How to take photographs

A quick guide to help you set up and take great photos of the students and activities at your high school
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Composition is subjective but some rules have stood the test of time. The goal is to make images interesting, easy to view and understand.

**Rule of Thirds**: Divide the scene into thirds vertically and horizontally. Where they intersect near the edges is considered the ideal area to place your subject.

**Horizons**: It is best not to place the horizon in the middle. Use the rule of thirds above. Ensure your horizons are level.

**Not in the centre**: Don’t place subjects right in the middle of frame. Use the rule of thirds.

**Move in closer**: Fill the frame with the subject.

**Viewpoint**: Consider the angle you are photographing from. Often photographing lower or from higher can make more dramatic pictures. Eye-level photos do work well with small children.

**Foreground**: Often images made with wide-angle lenses have empty foregrounds. Make sure you have something relevant in the foreground, perhaps even the subject itself.

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**Aperture** is a small, variable opening in the lens measured in f/stops. A large aperture lets a lot of light in and is often referred to as “fast”. A fast f/stop generally isolates the subject by making the foreground and background blur. A small aperture lets less light in and is called “slow”. A small f/stop can keep more of the image in focus and appear sharper.

**DSLR** stands for Digital Single Lens Reflex camera.

**Fast lens** is one with a large aperture and is more expensive (e.g. 24-70mm F2.8 on DSLR compared with a slow, less expensive lens such as 18-70mm F3.5-4.5). Fast lenses make it possible to blur a background and foreground; use flash at greater distances; use available light instead of flash without camera shake or tripod.

**Fill flash** is using electronic flash to reduce contrast. The light of the flash brightens shadows.

**Focal length** designates whether a lens setting is wide-angle, telephoto, or normal. A normal focal length produces images with a perspective similar to the human eye. On a typical DSLR a normal lens would be 35mm.

**Lens flare** makes the picture look washed out. It occurs when a light source like the sun shines directly into the front of the lens. Sometimes it reflects inside the lens causing hexagonal patterns on the image.

Using the correct lens hood helps to prevent lens flare. A telephoto lens can have a deep lens hood that is very effective. A wide-angle lens requires a shallow lens hood otherwise it will appear in the picture causing vignetting (darkening of the corners).

**Reflector** is a white surface that bounces light onto the subject, typically a portrait. It can be a 1m professional, collapsible, round reflector for $50 or you can use items such as a piece of white cardboard, a whiteboard or a white tablecloth.

T stands for telephoto or long lens setting that magnifies the image e.g. 135mm on DSLR.

W stands for wide-angle lens setting that records more of the subject without the photographer moving back e.g. 18mm on DSLR.

Zoom lens is one with many focal lengths (e.g. 18-70mm on DSLR). It can be a wide-angle zoom (e.g. 10-22mm on DSLR); wide to telephoto zoom (e.g. 18-200mm); or telephoto zoom (e.g. 70-300mm).
Lighting

Available light is any existing light e.g. daylight; overhead lights; stage lights etc.

Artificial light is what the photographer introduces, typically on-camera flash

Fluorescent and/or energy-saving lights cast a green tinge

Standard light globes cast a warm, yellow tinge

Daylight is neutral and has no colour cast

Remember

Don’t mix lighting types because digital cameras cannot correct for that mix.

Digital cameras automatically detect the colour and type of light source and set the white balance.

Avoid taking photos outside at midday when the sun is at its highest point.

Set your camera for highest resolution or highest quality.

