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Give Photography: Taking successful pictures at night 5/5 ?

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Whether you are shooting in urban or rural settings or elsewhere, night time photography always has something magical to offer!

Slow shutter speeds and a bit of practice are the best recipe for successful pictures.

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1. Working with slow shutter speeds

Given the low light levels involved with night time photography, your camera's sensor will select shutter speeds that are often slower than 1/60s. But, with a less steady shot, you are likely to end up with blurred pictures.

- Avoid increasing ISO sensitivity to achieve higher shutter speeds: the image soon degrades beyond ISO 400 (except with newer high-end SLRs).
- Are you a dab hand at free hand photography? Enable the image stabiliser: it will work up to 1/15s.
- Exposure times for night time shots should not exceed 30 seconds.

You can steady your camera by placing it on top of your bag, a sturdy base or, better still, a tripod. When using a tripod, be careful of sudden bursts of wind: they will rock your camera. Above all, remember to switch off the image stabiliser.

Pro tip: watch out for vibrations from the shutter release button, which can also cause blur! Avoid this by using your remote control. If you don't have a remote control, use shutter delay mode.

2. Underexposing

Whether you are working in A, S or M mode, remember to set a lower exposure as night scenes are often darker than a middle grey.

As a guide, here are the exposure times recommended for various subjects. Feel free to adapt these to suit the light conditions or distance from the subject in question: the nearer or brighter the subject is, the more you will need to lower the aperture or shutter speed.

Subject	Settings for ISO 100	Settings for 200 ISO
Close-up of the moon	1/250s at f/8	1/125s at f/8
Streets with street lighting	1/15s at f/2,8	1/15s at f/4
Subject lit by a fire light	1/4s at f/2,8	1/8s at f/2,8
Lit-up buildings	1/2s at f/2,8	1/2s at f/4
Fun fairs rides	1/8s at f/2,8	1/15s at f/2,8
Town or city at night	4s at f/2,8	2s at f/2,8
Landscape lit by a full moon	4 mn at f/4	2 mn at f/4

Beach or snowy landscape lit by a full moon

2 mn at f/4

1 mn at f/4

- What if your lens aperture won't go below f/2.8? Remember the reciprocity rule and use it to calculate the exposure (see the section on the basics of exposure)
- Never take a light reading directly from a light source as, except for bright lights, the rest of your scene will turn out black.

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All digital cameras have a built-in light meter or "exposure meter".

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