

Shoot Like the Pros: Part 1

Start Now!

by Dennis Power

Are you ready to win BIG prizes in **The Leader Magazine** photography contest? The tips presented here will improve your picture-taking, and increase your chances of winning one of over 50 prizes offered.

The Golden Rules

Photography is governed by three golden rules:

- Get close to your subject
- Hold your camera steady
- Use your flash.

I could almost finish this article right now with these words – they are *that* important. It sounds too simple, but these three points will improve the quality of your photos more than just about anything else you do.

Get Close to Your Subject

It's nice to see expressions on people's faces when we look at a photo. Sometimes the expressions "make" the whole photo. Get up close, without sticking your lens in someone's face, by using a zoom lens. Filling the frame with the subject is hard to convince people to do, but the results will amaze your audience.

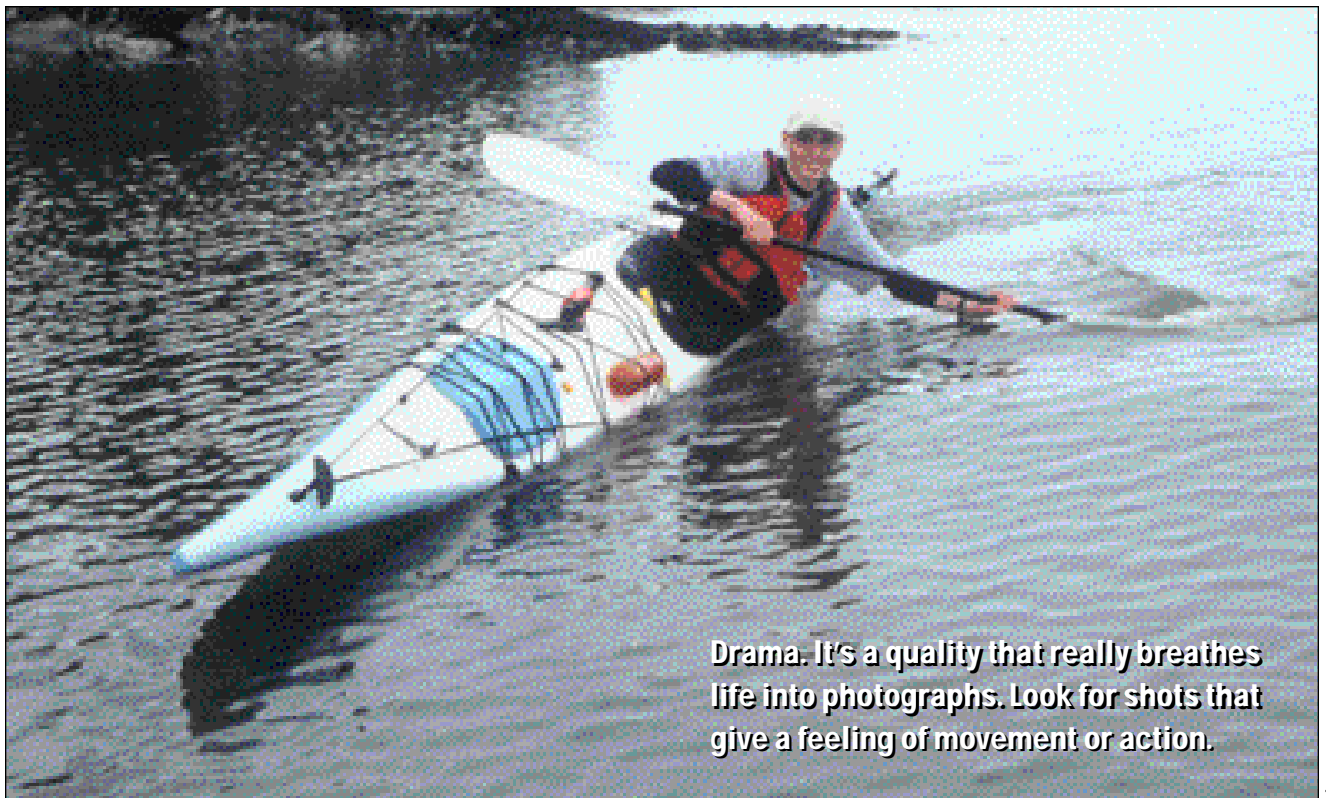
If your subjects get nervous when you close in, find someone or something to distract them. Using a point and shoot camera is less intimidating,

volumes have been written about how to capture the perfect moment on film. Some people find the skill and challenge completely escapes their abilities. But if you follow the tips below, the quality of your photography will improve dramatically.

and may be the answer. One camera that I have looks like a toy; few people are ever bothered by it. This has resulted in some really great shots.

