera is controlling the aperture. This is important to know because there will be times that you want to use a particular shutter speed but your lens aperture won’t be able to accommodate your request.
For example, you might encounter this problem when shooting in low-light situations: if you are shooting a fast-moving subject that will blur at a shutter speed slower than 1/125 of a second but the largest aperture of your lens is f/3.5, you might see that your aperture display in your viewfinder and the rear LCD panel will begin to blink. This is your warning that there won’t be enough light available for the shot—due to the limitations of the lens—so your picture will be underexposed (too dark).

Another case where you might run into this situation is when you are shooting moving water. To get that look of silky, flowing water, it’s usually necessary to use a shutter speed of at least 1/15 of a second or longer. If your waterfall is in full sunlight, you may get that blinking aperture display once again because the lens you are using only closes down to f/22 at its smallest opening. In this instance, your camera is warning you that you will be overexposing your image (too light). There are workarounds for these problems, which we will discuss later (see Chapter 7, “Landscape Photography”), but it is important to know that there can be limitations when using Tv mode.

**Setting up and shooting in Tv mode**

1. Turn on your camera and then turn the Mode dial to align the Tv with the indicator line.
2. Select your ISO by pressing the ISO button on the top of the camera and then turning the Main dial (the ISO selection will appear in the rear LCD panel).
3. Point the camera at your subject and then activate the camera meter by depressing the shutter button halfway.
4. View the exposure information in the bottom area of the viewfinder or by looking at the rear LCD panel.
5. While the meter is activated, use your index finger to roll the Main dial left and right to see the changed exposure values. Roll the dial to the right for faster shutter speeds and to the left for slower speeds.

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**Av: Aperture Priority Mode**

You wouldn’t know it from its name, but Av mode is one of the most useful and popular modes in the Creative zone. Av stands for Aperture Value and, like Time Value, it’s another term that you’ll seldom hear a photographer toss around. The mode, however, is one of my personal favorites, and I believe that it will quickly become one of yours as well. Av, more commonly referred to as Aperture Priority mode, is also deemed a semiautomatic mode because it allows you to once again control one factor of exposure while the camera adjusts for the other.
Why, you may ask, is this one of my favorite modes? It’s because the aperture of your lens dictates depth of field. Depth of field, along with composition, is a major factor in how you direct attention to what is important in your image. It is the controlling factor of how much area in your image is in focus. If you want to isolate a subject from the background, such as when shooting a portrait, you can use a large aperture to keep the focus on your subject and make both the foreground and background blurry. If you want to keep the entire scene sharply focused, such as with a landscape scene, then using a small aperture will render the greatest amount of depth of field possible.

**When to use Aperture Priority (Av) mode**

Use Av mode in these situations:

- When shooting portraits or wildlife (Figure 4.7)
- When shooting most landscape photography (Figure 4.8)
- When shooting macro, or close-up, photography (Figure 4.9)
- When shooting architectural photography, which often benefits from a large depth of field (Figure 4.10)
Figure 4.8
The smaller aperture setting brings sharpness to near and far objects.
ISO 400 • 1/100 sec. • f/9 • 18mm lens

Figure 4.9
Small apertures give more sharpness in macro images.
ISO 1250 • 1/320 sec. • f/16 • 62mm lens
F-stops and aperture

As discussed earlier, when referring to the numeric value of your lens aperture, you will find it described as an *f-stop*. The f-stop is one of those old photography terms that, technically, relates to the focal length of the lens (for example, 200mm) divided by the effective aperture diameter. These measurements are defined as “stops” and work incrementally with your shutter speed to create proper exposure. Older camera lenses used one-stop increments to assist in exposure adjustments, such as 1.4, 2, 2.8, 4, 5.6, 8, 11, 16, and 22. Each stop represents about half the amount of light entering the lens iris as the larger stop before it. Today, most lenses don’t have f-stop markings since all adjustments to this setting are performed via the camera’s electronics. The stops are also now typically divided into 1/3-stop increments to allow much finer adjustments to exposures, as well as to match the incremental values of your camera’s ISO settings, which are also adjusted in 1/3-stop increments.

Figure 4.10
A small aperture helps to capture all the details in this interesting building.
ISO 200 • 1/60 sec. • f/11 • 82mm lens
We have established that Aperture Priority (Av) mode is highly useful in controlling the depth of field in your image. But it’s also pivotal in determining the limits of available light that you can shoot in. Different lenses have different maximum apertures. The larger the maximum aperture, the less light you need in order to achieve a properly exposed image. You will recall that, when in Tv mode, there is a limit at which you can handhold your camera without introducing movement or hand shake, which causes blurriness in the final picture. If your lens has a larger aperture, you can let in more light all at once, which means that you can use faster shutter speeds. This is why lenses with large maximum apertures, such as f/1.4, are called “fast” lenses.

On the other hand, bright scenes require the use of a small aperture (such as f/16 or f/22), especially if you want to use a slower shutter speed. That small opening reduces the amount of incoming light, and this reduction of light requires that the shutter stay open longer.

**Setting up and shooting in Av mode**

1. Turn on your camera and then turn the Mode dial to align the Av with the indicator line.

2. Select your ISO by pressing the ISO button on the top of the camera and then turning the Main dial.

3. Point the camera at your subject and then activate the camera meter by depressing the shutter button halfway.

4. View the exposure information in the bottom area of the viewfinder or by looking at the rear display panel.

5. While the meter is activated, use your index finger to roll the Main dial left and right to see the changed exposure values. Roll the dial to the right for a smaller aperture (higher f-stop number) and to the left for a larger aperture (smaller f-stop number).

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**Zoom lenses and maximum apertures**

Some zoom lenses (like the 18–135mm kit lens) have a variable maximum aperture. This means that the largest opening will change depending on the zoom setting. In the example of the 18–135mm zoom, the lens has a maximum aperture of f/3.5 at 18mm and only f/5.6 when the lens is zoomed out to 135mm. Fixed aperture zoom lenses maintain the same maximum aperture throughout the zoom range. They are typically much more expensive than their variable maximum aperture counterparts.
M: Manual Mode

Once upon a time, long before digital cameras and program modes, there was Manual mode. In those days it wasn’t called “Manual mode” because there were no other modes. It was just photography. In fact, many photographers, myself included, cut their teeth on completely manual cameras. Let’s face it—if you want to learn the effects of aperture and shutter speed on your photography, there is no better way to learn than by setting these adjustments yourself. However, today, with the advancement of camera technology, many new photographers never give this mode a second thought. That’s truly a shame. Not only is it an excellent way to learn your photography basics, it’s also an essential tool to have in your photographic bag of tricks.

