

A full-page background image of a climber in an orange jacket and helmet, standing on a snowy mountain ridge. The climber is holding a green rope. The background shows a vast landscape of snow-covered mountains and a layer of white clouds under a soft, hazy sky.

# JIMMY CHIN

TEACHES ADVENTURE  
PHOTOGRAPHY

MASTERCLASS





# MEET YOUR INSTRUCTOR: JIMMY CHIN



As a 15 year veteran of The North Face Athlete Team, Jimmy is one of the most sought-after and recognized adventure sports athletes, photographers and filmmakers working today. He is one of the only people to ski Mount Everest from the summit and climbed the much coveted first ascent of the Shark's Fin on Meru. Jimmy has been profiled in numerous publications including *National Geographic*, *The New York Times*, *Wall Street Journal*, *GQ*, *People*, and *The New Yorker*.

As a filmmaker, Jimmy has directed documentaries, TV and commercial projects. His film, *Meru*, won the Audience Choice Award at the 2015 Sundance Film Festival and made the 2016 Oscar shortlist for Best Documentary. *Free Solo*, his latest film capturing Alex Honnold's historic El Capitan climb, won the TIFF People's Choice award in 2018.

Cover photo by Jimmy Chin.

CHAPTER 1

# ON LOCATION: CLIMBING PHOTOSHOOT



# ON LOCATION: CLIMBING PHOTOSHOOT

“IF THERE’S A LOT OF GOOD PLANNING AHEAD OF TIME, YOU’RE REALLY ABLE TO EMBRACE THE WHOLE EXPERIENCE, AS OPPOSED TO HAVING A LOT OF QUESTIONS AND NOT KNOWING WHAT YOU’RE DOING.”

In this chapter, Jimmy shoots climber Conrad Anker climbing against the background of Grand Teton National Park. For this shoot, Jimmy is physically close to Conrad, so he doesn’t need a long telephoto. He brings his “go-to” lens—a 24-70mm—and two wide-angle lenses—a 16-35mm and a 14mm. Wider lenses also help give a sense of depth, since they make the subject seem farther away than he or she actually is. (You’ll learn about lenses in greater detail in Chapter 16: Gear: Camera, Lenses, Power, and Storage.)

Jimmy imparts several lessons about managing a shoot that are applicable to all photographers:

- 1. Preparation is key.** Have a preproduction meeting to make sure everyone knows what’s happening creatively and logistically. Talk through everything that will appear on camera; determine your equipment needs; and choose the right location, time of day, and crew.
- 2. Get the hardest shots (or “hero shots”) first.** Then you can move on to other shots, knowing that your most crucial images are covered.

- 3. Give yourself options.** Always look for ways you can get alternates or varied images by shooting with different lenses and compositions. You’ll give yourself more options when it’s time for editing.
- 4. Communicate clearly.** Make sure that your crew and talent have what they need so that they can work safely and comfortably. Give clear direction to your talent, so they know what they should be doing, and can give you the performance you’re looking for.

## Working with models:

Conrad looks very comfortable on camera, but not everyone is comfortable being photographed. To help make a photo shoot less overwhelming for a subject, practice your communication skills so that you can give clear direction. If you give verbal directions, make sure to refer to directions from the subject’s point of view (not yours). Another way you can work with a subject to get them to change positions is to use the mirroring method. Ask them to do exactly what you do, as if they were looking in a mirror. That way, you can avoid potentially miscommunication with verbal directions.

This blog post on Wonderlass, [9 Tips to Make People Comfortable in Front of the Camera](#), will help you make your subjects look and feel good during the shoot.

[This article](#) in *PetaPixel* is a great primer on working with models for the first time.



**Learn more about depth:**

Jimmy talks about a basic rule of composition in this chapter: **Depth**. Depth is when you have something in your foreground, and something in your background. In this case, Jimmy gets close to the rock, which is the foreground, and has his main subject, Conrad, in the background. The photo has another layer of depth because of the Tetons in the distance.

To bring more depth to your images, take a photo of something in the distance using a somewhat wide lens (35mm or wider). Now take a photo of the same thing, but put something else in the foreground. (If you have a friend with you, you can have your friend stand far away at first, and then move closer to the camera.) Compare the two photos; do you notice how much deeper the second photo feels? Your eye travels back and forth between the foreground and background, giving the photo a deeper sense of space.



Photo by Jimmy Chin.

CHAPTER 2

# ON LOCATION: PORTRAITS AND NATURAL LIGHT





# ON LOCATION: PORTRAITS AND NATURAL LIGHT

“LIGHT IS EVERYTHING. IF YOU CAN’T CONTROL IT, YOU REALLY HAVE TO BE ABLE TO ANTICIPATE IT AND KNOW WHAT YOU WANT FROM IT.”

