

MONTH ONE
THE WEDDING SCHOOL

STARTUP : WEDDINGS



CAMERA, LENS, AND FLASH BASICS

A LETTER FROM SUSAN

Welcome to wedding photography!

I hope you love this amazing career path as much as I do. I've been a professional wedding photographer for over fifteen years, and would never change a single thing about what I do for a living.

I am so honored to help you navigate your first year as a wedding photographer. Whether you're picking up a camera for the first time, transitioning to weddings from some other type of photography, or have been shooting weddings for a while and are finally ready to move into making this a career - welcome!

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STARTUP : WEDDINGS

BY THE MONTH:

1. Photo 101, camera, lens, and flash basics
2. The wedding day : how to prepare
3. The wedding day : details and getting ready
4. The wedding day : ceremonies
5. The wedding day : family formals and bridal party
6. The wedding day : portraits of the couple
7. The wedding day : the reception
8. Post-wedding workflow
9. Marketing : Website and online presence
10. Marketing : Social media
11. Sales : Creating a price list
12. Sales : Booking the client





MONTH ONE : CAMERA, LENS, AND FLASH BASICS

GEAR REQUIREMENTS

CAMERA BODIES

- One reliable camera body
- One backup body (can rent when needed)

LENSES

- 24-70mm or equivalent
- 70-200mm of equivalent
- Macro lens (eventually)
- 35mm or 28mm primes (eventually)
- 85mm f/1.4 or f/1.2 (eventually)

SPEEDLIGHTS

- One reliable speedlight
- Eventually add a second
- Can rent others as backups when needed

VIDEO LIGHTS

- One reliable video light such as the Stella Pro
- Also consider the Ice Light
- Can rent others as backups when needed





**GET TO KNOW YOUR GEAR INSIDE
AND OUT. THE ONLY WAY TO DO
THAT IS THROUGH EXPERIENCE
AND PRACTICE.**

- SUSAN STRIPLING



STEP ONE : SHUTTER SPEED

You're going to want to consider your shutter speed as you shoot weddings. No matter what mode you're shooting in, you need to make sure of a few crucial things.

Make sure that your shutter speed is fast enough that you don't get camera shake. I have posted some suggested shutter speeds on the right of this page. That is the minimum shutter speed I am comfortable working with in those given conditions and with those lenses.

You also want to make sure that your shutter speed is fast enough to freeze the movement of your subjects. The shutter speeds listed to the right will also allow you to do that.

But don't take my word for it!

ACTION ITEM!

Take each of your lenses and test them with a variety of settings. Hand-hold the lenses at a slow shutter speed, and gradually increase the shutter speed until you find the place where you're comfortable hand-holding at each focal length. Do the same with a moving subject - how fast do you need to be with each lens to freeze motion?

1/80

Macro
photography

1/160

Lenses under
105mm

1/320

Lenses above
105mm



STEP TWO : F/STOP (APERTURE)

The second thing you'll consider when taking a picture is your f/stop, also known as your aperture.

While your lens might have the capability to shoot at a f/stop such as f/1.4, that might not be the best choice for your given situation.

I've included some of my go-to f/stop decisions to the right of this page to give you a good head start!

You want to be careful when shooting people, especially at weddings. While f/1.4 might be a great choice for a bridal portrait, it's not the best choice for a large family group. While f/16 might be perfect when shooting a ring with a macro lens, it might not be the right choice for photographing a wedding couple together.

ACTION ITEM!

Take each of your lenses and test them with a variety of settings. Try shooting at f/2.8, f/3.5, f/4, f/5.6, and so forth. Look at how each image changes. Look at what is in focus and what isn't when you make each change. Practice finding the right f/stop to get a big group in focus.

Practice finding the right f/stop to shoot two people together, side by side. The more you practice, the more you'll start to learn your preferences!

f/9-f/16

Macro
photography,
rings and small
details

f/1.4-f/4

Moments
Receptions
Prep coverage
Ceremonies
Portraits

f/4-f/11

Large formal
groups



STEP THREE : ISO

To explain it as simple as possible, ISO is how sensitive your camera is to the light in the environment you're in. The lower your ISO, the less sensitive your camera is to the light level in your room. A higher ISO makes your camera more sensitive.

In bright spaces, your ISO can be very low. In dark rooms, your ISO will be higher. With a higher ISO comes grain in the images, the more noticeable grain occurring when your ISO becomes very high.

ACTION ITEM!

