The step-by-step secrets for how to make your photos look like the pros!

Scott Kelby
Author of The Digital Photography Book, volume 1, the best-selling digital photography book of all time!
The Digital Photography Book
The step-by-step secrets for how to make your photos look like the pros!

Scott Kelby
This book is dedicated to the most amazing woman I have ever known: my wife, Kalebra.
Acknowledgments

Although only one name appears on the spine of this book, it takes a team of dedicated and talented people to pull a project like this together. I’m not only delighted to be working with them, but I also get the honor and privilege of thanking them here.

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Other Books By Scott Kelby

The Digital Photography Book, vols. 1, 2 & 3

Professional Portrait Retouching Techniques for Photographers Using Photoshop

Light It, Shoot It, Retouch It: Learn Step by Step How to Go from Empty Studio to Finished Image

The Adobe Photoshop Lightroom Book for Digital Photographers

The Adobe Photoshop Book for Digital Photographers

The Photoshop Elements Book for Digital Photographers

Photoshop Down & Dirty Tricks

The iPhone Book
About the Author

Scott is Editor, Publisher, and co-founder of Photoshop User magazine, is Publisher of Light it! digital magazine, and is co-host of the weekly video-casts The Grid (the weekly photography talk show) and Photoshop User TV.

He is President of the National Association of Photoshop Professionals (NAPP), the trade association for Adobe® Photoshop® users, and he’s President of the software training, education, and publishing firm Kelby Media Group.

Scott is a photographer, designer, and award-winning author of more than 50 books, including The Digital Photography Book, volumes 1, 2, and 3, The Adobe Photoshop Book for Digital Photographers, Professional Portrait Retouching Techniques for Photographers Using Photoshop, The Adobe Photoshop Lightroom Book for Digital Photographers, Light It, Shoot It, Retouch It: Learn Step by Step How to Go from Empty Studio to Finished Image, and The iPhone Book.

For the past two years, Scott has been honored with the distinction of being the world’s #1 best-selling author of books on photography. His books have been translated into dozens of different languages, including Chinese, Russian, Spanish, Korean, Polish, Taiwanese, French, German, Italian, Japanese, Dutch, Swedish, Turkish, and Portuguese, among others.

Scott is Training Director for the Adobe Photoshop Seminar Tour, and Conference Technical Chair for the Photoshop World Conference & Expo. He's featured in a series of training DVDs and online courses, and has been training photographers and Adobe Photoshop users since 1993.

For more information on Scott, visit him at:

His daily blog: www.scottkelby.com
Twitter: http://twitter.com/@scottkelby
Facebook: www.facebook.com/skelby
Google+: Scottgplus.com
# Table of Contents

## CHAPTER ONE

**Shooting People Like a Pro**

*Yet Even More Tips to Make People Look Their Very Best*

- 9 Things You’ll Wish You Had Known… 2
- …Before Reading This Book! 3
- That Was Only 6. Here Are the Last 3 4
- Getting Shallow Depth of Field with Studio Strobes 5
- Shooting Multiple Exposures In-Camera 6
- One Person, Multiple Times, in the Same Shot 7
- How to Freeze Motion in Portraits 8
- Avoid Seeing Too Much “Whites of the Eyes” 9
- More Tips for Great Group Shots 10
- Better Than the Self Timer for Group Shots 11
- Focus on the Subject’s Eye, Then Recompose 12
- That Works Unless You’re Shooting at f/1.4 13
- Creating the Blown-Out Look 14
- A Better Way to Direct Your Subject’s Posing 15
- Only Photographers Care About the Characteristics of Catch Lights 16
- What Not to Shoot with Your 50mm Lens 17
- Getting Both What’s in Front & Back in Focus 18
- Two Quick Composition Tips 19
- How to Get Better Full-Length Photos 20
- Controlling the Size of Your Subject 21

## CHAPTER TWO

**Using Hot Shoe Flash Like a Pro, Part 3**

*Picking Right Up Where the Last Book Left Off*

- Shooting Your Flash in Manual Mode 24
- The Trick to Keep from Lighting the Ground 25
- Using Studio-Quality Softboxes with Your Flash 26
- Mounting a Flash on a Monopod 27
- How to Put the Background Out of Focus Using Flash 28
- Don’t Have a Gel? Change Your White Balance 29
- Put Nikon’s Commander Mode One Click Away 30
- Making Your Flash Fire Every Time 31
- Creating a Tight Beam of Light 32
- The Advantages of Using Flash in Daylight 33
- How to Use Your Hot Shoe Flash’s Modeling Light 34
- Keep Your Flash from Powering Off 35
## Table of Contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>How Far to Place the Flash from the Umbrella</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Why Would Anyone Use Studio Strobes On Location?</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>CHAPTER THREE</strong></td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>More Tips on Using Your Studio Like a Pro</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>In Volume 3, We Took It Up a Notch. Now, Let's Do It Again!</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Pro Trick for Creating Falloff</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Getting a Different Look Without Moving the Lights</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Using Lens Flare as an Effect in the Studio</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How Far Should Your Subject Be from the Background?</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Let Your Main Light Do Double Duty</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rim-Light Profile Silhouettes Made Easy</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Using a Ring Flash</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use Almost Any Softbox You Want with Your Brand of Strobe</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When It Comes to Softboxes, Bigger Really Is Better</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What to Do When You Can’t Turn Your Strobe Power Down Any Further</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How to Light a Couple or Small Group</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Trick to Staying Out of Trouble</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Where to Put Your Softbox Demystified, Part I</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Where to Put Your Softbox Demystified, Part II</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Let Lightroom Fix Your Color as You Shoot</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How to Set a Custom White Balance In-Camera</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taking Your Existing Strobes On Location</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>CHAPTER FOUR</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>More Tips on Lenses</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Going Way Beyond Which Lens to Use</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Why Your Background Is Still in Focus at f/2.8</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What You Need to Know About Lens Compression</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seeing a Real Preview of Your Depth of Field</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Auto-Correcting the Fisheye Lens Effect in Photoshop</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shoot at the F-Stop You Bought the Lens For</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How to Deal with Lens Fogging</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Avoiding Sensor Dust from Your Body &amp; Lens Caps</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How to Focus Your Lens to Infinity</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t Shoot at the “Beginner” Focal Lengths</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Where to Hold a Long Lens to Steady It</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Which Lens for Outdoor Portraits?</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Table of Contents

