

Introduction to Photography: Course Basics

Course Requirements

This is a studio course. It requires that you spend time producing photographs. As a photographer, your “studio” will be the areas and locations you choose to photograph, the darkroom, and the finishing area in the photo area. From time to time you will find yourself doing research—in the library, on the web, or talking to people who have information to share with you. Spending time at this work is the primary requirement, for if you spend time working and producing the best images you can, you will come to understand in your gut what your head has learned in class.

The first part of the course will have assignments with some structure. During the second half of the semester you will write a proposal for a project that you will be expected to work on for the remainder of the term. These should be photographs that have some personal interest to you. Your final presentation will come from this body of work. Along the way, we will look at your progress weekly. You won't benefit from comment and criticism unless you have something to show and are present to show it. I might also take the time right now to remind you that the process of photography involves many steps which are strung together, and some of those steps depend on the successful completion of previous steps, so it is essential that you take the time to master each step during the week we present it.

Although I have been a photographer for more than thirty years and have had some success with the process of photography, making interesting photographs is still the essential problem. Like everyone else, you will have to figure this one out on your own. The best suggestion I can give you is to approach your work with interest, curiosity, enthusiasm, and thoughtfulness. And don't be afraid of mistakes.

Grades

According to the Registrar, letter grades A through F have the following meanings: Exceptional, Good, Acceptable, Poor, Failure. If you care about your grade, there are at least three things you can do to improve your chances for success.

1. Come to class. It's worth a third of your grade.
2. Turn in assignments, on time, every week. They are worth one third of your grade.
3. Make interesting photographs. The effort and quality you put into your work is worth one third of your grade.

Enthusiasm and a good attitude toward work will be an asset in this course. Extra weight will be given for work produced in the second half, once basic technical issues are solved. And yes, although it does not appear in the above equation, your participation in discussing work, both yours and that of others, will affect your grade. These can influence your grade by as much as a third. Exceptional students take heed. Talk to me if this, or anything else covered in this course, is not clear. Please keep in mind that although there are quite a few good students, there are not so many exceptional ones. Good students do what is expected of them. Good students do not surprise me. Exceptional students will use an assignment or independent project as a starting point for their interest and imagination as they explore and guide the medium.

Equipment

A kit containing the basic needs for this course is available at the bookstore. It contains film, a developing tank, film sleeves to store your negatives in, and other supplies that you will use. You may also need to buy photographic paper. Chemicals for processing film and prints are supplied by the department.

To photograph, you will need a camera, which is not provided by the school. The minimum requirements are that you have access to a single lens reflex camera which has manual controls and uses 35mm film. If you have access to a medium format camera, that's fine too as long as you talk to me to make sure you have the resources to make it work for this course. As the course progresses you will learn how certain kinds of cameras are conducive to certain styles of work, so that as you find a style and subject to work on you may find that your needs will change. If you can help it, do not rush to spend all of your money on the camera for this course until you have a good sense of what kind of camera is right for you. This could mean borrowing, renting, or sharing a camera until you figure out what you need.

Consider borrowing this camera from a relative, who may have a wonderful film camera sitting in a closet because they now use digital. (This camera may also have a lot of sentimental value, so you will need to be careful with it!) If you need to buy a camera they are selling at very reasonable prices, especially if you take a look at the used market. There are reputable dealers who buy professional equipment and offer it for sale, sometimes with a warranty. You may also find what you are looking for at a local camera shop that handles used equipment, or through the many online auction sites such as Ebay.

Course Site

A course web site is at <woodypackard.com/ubw>. I will post as much as I can there, including information about your assignments, additional reading you can do, some notes on subjects we cover in class—or don't have time to cover in class. You can also check your current standing by logging in to *Progress* with your email and a password that you give me.

Technical Problems

Although this is not strictly a technical course, photographic results depend on technical proficiency. You will be asked to show results each week, so if you're having trouble with some part of the process, we need to talk and find a solution sooner rather than later. We will be working on basic photographic proficiency throughout this course, and like other kinds of learning, each week's accomplishments will be the foundation for the next, so if you find that any of these steps isn't clear we'll need to step aside and clear things up. I will do my best to watch for signs of confusion, but in the end, it is your job to tell me when I am not clear, and my job to do a better job of explaining when I need to.

You should feel free to ask me questions in class, or during the week by calling me at my cell—585 232-1187. I get email at wood@woodypackard.com, so if your question requires a *really brief* answer this will work. (Email gets lower priority than a phone call and is less useful in solving a problem of any complexity.) My only caveat is that when you do have the opportunity to ask a question in class I hope you will ask me there. If you are confused about something I tried to explain there is a good chance that there are several of your colleagues who are also not sure. Presenting questions in class has the added benefit of clarifying details for everyone.

For problems with equipment or chemicals in the darkroom when I am not around, you can try asking Hope for help.

Goals

The purpose of this course is to give you a foundation in the mechanics, visual principles, and language of photography so that you have the ability to develop your skill on your own. Some of the topics we'll cover will include:

- Exposure control
- Depth of field
- Perspective and lens choice
- Motion control
- Design, composition, framing
- Film processing
- Black and white printing
- Specialized cameras

In addition, you will develop the language and visual literacy you need to provide the critical feedback necessary for your own progress.