



Meet the expert

Meet this month's busy pro photographer



SUSANNAH FIELDS
Susannah Fields is a professional photographer, based in North London,

operating in the city, the home counties and occasionally further afield. With several years of experience, Susannah's photographed everyone from happy couples on their wedding day to all manner of business people and places, right through to celebrities and even the Queen for PR and charity events. She adds: "An average month is spent doing editorial portraits for a hospitality magazine I work for, shooting for a few regular corporate and public sector clients and doing a few private commissions such as baby and maternity portraits, Bar Mitzvah parties and model/actor portfolios." With a passion for meeting new people and exploring new places, Susannah's a fabulous teacher with plenty to offer the developing photographer - visit her website's 'lesson' section to see which of her courses suit your level of expertise.

Website: www.flashfields.com

Meet the reader

A video producer who's eager to take photos



NICK ADDISON
"I worked in marketing for many years while making videos on the side as a hobby."

Last year I took the leap from the corporate world to set up my own business, mainly making music videos for up-and-coming bands. Having invested a lot of money in video equipment I decided that it was about time that I bought a decent stills camera, and got myself a Canon EOS 450D. Ultimately I'd like to be able to offer live and promo photography to bands alongside the videos."

Websites: www.dphotographer.co.uk/user/nickaddison

Behind the scenes...

Find out how our reader got on throughout the day

▶▶ FIRST THINGS FIRST

Susannah began by ascertaining Nick's existing level of photographic knowledge, before initiating the process of getting him acquainted with his camera. Susannah showed Nick all of the key settings that should be reset before each shoot, (white balance, ISO, etc) then went on to explain what each of the settings and exposure modes mean, something which Nick was previously unclear on. Next, Susannah started to break things down, focusing on one technique/setting at a time and giving Nick mini exercises to do in order to help him understand the theory, the first of which involved taking photos of groups of objects at different apertures to demonstrate the effect the setting has on depth of field.

▼ ISO EXERCISE

Once Nick had mastered the art of using different apertures, Susannah revealed the reasons for and against boosting his camera's ISO sensitivity, explaining when and when not to do it, before asking him to take a series of images, working up through his camera's sensitivity range. Nick found this exercise really helpful, ending up with visual examples that showed the positive and negative effects of changing the ISO.



▼ SHUTTER SNAPS

Next, Nick learned about working with Shutter Priority, with Susannah's innovative exercises involving a tennis ball and a scarf blowing in the wind providing a practical demonstration of the effect that altering the shutter speed has when capturing movement.



◀▶ ACTION SHOTS

Further shutter speed work involved capturing the movement in a nearby bed of windswept flowers - making use of Nick's new tripod - before Susannah encouraged him to turn his lens on himself for some action shots!



Improve my

We get back to basics with pro Susannah Fields and budding enthusiast Nick Addison

Like many developing photographers, Nick Addison possesses a keen eye for photography, but contacted us for a helping hand when it came to understanding the technical aspects of the genre. Luckily for him, pro photographer Susannah Fields was only too happy to offer some expert advice.

Experienced pro Susannah has recently started imparting her photographic knowledge to willing students, in the form of her group and private one-to-one lessons. Her lessons are paced according to her students' existing knowledge, and are packed with concise, easy-to-interpret advice, which Nick found to be of huge benefit.

Nick's current photographic knowledge has come through self-education, although he has more experience with recording moving images than stills: "I got into photography initially as a way of recording events, in my case mostly

revolving around cars in some way, usually while in motion. It's only relatively recently that I have started to take it more seriously, having bought my first DSLR."

On purchasing his Canon EOS 450D, Nick found that - although he could take a good shot - he didn't necessarily understand how he'd got there. "I think I have a decent eye for what works, though I don't really understand why or any of the theory," he explains. "Like most men I'm not one for reading manuals, so tend to find my way around new equipment by trial and error."

Nick admits that taking part in a lesson like Susannah's isn't something he'd normally have considered, but adds: "It certainly accelerated my learning process, so I'm really glad that I put myself forward and was lucky enough to be chosen. It was a thoroughly enjoyable day, and we were even lucky with the weather!"

DSLR skills

Nick's thoughts

Our reader shares his opinions on the day

DP: How did you get on with Susannah?

NA: Very well - it was all very relaxed and friendly, and she took the time to understand where I am at the moment, explained things clearly through examples, and checked my understanding as we went along.

DP: What's the best piece of advice that Susannah gave you during the course of the day?