**CHAPTER FIVE**

**Pro Tips for Shooting in Natural Light**

*How to Take Advantage of the Most Beautiful Light on Earth*

- Beautiful Backlit Shots 74
- Shooting Silhouettes 75
- Jay’s Trick for Not Missing the Shot 76
- How to Make Sure Your Sunset Looks Dark 77
- Tips for Using a Reflector Outdoors 78
- Control the “Power” of Your Reflector 79
- How to Deal with Underexposed Daytime Shots 80
- The Trick for Shooting at Night 81
- Shooting Light Trails 82
- Shooting Star Trails 83
- The Gear for Shooting Star Trails 84
- Another Reason to Avoid Shooting at High ISOs 85

**CHAPTER SIX**

**Shooting Landscape Photos Like a Pro**

*Yet Even More Tips for Creating Stunning Scenic Images*

- You Don’t Need Fast Lenses for Landscapes 88
- Three More Tips for Silky Waterfalls & Streams 89
- Long Exposure B&W, Part 1 (the Accessories) 90
- Long Exposure B&W, Part 2 (the Settings) 91
- Long Exposure B&W, Part 3, (the Setup) 92
- Long Exposure B&W, Part 4 (the Shot) 93
- Keeping Your Gear Dry Outdoors 94
- Use Grid Lines to Get Straight Horizon Lines 95
- Instant Duotones for Landscape Images 96
- Amplifying Size in Your Landscape Images 97
- Need a Darker Sky? Lower the Brightness 98
- Shoot Before a Storm or Right After It 99
- Doing Time-Lapse Photography 100
- Seek Out Still Water for Reflections 101
- Tip for Shooting Those Low-Angle Landscapes 102
- Make Your Cloudy White Balance Even Warmer 103
- The Landscape Image Post-Processing Secret 104
- What Helped My Landscape Photos the Most 105
Table of Contents

CHAPTER SEVEN  107
Pro Tips for Shooting Travel Photos
How to Come Back with Images You’re Really Proud Of
  Wait for the Actors to Walk Onto Your Stage  108
  Look for That Classic “Lone Tree” Shot  109
  Camera Bags That Won’t Attract the Wrong Kind of Attention  110
  How to Avoid Blurry Travel Shots  111
  My Favorite Travel Lenses  112
  The Trick to Capturing Real Lives  113
  Tourist Removal Shooting Techniques  114
  Learn How to Work the Scene  115
  Finding Which Travel Photos You Like Best  116
  Shooting from the Roof of Your Hotel  117

CHAPTER EIGHT  119
Shooting Sports Like a Pro
How to Get Professional Results from Your Next Sports Shoot
  A Tip and a Secret on Panning  120
  Finding the Right Shutter Speed for Panning  121
  Freezing Motion Trick for Motorsports  122
  Your Problems Start at Night or Indoors  123
  Turn Off VR (or IS) When Shooting Sports  124
  The Advantage of Using Fast Memory Cards  125
  How the Pros Focus for Sports  126
  Why Many Pros Shoot Sports in JPEG  127
  Using a Remote Camera  128
 Adding a Teleconverter to Get Really Tight  129
  Why You Need to Shoot the Warm-Ups  130
  Shoot Little Details Surrounding the Event  131
  Getting More Football Shots In-Focus  132

CHAPTER NINE  135
Shooting HDR Like a Pro
How to Shoot and Process HDR Images
  Shooting HDR: The Gear  136
  Shooting HDR: The Basic Idea  137
  Setting Up Your Camera to Shoot Bracketing  138
  A Canon Shooter’s HDR Helper  139
  What If Your Camera Doesn’t Have Bracketing?  140
Table of Contents

Which F-Stop to Use for HDR 141
Don’t Shoot One Bracketed Shot at a Time 142
Shooting Hand-Held HDR Shots 143
Which Types of Scenes Make Good HDR Shots 144
Shooting HDR Panos 145
Easily Find the Images You Bracketed for HDR 146
The Programs We Use for Creating HDR 147
A Good Preset for Photoshop’s HDR Pro 148
Sharpening HDR Photos 149
The HDR Look Without Shooting HDR 150
What They’re Not Telling You About HDR 151
Fixing Halos & Other HDR Problems 152

CHAPTER TEN
Pro Tips for Shooting DSLR Video
How to Get the Most Out of Your Built-In Video Capabilities
You’re Gonna Want an Eyepiece 156
Learn the Popular “Rack Focus” Technique 157
Adding Effects to Your Video in Your Camera 158
Why You Want an External Mic 159
Bad Audio = Bad Video 160
Making Certain You’re In Focus 161
Don’t Shoot Video Vertical 162
Why You Need to Lock Your Exposure 163
F-Stops Matter Here, Too, But… 164
How to Avoid “Flicker” While You’re Shooting 165
Want More of a “Film” Look? 166
Don’t Touch That Aperture 167
Why Zooming on Your DSLR Is Different 168
How to Use Autofocus for Shooting Video 169

CHAPTER ELEVEN
Pro Tips for Getting Better Photos
More Tricks of the Trade for Making Your Shots Look Better
Fit a Lot More Shots on Your Memory Card 172
Sneaky Trick When You Can’t Use Your Tripod 173
When Exposure Compensation Doesn’t Work 174
Avoid Signs Because They Draw the Eye 175
The “Gotcha” of Using Picture Styles 176
Table of Contents

Rotate Tall or Rotate Image or Both? 177
Reducing Noise in Low-Light Shots 178
What People Looking at Your Photos See First 179
Keeping Your Camera Info from Prying Eyes 180
Why JPEGs Look Better Than RAW Images 181
When You Don’t Need to Shoot on a Tripod 182
What to Do If Your Image Isn’t Quite Good Enough to Print 183
When to Switch to Spot Metering 184
Try Cinematic Cropping for a Wide-Screen Look 185
Sharpening Your Images for Print 186
How to Rescue a Damaged Memory Card 187