When you have your camera set to Manual (M) mode, the camera meter will give you a reading of the scene you are photographing. It’s your job, though, to set both the f-stop (aperture) and the shutter speed to achieve a correct exposure. If you need a faster shutter speed, you will have to make the reciprocal change to your f-stop. Using any other mode, such as Tv or Av, would mean that you just have to worry about one of these changes, but Manual mode means you have to do it all yourself. This can be a little challenging at first, but after a while you will have a complete understanding of how each change affects your exposure, which will, in turn, improve the way that you use the other modes.

When to use Manual (M) mode

Use Manual mode in these situations:

- When you need to maintain exposures between different frames for a panorama (Figure 4.11)
- When your environment is fooling your light meter and you need to maintain a certain exposure setting (Figure 4.12)
- When shooting silhouetted subjects, which requires overriding the camera’s meter readings (Figure 4.13)
Figure 4.11
Setting the camera on Manual for panorama shots helps to keep the exposure consistent.
ISO 200 • 10 sec. • f/22 • 24mm lens

Figure 4.12
This much blue sky would definitely cause under-exposure, so a manual setting kept things bright.
ISO 800 • 1/20 sec. • f/16 • 400mm lens
Figure 4.13
I really wanted a silhouette of the person on the ridge, so I placed my camera into Manual mode and underexposed the shot.

ISO 800 • 1/1600 sec. • f/18 • 18mm lens
Setting up and shooting in Manual mode

1. Turn the Mode dial to align the M with the indicator line.

2. Select your ISO by pressing the ISO button on the top of the camera and then turning the Main dial.

3. Point the camera at your subject and then activate the camera meter by depressing the shutter button halfway.

4. View the exposure information in the bottom area of the viewfinder or by looking at the rear display panel.

5. While the meter is activated, use your index finger to roll the Main dial left and right to change your shutter speed value until the exposure mark is lined up with the zero mark. The exposure information is displayed by a scale with marks that run from –2 to +2 stops. A “proper” exposure will line up with the arrow mark in the middle. As the indicator moves to the left, it is a sign that you will be underexposing (there is not enough light hitting the sensor to provide adequate exposure). Move the indicator to the right and you will be providing more exposure than the camera meter calls for. This is overexposure.

6. To set your exposure using the aperture, depress the shutter release button until the meter is activated. If you are using a T6s, simply rotate the Quick Control dial to change the aperture setting. If you are using a T6i, hold the Av button on the back of the camera with your thumb and then use your index finger to turn the Main dial right for a smaller aperture (large f-stop number) or left for a larger aperture (small f-stop number).

How I Shoot: A Closer Look at the Camera Settings I Use

The great thing about working with a DSLR camera is that I can always feel confident that some things will remain unchanged from camera to camera. For me, these are the Aperture Priority (Av) and Shutter Priority (Tv) shooting modes. Although I like to think of myself as a generalist in terms of my photography, I do tend to lean heavily on the landscape and urban photography genres. Working in these areas means that I am almost always going to be concerned with my depth of field. Whether it’s isolating my subject with a large aperture or trying to maximize the overall sharpness of a sweeping landscape, I always keep an eye on my aperture setting.
If I do have a need to control the action, I use Shutter Priority. If I am trying to create a silky waterfall effect, I can depend on Tv to provide that long shutter speed that it will deliver. Maybe I’m shooting a motocross jumper. I definitely need the fast shutter speeds that will freeze the fast-moving action. Although the other camera modes have their place, I think you will find that, like myself and most other working pros, you will use the Av and Tv modes for 90 percent of your shooting.

The other concern that I have when I’m setting up my camera is just how low I can keep my ISO. I raise the ISO only as a last resort because each increase in sensitivity is an opportunity for more digital noise to enter my image. To that end, I always have the High ISO Speed Noise Reduction feature turned on Standard (see Chapter 7).

To make quick changes while I shoot, I often use the Exposure Compensation feature (covered in Chapter 7) so that I can make small over- and underexposure changes. This is different than changing the aperture or shutter; it is more like fooling the camera meter into thinking the scene is brighter or darker than it actually is.

One of the reasons I change my exposure is to make corrections when I see the “blinkies” while looking at my images on the rear LCD. Blinkies are the warning signal that part of my image has been overexposed to the point that I no longer have any detail in the highlights. The highlight alert will flash wherever the potential exists for overexposure. The only unfortunate thing about this feature is that it doesn’t work with the full-screen preview mode. You have to set your camera display to one of the Histogram modes and then you will see the highlight alert (Figure 4.14). If you see any area of the thumbnail blinking black, you are probably overexposing that part of the image.

As you work your way through the coming chapters, you will see other tips and tricks I use in my daily photography, but the most important tip I can give is that you take the time to understand the features of your camera so that you can leverage the technology in a knowledgeable way. This will result in better photographs.
The information covered in this chapter will define how you work with your camera from this point on. Granted, there may be times that you just want to grab some quick pictures and will resort to the Basic zone, but to get serious with your photography, you should learn the modes in the Creative zone.

Starting off with Program mode

Set your camera on Program mode and start shooting. Become familiar with the adjustments you can make to your exposure by turning the Main dial. While shooting, make sure that you keep an eye on your ISO.

Learning to control time with the Tv mode

Find some moving subjects and then set your camera to Tv mode. Have someone ride their bike back and forth or even just photograph cars as they go by. Start with a slow shutter speed of around 1/30 of a second and then start shooting with faster and faster shutter speeds. Keep shooting until you can freeze the action. Now find something that isn’t moving, like a flower, and work your shutter speed from something fast like 1/500 of a second and then work your way down to about 1/4 of a second. The point is to see how well you can handhold your camera before you start introducing hand shake into the image.

