

NIGHT PHOTOGRAPHY

EQUIPMENT

Camera – preferably one with adjustable exposures
Fairly fast film, such as ISO 200 or 400
Tripod
Cable release or self timer
Flashlight
Extra camera batteries

GETTING STARTED

1. Tripod. It is essential to hold the camera steady unless trying for an intentionally blurred special effect. Therefore, use a tripod or sit the camera on a solid object. Taking the photo with a cable release, or using the self timer, also helps to keep the camera steady.

2. Film. Very fast film is usually not necessary, unless you are trying to record details of a building, for example. A better way to record building details is to take the photo at dusk when there is still enough light to see the building, but it is dark enough for lights to show up well. I generally use whatever film I already have in my camera.

3. Camera. A camera in which you can select your own settings works best. Point and shoot cameras will have uncertain results. Most select their own exposures, and many will force a flash to go off. Shut off the flash if possible. All you can do with a point and shoot is try it and see what happens.

4. Exposure. Set your camera on B. Suggested exposures for cameras capable of manual settings are included on the attached chart. Also, try the camera on automatic and see what happens.

A wide range of exposures will get good results, so it is best to experiment, record the exposure used, and see what you like best.

Try to avoid very long exposures, since this can cause a shift in color of the film. For those who are interested in the technical aspects, this is called “reciprocity failure.” Kodak film tends to turn purple, and Fuji green.

5. Compose your picture and shoot!

SPECIAL TECHNIQUES

1. Flash at night. Try mixing flash with your normal exposure for lights. Use the flash to illuminate an interesting foreground object.

2. Zooming. If you have a zoom lens, zoom during a long exposure. This creates streaks instead of stationary lights to create an abstract photo.

3. Panning. “Pan” the camera during a long exposure. That is, move the camera steadily in one chosen direction. This creates an intentional blur of the lights for an abstract photo.

4. Slide Sandwiches. Interesting images can be made by sandwiching slides together as listed below. This can be done for any kind of photography, not just night photos.

a. Select two slides which would go well together to make a single image. Example: moons over landscapes or buildings, etc. If the original slide is a little bit overexposed, it sandwiches better in most cases. The best time to take a picture of the moon for a sandwich is when the sky is blue and you can see the moon in the daytime. If you take a moon shot at night, obviously the sky would be too dark and the second image would not show. Don't take too long an exposure on moons or they become elongated. Other things that make good sandwiches are textures such as wood or paint, different colored filters, flower petal close-ups, clouds, and a variety of other things. Use your imagination!

b. Select the slide mount size by using the mask selector. (see slide Erie masks and heat seal mounts)

c. Cut off the corner of a slide mount and pull it apart. Take the film out and put it together with a second piece of film into another mount. Arrange the two slides emulsion to emulsion or you may have difficulty in projecting both on the screen at only one focus setting. I use a small piece of scotch tape to secure the film in the mount.

d. Heat seal the slide by ironing around the cardboard mount carefully with a hot iron (about a "wool" setting). Or use slide mounting equipment which I've demonstrated.

5. Filters can make interesting night images. Some I've used are the cross-star, rayburst, red or other colors, and multi-image.

6. Instant fog can be obtained by breathing on the lens – this can also make interesting night pictures.

7. Movement of cars (especially tail lights) can add to your pictures.

8. Reflections (in water, buildings, pottery, etc.) also make nice night images.

9. Star Trails. If you have a camera that will operate without the batteries, you can take them out to avoid having a light come on in the viewfinder that might ruin your photo. Light the foreground with artificial light and then leave the camera open for 1-10 hours. The longer the exposure, the longer the star trails. The sky won't be black, but will contain star trails to fill in an otherwise blank part of the photograph. Exposures this long can only be attempted near a new moon to avoid overexposure and to give good contrast between the sky and the star trails. Apertures are generally f/5.6 to f/2.8 for best results. If you do not have an interesting foreground and want a picture of only the sky and star trails, forget the artificial light. It's a good idea to compose your picture while it is still light, then take the lens cap off and shoot once it gets dark.

The above information applies to print film as well as slide film, except sandwiches. However, two photos can be combined to make a composite photo on some computer imaging programs.