CHAPTER TWELVE 189
Yet Even More Photo Recipes to Help You “Get the Shot”
The Simple Ingredients to Make It All Come Together

INDEX 209
Chapter Four

More Tips on Lenses
Going Way Beyond Which Lens to Use

When you look at a camera body, you can understand why it’s so expensive. After all, it’s got a built-in computer (that’s why it has a screen, and tons of menus you can navigate through, and you can set it up so it performs a bunch of tasks automatically, just like any other computer), so it kind of makes sense why it’s so expensive. But lenses don’t have any of that stuff. There is no computer. There is no screen. There are no menus. Besides being different lengths, they all pretty much look like they did 50 years ago, so you can’t say they’ve spent a ton of money on looks. At the end of the day, it’s a black tube with a round piece of glass on the end of it. Last time I checked, black tubes aren’t very expensive, and a whole bunch of glass will only get you around 10¢ if you recycle it, but take that glass and put it on the end of a black tube, and it suddenly costs like $1,800. I mean, seriously, how can this be? So I did some research into this, and although this has been a closely guarded secret within the industry for many years, I’m here to blow the lid off the real reason lenses are so expensive today. Apparently, there is a “lens cartel” operating out of an undisclosed location deep within Cheyenne Mountain in Colorado and, by carefully manipulating the distribution and production of lenses, they are able to keep the prices of these lenses sky high. They are, however, apparently very concerned about a Russian lens cartel, and their fear is that the Russians might try to fly vast shipments of underpriced lenses in through Canada and across the U.S. Border, where they would release these lenses to U.S.-based camera stores. To counter this, they have created a sophisticated tracking system, with a bunch of expensive monitors (using satellites abandoned by the U.S. military), but I was able to crack this system using just a 2,400-baud modem and a “back door” password named after the reclusive professor’s son who created all this. It was way easier than I thought.
You’ve probably heard by now that if you want to put the background behind your subject out of focus, you choose a “wide-open” aperture setting like f/4 or f/2.8, but there’s something they’re not telling you. For that to work, you actually have to zoom in somewhat on your subject. So, if you’re using a wide-angle lens (like an 18mm, 24mm, 28mm, and so on), even at f/2.8, unless your subject is really, really physically close to the lens, you’re not going to get that out-of-focus background you’re looking for. So, to get that soft, out-of-focus f/2.8 or f/4 background you’re dreaming of, switch to a telephoto lens, and know that the tighter in you are, the more out of focus the background will appear. So, at 70mm, it’s going to look a little blurry. At 85mm, even more so, as long as you’re fairly tight in on your subject—move back 10 feet from your subject, and you lose it. At 120mm, you’re getting nice and blurry backgrounds when you’re zoomed in, and if you zoom in tight at 200mm, that background behind them is blurry city.
What You Need to Know About Lens Compression

You may have heard a lot of talk, especially when it comes to shooting portraits, about “lens compression” and how different focal lengths offer different types of lens compression. What this is all basically about is one thing: the background behind your subject, and how far away that background seems to be. For example, when you’re shooting a portrait of somebody (or something, like the archway above, for that matter) at a wide angle, like 28mm or 35mm, the background behind them is going to look like it’s waaaaaayy behind them (it actually exaggerates the distance between them). That’s handy to know, because if you want to make it look like a huge sweeping scene with lots of depth between your subject and the background, shoot at a wide angle. However, if you zoom your lens to around 120mm and shoot the same subject at around the same size (which means you’ll probably have to take a few steps back, since you just zoomed in), the background will now look quite a bit closer to your subject (even though your subject and the background are still in the exact same place). Now, zoom in even tighter on your subject (to around 200mm), and the background looks like it’s even closer behind them. This is because when you zoom in tight like this, the compression effect the lens creates makes the distance between your subject and the background seem much shorter or more compressed. A lot of portrait and wedding photographers use this to their advantage because that compression also compresses your subject’s facial features, which looks very flattering.
Seeing a Real Preview of Your Depth of Field

Unfortunately, when you choose an f-stop that would give you a really shallow depth of field, like f/1.8 or f/2.8, your viewfinder doesn’t really give you a preview of how your soft, out-of-focus background will look. For you to really see how the background is going to look, you need to use your camera’s depth-of-field preview button. This button is usually located on the front of your camera, close to the side of the lens. Press-and-hold this button and then look in your viewfinder and it gives you a much more accurate preview of how your image will look with the f-stop you’ve chosen.
Auto-Correcting the Fisheye Lens Effect in Photoshop

A fisheye lens is one of those lenses that you don’t pull out very often (because a bunch of fisheye photos can get really old, really quick), but if you use them at the right time, they can be really fascinating. I use mine sometimes for cityscapes, or shooting in tight quarters, but mostly I use them for sports photography, where they look for sweeping shots of stadiums and indoor arenas, or I hold it up high over a group of players celebrating after the game, or I hold it down real low as the players take the field. Not everybody likes the rounding effect the fisheye gives, and if that sounds like you, don’t worry—you can use Photoshop to automatically remove the rounding and leave you with what looks like a super-wide-angle shot, rather than a rounded fisheye shot. Just open the image in Photoshop, then go under the Filter menu and choose Lens Correction. When the dialog appears, click on the Auto Correction tab, and turn on the Geometric Distortion checkbox. The filter will look at the EXIF data embedded into the shot when you took it to find out what kind of lens you used, then it will automatically apply a correction that removes the “fishiness” and, instead, gives you that flat, super-wide-angle look. Now that you’ve learned how to remove the roundness, you’ll probably find that some shots look better rounded and some look better flat, but at least now you’ve got two choices from just one lens.
Shoot at the F-Stop You Bought the Lens For