Your camera

Before you start it’s really important to read the instruction manual that came with your camera as not all camera toggles and controls appear in exactly the same place.
How to shoot this picture

It’s not that easy to make shots of students receiving/with awards visually appealing

Single award shots are far better to play with e.g. have student hold award close up to the face then fill the frame with their face and part of the award

Use a long/telephoto lens (T setting on your camera) and keep the background out of focus

Use “large” to medium aperture (F4, or F5.6, etc) to blur background

Use interesting but non-distracting background

Use reflector or flash to bounce light onto face

KEY MESSAGES

We promote and reward achievement

Our students succeed in a wide range of endeavours

We provide opportunities for our students to participate in a wide range of activities
How to shoot this picture

- Use a long/telephoto lens (T setting on your camera)
- Use “large” aperture (F2, F2.8, or F4, etc) to blur background
- Place students parallel with camera so both are in focus
- Note that students in foreground and background are out of focus
- Ensure students are active e.g. looking, pointing at same place
- Try some shots with students looking at camera
- The book is a prop but also reflects light onto faces
- Place students near a window
- Open all windows and turn off fluorescent lights to prevent green colour casts on photo

The book is a prop but also reflects light onto faces
Place students parallel with camera so both are in focus

KEY MESSAGES

We celebrate the diversity of our community
We know and engage our community well
Our students work and learn together productively

We know and engage our community well
Our students work and learn together productively
How to shoot this picture

- Use a long/telephoto lens (T setting on your camera)
- Use a “fast” lens (200mm F4)
- Use “large” aperture (F2, F2.8, or F4, etc) to blur background
- Open windows and doors to let in daylight
- Place students in foreground and background to make room look full
- Turn off fluorescent lights
- Turn off the flash if there is enough light coming from windows
- Make sure speaker is animated
- Place students in foreground and background to make room look full
Dedicated & qualified teachers

KEY MESSAGES

- Our teachers are strong role models
- Our teachers are highly skilled and dedicated
- Our students receive individual attention

How to shoot this picture

- Use a long/telephoto (T setting on your camera)
- Use a “large” aperture (F2, F2.8, F4, etc) to blur background
- Use a reflector to bounce light into face
- Use props such as a book to bounce more light onto subjects’ faces
- Have sun behind subjects
- Use props to bounce light onto subjects’ faces
- Have subjects parallel to camera so both are in focus
- Look for a simple, uncluttered background (dark if possible)
- Have happy, smiling faces
Environmental education

**How to shoot this picture**

- Use a long/telephoto lens (T setting on your camera)
- Use “large” aperture (F2, F2.8, or F4, etc) to blur foreground and background
- Have a dark background
- Place students in a shaft of sunlight
- Make sure students are active and looking, pointing at same place
- Use a map both as a prop and to reflect light onto faces
- Beware of dappled or spotty light on faces

**KEY MESSAGES**

- Our school offers environmental education programs
- Our students are active and engaged in their learning
Indoor sport action

KEY MESSAGES
Our school promotes a healthy lifestyle
Our students have access to a wide range of sports
Our school has excellent sporting facilities

How to shoot this picture
Avoid taking sport shots inside as movement and low light levels don’t mix
If you do, use available light in a large open space e.g. gym
Use a wide-angle lens (W setting on your camera) with “large” aperture (F2, F2.8, or F4, etc)
Look for something different in angle to create an interesting composition

Look for something different in angle to create an interesting composition
Library setting

KEY MESSAGES

Our students are self-directed learners
Our students learn to work cooperatively
We have excellent library facilities

How to shoot this picture

- Find a corner of library with neat books in background
- Choose 2 or 3 students
- Use available light and try using flash with it
- Make sure students are smiling, happy and engaged with what they are doing

Use a long/telephoto lens (T setting on your camera) to blur a distracting background, or wide-angle lens (W setting on your camera) to keep the group of people in sharp focus

Background may seem busy but works well here as a contrast to solid, dark uniforms
How to shoot this picture

- Use a wide-angle lens (W setting on your camera)
- Use “medium” aperture (F5.6, F8, etc) to keep all students in focus
- Choose appropriate location e.g. stage or hall
- Turn on stage lights and face them towards camera to backlight subjects
- Watch out for lens flare/ensure the lens is clean
- Use a reflector or fill flash to reflect light onto subjects
- Open doors and windows to let in daylight
- Turn off fluorescent lights
- Use a dark, simple, uncluttered background like a curtain to avoid visual distractions and to bring foreground colours to life