Controlling depth of field with the Av mode

The name of the game with Av mode is depth of field. Set up three items in equal distance from you. I would use chess pieces or something similar. Now focus on the middle item and set your camera to the largest aperture that your lens allows (remember, large aperture means a small number like f/3.5). Now, while still focusing on the middle subject, start shooting with ever-smaller apertures until you are at the smallest f-stop for your lens. If you have a zoom lens, try doing this exercise with the lens at the widest and then the most telephoto settings. Now move up to subjects that are farther away, like telephone poles, and shoot them in the same way. The idea is to get a feel for how each aperture setting affects your depth of field.
Giving and taking with Manual mode

Go outside on a sunny day and, using the camera in Manual mode, set your ISO to 100, your shutter speed to 1/125 of a second, and your aperture to f/16. Now press your shutter release button to get a meter reading. You should be pretty close to that zero mark. If not, make small adjustments to one of your settings until it hits that mark. Now is where the fun begins. Start moving your shutter speed slower, to 1/60, and then set your aperture to f/22. Now go the other way. Set your aperture on f/8 and your shutter speed to 1/500. Now review your images. If all went well, all the exposures should look the same. This is because you balanced the light with reciprocal changes to the aperture and shutter speed. Now go back to our original setting of 1/125 at f/16 and try just moving the shutter speed without changing the aperture. Just make 1/3-stop changes (1/125 to 1/100 to 1/80 to 1/60), and then review your images to see what a 1/3 stop of overexposure looks like. Then do the same thing going the opposite way. It’s hard to know if you want to over- or underexpose a scene until you have actually done it and seen the results.

*Share your results with the book’s Flickr group!*

*Join the group here: flickr.com/groups/t6s_t6ifromsnapshotstogreatshots*
Mood Lighting

Shooting When the Lights Get Low

There is no reason to put your camera away when the sun goes down. Your T6s / T6i has some great features that let you work with available light as well as the built-in flash. In this chapter, we will explore ways to push your camera’s technology to the limit in order to capture great photos in difficult lighting situations. We will also explore the use of flash and how best to use your built-in flash features to improve your photography. But let’s first look at working with low-level available light.
Raising the ISO: The Simple Solution

Let’s begin with the obvious way to keep shooting when the lights get low: raising the ISO (Figure 8.1). By now you know how to change the ISO: just press the ISO button on the top of the camera and turn the Main dial to adjust. In typical shooting situations, you should keep the ISO in the 100–800 range. This will keep your pictures nice and clean by keeping the digital noise to a minimum. But as the available light gets low, you might find yourself working in the higher ranges of the ISO scale, which could lead to more noise in your image.

You could use the flash, but that has a limited range (15–20 feet) that might not work for you. Also, you could be in a situation where flash is prohibited, or at least frowned upon, like at a wedding or in a museum.

And what about a tripod in combination with a long shutter speed? That is also an option, and we’ll cover it a little further into the chapter. The problem with using a tripod and a slow shutter speed in low-light photography, though, is that it performs best when
subjects aren’t moving. Besides, try to set up a tripod in a subway station and see how quickly you grab the attention of the security guards.

So if the only choice to get the shot is to raise the ISO to 800 or higher, make sure that you turn on the High ISO Speed Noise Reduction feature. This menu function is set to Standard by default, but as you start using higher ISO values you should consider changing it to the Strong setting. (See Chapter 7, “Landscape Photography,” for setting the noise reduction features.)

To see the effect of High ISO Speed Noise Reduction, you need to zoom in and take a closer look (Figure 8.2 and Figure 8.3).

Raising the noise reduction to the Strong setting slightly increases the processing time for your images, so if you are shooting in the Continuous drive mode you might see a little reduction in the speed of your frames per second.

### Noise reduction saves space

When shooting at very high ISO settings, running High ISO Speed NR at the Standard or Strong setting can save you space on your memory card. If you are saving your photos as JPEGs, the camera will compress the information in the image to take up less space. When you have excessive noise, you can literally add megabytes to the file size. This is because the camera has to deal with more information: it views the noise in the image as photo information and, therefore, tries not to lose that information during the compression process. That means more noise equals bigger files. So not only will turning on the High ISO Speed NR feature improve the look of your image, it will also save you some space so you can take a few more shots.

---

**Figure 8.2**

Here is an enlargement of a flower shot without any ISO noise reduction.

ISO 6400 • 1/200 sec. • f/5.6 • 55mm lens

**Figure 8.3**

Here is the same flower with noise reduction set to Strong.

ISO 6400 • 1/200 sec. • f/5.6 • 55mm lens
Using Very High ISOs

Is ISO 12800 just not enough for you? Well, in that case, you will need to turn on the ISO Expansion setting. This setting opens up another stop of ISO, raising the new limit to an incredible 25600. The highest setting will not appear in your ISO scale as a number, but as H for 12800.

Setting up the ISO Expansion feature

1. Press the Menu button, navigate to the Custom Functions option, and press Set (A).
2. Use the Quick Control dial (or Cross keys) to get to the ISO Expansion setting, located in the C. Fn I: Exposure section, and press Set (B).
3. Set the option to On and press Set (C).
4. Press the Menu button twice to exit; then press the ISO button to find the additional ISO setting of H (25600).

Manual Callout

For a complete listing of all the programmable custom functions, including the ISO Expansion feature, turn to page 351 in the T6s or page 337 in the T6i owner’s manual.
A word of warning about the expanded ISO settings: although it is great to have high ISO settings available during low-light shooting, they should always be your last resort. Even with the High ISO Speed NR turned on, the amount of visible noise will be extremely high. I can’t think of a situation where I ever needed to use the 25600 (H) setting, but you might find yourself at a nighttime sporting event under the lights, which would require ISOs of 3200 or 6400 to improve your shutter speeds and capture the action (Figure 8.4).