In this chapter, Jimmy shoots portraits of climber Conrad Anker against the background of Grand Teton National Park, just after the sun has dipped behind the mountains, and the light has become soft and indirect. Jimmy’s demonstration underscores the importance of the following skills:

- 1. Understanding light:** This is the most valuable skill you can learn as a photographer. Learn to use light quality, direction, and the changes in natural light throughout the day to your advantage.
- 2. Creating harmony between subject and background:** The background should never draw too much attention away from your subject.
- 3. Focus:** If you’re shooting a portrait, it’s critical that their eyes (or at least the eye that’s closer to the camera) are in focus; it’s okay if the rest of the image is soft, but the eye(s) must be sharp. Sometimes your autofocus might accidentally zero in on their eyebrow, leaving the pupil slightly out of focus. In order to avoid that, you can “focus with your body” to help ensure you get the shot you want. To use this technique, set your camera to manual focus mode, and then focus on the person’s eye. Then shoot a handful of photos where you lean back ever so slightly and then lean forward a tiny bit too. By moving the camera, you’re moving the plane of focus; one or more of those photos should be in focus by using this technique.

## Tips for using light:

If you’re shooting in a situation where the subject is significantly darker than the sky, as you saw in this chapter, you’ll likely want to underexpose your image slightly to make sure the sky isn’t blown out to a complete white. You can always brighten your subject later in postproduction. But if you overexpose the sky and the camera doesn’t record any information because it’s too bright, you won’t be able to recover any information in that part of the image, and the sky will always be a pure white.

Knowing exactly where the sun will rise or set on any given day is incredibly helpful when you’re planning a shoot. There are a few different apps you can purchase, which will tell you the exact sun (and sometimes the moon) position on any day of the year, anywhere on Earth. Here are a few of them:

- + The Photographer’s Ephemeris
- + Sun Surveyor
- + Sun Seeker

**Dive deeper: Light**

If you're working with natural (or available) light, you need to have a basic understanding of the **quality**, **direction**, and **color temperature** of light.



1. Dean Potter stand on mountain, arms open. Photo by Jimmy Chin.



2. Conrad Anker. Photo by Jimmy Chin.

**Quality** refers to whether the light is **hard** or **soft**.

**Hard light** is what light looks like on a sunny day, with deep shadows that have crisp, distinct edges—which you see in **PHOTO 1**. **Soft light** is what light looks like on a cloudy day, where shadows are much softer, and the edge of the shadow is not distinct—as you see in **PHOTO 2**. Soft light is great for portraits, because people don't end up with hard shadows on their faces.





1 - 4: Photos by Jimmy Chin

**Direction of light** refers to the direction which the light falls upon the subject: In **front light**, the subject is lit from the front—as you see in **PHOTO 1**—giving nice, even light on the subject’s face. It is flattering for portraits because it helps make the subject’s features smaller and wrinkles less noticeable. In **back light**, the subject is lit from behind—as you see in **PHOTO 2**—usually resulting in a silhouette, or else a very blown-out background. In **side light**, the subject is lit from either the left or the right—as you see in **PHOTO 3**—which helps to show the texture of your subject. **Top light** is generally considered the least flattering type of light, as it can result in “raccoon eyes,” with deep shadows in eye sockets—as you see in **PHOTO 4**. In **under light**, the subject is lit from below. Since light sources are almost always above our heads, when your subject is lit from below it feels quite unnatural—an effect that is usually associated with horror films. Jimmy doesn’t use this type of light in his work.



1-3: Photos by Jimmy Chin.

**Color temperature** is less intuitive because our eyes and brains are very good at adjusting to whatever light color we're seeing to make it look "normal." It's easier to be aware of color temperature nowadays, because we can buy different color temperature bulbs to light our homes. Even though we think of the sun as a constant source of light, the reality is that light changes temperature throughout the day (because of the way the light passes through the atmosphere). At **sunrise**, the light is warmer, or yellower—as you see in **PHOTO 1**. At **midday**, the light is much cooler, a bluish white—as you see in **PHOTO 2**. This is sometimes considered true white. The 30 minutes or so before the sun sets is usually called "golden hour" because the light has a warm, golden hue. Blue hour, or **twilight**, is the half hour after the sun sets, but there's still light in the sky. The sky will appear quite blue in photos—as you see in **PHOTO 3**.



## Exercises

- + Hold a portrait session with a friend, paying special attention to the relationship between your subject and the background. Make a conscious choice of background, avoiding situations that will detract from your subject (e.g. is there a tree “growing” out of your subject’s head?). Our eyes and brains are so good at overlooking superfluous information that we often don’t notice things that are distracting in a photo. The best way to check for this is to take a test shot, and then look closely at it, to make sure there’s nothing that detracts from your subject.
- + Pay attention to shadows you see every day, noting whether or not the edges have sharp, crisp lines. This will help you start identifying the difference between hard and soft light. Find a location that you pass by regularly, and take pictures of that location on a sunny day and also on a cloudy day. (It helps if you take them at roughly the same time of day.) Then compare the photos and note how different the shadows look, and the effect on the overall scene. Do you like one look better than the other, and if so, why?
- + To help understand direction of light, you can work with a flashlight or a bare bulb light that you can move around. Ask a friend to pose for you, and take photos of him/her in a darkened room, moving the light to various positions (front, back, side, top, underneath). The photos will all look quite different, and will help get you accustomed to seeing the direction of light on your subject. If you’re shooting with available light, you can’t move your light source, but you can usually move your subject (and you can always move your camera) to achieve a different direction of light.
- + To help you better understand color temperature and blue hour, take a picture of your house (or a friend’s house) just before and after sunset. Make sure you turn on all the lights in the house (assuming they are traditionally-colored bulbs, and not fluorescents or cool-white LEDs), and then take photos before the sun sets, then every 5 minutes after the sun sets until the sky is completely dark. Take a look at the photos, and note how different the colors look in them. Just before the sun goes down, the warm light in the sky will match the warm color of the lights in the house. But after the sun goes down, and it’s twilight, you’ll notice how strong the color difference becomes between the cool colors of the sky, and the warm colors coming from inside the house.
- + Focusing “with your body” is a great way to ensure that the key element is in focus, when you’re working with a wide-open lens. To experiment with this technique, get a friend to pose for you, and shoot with your fastest portrait lens (e.g. an 85mm lens at f1.4). Set your camera to continuous shooting, so that you can hold down the shutter button and take multiple exposures. Now focus on your friend’s eye, and while you’re shooting, lean back a tiny bit, then lean forward a tiny bit. You should shoot about 10 photos while you’re leaning. Evaluate the shots to check for critical focus. Sometimes you’ll find that your camera got the focus right on its own; but if it didn’t, then one of the other shots where you were leaning backwards or forwards should have the subject’s eye in sharp focus.