KEY MESSAGES

Our school has a strong tradition in the performing arts
Our extracurricular activities help students build confidence
Our students receive a well-rounded education
Live on stage (using props)

**KEY MESSAGES**

- Our school has a strong tradition in the creative and performing arts
- Our broad curriculum provides students a wide range of educational experiences
- Our drama programs help teach students confidence and self-discipline

**How to shoot this picture**

- Use a medium focal length lens (28mm to 85mm on a DSLR)
- Use a “medium” aperture (F5.6, F8 etc) to give enough depth of focus and maintain sharpness on subjects
- Use appropriate area e.g. stage, hall etc
- Use a reflector or fill flash to bounce light onto subjects
- Open doors, windows to let in daylight
- Turn off fluorescent lights
- Look for a dark, simple, uncluttered background like a curtain
- Using a picture frame around the students’ faces has made an otherwise ordinary photographic composition interesting
Mentoring

**KEY MESSAGES**

Our senior students are positive role models for younger students

Our students benefit from an effective mentoring program

**How to shoot this picture**

- Use a long/telephoto lens (T setting on your camera)
- Use “large” aperture (F2, F2.8, or F4, etc) to blur background
- Place students parallel with camera so both are in focus and have rear student lean forward slightly
- Choose a simple, uncluttered background
- Find extroverted students
- Try some shots with students looking off camera at same object
- Use a reflector to bounce light onto faces or turn on fill flash
How to shoot this picture

- Use a wide-angle lens (W setting on your camera)
- Use a “medium” aperture (F8, F11 etc) to give deep depth of focus and maintain sharpness on subjects
- Choose an appropriate location e.g. stage, hall
- Turn on stage lights and face them towards camera to backlight subjects
- Open doors and windows to let in daylight
- Turn off fluorescent lights
- Ensure all instruments are held/played correctly
- Using low camera angle and wide-angle lens creates a dynamic composition
- With wide-angle lenses place something of interest in foreground e.g. here it’s the instrument
- Use a dark, simple, uncluttered background e.g. curtain
How to shoot this picture

**Use a wide-angle lens for this shot** (W setting on your camera)

**Bear in mind that you have limited choice in setup or where sun is**

**Shoot up from below**

**Avoid potential underexposure by setting the exposure for vegetation in distance**

**Use fast shutter speed if you have that control on your camera or the runner on the dial**

**Don’t make students play an actual game — have the ball thrown up repeatedly in the same spot**
How to shoot this picture

Use a long/telephoto lens (T setting on your camera)

Use "large" aperture (F2, F2.8, or F4, etc) to blur background

Place students parallel with camera so both are in focus

Look for a simple, uncluttered background

Find extroverted students

Try some shots with students looking off camera at same object

Use a reflector to bounce light into faces or turn on fill flash

KEY MESSAGES

Our peer support program helps our students develop maturity and confidence

Our students care for each other

Our school is a happy and safe environment for your child
How to shoot this picture

- Use available light (stage lights) where possible
- Use long/telephoto lens (T setting on your camera)
- Use “large” aperture (F2, F2.8, or F4, etc) to blur background
- The exposure will be long and shot may suffer from camera shake so use a tripod if possible or brace camera against a wall or chair

Look at background and take advantage of banners, posters or even a plain black background

KEY MESSAGES

Our school offers opportunities for student leadership
We offer a diverse range of extracurricular activities
Our students are disciplined, informed and confident

Public speaking
How to shoot this picture

- Use a long/telephoto lens (T setting on your camera)
- Use a “large” aperture (F2, F2.8, F4, etc) to blur foreground and background
- Turn off fluorescent lights
- Set shot up near a window
- Use a reflector or flash to bounce light into face
- Use appropriate props e.g. Bunsen burner, test tubes
- Have subjects’ faces parallel to camera so all are in focus
- Look for a simple, uncluttered background
- Place other students in background but not looking at camera
- Ensure appropriate safety equipment is worn
- Have happy, smiling, interested faces

Set up shot near window to gain maximum natural light

Have subjects’ faces parallel to camera so all are in focus, place other students in background but not looking at camera

KEY MESSAGES

- Our school delivers strong science programs
- Our students are engaged and active learners
- Our teachers are highly qualified and skilled
How to shoot this picture

- Use a long/telephoto lens (T setting on your camera)
- Use “large” aperture (F2, F2.8, or F4, etc) to blur background
- Available light is hitting students in background
- The main focus is on students in foreground

Foreground students are engaged with camera as if they have been working together and have been asked to look up for a moment giving the illusion of an animated shot.

