Photo Tips
This guide aims to provide you with a variety of tips and tricks to help you create better pictures of food. The information here doesn’t rely on fancy equipment (nearly all of the images are shot on an iPhone) or extravagant settings (nearly all of the images are shot next to the same window in our kitchen). We’ll focus on simple concepts anyone can put into practice the next time they have a dish in front of them. We hope you find this to be an approachable and useful resource.

01 SIMPLIFY
02 COLOR
03 LIGHT
04 STYLING
05 PROCESSING
Simplify
01 Simplify

Eliminate visual distractions that call the viewer’s eyes away from the subject. Avoid patterned table cloths and plate ware, ornate utensils, busy surfaces, etc.

Try This

Not This
01 Simplify

Take advantage of the top down perspective (especially with your phone). The top down perspective allows you to isolate your scene and avoid distracting backgrounds.

Find your distance. A bowl of salad, full of colors and textures? Move away and introduce some negative space. Simple subject, monochromatic or mundane? Get in tight and capture subtlety and texture.

Try This

Not This
Color
02 Color

Keep things cool. Warm colors pop out at the viewer, cool colors recede. Generally, a neutral-cool background will be less distracting and help simplify the scene. You want the natural vibrance of the food catch the viewer’s eye, not the loud background.

Not This ->

<- Try This
Light
03 Light

SOFT LIGHT

Soft light from one direction is ideal rather than diffused light from all around - like close to a window, rather than in the middle of a room. It’s also best to avoid harsh, overly contrasty light - like direct sunlight.

“SHAPE” THE LIGHT

You can use a poster board or two to direct the light more intentionally. Using poster boards to block the light from all but one direction can deepen the shadows, add dynamic, or highlight specific parts of the frame.
This image is shot with unmodified window light entering from the top-right of the frame. This same light entering the window is bouncing off the walls throughout the room and filling back into the frame from all directions.

Same subject and location, this time with the addition of black poster boards flanking both sides of the subject. Notice how the shadows deepen and create a more directional aspect to the light.
Watch out for mixed light colors (cool light entering from a window compared to the warm light from a light bulb), turn off indoor lights to avoid the warm tint effecting your picture.

The images below we’re shot moments apart, but simply switching off the indoor lights yields a much cleaner and more natural result.
Always ensure that the light source is entering from the top half of the frame. Even if the perspective is perfectly top down, the image will still feel upside down, or just slightly off, if the light is entering the frame from the bottom half.

**This**
- Light source from above
- Shadows cast below

**Not This**
- Light source from below
- Shadows cast above
Styling
- Hack don’t chop. Uniformity in food is often visually monotonous. Let your food have its own size and shape.

- Dribble don’t spread. Garnish, dressing, bacon (huh?). Loosely bunch these things up in one area rather than evenly distributing across the whole dish.

- When the dish doesn’t look quite right, try taking something away first. Adding more to the plate usually adds more to the wrongness.

Multiply the subject. I’d bet your most memorable meals were communal, right? One solitary plate can feel sort of... solitary. Try arranging a few dishes to cue in on the communal feel. Keep in mind the Rule of Odds, which states that people are naturally drawn to unusual or uneven compositions.

- Imperfect over perfect. Let your food feel good, overly neat is unapproachable.
04 Styling

Do

Hack
Dribble
Be Imperfect
Take Away

Don’t

Chop
Spread Evenly
Be Perfect
Add To

(most of the time)
Processing
Save the filter for last. Get the image right with the old school adjustments, then finish it off with a subtle filter.

01 Adjust the exposure
02 Tweak the White Balance
03 Saturation / Contrast / Highlights / Fade / Grain - take the edge off the digital perfection.
04 Sharpen.
05 Filter a la mode. But don’t be greedy.
VSCOcam is a great, free camera app for mobile editing. Simple interface, quick, and you can save your favorite processing recipes for quickly applying a consistent look.

Here are a couple recipes to get you started:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Recipe 01</th>
<th>Recipe 02</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Exposure</td>
<td>+ 0.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contrast</td>
<td>+ 2.0</td>
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<tr>
<td>Saturation</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Highlights</td>
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<tr>
<td>Fade</td>
<td>+ 0.6</td>
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<tr>
<td>Grain</td>
<td>+ 5.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sharpen</td>
<td>+ 2.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Filter</td>
<td>A6 (+6.0)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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If you find this guide helpful we’d love to know! Please hashtag your pictures with #skphototips and tag @sk_cookingclub on Instagram.

End.