Fast lenses are pretty darn expensive these days (take a look at fast prime lenses, like the Sigma 85mm f/1.4 for Canon, which runs almost $1,000, or Nikon’s 85mm f/1.4, a hugely popular lens with wedding and portrait photographers, yet it costs around $1,700). If you bought one of those lenses (or any fast lens, like a zoom that’s f/2.8), you didn’t buy it to shoot it at f/8 or f/11. You paid that money for the f/1.4, so when you pull out that lens, you want to be shooting it at f/1.4. That’s the look, that’s the f-stop, and that’s the effect you paid for when you bought that expensive lens. So, make darn sure you’re getting your money’s worth by shooting it at the f-stop you bought it for.
How to Deal with Lens Fogging

The curse of the fogged lens generally happens to travel photographers who are shooting in warmer climates (which is generally where most people head for vacation—warmer climates), and it strikes when you leave your nice air-conditioned hotel room (or cruise ship cabin or car), and step out into the warm air, and your lens gets so fogged up that, for the next 20 or 30 minutes, it is unusable. There are two ways to deal with this: one way is to plan ahead to avoid the fogging, and another is what you do when it’s too late (you’re in fog town). We’ll start with avoidance. The most popular way to beat the fogging up front is to put your lens in a clear, plastic Ziploc bag and store that bag inside your suitcase in your room, so it stays warm, and away from the air conditioning. Then you keep your lens in the bag until you’re outside your room and ready to start shooting, and since your lens has been kept warm and sealed, it won’t fog up when you put it on outside. If it’s too late and your lens is already fogged, you can use a special fog eliminator cloth (a pack of three runs about $5, so go ahead and order them now, because by the time you need them, if you don’t have them, it will be too late). Nikon actually makes their own brand of Fog Eliminator Cloths (you can find ‘em at B&H Photo), but since all glass is made of...well...glass, I imagine they’ll work just fine on Canon lenses, as well (just don’t tell anyone they’re made by Nikon. Don’t worry—I’ll keep it between us).
Avoiding Sensor Dust from Your Body & Lens Caps

When you take your gear out of your camera bag, what’s the first thing you do? You take the cap off the body of your camera, and the rear lens cap off the end of your lens that connects to the camera (the mount). At that moment, you’re holding two of the major sources of sensor dust, and what you do with them next can make all the difference between a clean, spotless sensor, or one that will soon have more spots than a Disney Dalmatian. I know a lot of photographers that will put those caps into their pants pocket, so they don’t lose them (huge mistake, but at least you won’t lose them), or they toss them back into their camera bag (so they can collect dust and junk there. Yikes), or hopefully, they’ll put them in a zippered pocket in their camera bag (which isn’t all that bad, but isn’t great). Here’s a great tip to keep junk (and lint, and other stuff) from getting in either cap: screw them together. That’s right—turn the two caps so they face each other, and twist to screw them into each other. Now nothing gets in there. I’m still not sure I’d stuff them in my pants pocket, but now if I did, at least I’d feel a whole lot better about it.
How to Focus Your Lens to Infinity

If you’re going to try to shoot something that’s particularly hard to focus on (for example, let’s say you’re photographing fireworks, or a lightning storm way off in the distance [and by the way, that’s exactly where you want to be when photographing lighting—way, way off in the distance]), then you can set your focus to a setting called “infinity,” where everything way off in the distance will be in focus. To use this infinity focus, start by focusing on something visible a little way in front of you, then switch your lens to Manual focus mode (you do this on the lens itself—just switch from Auto focus to Manual). Now, turn the focusing ring on the lens itself (it’s usually down closer to the end of the lens) all the way to the right (on Nikons) or all the way to the left (on Canons), until you see the infinity symbol (∞) appear on the distance scale on the top of the lens. Now you’re focused out to infinity and things off in the distance will be in sharp focus, even if they’re too far away to actually focus on (like the moon, or stars, or Justin Bieber).
I hear from a lot of photographers who are frustrated because, compared to “everybody else,” they think their shots look kind of “average.” Now, consider this: if you’re a beginner and you buy a new camera, chances are it comes in a kit with something like an 18–55mm lens (called a “kit lens,” which is a very inexpensive, usually plastic, lens, which is generally not very sharp, lacks contrast and clarity, and so on). But let’s put quality issues aside for a moment and think about this: your average beginner is going to take nearly all their shots in that 18–55mm range, right? So how do you keep your shots from looking “average?” One way is to avoid shooting with the kit lens, or at the very least, avoid shooting in that 18–55mm focal length or your shots will be at the same focal length as your average beginner. So, although I hesitate to tell you that “the secret to better-looking shots is to buy a longer, better-quality lens,” because that won’t do it alone, I can tell you this: it surely helps. You don’t have to spend a lot on your longer lens (it can even be a used lens), but whatever you get will almost undoubtedly create sharper, higher-quality, and more contrasty images and you’ll be out of that 18–55mm beginner’s land.

Don’t Shoot at the “Beginner” Focal Lengths

If You Can’t Afford Another Lens, Do This

If you can’t afford a longer lens (although, check out Sigma’s 70–300mm for around $170), and you have to shoot with the kit lens, stay at the 18mm wide-angle focal length, and avoid the 55mm length at all costs. So in short—go wide!
If you’re shooting with a long lens (like a 300mm or a 400mm), there’s actually a place where you should hold the lens to help steady it while you’re shooting, even when it’s supported on a monopod. That spot is down at the end of the lens where the lens hood is. Your left hand gently rests on the end of the lens barrel (as shown above), which helps reduce the vibration and keeps your long lens steady while you shoot.
Which Lens for Outdoor Portraits?