CHAPTER 3

# CAPTURING YOUR PASSIONS





# CAPTURING YOUR PASSIONS

“AS A PHOTOGRAPHER YOU’RE SETTING YOUR OWN STANDARDS, AND I PERSONALLY THINK YOU SHOULD SET THEM VERY HIGH.”

**What motivates you as a photographer?** Maybe, like Jimmy, you are inspired by people that push the limits of what’s humanly possible. Dive into research about how those you admire do what they do; you’ll probably find that they started pushing in one direction, then kept pushing and pushing further until they reached the limit of what’s possible.

The best photographers pursue subject matter about which they are deeply passionate. Jimmy started off as a climber and skier long before he became a photographer, and his photographs are a natural extension of subjects which he loves. When you’re passionate about something, you know it deeply, and you can translate that depth of knowledge into powerful images.

**When thinking about what to photograph, ask yourself:**

- + What interests you?
- + What is unique about your point of view?
- + To what extent are you willing to take risks?
- + What are the possible consequences and are you willing to accept them?

Taking a creative risk can result in failure, and although it doesn’t feel great, that failure will often spark a new idea or approach for you to try again. The more you start to embrace mistakes and failures as a means to move forward, the faster you’re going to get to where you’re trying to go.

Whether your goal is small or large, it can be helpful if you can work with others as a team to achieve that goal. Often we feel we have to do everything ourselves. But the larger the task, the smarter it becomes to surround yourself with people who share your vision. Not only do many hands make light work: many brains, working together, can come up with ideas that a person working alone never could.

## **Exercises to Find Your Voice:**

Below are five exercises to help you find your creative voice. Select the one(s) that seems most useful to help you capture your passion.

- + Make a list of photographers that inspire you, and create a digital album of images that resonate with you. Can you identify common elements among the different images? Do certain themes, subjects, or styles show up across their different bodies of work? Being able to articulate the reasons why someone else’s work inspires you is imperative to understanding why you are moved by it. Now take a look at your own work, and see if you can list the common elements or themes that are your passions.

- + Spend some time doing some “cross-training” for your brain by exploring other types of photography. Go to a library or bookstore and start looking through books that show the history of photography, as well as many different genres of photography. Even if the subject matter doesn’t interest you, spend some time looking at each photo and try to figure out why someone thought this photo was good enough to publish. What are the things that make it a successful image? Is it the subject matter? The composition? The color? Or is it something less tangible, like the photographer’s unique point of view? Write a list of qualities for three different photographers that make their work unique.
- + Explore different types of art, thinking critically about what you see, read, or hear.
  - Go to a museum or gallery and look at the artwork, with the goal of figuring out what it is that makes that piece important enough for someone to put it on display.
  - Go to a concert, especially if it’s a new type of music that you don’t normally listen to. How does this music make you feel? How does it make the people around you feel?
  - Read a few short stories, or a biography of someone you admire. What kinds of stories resonate with you? Stories about perseverance or survival? Stories about love?
- + Experiment with a genre of photography that you’ve never tried before. For example, if you’re accustomed to shooting landscapes, try to shoot food. Or if you normally shoot architecture, try shooting portraits. Remember that you don’t have to publish or show anybody this work; it can just be part of your own artistic development. Trying different types of photography will help you become better at the thing you love shooting.
- + Make a list of things that you are interested in, no matter how small or esoteric. These can be hobbies that you have, like climbing or cooking, or broader concepts that you might be interested in, like social justice or climate change. Then spend some time doing research on what types of photographs are already being made on these subjects. Create a digital album of these inspirational images for reference.





▲  
Peter Croft at Dawn on Grand  
Traverse of Evolution Peaks,  
High Sierra, 1997. © Galen  
Rowell / Mountain Light



▲  
Bob Palias on Oodaaq Island,  
Greenland, 1996. © Galen  
Rowell / Mountain Light



▲  
Ron Kauk on Astroman, East Face  
of Washington Column Yosemite,  
California. © Galen Rowell / Mountain  
Light

### Learn more about Jimmy's influences:

**Galen Rowell** was one of the first climbing photographers to include himself in his own photos, melding the act of climbing and photographing the climb into one. He shot for *National Geographic*, *LIFE*, and many other publications. He died in 2002 in a plane crash, while returning from a photography workshop he had taught in Alaska. Read his obituary in the [New York Times](#), and check out *Galen Rowell: A Retrospective* (Sierra Club Books, 2008) to dig into his work. The book also features essays about mountaineering, conservation, and photography.