**Using the Multi Shot Noise Reduction**

Using high ISO settings is sometimes unavoidable and using the highest setting on the High ISO Speed Noise Reduction can lead to a softer look to your images. If you are photographing a nonmoving subject, you might want to try out the Multi Shot Noise Reduction. This is similar to the Handheld Night Scene mode that we discussed in Chapter 3, “The Basic Zone,” because it works by combining four exposures into a single image (Figure 8.5). This works by taking the four different exposures, aligning them, and then averaging out the random noise in each image to create one high-quality shot that has much less noise than you would get from just using the standard noise reduction (Figure 8.6).
Figure 8.5
You can get high-quality images with high ISO settings using the Multi Shot option.
Setting up the Multi Shot option

1. Press the Menu button, navigate to the third shooting menu, select High ISO Speed NR, and press set (A).

2. Select the Multi Shot Noise Reduction option and press Set (B).

Figure 8.6
The image on the left was created with the Multi Shot option. The noisier image on the right was created with standard noise reduction settings.
3. Adjust the camera to your desired exposure settings.

4. Press and hold the shutter release button once, and the camera will take the four exposures and then display the resulting JPEG image.

The Multi Shot option will stay active until you change the High ISO Speed NR setting or turn off your camera. It will reset once you turn the camera back on.

**Stabilizing the Situation**

If you purchased your camera with one of the new image stabilization (IS) lenses, you already own a great tool to squeeze two stops of exposure out of your camera when shooting without a tripod (Figure 8.7). Typically, the average person can handhold their camera down to about 1/60 of a second before blurriness results due to hand shake. As the length of the lens is increased (or zoomed), the ability to handhold at slow shutter speeds (1/60 and slower) and still get sharp images is further reduced.

The Canon IS lenses contain small gyro sensors and servo-actuated optical elements, which correct for camera shake and stabilize the image. The IS function is so good that it is possible to improve your handheld photography by two or three stops, meaning that if you are pretty solid at a shutter speed of 1/60, the IS feature lets you shoot at 1/15, and possibly even 1/8 of a second (Figure 8.8 and Figure 8.9).

![Figure 8.7](image)

*Figure 8.7*
Set the Stabilizer to the On position when using longer shutter speeds while handholding your camera.

**Self-timer**

Whether you are shooting with a tripod or even resting your camera on a wall, you can increase the sharpness of your pictures by taking your hands out of the equation. Whenever you use your finger to depress the shutter release button, you are increasing the chance that there will be a little bit of shake in your image. To eliminate this possibility, try setting your camera up to use the self-timer. To turn on the self-timer, just press the Q button to activate the Quick Control screen, highlight the drive mode icon, and then turn the Main dial until the self-timer icon appears. There are three self-timer modes to choose from. I generally use the two-second mode to cut down on time between exposures.
Figure 8.8
This image was handheld with the IS turned off.
ISO 400 • 1/4 sec. • f/5.6 • 135mm lens

Figure 8.9
Here is the same subject shot with the same settings, but this time with IS turned on.
Focusing in Low Light

The T6s / T6i has a great focusing system, but occasionally the light levels might be too low for the camera to achieve an accurate focus. There are a few things that you can do to overcome this obstacle.

First, you should know that the camera uses contrast in the viewfinder to establish a point of focus. This is why your camera will not be able to focus when you point it at a white wall or a cloudless sky. It simply can’t find any contrast in the scene to work with. Knowing this, you might be able to use a single focus point in One Shot mode to find an area of contrast that is of the same distance as your subject. You can then hold that focus by holding down the shutter button halfway and recomposing your image.

Then there are those times when there just isn’t anything there for you to focus on. A perfect example of this would be a fireworks display. If you point your lens to the night sky in any automatic focus (AF) mode, it will just keep searching for—and not finding—a focus point. On these occasions, you can simply turn off the autofocus feature and manually focus the lens (Figure 8.10). Look for the AF/MF switch on the side of the lens and slide it to the MF position.

Don’t forget to put it back in AF mode at the end of your shoot.

Focus Assist

Another way to ensure good focus is to enable the T6s / T6i’s Focus Assist mode. Focus Assist uses a short burst from your pop-up flash to shine some light on the scene, which assists the autofocus system in locating more detail. This feature is automatically activated when shooting in the Basic zone (except in Landscape, Sports, and Flash Off modes for the following reasons: in Landscape mode, the subject is usually too far away; in Sports mode, the subject is probably moving; and in Flash Off mode, you’ve disabled the flash entirely). Focus Assist should be enabled by default, but you can check the menu just to make sure.
Figure 8.10
Focusing on the night sky is best done in Manual focus mode.

ISO 100 • 2 sec. • f/13 • 110mm lens
Turning on the Focus Assist feature

1. Press the Menu button and then use the Main dial to get to the Custom Functions menu tab, highlight Custom Functions, and press the Set button (A).
2. Use the Quick Control dial (or Cross keys) to get to the C. Fn III: Autofocus/Drive AF-Assist Beam Firing feature to see what the current setting is for this function (B).

3. If it is not enabled, press the Set button, highlight Enable, and press the Set button.
4. To use it when working in the Creative zone, simply press the flash button to raise the pop-up flash.
5. With the flash in the “up” position, press the shutter button to focus and Focus Assist will activate if necessary.

If you don’t want the flash to fire during the actual exposure, you must first disable the flash.

Disabling the flash

1. Press the Menu button and then scroll the Main dial to highlight the first shooting menu (far left).
2. Scroll down to Flash Control and press the Set button (A).
3. Select Flash Firing and press the Set button (B).

4. Set the Flash Firing option to Disable (C).

**Shooting Long Exposures**

We have covered some of the techniques for shooting in low light, so let's go through the process of capturing a night or low-light scene for maximum image quality (Figure 8.11). The first thing to consider is that in order to shoot in low light with a low ISO, you will need to use shutter speeds that are longer than you could possibly handhold (longer than 1/15 of a second). This will require the use of a tripod or stable surface for you to place your camera on. For maximum quality, the ISO should be low—somewhere at or below 400. The long exposure noise reduction should be turned on to minimize the effects of exposing for longer durations. (To set this up, see Chapter 7.)