Hold your Camera Steady

If you expect a clearly focused picture, you must hold the camera steady. This is vital. Most people push the shutter release as if they were firing a rocket launcher. When someone handles a camera in this manner, there's no hope for anything but a blurry picture.



Drama. It's a quality that really breathes life into photographs. Look for shots that give a feeling of movement or action.

Photos: Dennis Power

Here's the secret to producing clear photos: apply firm pressure with the pad of your finger. Keep a firm grip on the camera and push it against your face until you feel the bone under your eyebrow and nose. Don't push so hard that it hurts; just make it a little uncomfortable. When the camera fires, it should almost come as a surprise.

Is there a tree, door frame or some other object that you can lean against to help steady the shot? If yes, use it. Your shooting will really improve when you follow this advice.

Use a Flash

Especially on a sunny day, when you get close to a subject's face, use a flash to eliminate shadows. But don't get too close. Your flash unit may not allow you to get closer than a metre from your subject without overexposing the person (i.e. the flash will make the subject appear washed out).

Respect the Reluctant Subject

Not everyone likes to be photographed; that statement applies to kids too. If someone is reluctant to be included in a photograph, don't force the issue. Let them sit out.

If you're determined to get a particular person on film, talk with them about it. Ask how they would like to be portrayed, and take the photo on their terms. If they remain reluctant, respect their wishes, and exclude them. However, if you show them the impressive images that result from your photography, in the future they may ask you to include them.

What Type of Camera to Buy?

Whether you shoot digital or film images, your choice of camera depends on what you plan to do with the photos. Because I don't use my pictures on the Web, but do slide shows and displays instead, I almost always shoot film. Film cameras include disposable, point and shoot, and single lens reflex models. I've tried disposable cameras, and have usually been disappointed with the results. But, if this type of camera is your only practical option, any picture is better than none.

Point and shoot cameras in experienced hands can produce high quality photos. They are compact enough to keep in a pocket, and don't represent a huge loss if they're lost or damaged. Several companies manufacture splash- and dust-proof models that cost around \$120; these produce good results and will take lots of abuse.

My camera of choice is a single lens reflex model with a 28-105 variable zoom lens. While on the trail, I always have it ready in my hand. At camp it's either on the ground beside me, or in a large pocket.

Never Say "Cheese"

If you ask your subjects to say "Cheese" or anything else when you're taking their picture, you'll get a lot of fake smiles and open mouths. Instead, as the photographer, talk to your subjects while you're getting ready for the shot. Watch them closely, and at precisely the right moment, when everyone is smiling or has the perfect expression, take the shot. Be quick, but once more, don't slam down the shutter.