There is no one lens for outdoor portraits, but if there is one lens that is really hot right now for outdoor portraits, hands down it has to be the Canon 85mm f/1.8 or the Nikon 85mm f/1.4. These lenses have a nice focal length for portraits, but the real reason everybody loves them is for the insanely shallow depth of field they provide (if you get your subject so they pretty much fill the frame, the background goes so soft and out of focus that you’ll never want to shoot anything else). You hardly see a professional wedding or senior portrait photographer not shooting an 85mm to death right now, and the reason is it looks great and people (clients) love its almost cinematic look. The only downside is, of course, that since it’s the lens that everybody wants to shoot, and since it does all this magical stuff to the background, it isn’t cheap. It’s a business investment (the Nikon 85mm f/1.4 sells for around $1,600, but the Canon 85mm f/1.8 sells for only around $400, so that’s actually a pretty good deal). Also, don’t forget about 85mm lenses from Sigma (for both Canon and Nikon), which many photographers swear by, and they’re usually much less expensive than Nikon or Canon lenses.
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Index

A
about this book, 2–4
action shots
  conveying motion in, 120–121
  freezing motion in, 8, 122, 195
  photo recipe for, 195
  See also sports photography
Adobe Photoshop. See Photoshop
AE Lock button, 163
AE-L/AF-L button, 163
aperture priority mode, 74, 77, 80, 138, 140
aperture setting
  background blur and, 60
  changing when recording video, 167
  See also f-stops
audio for DSLR video, 160
Auto FP setting, 28
Auto ISO feature, 111
Auto Rotate settings, 177
Auto White Balance setting, 100
Autofocus feature, 169

B
back focus button, 126
backgrounds
  blurring for portraits, 5, 60
  distance of studio subjects from, 43
  flash setting for out-of-focus, 28
  zooming for out-of-focus, 60
backlighting, natural, 74
batteries
  DSLR video and, 158
  powering strobes using, 56
  tip on charging, 46
battery packs, 56
beam of light, 32
beauty style shot, 194
Black, Dave, 129
blown-out look, 14, 42, 195
blurring backgrounds, 5, 60
blurry travel photos, 111
bracketing images. See exposure bracketing
Brightness slider, 98
Brilliance/Warmth filter, 104
bulb setting, 91
burst mode
  for HDR photography, 142
  for sports photography, 120, 125

C
cable release, 84, 90, 128, 136, 196
camera bags
carrying lens bags vs., 112
options for disguising, 110
camera gear
  author’s webpage on, 3
  DSLR video, 155, 156, 157, 168
  HDR photography, 136
  ND filter gear finder, 90
  sports photography, 123
  star trail photography, 84
  theft prevention for, 110
  See also DSLR cameras
Camera Raw
  cinematic cropping in, 185
duotone creation in, 96
noise reduction in, 178
opening TIFFs or JPEGs in, 98
sky darkening technique, 98
cameras. See DSLR cameras
Canon cameras, 4
  AE Lock button, 163
  Auto ISO feature, 111
  Auto Rotate setting, 177
  back focus button, 126
  continuous shooting mode, 142
  exposure bracketing on, 137, 138, 139
  exposure compensation feature, 74, 80, 140
  exposure meter in viewfinder, 81
  filters and effects, 158
  Focus Tracking settings, 132
  frame rate setting, 166
Canon cameras (continued)
  Grid Display feature, 95
  image size options, 172
  Promote Control for, 139
  sharpening feature, 166
  white balance adjustments, 103
canvas, printing on, 183
catch lights, 16
charging batteries, 46
choppy water photos, 101
cinematic cropping, 185
cityscapes, 117
Cloudy white balance setting, 29, 103
Color Efex Pro plug-in, 104, 191, 195, 206
Commander mode setup, 30
composition tips
  for landscape photography, 105, 199, 200, 205
  for portrait photography, 19, 206
  for the viewer’s eye, 179
compression, lens, 61
Concepcion, RC, 151
continuous shooting mode
  for HDR photography, 142
  for sports photography, 120, 125
couples, lighting, 50
Cowart, Jeremy, 41
cropping, cinematic, 185

darkening skies, 98, 193
dawn photos, 196, 200
daylight. See natural light
depth of field
  preview button for, 62
  studio portraits and, 5
  video focusing and, 157
diffused light, 190
digital cameras. See DSLR cameras
digital photos
  pro tips for improving, 171–187
  recipes for shooting, 189–207
  See also JPEG images; RAW images
directing your subjects, 15

Diussa, Scott, 111
Doorhof, Frank, 44
DPRReview.com website, 127
dramatic portraits, 201
DSLR cameras
  Auto ISO feature, 111
  back focus button, 126
  body and lens cap care, 66
  depth-of-field preview feature, 62
  exposure bracketing feature, 137, 138
  exposure compensation feature, 74, 80, 140
  exposure lock feature, 163
  Focus Tracking settings, 132
  frame rate setting, 166
  Grid lines feature, 95
  image size options, 172
  interval timer feature, 11
  manual mode on, 81
  most common brands of, 4
  multiple exposures created in, 6–7
  protecting in rainy weather, 94
  rotate image settings, 177
  sharpening feature, 166
  theft prevention for, 110
  video features of, 155–169
  white balance tool for, 55
  See also Canon cameras; Nikon cameras
DSLR Follow Focus accessory, 157
DSLR video. See video
duotone effects, 96
dusk photos, 200

E
Elinchrom softboxes, 48
equipment. See camera gear
E-TTL metering, 24
Evaluative metering, 184
Exchange Messenger camera bag, 110
EXIF data, 180
ExpoDisc, 55
exposure
  locking for video, 163
  long-exposure technique, 90–93
exposure bracketing
basics of, 137
camera setup for, 138
continuous shooting mode for, 142
exposure compensation for, 140
finding images from, 146
number of images for, 139
Promote Control for, 139
See also HDR photography
exposure compensation
backlit photos and, 74
blown-out look and, 14
exposure bracketing using, 140
manual mode and, 174
underexposed shots and, 80
Exposure slider, 98
external microphones, 159–160
eyepiece, video, 156
eyes
catch lights in, 16
focusing on, 12–13
posing tip for enlarging, 17
reducing whites of, 9
Ezybox Hotshoe softbox, 27