**Flash sync**

The basic idea behind the term flash synchronization (flash sync for short) is that when you take a photograph using the flash, the camera needs to ensure that the shutter is fully open at the time that the flash goes off. This is not an issue if you are using a long shutter speed such as 1/15 of a second but does become more critical for fast shutter speeds. To ensure that the flash and shutter are synchronized so that the flash is going off while the shutter is open, the T6s / T6i implements a top sync speed of 1/200 of a second. This means that when you are using the flash, you will not be able to have your shutter speed set any faster than 1/200. If you did use a faster shutter speed, the shutter would actually start closing before the flash fired, which would cause a black, underexposed area to appear in the frame where the light from the flash was blocked.
Once you have the noise reduction turned on, set your camera to Aperture Priority (Av) mode. This way, you can concentrate on the aperture that you believe is most appropriate and let the camera determine the best shutter speed. If it is too dark for the autofocus to function properly, try manually focusing. Finally, consider using a cable release (see the “Pimp My Ride” bonus chapter) to activate the shutter. If you don’t have one, check out the sidebar “Self-timer” earlier in this chapter. Once you shoot the image, you may notice some lag time before it is displayed on the rear LCD. This is due to the noise reduction process, which can take anywhere from a fraction of a second up to 30 seconds, depending on the length of the exposure.
Index

Numbers
720 and 1080 P (Progressive), 53
1920x1080 pixels, 53

A
action
  anticipating, 128, 135
  following, 135
action shots. See also moving targets
  Continuous Shooting mode, 129–130
  direction of travel, 116–117
  drive modes, 128
  getting in front of, 133
  pre-focusing for, 128
  subject speed, 118
  subject-to-camera distance, 119
  tips, 132–133
  wide vs. telephoto, 134
advanced techniques
  Anti-flicker Shoot option, 261–264
  Auto Lighting Optimizer, 258–259
  Handheld Night Scene mode, 259–261
  HDR Backlight Control, 257–258
  HDR images, 254–257
  My Menu setting, 264–265
  panoramas, 250–253
  white balance customization, 266–267
AE (Auto Exposure) Lock, using for portraits, 147–148
AE/AF Lock/Focus/Reduce Image, 4–5
AF Area Selection Button, 6–7
AI (Artificial Intelligence) focus modes, 13
AI Focus AF mode
  and AI Servo, 83, 134
  for moving targets, 124–126
  stop and go with, 127
Ambience setting in Creative Auto mode, 80
angles, considering in composition, 239
Anti-flicker Shoot option, 261–264
aperture
  and depth of field, 51
  examples, 48
  in exposure triangle, 47
  and f-stops, 101
  functions of, 51
  influencing, 87
  in LCD, 21
  small, 100–101
  and zoom lenses, 102
Aperture Priority mode (Av), 98–102, 108
  benefit of, 106
  isolating subjects, 123–124
  for portraits, 143–145
  vs. Shutter Priority mode (Tv), 123
shutter speed in Creative zone, 216
Aperture/Exposure Compensation, 5
audio
  improving for movies, 55
  recording for video, 54–55
  turning off, 55
Auto AF focus point selection, for moving targets, 124–126
Auto ISO setting, turning off, 12–13
Auto Lighting Optimizer, 21, 258–259
Autofocus Selection/Right button, 4
Autofocus Selection/Right cross key, 5
Automatic Focus Point mode, selecting, 126
Av mode. See Aperture Priority mode (Av)
back of T6i
AE/AF Lock/Focus/Reduce Image, 5
Aperture/Exposure Compensation, 5
Autofocus Selection/Right cross key, 5
Card Busy Lamp, 5
Dioptric Adjustment, 5
Drive Mode Selection/Left button, 4
Focus Point Selection/Enlarge Image, 5
Image Review, 5
INFO button, 5
Live View/Record button, 5
Menu, 5
Picture Style/Down cross key, 5
Quick Control, 5
Rear LCD, 5
Set, 5
Trash (Delete), 5
White Balance/Up cross key, 5
back of T6s
AE/AF Lock/Focus/Reduce Image, 4
Autofocus Selection/Right button, 4
Card Busy Lamp, 4
Dioptric Adjustment, 4
Drive Mode Selection/Left button, 4
Focus Point Selection/Enlarge Image, 4
Image Review, 4
INFO button, 4
Live View/Record button, 4
Menu, 4
Multi-function Lock switch, 4
Off/On/Movie Recording switch, 4
Picture Style/Down button, 4
Quick Control, 4
Rear LCD, 4
Set, 4
Trash (Delete), 4
White Balance/Up button, 4
background and foreground, focusing, 51
background sharpness setting, 80
Basic zone limitations
  Auto Focus, 82
  color space, 82
  Exposure Compensation, 82
  ISO, 82
  picture style, 82
  white balance, 82
Basic zone modes, 17. See also modes
  Close-up, 70, 84
  Creative Auto (CA), 78–81, 85
  Flash Off, 77–78
  Landscape, 69, 84
  Night Portrait, 85
  Portrait, 67–68, 84
  versus Program (P) mode, 92–94
  Scene Intelligent Auto, 66–67, 84
  Special Scene, 72–77
  Sports, 71–72, 84
battery
  charging, 8
  keeping backup of, 8
  level, 21
black-and-white
  filter colors, 184
  landscape photography, 183–185, 195
  portraits, 150–152
blurriness, controlling, 49
bracketing exposures, 256–257, 269
built-in flash. See also flash;
  off-camera flash; Pop-Up Flash button
FE Lock, 219
flash range, 218
metering modes, 217–219
shutter speeds, 216–217
testing limits of, 229
turning on, 215

