

Photo Tips

from
Red Leash Pet Photography



**“Gear is Good, Vision is Better”
~ David DuChemin**

I couldn't agree more with this statement. It doesn't matter what kind of camera you have - your phone, a point and shoot, or a fancy dSLR. What matters is your intention. Point and shoot is not a photographic technique. Every time you raise your camera to your eye, you should have a vision of what you want to capture and the image you want to create.

The key is patience and practice! I hope you enjoy these photo tips and happy shooting. Please post any images that you are especially proud of on www.facebook.com/redleash . I'd love to see them!

Lori Gross

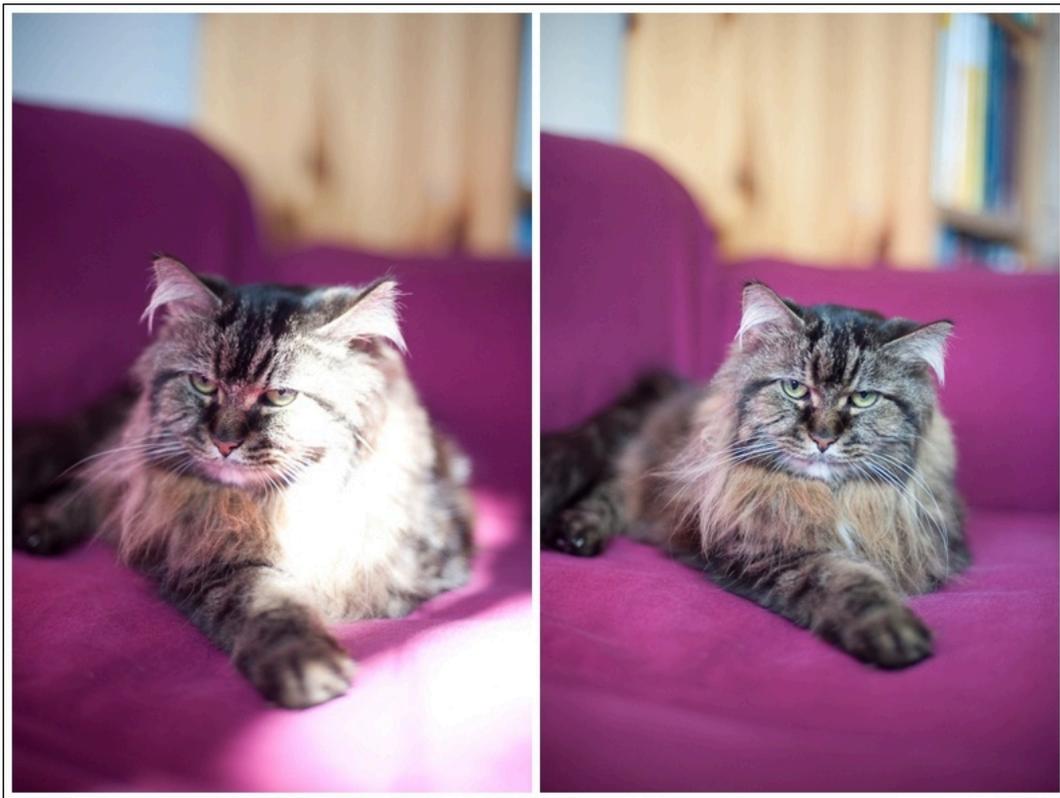
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1

Light

Always be aware of the light when you are photographing any subject, especially pets. It doesn't matter if your pet is white, black or multi-colored, you can get great shots at all times of the day if you pay attention to the light. Know where your light is coming from so that you can best position yourself and your subject all times of the day.

Soft and even light is best. That means that if it is a bright sunny day, you should look for a shaded area. The best time of the day to photograph animals outdoors is right after sunrise or right before sunset. When indoors, use window light instead of a flash. Nothing looks worse than the "devil eyes" that are created from a flash. The example below is from an indoor photo shoot. We had great window light, but it wasn't even. The image on the left shows how the light was making harsh shadows. To fix it, all I did was add a diffuser to the window to soften and even out the light. You don't need anything fancy, a sheet or sheer window shade works great.



