

living^{the}graylife

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BEGINNER BLOGGER: PHOTOGRAPHY

A LOOK AT WHY LIGHTING IS KEY,
CAMERA QUALITY DOESN'T MATTER,
BACKDROPS ARE ESSENTIAL,
AND HOW PRACTICE MAKES PERFECT

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BEGINNER BLOGGER: PHOTOGRAPHY

A PART OF THE [BEGINNER BLOGGER SERIES](#)

OVERVIEW & PURPOSE

Welcome to the one way to dramatically improve your blog. Photography. If you're struggling to figure out where to start when it comes to improving your blog, photography is the answer.

Chances are when a reader visits your site, they're not going to scroll through a post taking in each and every word. They're going to scroll through rather quickly, glancing at your pictures, and maybe if one image catches their eye, they'll read the text surrounding that picture. That's just the reality of things. But, knowing that can really help you improve your blog!

You don't have to have a degree in photography, have the best camera, or even have some expensive set-up. All you need is a camera, a window, a computer, and a basic understanding of how photography kind of works (although that also comes from experience)!

What do you feel like you're struggling with when it comes to your photography? Lighting? Staging? Not knowing where to even begin?

List some bloggers who you admire in the photography department?

Why do you think your photography isn't as good as it could be?

THE ESSENTIALS

My photography essentials:

- **A camera** that I'm comfortable using
- **White foam core**
- **A bright window**
- **Editing software**

Additional items:

- **Tripod**
- **Remote shutter**

See, you don't need some crazy expensive setup to take blog pictures. As long as the photos turn out well, who has to know what it took to get them!

LIGHTING

Want that clean, crisp white background that you see on so many blogs? It's all achieved by lighting (that and understanding your camera)! Lighting can turn blah into fab in just a matter of minutes, and when it comes to blogging, beautiful pictures are exactly what you're after.

Find a nice bright window or a covered porch and you'll be on your way to better blog photography in no time! If you don't have a window that lets in a decent amount of light, there's always the option of the great outdoors. Walk around your yard or campus and find a few places where the lighting is on point. Just make sure you're not shooting in direct sunlight because harsh shadows aren't your friend in blog photography. If you are shooting outdoors, overcast days are a great asset! The clouds act like a natural diffuser, creating smooth lines and no harsh shadows.

If you're still struggling with the lighting not being exactly bright enough, I highly suggest investing in a \$1 piece of white foam core from Dollar Tree or even a

reflector set from Amazon. They both achieve the same results: bouncing light back onto your setup to provide more light. If you do have a DSLR or a camera that will shoot in manual mode, adjusting the shutter speed to something really slow will also help brighten up your photos. I use low shutter speeds to make all of my flat lays and staged pictures nice and bright. But do make sure that if you're using a speed lower than 1/60th of a second to have a tripod and remote shutter, otherwise you risk blurry photos because of camera shake.

CAMERA

Do not think you need to go out and buy the latest and greatest camera to have the best blog pictures. Even if you have the Canon 5D Mark iii, you can still produce some pretty crappy pictures. In today's world where a cell phone camera is equivalent to the quality of a point-and-shoot and some DSLRs, there's no reason you can't use your cell phone.

Some bloggers solely shoot on their phones or a point-and-shoot. Some swear by their DSLR. But why? The photographers who swear by one camera, whether that be a phone or a DSLR, have become comfortable with their equipment. They know what settings it takes to get the shot they want. They know how to use their camera. If you're really struggling with getting the shot you want, focus on learning all you can about your camera. If you shooting on a phone, do some research on apps that may allow you to adjust more settings. Shooting on a DSLR? Get comfortable in manual mode.

Even if you're not using a DSLR, understand shutter speed, ISO, and aperture. Those three components are what you'll use to get those shots you want. They control how bright an image is, how crisp the image is, and countless other things. All in all, learn all that you can about your camera.

THE BACKGROUND & BACKDROP

A lot of beginners focus on what they're trying to photograph. They're only focused on trying to get that bottle of nail polish, box of tea, or beautiful canvas in

focus and looking great -- they're not thinking about what's in the background. In blog photography, the background of your picture gives context to whatever you're photographing. It sets the mood. It sets the scene.

Say you're taking a picture of fresh baked cookies. That photo would look a lot better if it was taken on top of the stove or with the mixer behind it than it would if you took it outside and set them in the middle of your yard and started snapping away. Here are some ways you could improve your cookie photography: (this is just an example)

- Taking the photo from above, leave them on the cookie sheet and include the spatula used to scrape the bowl (gives context on how you made them)
- Leave some on the cookie sheet and have a few plated up
- Create a picnic scene outside with a cozy blanket and adorable plate

If you're working on some flat lays for either an Instagram post or a blog cover photo or whatever you're using it for, sometimes you find the need for additional props. That bottle of face wash doesn't look great on it's own, but by adding a washcloth and maybe a toothbrush to the picture, it'll give it more context. Bloggers are known to collect and hoard photo props and we're always on the lookout for a great new addition to our stash. Looking to grow your blog photo prop stash? Check out:

- Dollar Tree
 - The arts & crafts section is ah-maz-ing and everything's a dollar so you really can't go wrong.
 - Some of their stuff is the exact same quality as Target's Dollar Spot and it's usually cheaper
- Target's Dollar Spot
 - A little more expensive, but all of their stuff goes together. The colors, the aesthetic, the shapes. Everything goes.

Mixing your blog photo props with a relevant backdrop will tie everything together. Blankets, porches, floors, marble counters, white foam core, brown paper bags, you name it, and as long as the backdrop compliments the props and the main focus, your photos will be on point. After all, readers get the most from the images on your blog!

EDITING & SAVING

As you read from the blog post, you know that you don't need Photoshop or another expensive editing software. There's so much you can do with the free software available to you. If you still want to try something more along the lines of Photoshop, check out GIMP. It's a free, open-source photo editing software that's super similar to Photoshop and a ton of bloggers love it!

Properly saving your images isn't a topic covered by most bloggers, but it's something that's super important for your blogging future. Better to be prepared for the unexpected in the future than to be kicking yourself because things didn't go as planned. Ok so enough about how important saving is, and let's just get on with it. If there's anything I learned from my recent blog re-brand and theme upgrade is that saving your pictures slightly larger than you think they should be is better than saving them way too small and having them be pixelated. Here are my guidelines for blog pictures:

- Blog images: max width of 1300px but no smaller than 1000px
- Blog cover images: 1300px wide no matter what

By keeping my images at a slightly larger size, they look great at any size. After all, it's much easier to resize an image to be smaller than try to enlarge it. When in doubt, save larger than you think.

IN A RUSH?

There's never not a time in a blogger's career when they've had a crazy week and just haven't had time to snap a picture for that week's post. In those times of panic and when you think your stockpile of photos has failed you, fear not! There are options!

My absolute favorite free picture website is unsplash.com. Unsplash has hundreds of high-quality photos for free. You can use them however you want. You can alter them, add text, add filters, do whatever you want. And it's free.