F
falloff creation, 40
fast memory cards, 125
file size settings, 172
Fill Light slider, 98
film-like look for video, 166
filters
DSLR video, 158
neutral density, 5, 90, 92, 199
polarizing, 89, 155, 199
fisheye lenses, 63, 204
flash, 23–37
beam of light from, 32
daylight use of, 33
distance from umbrellas, 36
freezing motion using, 8
ground lighting trick, 25, 207
manual mode for, 24
modeling light options, 34
mounting on a monopod, 27
Nikon’s Commander mode setup, 30
outdoor White Balance setting, 29
out-of-focus backgrounds using, 28
power limitations of, 37
preventing from powering off, 35
radio wireless remote for, 31
ring flash, 46
softbox adapters for, 26
tripod-free shooting with, 182
wide-angle diffuser for, 36
See also studio strobes
Flicker Reduction option, 165
focal lengths of lenses, 68
Focus Tracking settings, 132
focusing
autofocus for, 169
back focus button for, 126
to infinity, 67, 83
portrait photography, 12–13
rack, for DSLR video, 157
sports photography, 126, 132
subject and object, 18
Fog Eliminator Cloths, 65
fogged lenses, 65
foggy landscapes, 196
football games
detail shots from, 131
focus settings for, 132
player-in-stadium portrait, 21
See also sports photography
frame rate for video, 166
freezing motion, 8, 122, 195
f-stops
background blur and, 60
HDR photography and, 141
landscape photography and, 88, 91
lens cost consideration, 64
silky water effect and, 89
soft strobe lighting and, 49
sunset photos and, 77
video recording and, 164
See also aperture setting
full-length photos, 20
**Index**

**G**
gear. See camera gear
ghosting problems, 152
glassy-water shots, 101, 205
GoBoda lens bags, 112
gold reflectors, 78
golf courses, 109
gray cards, 54
Greenberg, Ed, 19
Grid lines feature, 95
ground lighting trick, 25, 207
group portraits, 10–11
  - interval timer for, 11
  - lighting small groups, 50
  - tips for shooting, 10

**H**
halo problems, 152
handheld shots
  - HDR photos as, 143, 204
  - steadying long lenses for, 69
**HDR Book, The (Concepcion),** 151
HDR Efex Pro, 147
HDR photography, 135–152
  - basic idea of, 137
  - camera setup for, 138
  - continuous shooting mode for, 142
  - faking with Topaz Adjust, 150
  - finding bracketed images, 146
  - fixing halos and ghosting in, 152
  - f-stops used for, 141
  - gear for shooting, 136
  - handheld shots in, 143, 204
  - HDR Pro feature for, 147, 148
  - nighttime images using, 149
  - number of bracketed images for, 139
  - panorama creation using, 145
  - photo recipes for, 197, 204
  - post-processing for, 151, 152
  - Promote Control used for, 139
  - sharpening HDR images, 149
  - software recommended for, 147
  - types of scenes for, 144
  - Web resource on, 144

HDR Pro feature, 147, 148
High Pass sharpening, 149
Highlight Warning, 14
High-Speed Sync mode, 28, 32
Hobby, David, 25
Hoodman HoodLoupe, 156
horizon line, 95
hot shoe flash. See flash
hotel roof cityscape shots, 117
Hydrophobia rain covers, 94

**I**
image size settings, 172
Image Stabilization (IS) feature, 124
infinity focus setting, 67, 83
interval timers, 11
IS (Image Stabilization) feature, 124
ISO setting
  - Auto ISO feature, 111
  - long exposures and, 91
  - photo quality and, 85
  - silky water effect and, 89
  - walk-around shots and, 76
i-TTL metering, 24

**J**
JPEG images
  - noise reduction for, 178
  - opening in Camera Raw, 98
  - processing of RAW vs., 181
  - shooting sports as, 127

**K**
Kacey Enterprises, 26
kelbytraining.com website
  - camera gear page, 3
  - video tutorial, 2
Kelly Moore camera bags, 110
kit lenses, 68
Klix software, 187
landscape photography, 87–105
amplifying size in, 97
aperture setting for, 88
Cloudy white balance for, 103
composition tips for, 105, 199, 200, 205
darkening skies in, 98
duotone effects, 96
horizon line in, 95
keeping gear dry for, 94
“lone tree” shots, 109
long-exposure technique, 90–93
low-angle shots, 102
photo recipes for, 196, 199–200, 205
post-processing secret for, 104
silky water effect, 89, 101, 199
storm-related photos, 99
time-lapse images, 100
water reflections, 101, 205
Lastolite gear
EzyBox Hotshoe softbox, 27
TriFlash Shoe Mount Bracket, 32
LCD screens
focusing video using, 161
swing-out for low-angle shots, 102
LED modeling light, 34
lens compression, 61
lens flare effect, 42
lens hood, 42
lenses, 59–70
background blur and, 60
bags for carrying, 112
body and lens cap care, 66
close-up portraits and, 17
compression effect caused by, 61
depth-of-field preview option, 62
fisheye effect correction, 63
fogging problems/solutions, 65
f-stop cost consideration, 64
holding/steadying of long, 69
infinity focus setting, 67, 83
kit lens limitations, 68
outdoor portrait, 70
sports photography, 123
teleconverters for, 89
travel photography, 112
video photography, 164
VR or IS feature on, 124
light
beam of, 32
catch, 16
diffused, 190
reflected, 78–79, 198
rim, 45
See also natural light
light trails
from cars, 82
from stars, 83–84
lighting
falloff creation, 40
softbox placement, 52–53
trick for studio, 51
See also flash; studio strobes
Lightroom
auto color correction, 54
cinematic cropping in, 185
duotone creation, 96
noise reduction in, 178
shooting tethered using, 54
sky darkening technique, 98
location portraits
photo recipes for, 202, 203, 207
studio strobes used for, 37, 56
locking your exposure, 163
“lone tree” shots, 109
long lenses
holding/steadying, 69
kit lenses vs., 68
portraits and, 17, 190
long-exposure technique, 90–93
accessories, 90
camera settings, 91
shot setup, 92
taking the shot, 93
LongTime Exposure Calculator, 93
low-angle landscape shots, 102
Lowepro camera bags, 110
low-light situations
- lenses for shooting in, 164
- reducing noise from shooting in, 178
- tripod and cable release for, 196, 205

