



The Secrets of Photography

#10 Ten Tips
for Great
Photographs



New York Institute of
Photography

WELCOME

Welcome to your lesson from the New York Institute of Photography—we've been educating photographers since 1910.

We have trained more
successful photographers
than any other school
in the world.

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Our Mission

For over 100 years, NYIP has been providing high-quality training in the art, technique, and business of photography. We offer a unique combination of online education and personal coaching. Our online, accredited certificate programs allow you to engage in course work at your own pace. Affordable tuition with flexible, interest-free payment plans and a no-risk refund policy make NYIP the best value in photographic education.

We have trained more successful photographers than any other school in the world. Through NYIP's combination of mentorship, course work, and assignments, you'll develop the skills you need to take your photography to the next level—and beyond. Our comprehensive courses contain hundreds of hours of training covering every facet of photography—from aperture to histograms and lighting to portfolio editing.



Our Students

There's NYIP graduate Matthew Lewis Jr., a Pulitzer Prize winning photographer who spent twenty-five years at the *Washington Post*. Lewis personifies the storytelling tradition in great news photography. His famous images include Jacqueline Kennedy at President Kennedy's funeral, scenes at the March on Washington in 1963, and policemen beating marchers during the Poor People's Campaign in 1968.

Other notable NYIP graduates include the profound documentarian W. Eugene Smith and famed celebrity photographer Douglas Kirkland.

Paul Gilmore, who studied with NYIP, was the first photographer to shoot moon rocks, while Richard Weede shot several of the most famous photographs of Elvis Presley. Jim Edds is a successful storm chaser and photographer who shoots extreme weather events for TV and magazines. Each studied the same material, but found their own stories to tell through unique images. Other notable NYIP graduates include the profound documentarian W. Eugene Smith and famed celebrity photographer Douglas Kirkland.



Henri Cartier-Bresson was one of the greatest photographers of the Twentieth Century. Basically, he took photographs the same way you do—he walked around, found something that was interesting to his eye, and then took a picture of that subject. It's a genre that is usually called *street photography*.

In a two-part profile by Dan Hofstadter that ran in *The New Yorker* in October 1989, Cartier-Bresson observed that "a photographer only has to have two legs, one arm, and one eye."

The most important part
of taking a photograph
is you.

What Cartier-Bresson was saying is that every photographer needs some way to move around, a way to hold the camera, and an eye to discern what's of interest.

Notice that Cartier-Bresson didn't say anything about needing a certain type of camera or a lot of lenses. He worked with a very limited amount of equipment which he kept out of sight most of the time. While it's true there are serious photographers who move around with two or three cameras around their neck, a heavy bag full of lenses, and other accessories slung over one shoulder, none of that is essential.

The most important part of taking great photographs is *you*. The camera (or phone or tablet) is just a tool you will use to capture your vision. The different features of your camera are elements of that tool. It's better if you understand those features, but, in today's all-automatic world, it's not absolutely necessary. Remember, no one ever asked Hemingway what kind of typewriter he used.



Ten Tips

Photography is one of the world's favorite pastimes. Each year, we take billions of pictures to record family memories, children's parties, and vacations. Nine out of ten families own a camera of some sort.

But despite advances in cameras, the pictures taken by most amateur photographers—and believe us, we see thousands of them each year—could be much better.

Remember these tips
whenever you pick up your camera,
and you'll shoot better photographs
and have more fun taking them!

This is true because, no matter how automated the camera, most people aren't aware of a few simple, creative guidelines that can turn subpar snapshots into great photographs. That's what the final section of this lesson is all about. We'll show you how you can apply a few basic guidelines—our Ten Tips—and start taking great photographs.

TEN TIPS FOR
GREAT PHOTOS



1 Concentrate on Your Subject.

This is the most important tip: Know what you want the subject of your picture to be. Look into your viewfinder before you shoot, and make sure your subject is clear and unambiguous.

On a recent trip to London, we saw a family of tourists emerge from their hotel on the banks of the River Thames. Dad had his wife and kids pose with the Tower Bridge, one of London's greatest landmarks, behind them. But they were standing in the middle of the hotel's parking lot, with three rows of parked cars directly behind them—in front of the Bridge. And that's where he posed them.

Remember Robert Capa—come in tight on your subjects. Use some of your new techniques

to accentuate your subjects. If you want the environment in your shot, if it's part of the story of your image, choose your location wisely.

The first example of the mother posed with her two children along the River Thames is a perfectly fine shot, but the environment tells us very little. It would be difficult for a viewer to gather from the image that the shot was made in London. The same is true for the second photograph.

