

The Learning Connexion
Photographing Your Artwork

0800 278 769 | tlc.ac.nz

THE LEARNING
CONNEXION
School of Creativity and Art

If you are using a digital camera to send images to your tutor or Programme Support staff, keep the resolution to the minimum setting available on the camera. This is typically 800 x 600 on a digital compact camera in JPEG format, although this depends on the make and model of your camera.

For your own records – set the size (dimensions) and quality on the highest settings available on your camera. Try not to use JPEG format. Use RAW format or TIFF if available. These formats produce much larger file sizes, (more data), and give much better colours, especially useful when printing out your work.

Lighting

Natural Light

Try to use natural light wherever possible. An overcast day or in the shade is preferable. Direct sunlight will reflect off the surface, especially shiny surfaces. If you are photographing in shade, make sure there aren't any patches of direct sunlight. Overcast days are best as this is when you will have the most even light source. Also make sure you photograph your work at the same time of day/weather condition to get the most consistent lighting. It's also important to have a neutral background if possible. Place your work against a sheet or large piece of card; this will work well. There is nothing as distracting as a cluttered background behind the artwork.

Artificial lighting

If you can't use natural light try not to mix types of light, especially if you are using a film camera. Film cameras can't automatically adjust colours like a digital camera can. Different light sources produce different types of light. We don't notice this as our brains adjust for this automatically. Fluorescent light can appear very green on film so try not to use this type of light. Tungsten light (ordinary household bulbs) can appear very orange. A photograph that looks too green or orange from tungsten light has what is called a colour cast. This is fine if you want a weird effect for a horror film but not good for accurately recording your artwork. Even with Photoshop it's impossible to clean up the colours to be truly accurate, so do take care with your lighting sources. Try not to combine the following light sources in one photo:

- Daylight
- Tungsten
- Fluorescent

Getting The Right Colour

Digital cameras

For digital cameras, either set the white balance on 'auto' or set it to the type of light you are using e.g. cloudy, tungsten. Take a couple of test shots of a white card first to check that the white remains white and doesn't take on some weird colour tinge.

Film cameras

If you are using a film camera, you will need to use a filter to correct the colour balance. For tungsten light sources use an 80B filter (a good camera shop will have these in stock). This filter looks very blue and screws to the front of your camera lens; it filters out the orange light to give neutral colours on film. Or you can buy tungsten balanced film (Fujichrome 64T or Kodak Ektachrome 64T are two examples). If you use Tungsten balanced film in ordinary daylight, it has a very blue appearance. This can be fun for special effects, but again, not good for accurate colours for recording your artwork.

Using lights

Make sure the light is even across the image. Again, photographing a piece of white card the same size as your artwork is a good check. If a corner looks too dark, try pulling the lights away from the artwork; this will even them out. If you find it isn't even or you are getting reflections from the surface texture of the paint on the work, try reflecting your light source off a white wall, ceiling or a large sheet of white paper. This evens out the light and will prevent reflections. Reflecting your light off a coloured surface will mean that the light will take on this colour and your nice artwork may have a lovely unwanted shade of pink, green, purple or blue.

If you can, try using two identical lights, one on either side of the artwork shining across the surface of the work at approximately a 45° angle. This will minimize reflections and give you an even light source.

Using a flash

Don't use your camera's built-in flash. This will reflect straight back off the surface of the work and cause a 'hot spot'.

Framing Your Work

Background

Consider the background. Try to keep a clean white, black or grey background behind your work.

Scale

Indicate scale. Include something in the painting such as either a ruler or a coin for a small subject. This allows the viewer to gauge the relative size of the work. Just make sure it isn't in front of your work. Or list the size of all of the items you are photographing. Keeping a record of this is a good idea anyway, especially if you sell your work. Your photograph may become the only evidence of your artwork.

Composition

Frame your work up in the viewfinder or screen so that the sides are parallel to the edges of the screen/viewfinder of your camera. Don't stand off to the side of the work or lean the work against a wall and stand above it. A good trick is to get a small mirror and tape or suspend it in front of the artwork. If you can see the reflection of the camera in the mirror, this means you are square on to the artwork and the sides of the artwork will be perfectly straight in the viewfinder.

Also, don't try and go in too close with a wide-angle lens. Wide angle lenses have what is known as barrel distortion which makes the edges of your artwork curve in the shape of a barrel. Stand back a distance, zoom in and get a good tight crop on your artwork with straight edges. Your photo needs to show the whole work with straight edges, as it is in real life. Try to leave a little space around the work so that the whole work can be seen.

Works with glass

It's very difficult to take photos of works that have been framed with glass, as this is highly reflective. Photograph your work before you get it framed or; remove the glass if possible.

Focusing

Make sure your image is sharp. Don't assume that because it looks okay on your camera's viewfinder that you will get a sharp result. Ideally, check the image on your computer before you send it off. If you find you are getting blurry pictures, you may be getting camera shake because there isn't enough light. A tripod is a good investment and will ensure that you get a sharp picture. It is a great aid to getting a well framed image. You can also try adding more light or use good natural lighting (e.g. outside). As a last resort, try resting the camera on a table or chair to steady it.

Tip: If your camera allows it: zoom right in to your image and focus, then zoom out again and take your shot. This will ensure you get the sharpest focus of your image.

Close-ups

Remember to take close-up shots to show the work in detail. Brush marks, a complex section of the drawing - any area you would like to record particularly well. You will probably find it easier to take sharp photographs by getting closer to the work and using the macro setting on your camera, (this is often labelled with a symbol of a flower).

macro symbol =