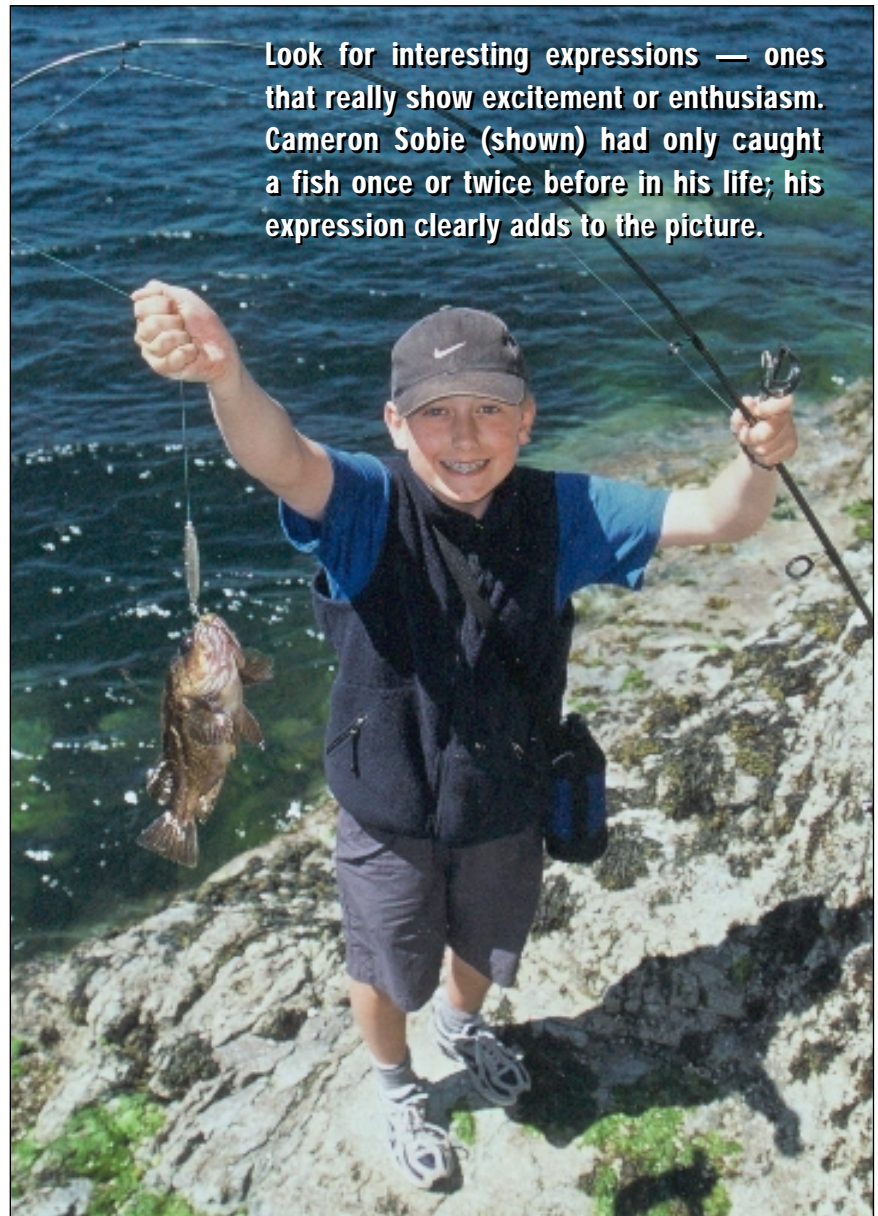
For larger groups, let them know when you're about to take the photo. This will relax them until the final countdown.

ENTER THE LEADER MAGAZINE'S PHOTO CONTEST

Now that you know the secret of successful photography, start shooting and enter pictures in the Leader Magazine Photo Contest. Everyone can enter as many photos as they wish, digital ones too. See the October Leader for details.

We're offering over 50 outstanding prizes, including a tent, backpack, stove, T-shirts, and more.

Send your photos to us no later than January 31, 2003. Good luck.



Look for interesting expressions — ones that really show excitement or enthusiasm. Cameron Sobie (shown) had only caught a fish once or twice before in his life; his expression clearly adds to the picture.

Watch the Background

Don't let a good picture be ruined by something unwanted in the background. As you're focusing or composing your shot, look past your subject to see what's there. If you don't like what you see, shift your position, or use an f-stop that will fade or blur the background. (Note: The lower the f-stop number, the more blurred the background will appear.)

Focus on the Eyes

For most portraits or close-up shots, the subject's eyes need to be perfectly focused or the picture won't look right. Sure, you might have the person's clothes well focused, but if the eyes are blurred, the image will not be satisfying for anyone.

For auto-focus cameras, focus on the eyes or face, then hold that focusing point, and recompose the shot before taking the picture.

Don't Always Shoot at Eye Level

When taking photos of Beavers and Cubs, get down on the ground at their level. Or, climb a tree to get a different perspective for a group shot. A little variety in angles will create more interest in your photos.

It's Not Quite Cheating

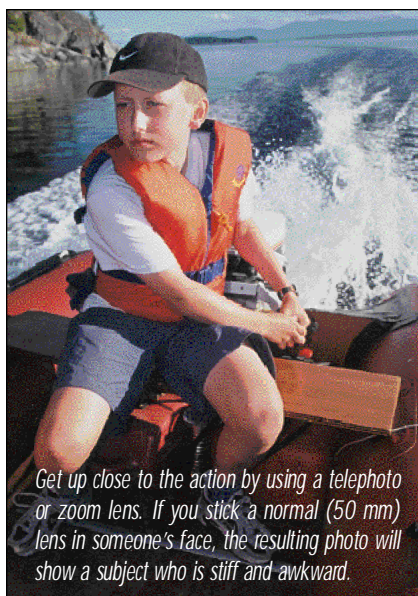
If you don't think you have a photographer's eye, or if you need inspiration, look through magazines to get some photo-taking ideas. When you see a picture that really strikes you as impressive, tear it out or make a sketch, and use it as a guide for composing pictures of your own.

