



# A snappy bit of copy

*I was commissioned to write this piece about taking up photography for the lifestyle section of NatWest's business customer website. The messages are simple enough – the trick is to write in a style that makes people read to the end. This first appeared on the bank's Content Live pages in 2018.*

WE will take an astonishing three trillion pictures this year – more than all previous years combined. We have all suddenly become photographers.

Smartphones have given us the ability and desire to capture and share every event in our lives, from once-in-a-lifetime family moments to a plate of half-eaten breakfast. But the ease of taking pictures is inspiring thousands of us to move on from frivolous snapshots and take pictures a little more seriously.

So how do you get into photography?

## **1) Ask yourself why**

Photography is extremely rewarding – but before you invest, ask yourself why you're doing it, what you want to photograph and why you need a camera that's heavier, and slower to position than shooting with your phone. Do you want to photograph

still life? Portraits? Sport? Or just anything you see? Knowing the answers to these questions before you shop will help you to...

## **2) Buy a camera**

Obviously. Basic 'point and shoots' may be tempting price-wise, but they are limiting – with so many automatic features you can manually control hardly anything. It's better to step up to an entry-level DSLR (digital single lens reflex) camera, which has interchangeable lenses; contains a mirror (the SLR) enabling you to see what your lens sees; and enables you to override those automatic features and manually control exposure, shutter speed etc as you get more confident.

SLRs start around £250-£300 but you can get bargains by buying "packages" including a bag, filters or other lenses. But before you buy, check that it's compatible with other lenses etc as you'll likely want to add to it in the future. But buying nice kit is a waste of money if you don't...

## **3) Know your camera**

How many times have you hurriedly started using a gadget and never learned half the things it does? Set aside time to explore your camera, learn how to change the exposure, the ISO, shutter speed and its other settings. Read the manual thoroughly – then experiment taking pictures and writing the combinations that achieved each effect. It takes time but it's worth it to know your camera's potential. But if this seems too daunting...

## **4) Join a camera club**

The best way to learn any skill is from other people. There are around 450 camera clubs in the UK – like-minded folk who with group events, visiting experts and themed evenings to photograph subjects, encourage participation and ideas and can improve the skills of everyone in the club. There is usually an annual membership fee but try to tag along to a couple of meetings for free, as clubs don't suit everyone.

Some are brilliant, others offer little scope for individuality, forcing you all to take the same picture. Others still focus entirely on entering competitions or are simply an excuse for 150-year-old immovable club founders to bore everyone once a week with their holiday snaps. But whether or not you join a club, you should...



## **5) Look at other artists' work**

As you learn more about photography, you won't look at pictures the same way again. "You don't make a photograph just with a camera," once said legendary US lensman Ansel Adams. "You bring to photography all the pictures you have seen, the books you have read, the music you have heard, the people you have loved."

You will find yourself instinctively looking at professional images, wondering how they were achieved and imagining how you might recreate it. If a particular picture grabs you, find out who took it and find more of their work. Everything you see will become a photograph in your head – so it's important to...

#### **6) Take your camera everywhere**

You may specialise in portraits, or action shots, but as you develop your art, photographic opportunities will always suddenly present themselves, so be ready. Having to carry equipment may be another factor in your choice of camera. But it's not all about reacting to sudden opportunities – sometimes it's good just to...

#### **7) Take time to practise**

Take yourself off for an afternoon with just your camera, with an idea of what you're going to do with it. Playing a round of golf is fun, but you improve the most with formal repetition on the driving range – so taking time and practising over and over to get the right picture will make you a better photographer. It will also shape how you want to add to your equipment – but you need to...

#### **8) Buy only what you need**

Photography can be expensive and there are many tempting toys around. Fancy a lens like your mate Fred's? Don't rush to buy it – individual lenses suit individual



photographers. Just because his lens suits his camera and his ideal pictures, doesn't mean it suits yours. Ask to borrow it (and Fred, too, if he doesn't want to let it out of his sight) and have a play before buying your own. It's too easy to break the bank on something that looks pretty but doesn't work for you. This isn't a

“who's got the longest lens” competition – don't copy or outdo Fred, buy what YOU need. And that isn't necessarily a new piece of hardware, for you also need to...

#### **9) Become a Photoshopper**

Purists claim true photography is not enhanced, and they have a point – if you don't count the lenses, filters and exposures photographers have been manipulating for years to get that perfect shot. Today's photographers have mountains of manipulation software available – Adobe Photoshop is king, but other lead players include Capture One and Serif Affinity, and it pays to invest in one and learn how to use it. After all, we're creating art.

And when you do, you could even sell it – if you...

#### **10) Find your audience**

Your new hobby could make you money. Professional photography is a crowded marketplace and some traditional avenues are closing – eg newspapers are less inclined to pay for pictures, or even to employ photographers, when they can ask the

public to send in their snaps for nothing. On the other hand, technology has given photographers opportunities to promote their work through their own websites and social media. A few well promoted shots, even just among friends and family, could land a portrait or wedding commission. And it still can be worth sending portfolios to commercial or scientific organisations.



But ultimately, photography is an art form, which means you can explore it however you like. Every photographer sees the world from a slightly different angle and sees a special beauty in things others do not. Now, where's that half-eaten breakfast?