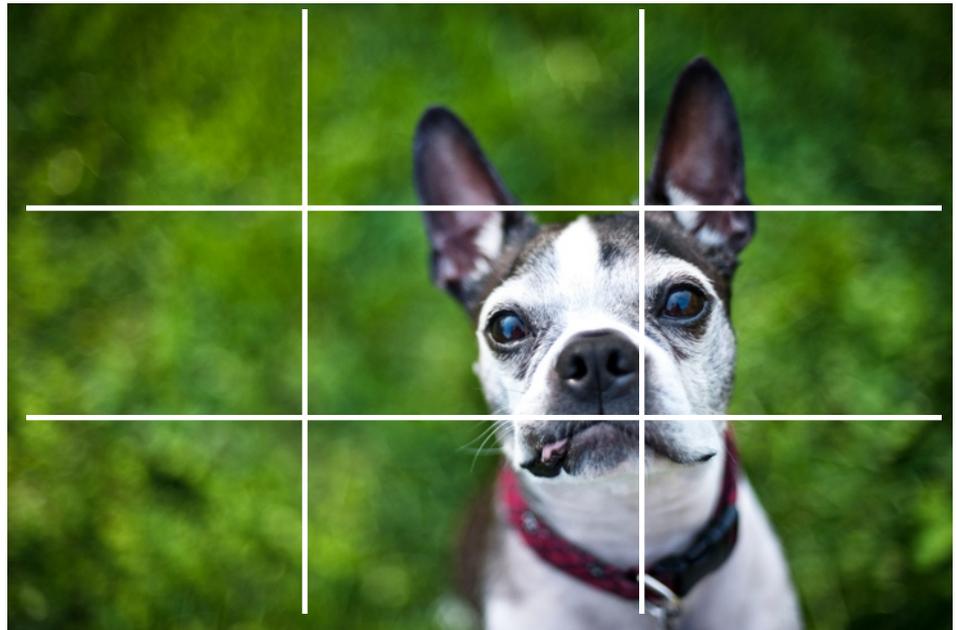
These images were taken seconds apart with the exact same camera settings. Ideally, Chester would have been giving me her cutest look, but you get the idea.

#2

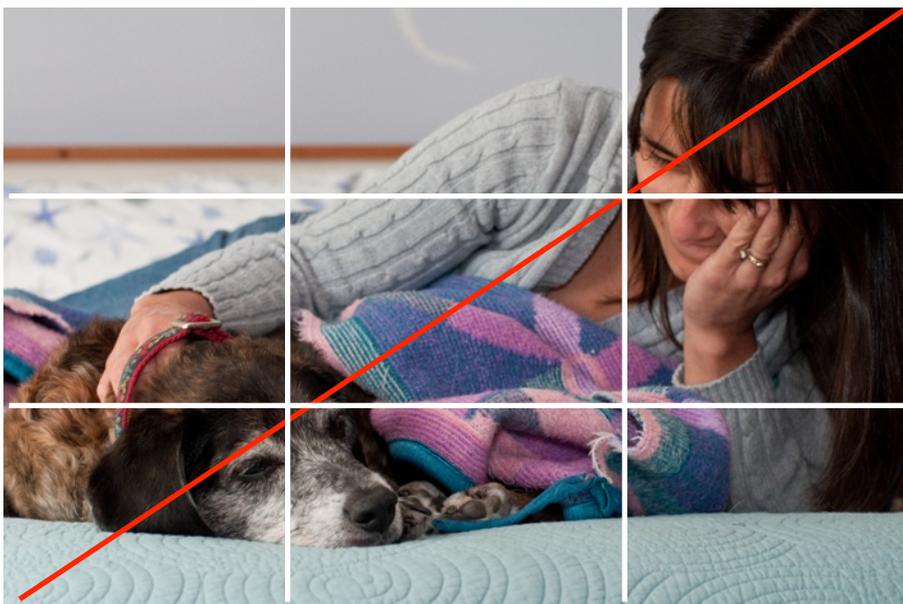
Leading Lines and the “Rule of Thirds”

Certain images have more visual appeal than others. They draw your eye to the subject, around the frame and just feel right. This is no coincidence. When you look at a photograph you like, start to notice where the placement of the main subject is relative to the rest of the frame. Then, what path does your eye take? Why does it go there and not somewhere else?

When composing your images, look for leading lines like diagonals to help move your eye through the image. In addition, utilizing the “rule of thirds” will give your image both balance and interest. Imagine a grid on top of your image -- some cameras have a built in grid you can show in your viewfinder to help you compose your image. Try and put the important elements along one of the grid lines, or at the intersection of two lines.



Using the “rule of thirds” gives this image just the right amount of balance.



This image uses both the “rule of thirds” and a diagonal line to lead your eye through the image, but not out of it. Having both Tuck and Heather looking at one another connects them and keeps the viewers eye in the frame.

#3

Watch the Gaze

Just like the image of Heather and Tuck on the last page, it is important to watch where your subject is looking. Animals (and people) should be looking or running into the frame, leading your eye through the image as to where they are going and what they are looking at. The negative space is needed to balance the image.