See also nighttime photos

M
 Magic Slipper, 26
 Maisel, Jay, 76, 108, 175
 Manfrotto Magic Arm and Super Clamp, 128, 173
 manual mode
  - camera, 81, 91, 100, 174
  - flash, 24
 Martin, Steve, 6
 Matrix metering, 184
 Mautner, Cliff, 13, 80
 McNally, Joe, 6, 31
 megapixel settings, 172
 memory cards
  - advantage of fast, 125
  - fitting more photos on, 172
  - rescuing damaged, 187
  - switch for locking, 187
 microphones, 159–160
 model releases, 19
 modeling light, 34
 monopods, 27
 motion
  - conveying, 120–121
  - freezing, 8, 122, 195
 See also action shots; sports photography
 motorsport photography, 122
 multiple exposures, 6–7, 18

N
 natural light, 73–85
  - backlit shots and, 74
  - exposure compensation and, 74, 80
  - flash used with, 33
  - ISO settings and, 76, 85
 nighttime photos and, 81–83
  - portraits shot in, 190, 193, 198, 202
  - reflectors used with, 78–79
  - silhouettes shot in, 75
  - star trails and, 83–84
  - sunset photos and, 77, 193
  - tripod-free shooting in, 182
  - underexposed image adjustments in, 80
  - walk-around photos in, 85

neutral density (ND) filter, 5, 90, 92, 199

nighttime photos
- HDR images, 149
- light trails, 82
- star trails, 83–84
- tips for shooting, 81

See also low-light situations

Nik Software
- Color Efex Pro, 104, 191, 195, 206
- HDR Efex Pro, 147

Nikon cameras, 4
- AE-L/AF-L button, 163
- Auto ISO feature, 111
- back focus button, 126
- Commander mode setup, 30
- continuous shooting mode, 142
- exposure bracketing on, 137, 138
- exposure compensation feature, 74, 80, 140
- exposure meter in viewfinder, 81
- filters and effects, 158
- Flicker Reduction option, 165
- Focus Tracking settings, 132
- frame rate setting, 166
- Grid Display feature, 95
- image size options, 172
- interval timer feature, 11
- multiple exposure feature, 6
- rotate image settings, 177
- sharpening feature, 166
- white balance adjustments, 103

Nikon Capture NX program, 176

NiMH batteries, 46

noise reduction, 178
O
one-light studio setup, 44
on-location portraits. See location portraits
OP/TECH Rainsleeves, 94
outdoor photography
backlit shots, 74
exposure compensation for, 80 flash used in, 29, 33
keeping gear dry for, 94 portrait lenses for, 70 reflectors used in, 78–79 veils used in, 198
See also landscape photography
oversharpening images, 186

P
panning
conveying motion through, 120–121 finding the shutter speed for, 121 tip and secret about, 120 parabolic umbrellas, 48 Paul C. Buff battery pack, 56 people
capturing the real lives of, 113 remembering the names of, 15 walking by in travel photos, 108
See also portraits
Peterson, Moose, 89
photo recipes, 189–207
Photo Recipes Live: Behind the Scenes (Kelby), 189
Photographer’s Survival Manual: A Legal Guide for Artists in the Digital Age (Greenberg and Reznicki), 19
Photomatrix Pro, 147
Photomerge feature, 145
Photoshop
blending multiple images in, 6, 7, 18 cinematic cropping in, 185 fisheye effect correction in, 63 HDR Pro feature in, 147, 148 High Pass sharpening in, 149 noise reduction in, 178 panorama creation in, 145 post-processing HDR images in, 151 removing tourists from photos in, 114 sharpening images for print in, 186 sky darkening technique in, 98 Topaz Adjust plug-in for, 150 Photoshop Lightroom. See Lightroom picture styles, 176 PocketWizard AC3 Zone Controller, 31 polarizing filters, 89, 155, 199 portraits, 5–21 blown-out look for, 14 blurring backgrounds in, 5, 60 characteristics of catch lights in, 16 composition tips for, 19, 206 directing your subjects for, 15 dramatic corporate, 201 enlarging the eyes in, 17 focusing the camera for, 12–13 freezing motion in, 8 full-length shots as, 20 group shots as, 10–11 lens focal length for, 17, 70 merging focus points for, 18 model releases for, 19 multiple-exposure, 6–7, 18 photo recipes for, 190, 192–194, 198, 201–203, 206–207 posing subjects for, 15, 17 subject size effects in, 21 sunglass reflections in, 16 white-eye reduction in, 9 posing subjects, 15, 17 post-processing, 141 previews
depth-of-field, 62 modeling light, 34, 45 picture style, 176 printing
images on canvas, 183 sharpening images for, 186 professional tips/techniques, 171–187 avoiding signs in photos, 175 cinematic cropping style, 185 composing for the viewer’s eye, 179
professional tips/techniques (continued)
  JPEG vs. RAW image processing, 181
  manual mode exposure compensation, 174
  noise reduction for low-light shots, 178
  picture styles in RAW format, 176
  printing images on canvas, 183
  reducing camera file size, 172
  removing image EXIF data, 180
  rescuing damaged memory cards, 187
  rotate image settings, 177
  sharpening images for print, 186
  Spot metering situations, 184
  stabilizing cameras without tripods, 173
  tripod-free shooting situations, 182
profile silhouettes, 45
Promote Control, 139

R
rack focus technique, 157
radio wireless remote, 31
rainy weather protection, 94
RAW images
  HDR photography and, 146
  image size options for, 172
  noise reduction for, 178
  picture styles and, 176
  processing of JPEGs vs., 181
  sports photography and, 127
recipes for photos, 189–207
reflections
  catch lights as, 16
  softbox, in sunglasses, 16
  still water, 101
reflectors
  controlling the light from, 79
  outdoor use of, 78–79, 198
remote camera, 128
Reznicki, Jack, 15, 19
rim-light profile silhouettes, 45
ring flash, 46
ring-light look, 206
Rode VideoMic shotgun mic, 160
Rogue 3-in-1 Honeycomb Grid, 32
Rotate Tall/Rotate Image settings, 177