But in the third shot, we are quite clear that the family we're seeing is in Paris. The story is much more complete. As it is in the fourth shot, on the following page, where we see a couple in London.





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If the Dad in our parking lot story had given the subject of his photo any thought, he could have set up an eye-catching photo in just a few seconds by moving his family to a location next to the parking lot, where the picture would show them large up front, with an unobstructed view of the Thames River (which didn't even show up in Dad's photo) and the full sweep of the Tower Bridge behind them.

Why didn't he move out of the parking lot? Because he didn't look at what was in his viewfinder before shooting. He didn't really consider the first tip—know the subject—before he shot.

Too often we think we know what we're photographing. After all, we know we're in London, we know we're staying at a hotel, with a great view of the Tower Bridge, but we don't see that the viewfinder displays a tiny bridge, three rows of cars, and an asphalt parking lot.

Take time to look, and ask yourself the first question: What is the subject of my photograph?

The time to ask that question is before you take the picture, while you're looking through the viewfinder.



2 Simplify to Eliminate Clutter.

Unexpected clutter—unwanted objects or people drawing attention away from the subject—ruin lots of pictures. Human vision allows our mind to overlook this clutter, but your camera is not so forgiving. Train your eye to spot clutter in the viewfinder before you shoot. Once you see it, it's usually easy to eliminate it from your picture—often by moving just a step or two to one side.

When outdoors, watch for strangers in the picture frame, trees in the background that seem to sprout out of your subject's head like antlers, garbage cans, used Kleenex on the grass, or anything else that will take attention from your subject. Indoors, watch for furniture and objects that will loom large and be distracting in your picture. If you see them in your viewfinder, eliminate them.

Don't hesitate to remove a few unsightly objects from the dining table before taking pictures of the family Thanksgiving dinner.

Proud parents are often so taken with the cute antics of Junior playing in the living room that they fail to notice the distracting furniture and objects that are also in the picture. Find a different angle that gives you a simpler background.

Learn to see—and eliminate—clutter in the background. It will help emphasize your intended subject and add eye-power to your photographs.





3 Shoot Up Close.

One way to make sure the viewer knows the subject of your picture is to make it big in the frame. Many professional photographers will tell you: "If the picture isn't working, move closer to your subject."

This is important advice for those who tend to be timid when shooting. In many amateur photographs, the subject is too small in the frame and the photographer loses the drama of the shot.

Making the subject larger is the simplest and best way to focus attention on your subject. The trick is to move or zoom in closer. For portraits, after you take a head-to-waist shot, move in closer for a head-and-shoulders shot.



4 Study Your Photographs.

Most people are disappointed by the majority of photographs they take, yet they scroll through their photos as they take them without a lot of thought. That's a mistake. Study all the photographs you take, and learn from them.

Ask yourself if a mediocre picture could be improved in terms of showing the subject better, focusing the viewer's eye on your subject more powerfully, or eliminating any distractions. All photographers—even pros—shoot duds. Don't shun them. Take the time to look and learn from them. Our first three tips, in effect, told you to look through the viewfinder and see everything before you press the shutter. The trick to learning to see is to study your photos and learn what went wrong.

Learn to spot mistakes in your prints so that, next time, you'll see them in your viewfinder before you take the picture—you'll move a few feet or clean up the background—and you'll end up with a much better photograph.

Look at both of these photos. The first one includes too much background, and, by looking at it in the viewfinder, the decision was made to crop in more tightly in the second photo.



Correct lighting is a complex subject that can't be reduced to a quick tip. However, many lighting problems can be corrected with a few common-sense steps. Our next three tips deal with lighting techniques.





5 Be Aware of the Sun.

George Eastman's original rule for making pictures outdoors was simple and effective: Position yourself with the sun behind one shoulder, falling directly onto your subject.

This is still great advice for taking pictures of buildings, cars, landmarks, and sporting events. But it's not great for most "people" pictures. Why? Because people squint when the sun is in their eyes—and you don't want squinting portraits! Here's what to do to get good lighting when you're shooting pictures

of people. Move them into the shade where they won't have to squint, where the lighting is softer and more flattering. The shade of a tree. The shade of a building. The shade of an umbrella. Any shade will do. This will make your portrait look a thousand times better. (Hint: An overcast day is terrific. The clouds cast the shade you want! Just don't include too much of the actual sky in your shot. If you do, it might cause your camera's autoexposure to make the subject's face too dark.)