The Eyes are the Window to the Soul

Unless you are intentionally shooting a detail like a nose, paw or ear, the eyes should be in focus. We connect with both humans and animals by looking into one another's eyes. An otherwise amazing image can quickly be ruined by simply not having the eyes in focus. For the best results, position yourself so you capture beautiful "catchlights" in the eyes.



#4

#5

Simplify and Watch your Background

Too much clutter in an image draws your eye away from the subject. Have you ever tried to photograph a parade? It's almost impossible to capture the impact of what you saw in real life. Too often the image disappoints.

Not every image should be a close up. I encourage you to capture the context of the environment along with your pet. Step back and look around for the most complimentary frame. Are you on a beach? Try and avoid other people in the background. On the docks or at a park? Watch out for trash cans and other bright items that may draw attention. Look to make sure that there is not a pole or other object growing out of your subjects head. Sometimes all you need to do to get a simple uncluttered image is reposition yourself.



You'd never know that there were other people on the beach with us. A little patience and maneuvering allowed me to get this image showing the whole scene, but without extra distractions in it.



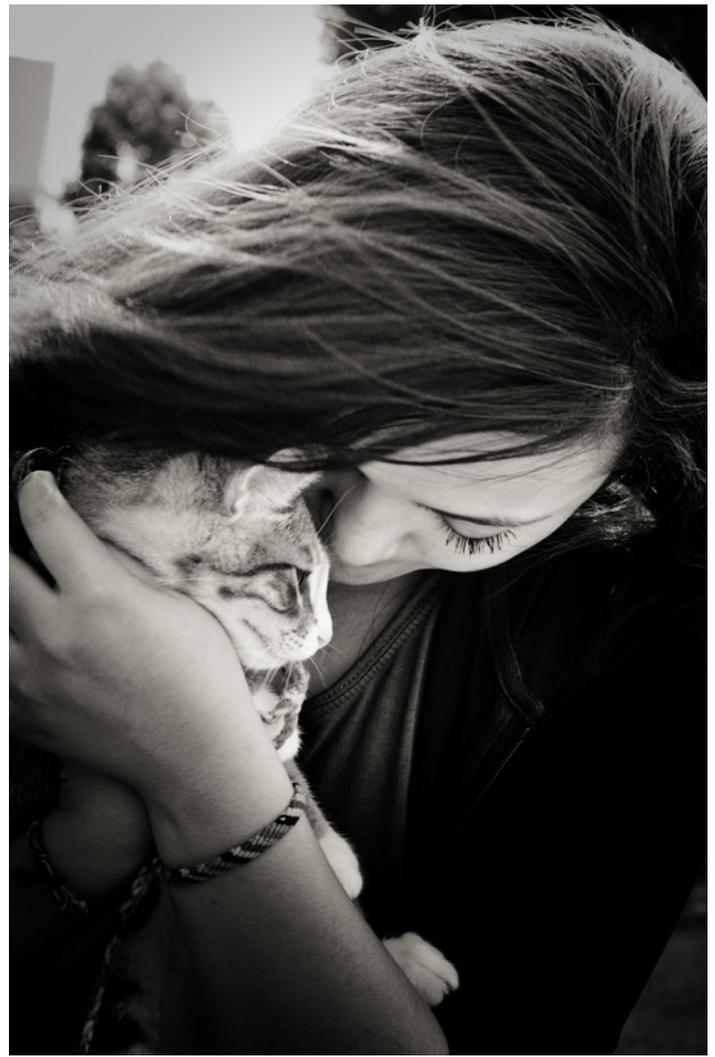
For this image, I removed the books off of the coffee table and hid the throw pillows on the couch since they were brightly colored and drawing my attention away from the main subject. This left Lucy, the Christmas tree and stockings as the focus.

#6

Anticipate the Moment

A photograph is a frozen moment in time. A jump, a touch, a cuddle, a smile. Two images taken seconds apart can have a totally different look and feel. The secret to getting the image you desire is patience and anticipation. Cuddles and natural smiles do not always happen on command; you must watch and wait for that special image.

Action shots like running, swimming and chewing are so much fun to capture. Knowing your pet's behavior can help you predict those perfect action shots. Firstly, you want to set up your camera for action. Do this by using burst mode, or continuous shooting. Then, make sure your shutter speed is fast enough to handle the action. If you don't know how to control your own shutter speed, you can set your camera is on the sports setting (running man). Shooting in burst allows you to capture the whole sequence of action and then pick your favorite later. My secret for action shots is repetition. Have your dog fetch the stick over and over again so that you can learn their pattern, anticipate the moment and get the shot!