S
SanDisk RescuePro software, 187
self timers, 11
sensor dust, 66
shade light, 78
Shade white balance setting, 103
sharpening
  HDR photos, 149
  images for print, 186
  in-camera, 166
shoot-through umbrellas, 36
shutter priority mode, 193, 202
shutter speed
  action shots and, 122, 195
  bulb mode for, 91
  dark gradient issue and, 33
  panning related to, 121, 122
  setting the minimum, 111
  silky water effect and, 89, 199
Sigma lenses, 68, 70
signs in photos, 175
silhouettes
  front lighting, 193, 202
  rim-light profile, 45
  shooting backlit, 75
silky water effect, 89, 101, 199
skies
  darkening, 98, 193
  shooting stormy, 99
small groups
  studio lighting for, 50
See also group portraits
softboxes
  bigger is better for, 48
  flash adapters for, 26
  light falloff creation, 40
  placement considerations, 52–53
  reflected in sunglasses, 16
  strobe adapters for, 47
  umbrellas vs., 48
sports photography, 119–132
  camera gear for, 123
  conveying motion in, 120–121
  covering event details in, 131
  fast memory cards for, 125
fisheye lenses used for, 63
focus tips for, 126, 132
freezing motion in, 122, 195
JPEG format used for, 127
panning moving subjects in, 120–121, 122
problems with night or indoor, 123
remote camera used for, 128
shutter speeds used for, 121, 122
storytelling shots in, 131
teleconverters used for, 129
turning off VR or IS for, 124
warm-up shots in, 130
Spot metering mode, 74, 184
star trails, 83–84
gear for shooting, 84
instructions on shooting, 83
still-water shots, 101, 205
storm photos, 99
storytelling shots, 131
strobes. See studio strobes
studio photography, 39–56
big softboxes for, 48
blurring backgrounds in, 5
couple/small group lighting in, 50
freezing motion in, 8
lens flare effect in, 42
light falloff creation in, 40
Lightroom color fixes in, 54
mixing brands of gear in, 47
moving around the studio for, 41
one-light setup in, 44
rim-light profile silhouettes in, 45
ring flash used in, 46
shooting tethered in, 54
softbox placement in, 52–53
softening the light in, 49
solving lighting problems in, 51
subject-to-background distance in, 43
white balance tool for, 55
studio strobes
battery packs for, 56
modeling light on, 34
on-location use of, 37, 56
powering down, 49
softbox adapters for, 47
See also flash
studio-quality softboxes, 26
sunglass reflections, 16
sunlight. See natural light
sunset photos, 77, 193, 200
super-wide-angle lenses, 112
swing-out screens, 102
sync speed settings, 28
T
Tascam TM-ST1 mic, 159
Tejada, David, 30
teleconverters
    silky water effect and, 89
    sports photography and, 129
telephoto lenses. See long lenses
tethered shooting
    extension cable for, 47
    Lightroom used for, 54
theft, preventing, 110
Think Tank Photo, 110
TIFFs, opening in Camera Raw, 98
time-lapse photography, 100
tips and techniques. See professional
    tips/techniques
Topaz Adjust plug-in, 150
tourist removal techniques, 114
travel photography, 107–117
    avoiding blurry shots, 111
    camera bags designed for, 110
    capturing real lives in, 113
    examining your best, 116
    hotel roof cityscape shots, 117
    lenses recommended for, 112
    “lone tree” shot in, 109
    people walking by in, 108
    theft prevention tips, 110, 112
    tourist removal techniques, 114
    working the scene in, 115
TriFlash Shoe Mount Bracket, 32
tripods
dawn or dusk shots and, 200
HDR photography and, 136, 143
long exposure shots and, 90
silky water shots and, 199
situations for not using, 182
star trail photos and, 84
TTL metering, 24

U
umbrellas
flash distance from, 36
reflective, 48
shoot-through, 36, 48
underexposed daytime shots, 80
Unsharp Mask filter, 186
Urban Disguise camera bags, 110
USB extension cable, 47

V
vacation photography. See travel photography
Vagabond Mini Lithium battery pack, 56
veils for outdoor shots, 198
Vibration Reduction (VR) feature, 124
video (DSLR), 155–169
aperture changes with, 167
autofocus used for, 169
battery usage by, 158
eyepiece and strap for, 156
film-like look for, 166
filters and effects for, 158
flicker reduction option for, 165
focusing with the LCD screen, 161
frame rate settings for, 161
f-stops for shooting, 164
importance of audio for, 160
locking the exposure for, 163
microphones used for, 159–160
purchasing gear for, 155, 156
rack focus technique for, 157
time limit for shooting, 159
widescreen orientation for, 162
zooming smoothly for, 168
video tutorials
on black-and-white conversions, 93
on ground lighting trick, 25
on learning from this book, 2
on multiple exposure images, 7
on rack focusing effect, 157
on removing tourists from photos, 114
on time-lapse photography, 100
See also Web resources
viewfinders
covering, 92
exposure meter in, 81
VR (Vibration Reduction) feature, 124

W
walk-around shots, 76
water photos
silky water effect, 89, 101, 199
still water reflections, 101, 205
weather considerations
protecting camera gear, 94
shooting before/after storms, 99
Web resources
about this book, 2
gear recommendations, 3
HDR photography, 144
See also video tutorials
wedding portraits, 27, 80, 203
Westcott Magic Slipper, 26
white balance
Cloudy setting, 29, 103
ExpoDisc for setting, 55
gray card for setting, 54
outdoor flash and, 29
white-eye effect reduction, 9
wide-angle diffusers, 36
wide-angle lenses
landscape photography and, 97, 200
portrait photography and, 21
sports photography and, 63, 195
travel photography and, 112
wireless cable release, 90, 128
wireless remote, 31, 128
Wise, Alex, 93
working the scene, 115

Z
zoom lenses, 112, 123
zooming
  blurring backgrounds by, 60
  video accessories for, 168