C

camera
holding properly, 26–27
setting up, 27
camera back (T6i)
AE/AF Lock/Focus/Reduce Image, 5
Aperture/Exposure Compensation, 5
Auto-focus Selection/Right cross key, 5
Card Busy Lamp, 5
Dioptric Adjustment, 5
Drive Mode Selection/Left cross key, 5
Focus Point Selection/Enlarge Image, 5
Image Review, 5
INFO button, 5
Live View/Record button, 5
Menu, 5
Picture Style/Down cross key, 5
Quick Control, 5
Rear LCD, 5
Set, 5
Trash (Delete), 5
White Balance/Up cross key, 5
camera back (T6s)
AE/AF Lock/Focus/Reduce Image, 4
Auto-focus Selection/Right button, 4
Card Busy Lamp, 4
Dioptric Adjustment, 4
Drive Mode Selection/Left button, 4
Focus Point Selection/Enlarge Image, 4
Image Review, 4
INFO button, 4
Live View/Record button, 4
Menu, 4
Multi-function Lock switch, 4
On/Off Movie Recording switch, 4
Picture Style/Down button, 4
Quick Control, 4
Rear LCD, 4
Set, 4
Trash (Delete), 4
White Balance/Up button, 4
camera front (T6i)
Depth-of-Field Preview, 3
EF Lens Align Mark, 3
EF-S Lens Align Mark, 3
Lens Release, 3
Main Dial, 3
Red-Eye Reduction/Self-Timer Lamp, 3
Remote Control Sensor, 3
Shutter Release button, 3
camera settings. See modes
camera top (T6i)
AF Area Selection button, 7
Display button, 7
ISO, 7
Main Dial, 7
Microphones, 7
Mode Dial, 7
On/Off/Movie Record, 7
Pop-Up Flash button, 7
Shutter Release, 7
Speedlite Hot Shoe, 7
camera top (T6s)
AF Area Selection button, 6
ISO, 6
LCD Illumination button, 6
LCD Top Panel, 6
Main Dial, 6
Microphones, 6
Mode Dial, 6
Mode Lock button, 6
Pop-Up Flash button, 6
Shutter Release, 6
Speedlite Hot Shoe, 6
Candlelight Portrait mode, 75.
See also portraits

Canon website, checking for firmware updates, 35–36
capture frame rate, considering for video, 53
Card Busy Lamp, 4–5
catchlights, adding to portraits, 155
Center-Weighted metering mode, 145
charging batteries, 8
children, photographing, 163. See also Kids mode
cleaning sensors, 37–38, 59
Close-up mode, 69, 84
color filters, adding to Monochrome picture style, 184
color temperatures, warm versus cool, 185
colors
considering in composition, 241
customizing, 269
composition
angles, 239
brightness, 191
color, 241
colors, 191
contrast, 242
creating depth, 193–194
depth of field, 236–238
explained, 231
focusing attention, 245
fundamentals, 245
in landscape photography, 234–235
leading lines, 243, 245
lines and patterns, 245
patterns, 240
point of view, 240
rule of thirds, 192–193
sharpness, 191
splitting frames, 243–244
Continuous Shooting mode, 129–130
contrast, considering in composition, 242
Creative Auto (CA) mode settings, 85
Ambience, 80
Background Sharpness, 80
Drive mode, 80–81
features, 78–79
Flash option, 81–82
Creative zone, 17
Aperture Priority mode (Av), 98–102, 108
explained, 87
Manual mode (M), 103–106, 109
Program (P) mode, 92–94, 108
Shutter Priority mode (Tv), 95–98, 108
shutter speeds, 216
using built-in flash, 215

D
date, displaying in LCD, 21
deleting images, 4–5, 23
depth, creating, 193–194
depth of field
and aperture, 51
in composition, 236–238
explained, 51
and motion, 49–51
in portraits, 165
Preview, 2–3, 188
wide-angle vs. telephoto lenses, 195
Dioptric Adjustment, 4–5
direction of travel, considering for action shots, 116–117
Display button, top of T6i, 7
display modes, 21, 23
Drive Mode Selection/Left button, 4
Drive Mode Selection/Left cross key, 5
drive modes, 80–81, 128

**E**
EF Lens Align Mark, 2–3
EF-S Lens Align Mark, 2–3
environmental portraits, 144. See also landscape photography
Evaluative metering mode, 145
exposures. See also long exposures;
underexposure bracketing, 256–257
calculation of, 48–49
changing, 107
explained, 47
reciprocal, 48–49
triangle, 47
Exposure Compensation, 107, 181–183
Extended ISO feature, 228
external Speedlite, using, 222–225
eyes in portraits, focusing on, 148–149

**F**
f/4–f/22 apertures, 48
faces, detecting, 152–154
FE (Flash Exposure) Lock feature, using, 219
filename, displaying in LCD, 21
fill flash, using to reduce shadows, 155–156
filter colors, using in black-and-white photos, 184
firmware
checking version of, 35, 59
updating, 34–36
flash. See also built-in flash;
off-camera flash
disabling for Focus Assist mode, 212–213
and glass, 226–227
Flash Exposure Compensation feature, 219–220
Flash Off mode, 77–78
Flash setting, 81–82
flash sync
explained, 213
standard, 216
flicker, dealing with, 261–264
flowers
applying noise reduction to, 203
photographing in greenhouses, 30–31
shooting in Close-up mode, 70
focal length, explained, 42
focus, maintaining for moving targets, 124–126
Focus Assist mode, 210, 212–213
focus modes
AI Focus, 83
AI Servo, 83
choosing, 27, 127
One Shot, 13–14, 83
single point of focus, 13–14
focus point, selecting, 13–15, 126
Focus Point Selection/Enlarge Image, 4–5
focusing
attention, 245
depth of field preview button, 188
foreground and background, 51
in low light, 210–213
near to far, 187
on night sky, 210–211
simplifying, 188–189
while using tripods, 189
Food mode, 74
football game, shooting, 205
foreground and background, focusing, 51
formats, RAW vs. JPEG, 39–41
formatting memory cards, 33–34, 59
fps (frames per second), considering for video, 53
frame rate, for continuous burst, 130
frames, splitting, 243–244
freezing moments, 111
front of T6i
Depth-of-Field Preview, 3
EF Lens Align Mark, 3
EF-S Lens Align Mark, 3
Lens Release, 3
Main Dial, 3
Red-Eye Reduction/Self-Timer Lamp, 3
Remote Control Sensor, 3
Shutter Release button, 3
front of T6s
Depth-of-Field Preview, 2
EF Lens Align Mark, 2
EF-S Lens Align Mark, 2
Lens Release, 2
Main Dial, 2
Red-Eye Reduction/Self-Timer Lamp, 2
Remote Control Sensor, 2
Shutter Release button, 2

