

theframework
CREATIVE LEARNING FOR INTENTIONAL PHOTOGRAPHERS

A FIELD GUIDE

5 Questions Before Every Photograph

Photography is more than a photograph.

www.photographyismore.com

START HERE

Before you raise the camera.

The camera doesn't make the photograph. You do — in the half-second before you ever touch the shutter.

Most photographers shoot on reflex. Something catches the eye, the camera comes up, and the photograph happens to them. The ones who grow are the ones who slow down and decide.

These five questions are a pause button. Ask them in the field — out loud if you have to — until they become instinct. They work the same whether you're holding a phone or a view camera, because none of them are about gear. They're about seeing.

TRY THIS

Read it once. Then go make something on purpose.

01

QUESTION ONE

Why this?

What actually stopped you? Name it in a single word: the light, a gesture, a color, a line, a feeling. If you can't name what pulled you in, you don't have a photograph yet — you have a reflex.

Find the one thing. Then build the entire frame around protecting it.

TRY THIS

Say the reason out loud before you shoot. If it sounds thin, keep looking.

02

QUESTION TWO

What's the light doing?

Light is your real subject. Read its direction — where are the shadows falling? Read its quality — hard and sharp, or soft and open? Read its color — warm, cool, or neutral?

The same scene is a different photograph at 7 a.m. and at noon. Don't fight the light you have. Put your subject where it does the most work.

TRY THIS

Before composing, find the shadows. They'll tell you where to stand.

03

QUESTION THREE

Where's the eye going?

A photograph leads a viewer's eye along a path. Trace yours: where does it land first, and where does it travel next? Lines, contrast, focus, and faces all pull attention.

If the eye wanders off the edge or snags on clutter, the photograph leaks. Lead it on purpose.

TRY THIS

Glance at the frame for one second, then look away. Where did your eye go? That's your subject — for better or worse.

04

QUESTION FOUR

What do I leave out?

A frame is defined by its edges. Most weak photographs aren't missing something — they're carrying too much. Strong work is subtraction: step closer, change the angle, wait for the distraction to leave.

Ask what every element is doing. If it isn't serving the photograph, it's working against it.

TRY THIS

Walk the four edges of your frame with your eyes. Cut anything that doesn't belong.

05

QUESTION FIVE

What's the story?

Every photograph says something — make sure it's saying what you mean. Sum it up in one sentence: “This is about ____.”

If you can say it, you can shoot it — and you'll know when you've got it. If you can't, the photograph isn't finished forming in your head yet.

TRY THIS

Finish the sentence before you press the shutter: “This photograph is about...”

KEEP GOING

Now go make something on purpose.

These five questions are simple. Living by them is the work of a lifetime — and that's the point. The gear will keep changing. Seeing with intent never goes out of date.

If this is how you want to grow as a photographer, it's exactly what Framework is built for.

Framework

Classes, workshops, and mentoring for photographers who want to see deeper.

The Collab Collective

A casual monthly meetup where every photographer belongs.

photographyismore.com

justin@tedfordphoto.com