Special Thanks to Bob Craig

Have you noticed that Scouts Canada's web site design has changed since the summer?

While we've got a new look, much of the content can be attributed to Bob Craig of London, Ontario. A dedicated and committed volunteer, Bob served as webmaster for our national web site for the past six years.

Thank you Bob for your hard work and conscientious service.



Get up close to the action by using a telephoto or zoom lens. If you stick a normal (50 mm) lens in someone's face, the resulting photo will show a subject who is stiff and awkward.

Use Lots of Film

If you can afford it, use lots of film. The more you shoot, the more you'll learn. Analyze each photo when you get a roll back from the developer, and try to improve on the composition.

Look for a good photo shop near your home, and buy film with pre-paid developing. My film of choice is readily available almost everywhere for about \$7 per roll of 24 exposures. If I include photo finishing, the entire package costs \$11 per roll; and the store does excellent work. When I purchase three rolls, I get a discount of \$1 per roll.

If you normally buy the cheapest film and have it developed at bargain-basement prices, why not consider moving up? You may notice a big quality difference.

Pick a Photo Shop

If you have the opportunity, pick a good photo shop and stick with it. After a while you may notice that regular customers get treated a little better.

When I pick up photos I look at them right away, and if nobody is waiting in the store, I'll show the staff the ones I like best. I always thank them for the effort they've put into making my pictures beautiful. This might sound corny, but the staff love to see my shots and get my feedback. Spend time developing this relationship, and you're sure to benefit from it.

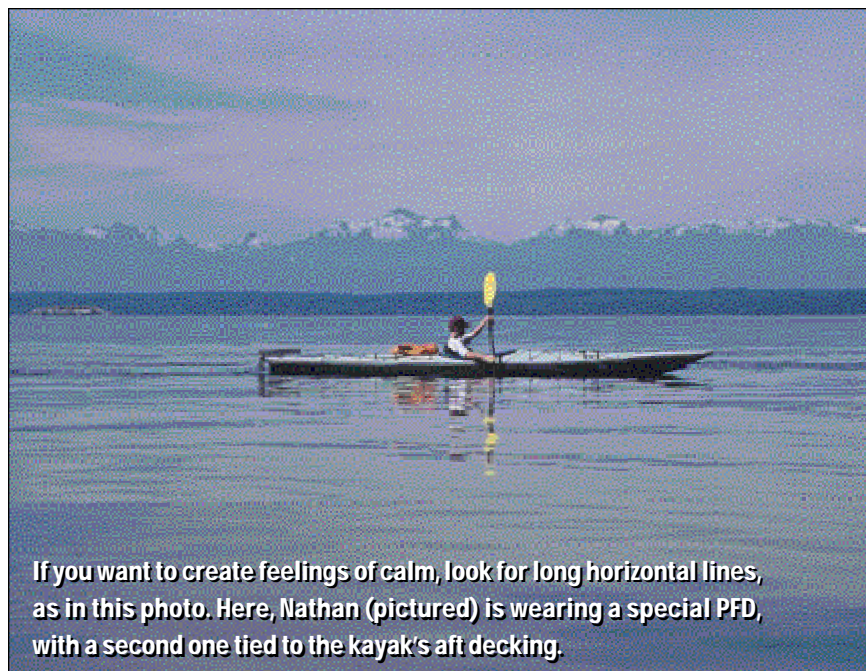
Prints or Slides?

On a regular (short) outing I shoot only prints, however, on a long trip I'll bring an extra camera and shoot some slides as well. It's easy enough to have a few prints made into slides over the course of a year, but making lots of prints from slides gets expensive – as high as \$1.50 a print.

I usually have glossy prints made because they look sharper than a "mat" finish, and scan better.

Take every opportunity to practise these shooting techniques; you'll be surprised how dramatically your photographs will improve. See next month's **Leader** for Part 2. Happy shooting! ^

— Dennis Power lives and Scouts in Victoria, BC. His photographic images have won several prizes in the *Leader Magazine* photo contest.



If you want to create feelings of calm, look for long horizontal lines, as in this photo. Here, Nathan (pictured) is wearing a special PFD, with a second one tied to the kayak's aft decking.