**G**
Golden Gate Bridge, 64–66
golden light, 185–186
greenhouses, taking photos in, 30–31
Grid overlay, using with Live View, 154
guitar photos, 206–207

**H**
Handheld Night Scene mode, 77, 259–261. See also night
handholding cameras, 228
HD (high-def) video, 52–53
HDR Backlight Control, 77, 257–258
HDR images, shooting, 254–257
HFD (hyper focal distance), 187, 189, 195
highlights
capturing, 269
regaining detail in, 182–183
histogram
features of, 24–25
in LCD, 21

**I**
image quality, setting, 10–11, 41
image resolution, 40. See also resolution
Image Review
back of T6i, 5
back of T6s, 4
changing time setting, 20–23
image size, displaying in LCD, 21
image thumbnail, displaying in LCD, 21
images. See also shots
deleting, 23
zooming into, 120
indoors, shooting, 221
INFO button, 4–5
info screens, scrolling through, 22
Info Scroll Indicator, 21
interlaced video, 53
IS (image stabilization) lenses, 173
IS lenses, using, 208–209
ISO Expansion feature, 204–205
ISO settings
100 reciprocal exposure, 48
200 reciprocal exposure, 49
adjusting, 107
in exposure triangle, 47
for landscape photography, 174–175
INDEX 273

light, striking sensor, 49
light flicker, dealing with, 261–264
lighting. See mood lighting
Lincoln Memorial, 198–199
lines and patterns, considering in composition, 245
Live View mode
Face Detection, 152–154
Grid overlay, 154
previewing white balance settings, 178
resource, 153
using with rule of thirds, 195
Live View/Movie Shooting button, 52
Live View/Record button, 4–5
long exposures, shooting, 213–214, 229.
See also exposures
low light
focusing in, 210–213
shooting in, 98

M
Main Dial
T6i, 3, 7
T6s, 2, 6
Maisel, Jay, 231
Manual mode (M), 103–106, 109
for anticipated action, 128
shutter speed in Creative zone, 216
memory card
checking for, 9
choosing, 32
formatting, 33–34, 59
menu, displaying in LCD, 4–5
metering modes
for built-in flash, 217–219
Center-Weighted, 145
Evaluative, 145
in LCD, 21
Partial, 145, 147
for portraits, 145–147, 165
Spot, 145
microphones
external, 55
locating to record sound, 54
shotgun type, 55
top of T6i, 7
top of T6s, 6
Mode Dial, 6–7
Mode Lock button, 6
modes. See Basic zone modes; shooting modes
Close-up, 70
Creative Auto (CA), 78–79
Flash Off, 77–78
for focus, 83
Landscape, 69
Portrait, 67–68
preferences for, 106–107
Scene Intelligent Auto, 66–67
Special Scene, 72–77
Sports, 71–77
Monochrome picture style, 150–152
color toning, 185
landscape photography, 184
sharpness and contrast, 185
mood lighting
built-in flash, 215–219
Focus Assist mode, 210
focusing in low light, 210–213
IS lenses, 208–209
ISO settings, 204–205
long exposure, 213–214
Multi Shot Noise Reduction, 205–208
noise reduction, 203
raising ISO, 202–203
motion
carrying, 130–132
and depth of field, 49–51
panning, 130–131
stopping, 121–122
motion blur, 131–132
Mount Hood, 170–171
movement, feeling, 135
Movie mode, activating, 52
movie quality, setting, 54
movies, improving sound for, 55
moving targets. See also action shots
capturing, 111–115
maintaining focus, 124–126
stop and go, 127
switching between still targets, 127
Multi Shot Noise Reduction, 205–208.
See also noise reduction
Multi-function Lock Switch, back of T6s, 4
My Menu setting, 264–265

N
nature photography, in greenhouses, 30–31
night, shooting at, 196–197, 200–201.
See also Handheld Night Scene mode; mood lighting
Night Portrait mode, 76, 85. See also portraits
night sky, focusing on, 210–211
noise, explained, 12
noise reduction. See also Multi Shot Noise Reduction

High ISO Speed, 228
for landscape photography, 176–177
in long exposures, 229
saving space with, 203
normal lenses, 43–44

O
off-camera flash, 222–225.
See also flash
Off/On/Movie Recording Switch, back of T6s, 4
One Shot focus mode, 83, 149
On/Off/Movie Record, 7
optical glass, use in lenses, 41–42
orchids
photographing in greenhouses, 30–31
shooting in low light, 202

P
panning, 130–131
panoramas
experiments, 269
Manual mode, 104
multiple-image, 252
shooting, 250–253
sorting shots for, 253
Partial metering mode, 145, 147
patterns, considering in composition, 240
Peru, Sacred Valley, 62–63, 69
photos. See images; shots
Picture Style/Down button, 4
Quick Control
activating, 208
back of T6i, 5
back of T6s, 4
Quick Control Dial, back of T6s, 4
Portait mode, 67–68, 84, 142
portrait orientation, 152, 160–161
portrait tips
avoiding center of frame, 158
choosing lenses, 158–159
cropping, 160
getting close to subjects, 163
taking candid shots, 164
using sunblock, 162
portraits. See also Candlelight Portrait mode; Night Portrait mode
AE Lock feature, 147–148
Aperture Priority mode (Av), 143–145
black and white, 150–152
catchlights, 155
choosing lenses for, 68
depth of field in, 165
detecting faces, 152–154
fill flash for reducing shadows, 155–156
focusing on eyes, 148–149
focusing on single point, 149
improving skin tones, 152
metering modes, 145–147, 165
natural light, 165
One Shot Focus mode, 149
people on the move, 157
picture styles, 165
Program (P) mode
Vs. Basic zone modes, 92–94
shutter speed in Creative zone, 216
starting off with, 108
progressive scan video, 53

Q
Quality Setting, 21
Quick Control
activating, 208
back of T6i, 5
back of T6s, 4
Quick Control Dial, back of T6s, 4
Release shutter without card, turning off, 9–10
Remote Control Sensor, 2–3
resolution, 1920×1080 pixels, 53.
See also image resolution
reviewing shots, 19–23, 27, 120
rule of thirds, 192–195