6 Don't Use Flash When It Hurts.

While standing on a mid-Manhattan street looking up at the Empire State Building at twilight, you can see tourists' cameras flashing from the observation deck. But that little electronic flash is designed to light up subjects from about 3 to 12 feet away. It won't illuminate the miles of avenues in New York. And it won't illuminate the musicians on stage when you take a picture from the 35th row. In fact, the flash may actually hurt the picture. At the Empire State building, many amateurs shoot through a glass partition. What the camera "sees" when the flash goes off is the glare on the glass. And that's what you see in the picture. Or from the 35th row in the arena, the flash lights up the backs of the people in front of you. They become the subject of your picture, whether you intended it or not.

Another example: Flash will hurt your picture if you have two subjects where one is three feet from the camera and the other is eight feet away. The flash will either turn the closer one into a bright, burned-out blob or fail to sufficiently light the subject farther away, or both.

Solution? Either turn off the flash or move the subjects so they are an equal distance from your flash.



7 Use Flash When It Helps.

Of course, when you're photographing someone or something close up in the dark, the flash can give you all the light you need. But there are other times—in bright light—when your flash can help, too. For example, in daylight, your flash is great for filling in shadows on your subject's face when the sun is directly overhead or to the side, and it can give a little extra light to portraits taken in shade.

The problem is that your automatic flash may not go off in bright sunlight. Here's how to solve this. If

your camera has a flash control, set the flash to fire regardless of the light it senses. Check the instructions that came with your camera to see what flash controls your model has. Chances are, you can make the flash fire even under bright lighting conditions where it wouldn't do so automatically.

Flash in twilight is also great for portraits outdoors. It lights the subject's face, leaving the background of darkening sky a rich dark-blue tone. With a little experimenting to find the right level of twilight, you'll be able to impress your friends by taking great late-afternoon portraits with dramatic lighting.





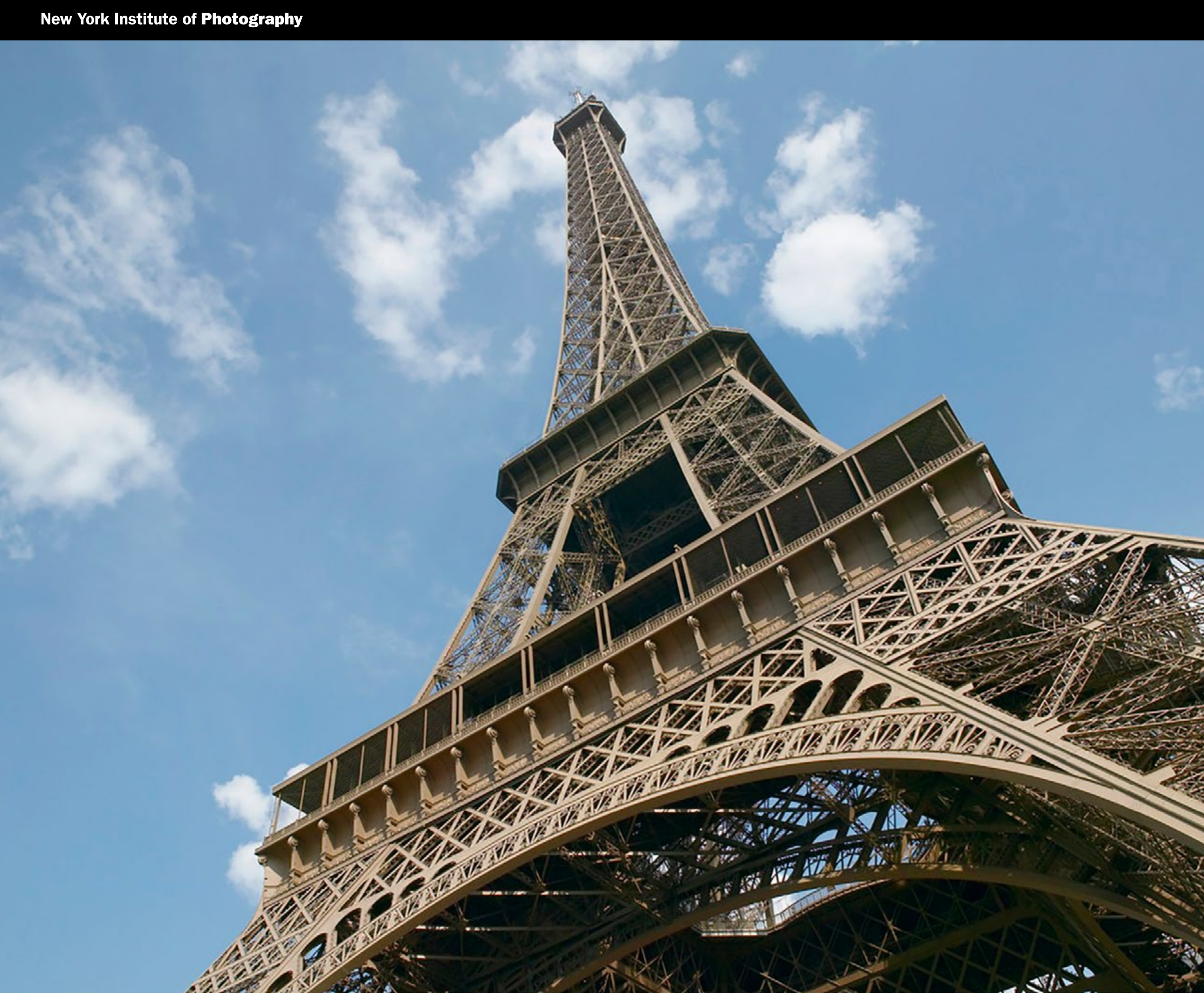
8 Decide: Horizontal or Vertical.