Change Your Perspective

#7

A simple change in perspective can greatly impact the emotion of an image. Get out of the habit of taking every photo from your eye's height. Shooting from a pet's perspective makes the photo more intimate. Kneel or lay down on the ground with your pet. Even shoot from below for something completely different.

Many people, including myself, like to take photos of pets looking up at us. In order to get an image that stands out from others, I encourage you to get very close and fill the whole frame with their head and body.



Taken from below



Taken from above



Taken from the cat's perspective

Horizontal and Vertical

#8

Sometimes its easy to forget that our camera takes photos both horizontally and vertically. Try and take your image both ways and decide later which one you like better. You might be surprised at the outcome and how one image stands out more than the other even though they were taken seconds apart.



These images of Mulligan were taken only a few frames apart. Even though Mulligan has not moved, the entire image is changed by altering from horizontal to vertical. Which one do you like better?

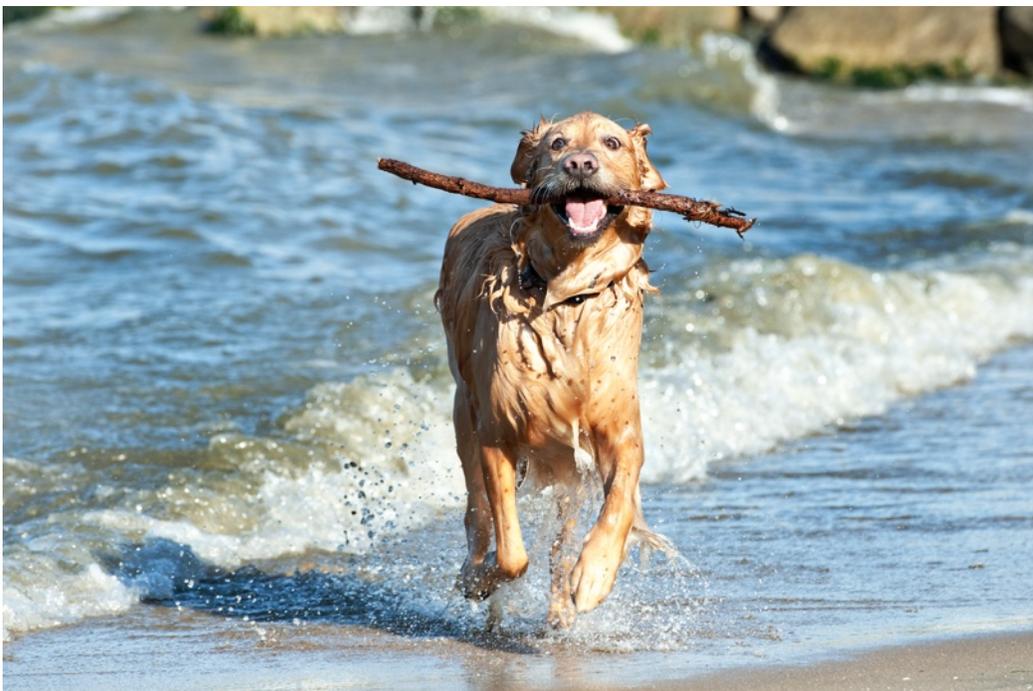
#9

The Crop Factor

Digital cameras are very powerful machines and have more megapixels than you will ever need, unless you desire to print a billboard. This leaves you room for cropping, allowing you to alter your composition after the fact. Use this to your advantage to straighten horizons, crop out distractions and zoom into your subject.

If your camera has digital zoom (and most point and shoots do), turn it OFF! Using digital zoom creates pixellated images, ruining your photo.

Before: The composition of this image is not where I wanted it to be. There is another dog's tail in the frame and the brightly lit rocks are distracting to my eye and pulling my attention away from the main subject. I loved the shot though and knew I could make it stronger.



After: I have cropped the photo so that Riley is center stage. The distraction of the rocks is gone and the wave is making a nice diagonal through the image. I could have even brought this in tighter and not lost any quality when enlarging the image for the wall.

#10

Break the Rules

Now that you have read all of my pointers, I want to encourage you to break the rules and get creative. Don't be afraid to try something new. Develop your own style with photography and shoot with your heart. Remember, photography is an art and, in the end, if you love the image you create that is what matters most.



Here I focused on Manu's nose and tongue.



The image to the left was blurred intentionally to show motion. The image above is also unconventional with centering the dog and cutting off part of her face, but I love it.