▲  
FRANCE. Paris. Place de  
l'Europe. Gare Saint Lazare.  
1932. © Henri Cartier-Bresson  
/ Magnum Photo

**Henri Cartier-Bresson** was one of the most influential photographers of the twentieth century, pioneering the genre of street photography. He co-founded [Magnum Photos](#) in 1947, along with several other important photographers, including Robert Capa. In Cartier-Bresson's 1952 book, *The Decisive Moment*, he wrote, "To me, photography is the simultaneous recognition, in a fraction of a second, of the significance of an event as well as of a precise organization of forms which give that event its proper expression." He called this the decisive moment. "There is a creative fraction of a second when you are taking a picture. Your eye must see a composition or an expression that life itself offers you, and you must know with intuition when to click the camera. That is the moment the photographer is creative."





CUBA. Havana. 1998.  
A group of children playing  
in a playground. © David Alan  
Harvey / Magnum Photos



CUBA.. Manicaragua. 1998.  
Tobacco farmers mend their  
fence. © David Alan Harvey /  
Magnum Photos



**David Alan Harvey** is a member of Magnum Photos. Harvey has shot over forty essays for *National Geographic* magazine and has covered stories around the world, including projects on French teenagers, the Berlin Wall, Maya culture, Vietnam, Native Americans, Mexico, and Naples, and a recent feature on Nairobi. His motto is: "Don't shoot what it looks like; shoot what it feels like."

HONDURAS. Tegucigalpa.  
1990. © David Alan Harvey /  
Magnum Photos





Kuwait Series, Greater Burhan Oil Field (Capping Well Head), 1991. © Sebastião Salgado / Contact Press Images



Women carry their goods to the market of Chimbote. Region of Chimborazo, Ecuador. © Sebastião Salgado / Contact Press Images



Rwandan refugee camp of Benako, Tanzania, 1994. © Sebastião Salgado / Contact Press Images

**Sebastião Salgado** is a world-renowned photographer who was formerly an economist. His deep interest in how different world economies affected people translated into images of forced migration and workers. Salgado was a member of Magnum Photos before founding [Amazonas Images](#) with his wife, Lélia Wanick Salgado. You can read more about his life [here](#), and watch a [TED Talk](#) in which he talks about how he nearly gave up photography. Wim Wenders and Salgado's son Juliano co-directed the documentary *The Salt of the Earth* about his life and work.



CHAPTER 4

# PRINCIPLES OF NARRATIVE: CONCEPT, RESEARCH, AND PITCH



# PRINCIPLES OF NARRATIVE: CONCEPT, RESEARCH, AND PITCH

“THE BEST PHOTOJOURNALISTS OUT THERE AREN’T JUST GREAT PHOTOGRAPHERS. THEY’RE GREAT THINKERS. THEY’RE GREAT STORYTELLERS.”

When you’re shooting work for a magazine, there are four steps in the process:

1. Concepting and research the idea
2. Pitch the idea
3. Shoot the story
4. Edit the story

Jimmy goes over the first two steps in this chapter, and the others in Chapter 5: Principles of Narrative: The Shoot and The Edit.

## 1. Concepting and researching the idea:

Concepting is essentially establishing the viewpoint for your story, for example, “I plan to follow and document a climber’s free solo attempt to climb Half Dome as a way to show how human potential is limitless.” Whether you’re researching from your desk or out in the field, your aim is twofold: to learn as much as you can about your subject, and to uncover what other stories have been told about it, both in this particular magazine and elsewhere. If you aren’t already embedded into the culture of your subject, you’ll also use your research process as a way to meet people who can help you. The more familiar you get and the more connections you make, the better your access and your final story will be.

2. **Pitching the idea to the magazine:** Your pitch should answer two fundamental questions for a magazine editor: why they should care about your story, and why you are the right person to tell it. When pitching your idea, make sure to emphasize what makes your perspective on this story new and unique. Give your editor a sense of what the photos will look like, and point to larger concepts that place the story in a broader context. When pitching yourself, show examples of past work that proves you can pull the story off. And remember that pitching is also about listening. By listening to the client and incorporating their concerns into your workflow, you have a much better chance that the end result will be one that will satisfy everyone.

“YOU’RE NOT JUST PITCHING THE IMAGES. YOU’RE PITCHING YOURSELF. AND YOU’RE PITCHING A NARRATIVE.”

## Resources for editorial photography:

It can be tricky to break into editorial photography if you’ve never done it before. Read this [Photo District News article](#) about how photo editors find and hire photographers, including advice from *The Atlantic magazine* and MSNBC.

Adobe Create talks with professionals at *Bon Appétit*, *Glamour*, *Mother Jones*, and *Wired* about “[What Photo Editors Want](#)” from photographers.

[Workbook](#) is a portfolio service where photo editors can look for photographers (and other artists). Like ASMP’s “[Find a Photographer](#),” it makes some of your best work easily searchable by decision makers.