S
Sacred Valley, Peru, 62–63, 69
Scene Intelligent Auto mode, 66–67, 84
SD (Secure Digital) memory cards, using, 32
self-timer, using, 208
sensor, cleaning, 37–38, 59
Set button, 4–5
settings. See modes
shadows
capturing, 269
reducing in portraits, 155–156
sharpness, increasing, 208
shooting indoors, 221
shooting modes. See also modes
Basic zone, 17
Creative zone, 17
in LCD, 21
shutter speed
and blurriness, 49
and built-in flash, 216–217
controlling, 97
in exposure triangle, 47–48
functions of, 49
influencing, 87
in LCD, 21
lowering for action shots, 119
slow vs. fast, 95–96
using to freeze moments, 111, 116
silhouettes, shooting, 105
single point of focus, 13–14
skies, adjusting brightness, 181–183
skin tones, improving in portraits, 152
sound
improving for movies, 55
recording for video, 54–55
turning off, 55
Special Scene modes
Candlelight Portrait, 75
changing between, 72
Food, 74
Handheld Night Scene, 77
HDR Backlight control, 77
Kids, 73
Night Portrait, 76
speedlite, using, 222–225
Speedlite Hot Shoe, 6–7
splitting frames, 243–244
Sports mode, 71–77, 84
Spot metering mode, 145
Stabilizer, setting, 208
speedlite, using, 222–225
Speedlite Hot Shoe, 6–7
splitting frames, 243–244
Sports mode, 71–77, 84
Spot metering mode, 145
Stabilizer, setting, 208
stop
and aperture, 101
explained, 48
subject speed, considering for action shots, 118
subjects, isolating, 51, 123–124

T
T6i camera back
AE/AF Lock/Focus/Reduce Image, 5
Aperture/Exposure Compensation, 5
Autofocus Selection/Right cross key, 5
Card Busy Lamp, 5
Diopter Adjustment, 5
Drive Mode Selection/Left cross key, 5
Focus Point Selection/Enlarge Image, 5
Image Review, 5
INFO button, 5
Live View/Record button, 5
Menu, 5
Picture Style/Down cross key, 5
Quick Control, 5
Rear LCD, 5
Set, 5
Trash (Delete), 5
White Balance/Up cross key, 5
T6s camera back
AE/AF Lock/Focus/Reduce Image, 4
Autofocus Selection/Right button, 4
Card Busy Lamp, 4
Diopter Adjustment, 4
Drive Mode Selection/Left button, 4
Focus Point Selection/Enlarge Image, 4
Image Review, 4
INFO button, 4
Live View/Record button, 4
Menu, 4
Multi-function Lock switch, 4
Off/On/Movie Recording switch, 4
Picture Style/Down button, 4
Quick Control, 4
Quick Control Dial, 4
Rear LCD, 4
Set, 4
Trash (Delete), 4
White Balance/Up button, 4
T6i camera front
Depth-of-Field Preview, 3
EF Lens Align Mark, 3
EF-S Lens Align Mark, 3
Lens Release, 3
Main Dial, 3
Red-Eye Reduction/Self-Timer Lamp, 3
Remote Control Sensor, 3
Shutter Release button, 3
T6s camera front
Depth-of-Field Preview, 2
EF Lens Align Mark, 2
EF-S Lens Align Mark, 2
Lens Release, 2
Main Dial, 2
Red-Eye Reduction/Self-Timer Lamp, 2
Remote Control Sensor, 2
Shutter Release button, 2
T6i camera top
AF Area Selection button, 7
Display button, 7
ISO, 7
Main Dial, 7
Microphones, 7
Mode Dial, 7
On/Off/Movie Record, 7
Pop-Up Flash button, 7
Shutter Release, 7
Speedlite Hot Shoe, 7
T6s camera top
AF Area Selection button, 6
ISO, 6
LCD Illumination button, 6
LCD Top Panel, 6
Main Dial, 6
Microphones, 6
Mode Dial, 6
Mode Lock button, 6
Pop-Up Flash button, 6
Shutter Release, 7
Speedlite Hot Shoe, 6
touchscreen, turning off, 18–19
Trash (Delete), 4–5
tripods
in landscape photography, 172–173, 186
stability, 173
using while focusing, 189
Tv (Shutter Priority) mode, 95–98, 108
vs. Aperture Priority mode (Av), 123
benefit of, 106–107
ISO adjustment on the fly, 122
for people on the move, 157
shutter speed in Creative zone, 216
using to stop motion, 121–122

telephoto lenses
features, 44–46
vs. wide-angle lenses, 195
time color, 17
tips
Auto ISO setting, 12–13
charging battery, 8
focus point and mode, 13–15
holding camera, 26
JPEG image quality, 10–11
Release shutter without card, 9–10
reviewing shots, 19
touchscreen, 18–19
viewfinder diopter, 18
white balance, 14–17
U
underexposure, preventing, 104.
See also exposures
updating firmware, 34–36

V
video
capture frame rate, 53
features of, 52
focusing camera, 56
fps (frames per second), 53
HD (high-def), 52–53
interlaced, 53
ports, 58
progressive scan, 53
quality, 53–54
recording audio for, 54–55
resources, 58
setting movie quality, 54
watching, 58
video snapshots, 56–57
viewfinder diopter, adjusting, 18

W
water, silky look of, 97
waterfall shots
black-and-white, 183
photographing, 168–169
setting up for, 190–191
white balance
customizing, 266–267
explained, 14, 16
for landscape photography, 177–178
in LCD, 21
setting, 17, 27
and temperature color, 17
white balance settings
Auto, 16
Cloudy, 16
Custom, 16
Daylight, 16
Flash, 16
Shade, 16
Tungsten, 16
White Fluorescent, 16
White Balance/Up button, 4
White Balance/Up cross key, 5
wide-angle lenses
for environmental portraits, 144
features, 42–43
vs. telephoto, 195
Wi-Fi function, 21
wireless flash, controlling, 225–226

Z
Zone AF mode, selecting, 126
zoom lenses, 46, 102
zooming into images, 120