



Arlington Camera

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Pet Photography

by Margaret Bryant

I think every pet owner likes to take photographs of their pet. With the advent of good, affordable digital cameras, taking good pictures of your pet is now within most everyone's reach. While my tips are more oriented to photographing dogs and cats, the concepts can be applied to most any animal.

I've divided my tips into two sections. The first section is all non-technical tips. You don't have to know anything about f-stops or shutter speeds to understand the information. The second section is a tiny bit more technical covering tips for your camera set up and file sizes of the completed image.



Non-Tech Tips

- If your dog is an active dog, tire him/her out before attempting to take pictures. After tiring them out, bring them into a cool area to cool them off for a short while. This way their tongues aren't hanging out so much when you take pictures.
- Make sure your dog is hungry. Most dogs will work more for treats when they are hungry. I know my dogs will do just about anything for a treat!
- Practice obedience with your dog prior to trying to photograph him. A dog that will reliably sit or lie down is a lot less frustrating.
- If you can find someone to help you get the dog's or cat's attention, even better. For dogs squeaky toys can work, for cats use cat teasers.
- If you are photographing a small dog or cat, put them on a grooming table or other elevated flat area. They are less likely to walk off as easily (especially dogs).
- Fill the frame. You don't want the dog or cat to be a little blob in the picture, get close! Fill the viewfinder with your pet.
- Don't look down on the cat or dog. Photograph at the same level they are.
- Be sure there are no distracting backgrounds or other distracting elements in your picture. You want the focus of your picture to be your pet. More later on how that may be done.
- Show the unique features of the animal. If your dog had a great face, get in really close. Maybe your cat has beautiful eyes. Get in even closer. No one said you had to show the cat's whole face. Sometimes the eyes are enough. Be creative!
- Give the animal a sense of scale especially if the dog or cat is especially large or small. The sense of scale could be having a person in the picture or any object of a known size. Shoes are usually a good prop.
- If your dog or cat is black, it is much more difficult to photograph them. I know you already knew that!:-) Most dogs and cats have fur that has shiny highlights. You just need to light up the fur. With dogs, the easiest way to do that is to take them outdoors in the sunlight. For cats, the easiest way is to get them into some direct window light.
- Try to prevent red eye/green eye. In humans, when a flash is used it reflects off the retina and produces

“red eye”. With many animals the retina has a reflective layer behind it called the tapetum lucidum. This helps them see better at night. It is that reflective layer that produces “green eye” in dogs and cats. You usually see red eye/green eye when your flash is on the same plane as your camera lens. To avoid getting red eye/green eye, move your flash away from your camera lens. If you are using a point and shoot and that is not possible, turn off the flash and take the animal outside or use window light.

- The most important tip of all is focus!! The eyes of the animal MUST be in focus. We as humans really identify with eyes. So even if the dog’s nose is out of focus, as long as the eyes are in focus, you are okay. Sometimes people will be creative with focus and put the eyes out of focus. If you do that, do it intentionally, to tell a different story with your picture than you might ordinarily tell.

Technical Tips

- White balance- Make sure you are using the correct white balance for the situation. You don’t have to shoot on “auto”, choose cloudy for an overcast day and sunny for shooting in full sun. If you want to get creative, you can try setting the white balance to the “wrong” white balance and see what it looks like.
- Make sure your lens is not zoomed out so it is too wide angle. Wide angle lenses will distort the subject, so make sure your lens is not too wide unless that is the look that you want.
- Make sure your camera is set up for the proper resolution. I would recommend at the very least, a medium or high resolution jpeg. If you really want high quality you can shoot raw.
- Show detail in the highlights and shadow areas. You do this by making sure the animal is properly lit.
- If your camera has the ability, use your f-stop, shutter speed and ISO to your advantage.
 - Use a small number f-stop to blur the background. Set your camera on aperture priority. When you change the f-stop, the shutter speed will change. Change the f-stop to the smallest number you can without having the shutter open too long. You want to blur the background, not the subject. J
 - If you want to stop motion, you can use shutter priority to select your shutter speed to stop the motion. You can also select a longer shutter speed to blur the motion if you want something more artistic.
 - Use as low an ISO as you can to keep the noise level down.
- When you are all done shooting, you’ll want to do something with the pictures. You may want to save them for your own online album, you may want to print them out, or you may want to email them to your friends and family. To do that, you’ll want to make sure they are the proper file size for the particular application.
 - If the image is going on the web, resize it for 72 ppi and the correct pixel width Example- a photo that is 2”x3” at 72 ppi is about 144 px wide and 216 px tall and has a file size of about 32k (medium JPG)
 - If the image is for print, resize it for 300 ppi and the correct pixel width Example- a photo that is 2”x3” at 300 ppi is 600 px wide and 900 px tall and has a file size of about 65k (medium JPG)
 - If you are going to be emailing the image, know what the recipient might do with it. Most of the time they will just be viewing it so the web size above, is just right. If they will be printing it out, the print size above is the correct choice. Don’t assume the recipient will be printing all the images. I go crazy when people send me these huge files when they just want to show me a little picture. No need to send huge files if the recipient won’t be printing them out.
- Tools to Use
 - Cameras with adjustable f stop and shutter speed
 - The sun or other suitable light
 - Free photo editing software (Google search) <http://www.digicamhelp.com/processing-photos/basic-editing/free-software.php>

I hope this has helped you to better understand how you can get better photos of your animals. So go out there, be creative and have fun photographing your pets!

Margaret Bryant

is an award winning photographer specializing in dog photography. Her portraiture is in color or classic black and white revealing the personality of the dog and the relationship they have with their humans. Margaret is a member of several professional photography organizations including the Professional Photographers of America (PPA), Texas PPA, Dallas PPA, WPPA and the American Society of Media Photographer (ASMP). To learn more about Margaret, please visit her website at www.bryantdogphotography.com