Here are some [specific ideas](#) about how to be a good editorial photographer, including how to find out if the photos need to be horizontal or vertical (magazine covers are almost always vertical), and how to use the accompanying article as research for dictating any specific images you may want to shoot.

Getting regular portfolio reviews is a good way to make sure you're telling your story effectively. Reviews often happen at photo festivals, and can be geared toward any type of photography, including editorial and fine art. Make sure you read up on the reviewers to find a good fit for the type of work you do. Here are a few notable photo festivals:

- + [Filter Photo](#)
- + [Palm Springs Photo Festival](#)
- + [Review Santa Fe Photo Festival](#)
- + [Photolucida](#)
- + [PhotoNOLA](#)

*The New York Times* also has an annual photo review that anyone can enter; the deadline is usually in January. Read the application guidelines for 2018 [here](#). Although that deadline has passed, it should give you a good idea of the requirements for submission.

Watch this [video](#) from National Geographic Live about how Robert Clark became an editorial photographer for the magazine of his dreams.

Before she became the senior photo editor for *National Geographic* in 2005, [Sarah Leen](#) spent 27 years as a freelance photographer, regularly contributing to the magazine. National Geographic Society published a book of her work, *American Back Roads and Byways*, in 2000.

### How to pitch a story:

Determine a story that you think is magazine-worthy, and research outlets to determine where it might be a good fit. Then concept, research, and craft your pitch, using the following roadmap as your guide:

- 1. Concept a bunch of ideas.** Start broadly, writing down as many concepts as you can think of, and then start doing preliminary research on the concepts, making note of key points you could use to pitch your idea. Be specific, and pull visual examples (either from your own work, or someone else's) whenever possible to support your pitch.
- 2. Research the existing editorial coverage of your ideas.** Evaluate every article you find that has crossover with your ideas, making note of its specific point-of-view, and also what larger concept each story is pointing to. Then look through the list and figure out what gaps exist in the ways this subject matter has been approached in the past. Do any of those gaps seem like they'd be interesting to you (and the magazine, and its readership)?
- 3. Refine your ideas into elevator pitches.** Write it down, revise it several times, and then read it out loud to see how it sounds. Once you're ready, find a friend you can practice with, and pitch them your story. Then ask them what they think about the clarity and brevity of your pitch; both are very important to a photo editor.
- 4. Identify outlets for your pitch.** If you've never pitched anything before, you might benefit from starting a little smaller. Are there any local or niche magazines you could contact that would be open to a freelancer pitching a photo story to them? Make sure you research what other stories the publication has already done on this subject.



5. **Prep your portfolio.** When you pitch, you'll need to have a portfolio of work that you can share; ideally you already have a website with your work, but if you don't, you can create a free, sophisticated-looking pitch using Adobe Spark.
  6. **Prepare a rough budget.** You'll need to have a firm understanding of how much it would cost to execute the assignment you pitch. This budget should include your time and any hard costs for crew or materials that you would need, as well as insurance, food, permits, and location fees. You don't need to send your budget with your pitch; you just need to be prepared for that eventual conversation.
  7. **Pitch.** Construct and send your pitch following these steps. If you're not a strong writer, get a friend, or hire a professional writer to help you craft this email.
- + **Find the right person.** Don't send your pitch to a general email inbox; do some research to make sure you know who the appropriate contact person is. If you're pitching a magazine, you'll find the editors' names on the masthead.
  - + **Hook them with a strong subject line.** Editors get so many emails each day; a well-written subject line will make them want to open your email and read your pitch.
  - + **Be brief.** In just a few sentences (and maybe a couple of images), give the editor a sense of what the story would be about, what the takeaways for the reader would be, and why it's relevant now.
  - + **Give them the option to see more work.** Include links to any previous work you've done that would help them understand why you're the right person for the job.
  - + **Follow up.** End the email telling them that you'll follow up in a couple of days (and then don't forget to do that).

**JIMMY'S NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC EDITORIAL:**

Photos by Jimmy Chin.









CHAPTER 5

# PRINCIPLES OF NARRATIVE: THE SHOOT AND THE EDIT



# PRINCIPLES OF NARRATIVE: THE SHOOT AND THE EDIT

“GREAT EDITORS ARE BRUTAL.”

In Chapter 4: Principles of Narrative: *Concept, Research, and Pitch*, Jimmy discusses the first two steps for creating a photojournalistic story for a magazine: concepting and pitching. In this chapter, he continues with steps three and four.

**3. The shoot:** It's critical for your story to be complete, so endeavor to capture a wide variety of shots—in subject matter, composition, mood, and scale. While it can be tempting to focus exclusively on the epic, high-impact images, it's just as important to craft images that give context and meaning to the project by showing the behind-the-scenes process of how and why things happen.

**4. The edit:** To successfully edit photos to tell your story, you have to divorce yourself from the experience of shooting the images and look at them objectively. As you cull your photos down, don't try to do it all in one step. First, go through and mark any images that you think are good ones. Then go through that group, and narrow it down further to select the best of that group. As you're getting down to a manageable number of images, evaluate how they work in concert to tell your story. Is each critical to the narrative? Be ruthless as you cull your images down—cutting pictures only hurts for a while. Do each round of editing on a separate day if you can, so that you're coming to the images with fresh eyes each time.