Before you press the shutter, try most photographs from a horizontal viewpoint, then turn the camera 90 degrees to consider taking a vertical shot. Obviously, if you are taking the Eiffel Tower or a full-length portrait of a person, you will probably use a vertical shot. But even with subjects that don't have strong vertical elements, such as landscapes, try viewing both horizontal and vertical images before you take the picture.

If either a horizontal or vertical composition is clearly better for showing your subject, then use the one that works better.

When in doubt, shoot the scene both ways and leave the final decision for later when you view the images on your computer screen. Use all your options.





9 Watch for Interesting Angles.

Most amateurs shoot standing up, with the camera pointed straight ahead at eye level. That's the way we view the world most of the time, and that's exactly what results in boring photographs—showing your viewer something they've already seen. Why not try something different?

Smart photographers look up and down, exploring images from unexpected angles. Pros often shoot at knee level or lie flat on the ground for a dramatic, low-angle shot. A good overall scenic view of a park or town square can often be improved by capturing it from an upper story window. Remember—you don't need a fancy camera to find a fresh angle. All you need is imagination.

Explore: If an unusual angle will help focus attention on your subject, use it. After all, you can take as many photos as you want with your digital camera, so feel free to take plenty of shots.

Sometimes it's necessary to use a low angle just to make the subject look normal. Small children, for example, should be photographed from their height rather than yours. Theirs is a small world. Avoid looking down on them with your camera.

10 Experiment!

Let's learn from professional news photographers. Before anything else, they generally make a "safe" picture. That is, a straightforward image that tells the newspaper story: who, what, when, where, and how. Then (and this is the tip) they keep shooting, seeking interesting angles and framing possibilities that might tell the story better.

It's worth spending a few extra moments to get a more powerful picture. The extra pictures you take, trying for a better angle, are the ones that will transform you from a snapshotter to a photographer. As you demand more from your pictures, you'll often find that you don't take the first version of the image you see in your viewfinder. You'll look around and find a more interesting image right away.

That's it...

Now you've got your ten tips. If you take the time to consider each of them and the effort necessary to make each one part of your photography, we guarantee that your photographs will improve. More importantly, you will begin to see the enormous possibilities within the art of photography.

You'll find your eye seeing "a picture" in your viewfinder, and this is the real beginning of great photographs.



Look Ahead

Before we leave this introductory lesson, there's one more point we want to cover. That's the future, and the speed with which it's coming at us, and the dazzling innovations we're seeing on a regular basis.

New products and applications for digital photography have popped up all over the place. What new consumer innovation will be announced next month? Next year? What digital photography gear will be old hat a decade from now? We can't tell you what new innovations will surface at the next Consumer Electronics Show, but we guarantee that there will be all kinds of inventive gadgets, new markets for photography, and digital imaging possibilities beyond our ability to envision at this time.

When things are changing this fast, it's an exciting time to be a photographer. While we can't predict the future, we can make you two promises. Whether in print or on the Web, good content is still king, and good pictures are always going to be at the heart of our craft. Photography technique is as important now as it was at the dawn of photography.

Here's a second promise. The power of photography will continue to grow! Please visit us at nyip.edu and request a copy of our course offerings today.



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