Available light is hitting students in background

Senior students

KEY MESSAGES

- Our school promotes a love of learning
- We promote cooperative learning
- Our students are engaged in their learning
- Our students are confident and well-prepared for life after school
How to shoot this picture

If you need to set up a sport shot then include teacher instructing students rather than having students line up on their own.

Use a wide-angle lens (W setting on your camera)

Use “small” aperture (F8, F11, or F16, etc) to keep subjects in focus

Keep background plain as a contrast to foreground action

Have light coming from behind subjects and use fill flash or reflector

KEY MESSAGES

We promote a healthy lifestyle

We offer a diverse choice of sporting activities

We have highly qualified specialist teachers
Uniform

KEY MESSAGES

Our students take pride in themselves and their school

Our students are capable and well-prepared to take their place as productive citizens

Our school nurtures responsible citizens of the future

How to shoot this picture

Use tree as a prop

Have sun coming from behind to throw light on subjects’ hair and also to stop them from squinting

Use “large” aperture (F2, F2.8, or F4, etc) to blur background

Engage students with camera or have them talking to each other

Use a long/telephoto lens (T setting on your camera) to focus on faces and throw background out of focus
Uniform (informal pose)

**KEY MESSAGES**

Our students take pride in themselves and their school

We nurture responsible citizens of the future

Our students are disciplined, confident and ready to take their place in society

We celebrate our diverse community

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**How to shoot this picture**

Select 2 or 3 students neat and tidy in school uniform

Select a location with non-distracting background and, as for portraits, have light coming from behind students’ heads

Use a reflector to bounce light towards their faces, but off to side to eliminate squinting

Use a long/telephoto lens (T setting on your camera)

Use “large” aperture (F2, F2.8, or F4, etc) to blur background

Have students lean in a relaxed fashion

Ask students to smile at camera and be engaged
Vocational Education & Training (hospitality)

KEY MESSAGES
- Our school provides choice through a broad curriculum
- Our students leave school well prepared to take their place in the workforce
- Our students have access to specialised facilities and equipment
- Our students enjoy learning

How to shoot this picture

Create visual interest by contrasting colourful foodstuffs or other items against white uniforms

Make sure that uniforms are being worn correctly with no items missing

Use a long/telephoto lens (T setting on your camera) so student in foreground is in focus while keeping background students out of focus

Use "large" aperture (F2, F2.8, or F4, etc) to blur background

Use a flash on and off camera to give the same effect as available light coming through window

The smiles on faces of students really make this shot
How to shoot this picture

- Use a medium telephoto lens (T setting on your camera)
- Use a “medium” aperture (F5.6, F8, etc) to blur foreground and background
- Use a reflector or flash to bounce light onto face
- Use props/tools that are appropriate for the job
- Look for a simple, uncluttered background related to job
- Ensure appropriate safety equipment is worn
- Have subjects’ faces close together and parallel to camera so both are in focus

KEY MESSAGES

We offer our students a range of courses that lead to post school employment.

Our diverse curriculum gives our students great subject choice.
How to shoot this picture

- Use a long/telephoto lens (T setting on your camera) to throw background out of focus
- Use "large" aperture (F2, F2.8, or F4, etc) to blur background
- Set up scene with a colourful background
- Use available light with a fill bouncing off canvas
- If using props in foreground be aware that some cameras may find it difficult not to focus on those props

KEY MESSAGES

- Our school has a focus on the creative arts
- We offer a broad curriculum that ensures a well-rounded education for our students
- We have highly skilled specialist teachers