Even though you need to make sure that all your photos work together to form a complete narrative, it's also very important to think about which image is going to be the one that tells the entire

story in a single frame. Ideally it will not only give a sense of the complete story, but also point to some of the larger considerations that turned up during your research. In many ways, this single image needs to act as a metaphor for the larger themes of your narrative.

## Resources for editorial photography:

Editorial work usually doesn't require a release from people who appear in your photos, but if you want to also license the work for commercial purposes or stock photography, a release is necessary. Read this [ASMP article](#) about why you should get model (and location) releases whenever possible.

Editorial work usually pays less than commercial work, but your images can have a second life; it's not uncommon for photographers to license their work for magazines as stock photography. Read this [Format Magazine article](#) about how editorial photographers can make money with their work in secondary markets. Here's a partial list of companies that serve as a market for stock photography:

- + [Shutterstock](#)
- + [iStock](#)
- + [Bigstock](#)
- + [123rf](#)
- + [Dreamstime](#)
- + [Depositphotos](#)
- + [Crestock](#)
- + [Yay Images](#)
- + [Gallery Stock](#)
- + [People Images](#)
- + [Snapwire](#)

**How to create a photo essay:**

Continuing from Chapter 4: Principles of Narrative: Concept, Research, and Pitch, even if your pitches weren't successful, execute the assignment as if you were hired to do it. From this work, you'll not only gain valuable experience, but also a great portfolio piece that you can share with a photo editor.

Before you get started, think about these questions: How are you going to make it all happen? What are the budgetary and schedule issues that you'll have to overcome to make the assignment work? Then, shoot the assignment keeping in mind the key points from Jimmy's lessons:

1. Tell a diverse, confident story.
  2. Make sure you have a wide variety of images to select from.
  3. Be brutal when you're editing your photos.  
(Don't edit any images on the same day you shoot; it'll be easier to be objective if you let a little time pass between shooting and editing.)
- + Narrow everything you shot down to the best 100 photos.
  - + A day or more later, look at those 100 images and narrow them down to the top 25.
  - + Finally, narrow the 25 down to the top 10 images, making sure each photo serves your original concept for the story.
4. At the same time, get a trusted, visually sophisticated friend to help you, by giving them the top 100 photos, and a written description of the overall story, and let them select what they think are the top 10 photos.
  5. Compare your top 10s. Where did they differ? Ask your friend why they chose photos that were different than yours, making sure you listen to what they say without arguing about any of their choices; your job is to listen and understand what they saw in the images, and why they made the choices they did.
  6. Keeping in mind your discussion with your trusted friend, make your final selections for the 10 best images that tell your story.
  7. Complete the assignment by writing captions for the 10 final images.



**JIMMY'S NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC EDITORIAL:**

▲ Alex Honnold on Half Dome, used on the cover of *National Geographic*. Photo by Jimmy Chin.

Jimmy's shot of Alex Honnold on Half Dome is an example of the one image that tells the story in a single frame. It was the hero image for his *National Geographic* story about climbing in Yosemite, and it ended up being the cover. This captivating shot illustrates this story specifically—showing Yosemite's iconic peak—but it also underscores Jimmy's larger point that the human potential is limitless, as it shows Alex standing all alone, without any harness or ropes.



▲ Mountain climber Cedar Wright. Photo by Jimmy Chin.



▲ Photo by Jimmy Chin.



▲ Photo by Jimmy Chin.

CHAPTER 6

# PHOTO STUDIES: SHOOTING AT THE TOP





# PHOTO STUDIES: SHOOTING AT THE TOP



▲  
Skiers on Everest.  
Photo by Jimmy Chin.

“PHOTOGRAPHY IS A VEHICLE TO GIVE YOU ACCESS TO THE WORLD.”

## **Skiing Down Mount Everest**

Jimmy took this photograph (left) at the top of Mount Everest in 2006, on a trip with Kit and Rob DesLauriers, in which they not only climbed Everest, but also skied down it. Summiting Everest takes so much preparation, willpower, and presence of mind that over the two days it took Jimmy and his colleagues to get down to the base camp, he only took 10 photos. Every photo from that trip is precious. Jimmy also knew that he wouldn't have the ability to think through any technical requirements for photography, so he shot his photos in Program mode (fully automatic, like a point-and-shoot camera), which is not typical for a professional. But he trusted his camera enough to know that it would get good exposures for him, so that he could concentrate on all the details that go into getting down from the summit safely.



### Climbing One World Trade Center

In 2016, Jimmy was approached by Kathy Ryan, the director of photography for the *New York Times Magazine*, who asked him to bring his climbing skills to an urban environment. They hatched a plan for Jimmy to climb the World Trade Center, capturing a unique view of the city.

There were a lot of logistical hurdles, and despite months of planning, Jimmy only had a brief window of time in which he could shoot. Furthermore, he had an equipment failure;

the strobes he had placed in order to light his subject didn't work because of all the radio wave interference. Thinking quickly, he used his headlamp to shine light on the subject and get the shot.

These two very different experiences have something in common, which is that a professional will always be at his or her best, no matter what the circumstances. Jimmy does whatever he needs to do in order to get the shot, which is one of the reasons he is so successful.



Man climbs World Trade Center tower.  
Photos by Jimmy Chin.

**Dive deeper:**

See the [photos](#) Jimmy shot on the ski trip down Everest.