Practice with your ISO! Work on combining your ISO, shutter speed, and f/stop into one great exposure. Test your camera in bright light and observe what ISO's work best. Test your camera in dim and dark lighting conditions, and observe what happens as your ISO rises. Where are you most comfortable? What ISO's do you find yourself gravitating towards? When does the noise and grain start to bother you? Where are your limits?

100

Outside, very bright natural light

400-1600

Dark getting-ready rooms, portraits outside close to nighttime

800-10,000

Dark ceremony locations, very dark getting-ready locations, dark receptions

WHERE TO BEGIN WITH SPEEDLIGHTS

A woman in a white wedding dress stands in profile by a window with red curtains. She is looking down at her dress. The scene is dimly lit, with light coming from the window.

Where do you even start when shooting while using a speedlight?

There are so many lessons on off-camera flash, using multiple flashes, and more. We're not going to start there!

I want you to start by simply putting your speedlight on TTL and putting it on your camera.

Make sure your camera is entirely in manual, and experiment with your settings.

Slower shutter speeds will allow in more ambient light, but might not freeze movement.

Faster speeds might freeze movement, but may obliterate all ambient light.

ACTION ITEM!

Practice with your speedlight on your camera. Lower your shutter speed in a dark room and work on capturing a moving subject. How low can your shutter speed go before you start to get motion blur?

How fast can your shutter speed go before you lose the ambient light in the room?

SAMPLE SETTINGS TO TEST

Super dark reception space 1/40 sec, f/4.0, ISO 1600, TTL flash

Slightly brighter reception space 1/40 sec, f/4.0, ISO 800, TTL flash

Indoor room, midday, medium light level 1/125 sec, f/4.0, ISO 400, TTL flash

Start with these settings and see what works best for you. You might have to increase your shutter speed to freeze movement. You might have to decrease your shutter speed to let in ambient light. You might need to raise or lower your ISO to properly balance the light in the image. Start with these settings as a baseline, and adjust as needed. Practice in all kinds of lighting scenarios and work on being able to freeze movement while preserving the ambient light. Practice, practice, and practice some more!



VIDEO LIGHT

A CONTINUOUS LIGHT SOURCE



Video lights are a great way to supplement ambient light, or use as a main light for a portrait or detail shot.

There are many different video lights out there, two popular ones being the Stella Pro and the Ice Light.

If you aren't sure what video light would fit your needs best, I'd suggest visit a camera shop and checking them out.

You can also rent them if you're like to try them on your own time.

ACTION ITEM!

Practice with your video light in different situations. Move it in front of your subject, to the side of your subject, and behind your subject. Practice with different settings on your camera (shutter speed, f/stop, and ISO) until you're comfortable with your video light in any given condition. Remember, practice makes perfect so try and try again until you're comfortable!



**DON'T BE DAUNTED BY THE
TECHNICAL ASPECTS OF
SHOOTING. PRACTICE AND
EXPERIENCE WILL HELP MAKE THIS
SECOND NATURE!**

- SUSAN STRIPLING



LESSON ONE

LENS PRACTICE : FOCAL LENGTH

Every focal length affects the story that you tell. A wide angle perspective is quite different from the perspective at 200mm.

Practice storytelling with each lens that you own. Practice at each focal length. How does the focal length affect the background of your image? How does it affect the look of your subject? How does it change the overall look of your image?

Shoot with a wide angle lens, then shoot the same scene with a longer lens. Look at how each image is different. Don't technically overanalyze it, just look. You'll begin to establish your own opinions about what focal length helps tell what story, and what you prefer.

Don't worry if this doesn't come naturally right away. It will - I promise!



LESSON TWO

LENS PRACTICE: APERTURE CHOICES

Your f/stop also affects the story that you are trying to tell.

Go through each of your lenses and experiment with your f/stop. What does an image look like at f/2.8? How does that affect the look of your background and subject? Change to f/4.5, f/8, f/11. Try every f/stop in between and beyond. Look at how it changes the final image.

Combine that with lesson one, and experiment with f/stop choices at different focal lengths. Understanding the look of these combinations is crucial to becoming a well-rounded photographer.

Once you can see these decisions in your head without having to test them in real time, you'll be able to think creatively and not about your settings each time you take a picture!



**THIS CAN BE OVERWHELMING -
BUT THIS IS JUST MONTH ONE!
STAY TUNED FOR MUCH, MUCH
MORE!**

- SUSAN STRIPLING