NA: The single biggest thing was probably one of the first - to keep the camera on autofocus rather than trying to do it manually at this stage. I'd assumed that focusing manually would be one of the first things to learn rather than the last, but Susannah showed that it's better in most cases to have the camera on AF and use the focus locking technique that I had got used to with my old point-and-click Optio S. You can then concentrate on the aperture, shutter speed and ISO to get the look that you're after.

DP: Which of Susannah's tips are you going to put into practice next time you're out photographing?

NA: I'm going to try and find myself a day to continue

playing around with aperture, shutter speed and ISO to really cement things in my head, taking the time afterwards to compare the images and see what the differences are. I now understand the basics but still need to think about it while I'm shooting - I need a bit of practise to be able to do things more intuitively. After that I'm going to set up a day with a band that I have worked with to experiment a bit with them!

DP: Do you feel this experience has improved your photography?

NA: Very much so - like any piece of equipment, understanding the controls, what they do and when and how to use them is key. Had I not done this course I would have taught myself through trial and error, which not only would have taken longer, but would also have inevitably meant missed opportunities as I messed up the 'one chance' photos along the way. Susannah gave some good practical tips, such as to be careful below shutter speeds of 1/60 second, as that's the point at which camera shake starts to creep in if you're not using a tripod.

DP: What was your favourite moment/s of the day?

NA: Those 'eureka' moments, when something suddenly clicked!

Key skills

Nick on 'getting out of Auto mode'

"I went through a very similar 'get out of Auto mode' familiarisation process when I made the step up from consumer camcorder to something more sophisticated, and although the same basic principles apply (indeed, many of the controls are labelled the same, as my video camera is also a Canon) the two are more different than you might at first expect. Just because you're not capturing a moving image doesn't mean that it's easier!

Susannah definitely helped me understand the way round my camera better. I had a couple of 'ooooooh I get it' moments during the day, such as when she explained the relationship between aperture and shutter speed as a seesaw, and for whatever you set as the priority, the camera automatically adjusts the other to balance it out and let the right amount of light in to expose it correctly. Having understood that, I initially didn't get why you would choose one as priority over the other if the camera is going to balance the other for you, but then it clicked: you use Shutter Priority if you're trying to freeze or show motion, for example. Easy really, but up to that point I had stayed in Aperture Priority mode simply because that's what I do with my video camera. I had also never played about with ISO and exposure compensation, so it was good to understand when and how to use both of these."

▶▶ FREEZE FRAME

Nick explains: "A good example of what Susannah described as a sports shot like you'd see in newspapers - the action frozen through using a high shutter speed, which also has the knock-on effect of blurring the background through the larger aperture that the camera selects to get enough light in." Susannah adds: "Demonstrating with the tennis ball and scarf really helped Nick to comprehend shutter speed, in a fun way. I do think that Nick's photos totally demonstrate that he understood fully, by the end of the lesson, how to use his Shutter Priority mode correctly."

▶▶ NICK'S FAVOURITE SHOT OF THE DAY

Reader comment: "I like the depth of field in this shot. There was another similar one where the depth of field was shallower, which I thought I would prefer, but you actually get a better sense of depth when the focus doesn't fall off as sharply. Changing the ISO to 400 from 100 also seems to have increased the richness of the colours."

Pro comment: "It would be unfair to judge Nick's photography from this lesson, because it was designed to get him using his camera fully and the shots we took were more to demonstrate points and 'test' out the theories I was teaching him. Having a background in videography he understood aperture and its relation to depth of field, but didn't really know how it fully translated into taking pictures. By the end of the lesson I felt this had changed: this image is proof of his having grasped the whole concept behind using Aperture Priority mode and its relation to creative use of depth of field."



▶▶ FLOWER POWER

Nick states: "This photo of flowers in the wind was an experiment with slower shutter speeds, taken on the tripod. It gives a slightly strange effect as the small flowers close to the ground are not moving and remain sharp, whereas the taller flowers and the bushes behind were moving quite a lot in the wind." Susannah continues: "Nick seemed to click (pardon the pun!) on quite a few of the technicalities that before he had understood a little, but after explanation and practise during the lesson, really seemed to understand fully. At one point he actually said 'Wow, something in my head just clicked', which really made me feel pleased."



▶▶ PARK LIFE

Nick states: "This one of the park is nice and crisp with the water in the fountain frozen, but you can still see movement of the trees in the wind. There's definitely something funny going on with the perspective of the grass in the middle, though!" On her opinion of Nick as a student, Susannah enthuses: "Nick's a great guy with a good technical head, but he had a few gaps in his knowledge of photography, which he picked up quickly. We had a good giggle carrying out some of the tasks, which made teaching him very easy. Overall a great lesson and by the sounds of it, a successful one for him as well."

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