

Through the Lens of a Pro: Tips for Beginning Photographers

Written by KIERA LANNI | PHOTOGRAPHY/LEISURE EDITOR
Wednesday, 09 December 2015 12:03



When I held my first “real” camera, all I wanted to do was shoot, shoot, shoot. I would shoot a photo of that bug on the ground, the clouds in the sky, or my sister in awful outfits I thought were fashionable at the time. I was drawn to photography because it has the ability to tell a story with no words and capture a moment in time forever.

The art of photography has gone from sitting still in front of a camera for an extended amount of time to get a single photograph in the 1800s, to using your phone to take multiple selfies at a time. We are so saturated in images today that we forget that much more goes into a photograph than just pointing and shooting. People dedicate their lives to the craft of photography in order to perfect it, and share a different perspective of the world that we often look past in our busy lives.

So, what should you know if you want to pursue photography as a career?

First, it is good to know some statistics on photography as an occupation. According to the United States Department of Labor, in 2012, 136,600 people were employed as professional photographers. That includes everyone from studio photographers, to product photographers, to photojournalists. The average salary of a photographer is \$28,490 per year, but of course, that depends on the photographer’s level of success. Their income always fluctuates as well, since their jobs depend on clients and assignments.

When I first became interested in photography, I didn’t know much and didn’t think I could potentially have a career in the field. However, as I started to photograph, I instantly fell in love. Photography allowed me to be artistic and express myself through the scenes and stories I could create through the photos. I was able to tell people something without talking which, as a shy person, is a good thing for me.

My high school teacher told me I had a real knack for photography, so I decided to make it my minor in college. Along my way of discovering my own photographic voice, I met two influential photographers who truly taught me what I know. One of them is Danny Sanchez, a notable photographer from Red Bank, NJ, with whom I intern. The other is Mark Ludak, a specialist

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professor of photography at the University. What they have taught me is useful to all potential photographers.

When you first start out, you should have a hunger to learn all you can about photography. Sanchez chose to be a photographer after being unsure what he wanted to be. When he came out of the army, he took a few classes at Brookdale Community College and held different jobs until he realized that he really had a love for photography.

Sanchez said, "I was in all the way right from the get-go; there was no turning back. Even if I took terrible pictures in the beginning, I just knew that the next roll of film that I shot would be better than the last one."

Sanchez had landed a job with *US* and *Star* Magazines, and has shot celebrities such as Jon Bon Jovi and Anne Heche. However, before he got to that level, Sanchez had much to learn. He suggests collecting photos and studying photographers that you want to emulate.

"One of the first things they [potential photographers] should probably do is to put together photographic materials of subjects that you like and can envision yourself doing in the future," he said.

Sanchez also suggests shooting as much as you can. He said, "When you're starting out, shoot fairly often and be critical of yourself. Don't think just because you shot it that it's great; try to get something out of every shoot to put in your book."

I know that I am my own biggest critic, and that can be a good thing. Thinking that everything you shoot belongs in a museum is not going to help you learn. Even after many failed attempts in the dark room, and all the frustration when I couldn't get the photo I wanted, I still learned something in the end. I learned to not make that mistake again and move on.

Even so, Sanchez has a warning for new photographers: "One thing that I did not do was compare myself to other students or other people who were starting out like myself." Comparing yourself to other photographers disables you from finding your own voice.

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Moreover, a photographer should find what area of photography appeals to them most. Personally, I love to photograph people, and I like to shoot artistic and fashion photography. I learned what I like by trying out all the aspects of photography. Sanchez said, though, some people might shoot something they do not like or endorse just for the money. That is when choosing what area you want to work in becomes a question of your own integrity, and that can be tricky.

Another way to gain valuable knowledge of the world of photography is to intern with a photo studio or photographer. One of the studios Sanchez interned at was a studio in New York City that shot for magazines like *Cosmo*. "I made myself useful; I was so gung-ho about going into this world that it showed," Sanchez said.

At an internship, you can really see every little thing that goes on. When I intern with Sanchez, I examine the relationship between him and his subject: how they communicate and how they connect. I observe the different techniques he uses to get the results he wants. I observe how he adjusts the lighting, how he stands when he photographs, and how uses his personality to make his subjects feel comfortable and good about themselves.

Photography is different from other lines of work because you get a different view of the world when you have to connect with your subject or analyze a scene. You look for the beauty or the ugliness in the world. It causes you to be more vigilant.

Ludak studied philosophy in college before becoming a photojournalist and professor. His background in philosophy provided him with the means to explore photojournalism and travel the world. "Philosophy taught me to investigate the world we live in and look for meaning, value, purpose and an ethical foundation for life. Photography provided for me a way to both investigate the world and make art," Ludak said.

Ludak continued to say that he does not really know a person until he photographs them. "Photography forces me to slow down and really examine and appreciate the world around me. Through it, I learn new things about the world and consequently myself."

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The biggest lesson for someone interested in photography is to get to know themselves. Know what you want to do, and learn how to do it. After you do that, just keep shooting until you can't shoot anymore. Even after that, keep shooting because you will learn what you are capable of, and it may surprise you.

PHOTO COURTESY of Danny Sanchez

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