Watch a [video](#) of Jimmy's trip up Meru to see what it's like to camp on the vertical face of a mountain.

Watch the [VR piece](#) that Jimmy shot atop the World Trade Center.

**Practice thinking creatively under pressure:**

To force yourself to think creatively under pressure, try one of the following assignments:

- + Have a friend select a small object (no bigger than a toaster and light enough to carry), keeping it a secret from you. Then have your friend give you the object, and set a timer for 20 minutes. Your assignment is to take 20 unique photos of that object in 20 minutes. (If your friend is also a photographer, you can each bring an object for the other person and shoot simultaneously.)
- + Pull a book off a shelf, randomly open to a page, and take 60 seconds to select a word or phrase from that page. Then time yourself for one hour and see how many photos you can take that relate to that word or phrase. (Again, this is great to do with a friend, so that you can share your results with each other.)
- + Get a timer, some paper and a pen. Set the timer for 60 seconds and then answer one of the questions below. When you're done, reset the time for another 60 seconds and write down as many new answers as you can. Finally, set the time for another 60 seconds and write down however many more come to mind.
  - How could you get to the airport if you didn't have any money?
  - What are ways you could get between two islands?
  - What are some specific things you could do in the place where you live to help someone less fortunate than you?

CHAPTER 7

# COMMERCIAL WORK: PITCHING AND WORKING WITH CLIENTS





# COMMERCIAL WORK: PITCHING AND WORKING WITH CLIENTS

“PRESENTATION IS IMPORTANT. CONFIDENCE IS IMPORTANT. BUT YOU SHOULD BE ABLE TO BACK EVERYTHING UP WITH YOUR WORK.”

Like most photographers, Jimmy does both editorial assignments and commercial work. The subject matter for both could be the same (for example: mountain climbing), but the process and results are quite different.

These differences generally hold true, although the process isn't always so clear cut. For example, it's possible to shoot a commercial job with more of an editorial process.

| Editorial Photography   | Commercial Photography   |
|---|--|
| The end goal is to tell a story.  | The end goal is to tell a <i>brand</i> story, which connects a product or service to its customers.                                |
| The client is a magazine or other type of publisher.  | The client is a company or brand.  |
| The photographer is a “fly on the wall” observing and capturing moments.  | The photographer explicitly directs the action to achieve the desired outcome.   |
| The photographer has creative freedom to tell the story as they choose.   | The brand (usually) has final say on creative decisions; the photographer works within brand guidelines and an approved shot list. |
| The photographer is likely shooting independently, without the client present.  | The client is usually with the photographer, approving images as they work.  |
| The photographer usually retains ownership of the work, though the magazine can request exclusive use of the work for a period of time. | The client usually retains ownership of the work, commissioning it as a work for hire.   |

For a commercial shoot, your priority is to meet the client's needs—while keeping in mind that they have come to you because they value what you bring to the process. It can be a tricky balance to know when to gently push back on a client's idea. If your relationship with the client is such that you can assert your ideas, you may do so, but you want to preserve the relationship. One way to approach this is to make sure you first get exactly what the client wants, and then shoot the alternate idea that you have, time permitting. You can pitch this to the client as a value-added service, assuring them that they'll get exactly what they want plus an additional option.

Sometimes you'll be working directly with the client, but other times there will be an advertising agency in between the client and you. Then you have to make sure that you and the agency work together, elevating each other's ideas, so that the client is happy.

### How to get commercial work:

There are two different ways you can get commercial work:

- 1. Creative director contacts you directly because they've seen and like your work.** This is ideal, because you know they already like you and your style, and want to figure out a way to make it work. You'll meet with the agency or client to talk through the project and make sure it's the right fit for both of you. Sometimes there's a fixed budget for the project, but other times you'll need to come up with a bid that they can approve.
- 2. You are sent a Request for Proposal (RFP), inviting you to pitch for a job.** This is an open competition between two or more photographers. For these it's important to understand the criteria upon which the agency or client will make their decision. Ideally, they're making their choice based on creativity, but sometimes they are primarily looking at the bid. Talk with them and try to assess the situation. You can also ask if they have a fixed budget; creative concepts are paramount when this is the case.

### How to pitch commercial work:

- 3. Do your homework.** Research past advertising campaigns for the client—become familiar with the brand and its values so that you don't pitch something inappropriate. Also, ask questions about how the campaign is being used (for example, is it for print? social media?) and who the audience is. All this research will inform the proposal, or pitch deck, that you submit.
- 4. Create a pitch deck.** A pitch deck clearly communicates your ideas to the agency/client, and shows how you would approach the project. A good pitch deck usually contains the following:
  - + A project overview that clearly states the nature of the project, its objectives, and how you would meet those objectives.
  - + Reference images to support the overview—ideally you pull from your own work, but if you don't have anything appropriate, then you'll have to pull from other people's work, making sure they understand that the images are for reference only—that they aren't yours.
  - + A bid, which you'll send with the pitch deck as a separate document.
  - + A calendar, listing the prep and shooting days, and key check-in dates when the agency/client will need to approve things, in order to stay on schedule.
- 5. Draft a budget.** If someone asked you to buy them a bottle of the finest Champagne, and handed you a five dollar bill, you'd have to tell them that that wasn't enough money, right? That analogy holds true for any commercial job, too. The creative concept and the available resources to complete the job must be aligned, or else you're trying to buy Champagne for five bucks. That's why you can't pitch a creative concept without also pitching a budget, because the two go hand-in-hand. Your pitch expresses what you'll do, and the bid tells them what it will cost. When there's a fixed budget for a project, it's your job to figure out how to best spend that budget to achieve the client's vision.

