

A 15 Minute Lesson For The Photography Beginner

by [Peter West Carey](#)

[We've all done it ?](#)

[We've all asked or been asked ?](#)

[We've given or been given the answer !!](#)

[A quick lesson below](#)

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I was sitting in the heat and humidity of the the Amazonian rainforest inside the 1970's designed airport at Puerto Maldonado, Peru. We had a few minutes before heading back to Lima and I had been trying to find time to help a young Norwegian traveling on the same itinerary as me.



When he saw my camera a few days earlier, he had the same comment I have head a dozen times while traveling;

“I just bought this camera before my trip and I haven't a clue how to use it. So I just leave it on Auto.”

If you have uttered this phrase in the recent past, read on. If you have mastery of your camera this post will not likely excite you.

I then told him I'd be happy to help him get a little more out of his camera for the rest of his travels through South America. It's always tricky making this offer, because some people just want a few tips and some can suck down half a day of sightseeing with constant questions. Unfortunately we didn't have a chance to sit down and talk cameras until our time traveling together was almost over.

With just 15 minutes until we boarded and sat in different areas of the plane, I did my best to fill his head with quick tips to take better photos while he headed on to Brazil. Here then is what I told him.

Move off of Auto (and the reasons why)

Like a lot of people new to cameras, he was stuck on Auto or Auto with flash off. I quickly explained that his camera takes average pictures in Auto and took a few example shots to show him. Want to pick one person out of a crowd? Chances are Auto will make sure everyone is in focus, losing your friend. Standing in front of a sunset and wondering why your friend is always pitch black and the sun is not bright? Auto mode. With that in mind, I suggested....

Try P mode

Moving the dial to P(rogram), I explained that he would now be in charge of when his flash fired (and to not forget to use it at night when needed, but also in the middle of the day when there are shadows on faces). He could also control metering. As there were skylights in the airport and friends sitting across from us, with a very bright backlight, I took a shot with the friends centered. They were very dark because of the backlight. "Yeah! I've done that all the time!" he exclaimed. The camera was metering off the background and not the friends.

I showed him the simple trick of aiming the camera slightly down, so the friends filled the frame more than the backlight. He could then hold the shutter down halfway and it will lock the settings to that metering. Then, panning back up to center the friends, take a shot. Boom, the friends were light enough to be seen while the background got a bit blown out. I explained holding the shutter down half way locks exposure (the overall brightness of the shot) and focus.

P mode would allow him other adjustments, which we skipped over in the interest of time. I left telling him there was more to learn and his manual would explain adjustments that can be made in this mode.

When to use A Mode

A(perture) mode was next and it has one of the coolest effects on images. A mode controls how many things are in focus. Skipping over the technical aspects, I told him the lower the f/ number (shown on the bottom of his screen) the less things are in focus. The higher the number, the more things in focus. This is very important for making things stand out.

Again, using a friend, I showed how at f/3.5 the person stood out from the other passengers in the waiting area (demonstrated here with a shot of a ruin wall taken at Machu Picchu shot at f/6.3).



I then spun the front dial on the camera to increase the f/stop number to its maximum. Taking another shot, the friends quickly blended into the background (shown here by increasing the aperture number to f/40 at Machu Picchu).



The lesson? A smaller number for aperture helps make objects stand out from their background. When you want to include everything, like a friend standing in front of a beach or monument, use a higher number.

When to use S mode

As they made the pre-boarding announcement and people started to shift, I sped up my presentation, which, at this point, was now about speed in S(hutter Priority) mode. In S mode he now had control of how much things were blurred. With limited time, I went for two highlights of S mode:

At 1/10th of a second, motion starts to blur in interesting ways if you know what's going on.

For instance, waterfalls start to get the veil look to them. Any movement can be emphasized, such as this mechanical plow in Bhutan, churning a field.



1/500th of a second is a good shutter speed to start freezing motion.

If he wants to stop something from moving, the faster the shutter speed the better. Fast moving objects typically need a shutter speed of 1/500th of a second or more. This number is also controlled with his front dial, as it will likely be on your camera. An example below of a truck speeding past a newly constructed statue of Buddha in Bhutan, shot at 1/800th of a second to stop the truck sharply.



Get closer

I left him with the last bit of simple advice I leave for you. Get Closer. One of the biggest mistakes new photographers make is moving too far back and trying to get everything in focus. This approach, while sometimes effective, makes images flat and two dimensional as they lack depth. Get Closer. I showed him some examples with his camera and while I don't have those images in the airport with me, I can show you what I mean with another set of photos.

The first images is the 'standard' tourist shot. "Look! It's a pretty plant!"



The problem is the plant gets lost in the background. Moving a bit closer, it starts to stand out a bit more.



But we can do ever one better by getting some detail. In this last shot, I am about a foot from the plant.



By this point, my section of the plane was being called for boarding and it was time to go.

While I will likely never see the young Norwegian again, I hope those 15 minutes helped him to take a few better photos while on his world travels. It is also my sincere hope that these few minutes can help you if you are just getting started with a new camera and want some easy advice for better photos.

Lastly, I should have added: Experiment! Photography should be fun and with practically zero cost to experiment digitally, play with your camera and see what works for you.

If you had just 15 minutes to help someone new to photography and traveling, what would you tell them?

Read more: <http://www.digital-photography-school.com/a-15-minute-lesson-for-the-photography-beginner#ixzz1g2iYeOG9>