

Better Focus and Sharpness (Part 2)

By Peter Tellone at photography.tutsplus.com

Continued from last month...

Shutter Speed

Shutter speed is another issue that can lead to a lack of sharpness. Every person has a limit to how slow a shutter speed they can hand hold at any given focal length lens. Some people are steadier than others but if you don't have sufficient shutter speed to overcome the movement (shake) of your hands, your image will come out blurry. For standard and wide angle lenses, most people can hand hold down to about 1/30th to 1/60th of a second.



For longer telephoto lenses it usually requires much more. A general rule that people start with is "1 over the focal length of their lens". So if you have a 200mm lens, shoot at 1/200th of a second and go from there to determine your holding ability.

It also depends on how far away you are from your subject, as movement is exaggerated the further away from the subject you are.

If your subject is moving, holding the camera still or a tripod won't help - you'll need to have sufficient shutter speed to stop the action. Most start at around 1/250 but it depends on how fast your subject is moving. Requirements also vary depending upon whether you are shooting static or panning along with the subject. If you pan, you can get away with a far slower shutter speed and also get some interesting effects. It lets you show movement in the background but stops the subject.

Image stabilisation systems on lenses allow for hand holding at lower shutter speeds (up to 3 stops more) but will not stop action any better than a non-IS lens. You can only stop action with shutter speed (or a high speed flash).



Further Reading:

<http://photography.tutsplus.com/tutorials/achieving-better-focus-and-sharpness-in-your-images-photo-398>

What Should I Focus On?

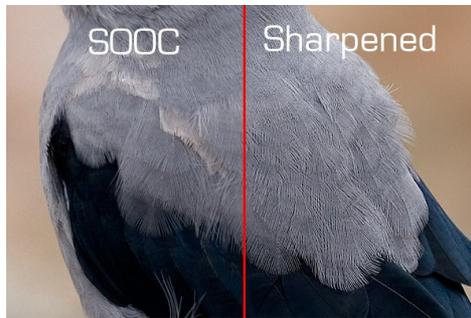
For portrait/headshots, it's fairly widely agreed upon: the eyes. For other portraits it is still the face, unless there is another body part that you want the "focus" of the image to be on. Have your sharpest focus on the area that you want to draw the viewer's eye to.

In landscapes it is not always as easy, but you still follow the same rule as above. Don't settle for "it's a wide angle landscape, focus on infinity". If you have a foreground subject, focus on that and let your DOF carry the image to the background. If the foreground subject does not have sharp focus, it adds confusion to the image, since we naturally see things up close sharper than far away objects.

Now I could get in to focusing at the "Hyper Focal Distance" but that may be beyond the scope of this Tut. If you are interested in it, and you should be, perform a quick Google search for it.

It's in Focus, but is it Sharp?

Focus and sharpness are two different things. Explaining sharpness could take another whole tutorial, so I'm just make a couple of useful points.



If an image is out of focus, you can't make it in focus by sharpening. You will just have a very sharp out of focus picture. Most RAW images need sharpening of some type. Whether you use Smart Sharpen, an unsharp mask, or hi-pass filtering techniques. That said, as I have gradually moved up in camera quality I have found less and less need for sharpening and now only use it in about 25% of my images.

Remember also that sharpening is final product dependant. You would not sharpen the same amount for a web-sized image as you would for a 16 x 20 print. And with that in mind, if you intend selling an image to

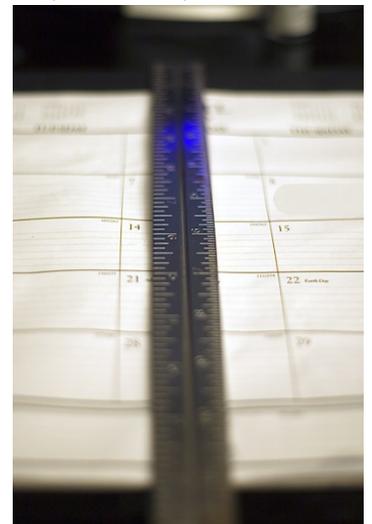
a stock photography agency, don't sharpen your image at all. Most ask that you do not, as you cannot predict the use and size of the image.

I did all that. I'm still out of focus!

There's a small chance that it may actually be a problem with your equipment. (Many) cameras have fine tuning for front and back focus for up to 20 different lenses, so if you know one lens in particular focuses in front of your subject every time, you can make an adjustment in the camera to fix that. If this isn't available, you'll need to determine whether it's just your lens - or your lens and camera - that need taking for repair.

Here is a test you can do at home to give you a good idea if it is you or the camera. Find a ruler or yard stick and place it on a table going away from the camera. Mount your camera on a tripod, and open the aperture up all the way. Shoot down on the ruler at a 45 degree angle, focusing on a certain mark - in this case, the 6" mark.

If that is what you see clearest when you open the picture, then your equipment is fine - go back and work on your technique! If the sharpest point is in front of or behind that point, then you know there is an equipment problem and it should be sent in for service. ■



Welcome to our New Members and Visitors

Please welcome new members and Visitors to the Peninsula Camera Club. New Members are especially invited to take part in the special "Education Nights" where more experienced members provide a great understanding of photography and photographic processing with specific information, hints and tips galore designed especially to help you gain more from your photography—not to be missed !

A special welcome to our visitors. We hope you enjoy the meetings and develop a love and passion for photography. One of the aims of our club is to encourage, foster, develop and advance skills and promote the enjoyment of photography. If we can help you in any way or you have any questions, would like to know more about the club or would like a membership form please feel free to ask any member of the club.

Peninsula Camera Club

Life Members Dr. Peter Marendy, Ken Peters, Brad King, Lyn King, Peter Edwards, Glenn Rossiter, Dave Lamb, Peter O'Brien, & John Taylor

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Catering Convenor - June Hill & Robyn Paul
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