**6. Show passion.** Whenever you're talking with the agency/client, it's important to show them that you are fully engaged and passionate about their project. Ideally, they will feel like their project is the only thing you're thinking about. Having a positive, solution-oriented attitude is especially important, not only when you're pitching, but throughout the entire shoot as well.

### Managing the project:

Once you have an approved creative direction, budget, and schedule, you need to stick to them. Ideally you have a producer to manage those things so that you can focus on the creative problem-solving and client communication.

Changes inevitably occur during a project, and you need to be clear with the agency and client what the effects of the change mean. Sometimes the change is small, and has little or no impact on the budget or schedule. But other times the client might request a change that will affect both. Before you agree to the change, you have to make sure the agency/client understands the ramifications of the requested change. If it means the budget or schedule is going to change, they need to approve that before anything else happens. What you don't want to have happen is for the client to ask for a change, and then after you've done it, you inform them that it's going to cost more, and/or set the project back a day. It's your job (or your producer's job, if you have one) to make sure the client is making informed decisions.

### Resources for commercial photographers:

When you're pitching an agency or client, it's also important to address the specifics of what, exactly, they are hiring you to do. This is usually spelled out in the bid and in a Terms and Conditions page. Some details you need to address in your proposal when you are bidding a project are:

- + What is the schedule?
- + What is the cost, and how is it broken down?

- + How many finished images will the client get?
- + What rights does the client have to use the images? (Is it in all media, or just specific ones?)
- + How long will the client be licensing the images for? (6 months? 2 years? Perpetuity?)
- + What is the client responsible for? (If you're shooting a product, is the client providing it?)
- + When will you be paid? (Half up front, and half upon completion?)
- + What is your cancellation and rescheduling policy?
- + And don't forget a place for the client to sign your proposal, indicating that they understand and accept your terms.

A detailed proposal helps eliminate confusion, and protects you against assumptions that your client might be making but not explicitly saying.

*Photo District News* is a useful magazine to get if you're interested in commercial work, with articles in every issue about commercial and other types of photography. One such article, [Creative Pitches that Land Advertising Clients](#), is chock-full of great examples of pitches, bids, and how to best communicate during a preproduction call. A subscription to PDN is required to access this premium content.

If you'd like to get on an ad agency or client's radar for potential future jobs, [this helpful article](#) will give you ideas on what to do. [Agency Access](#) is a great way to find out who the key people are to be talking to at any ad agency (subscription required). You should also read this article in Photoshelter, "[12 Tips to Approach Photo Buyers the Right Way](#)" to gain insights on how and when to make your mark.



[Wonderful Machine](#) is a marketing service for commercial photographers. You can apply to be listed on their site, so that potential clients can find you. They also help with marketing, estimating, and editing; they can even produce the entire shoot for you.

[BlinkBid](#) is commonly used by commercial photographers to create bids for their jobs. It will help you make sure you don't forget important line items in your bid, and it also gives you the ability to share your in-progress bids with another person, like your producer. (Subscription required.)

[A Photo Editor](#) is a valuable website for both commercial and editorial photographers, edited by Rob Haggart, the former Director of Photography for *Men's Journal* and *Outside Magazine*.

The [American Society of Media Photographers](#) is a national organization with local chapters all across the United States. Members are listed in their [Find a Photographer](#) database, and enjoy a number of benefits, including business affairs assistance and discounts on many products including Apple, Blinkbid, insurance, and photo workshops.

#### Dive deeper:

[James Nachtwey](#) is an American photojournalist and war photographer. He shoots for *Time* magazine and has covered many international wars and conflicts. Filmmaker Christian Frei made an [award-winning documentary](#) about Nachtwey in 2001.

Watch this [incredible spot](#) Jimmy directed for Pirelli Tires to see how he brings his know-how to the commercial world.

#### So you want to be a commercial photographer?

1. Take a hard look at your website and make sure it presents your best work in the clearest way possible. A busy Art Producer or Creative Director doesn't want to spend time trying to figure out how to access your images. Group your work systematically, and label clearly. Only put your best work on your website; quality definitely trumps quantity here. Look at the

websites of other photographers and see how their sites work. Are they easy to navigate? And make sure that your contact info is easy to find; your phone number and email should be listed, not a contact form that someone has to fill out and wait for you to contact them back.

2. It's important to have a strong portfolio of work to show prospective clients. [Find a professional commercial photographer](#) and ask if they would be willing to review your work.
3. If you're interested in working with a specific brand, find out who their advertising agency is, and then identify the agency's Art Producers or Art Buyers so that you can get in contact with them. Ideally, you want to be able to come into their agency so that they can see some of your work and what your personality is like. Send a brief email with a couple of really strong images, telling them why you'd like to work for them, and why you're the right photographer. Tell them that you'll follow up with a phone call in a few days, and then make sure you follow through. If you don't hear anything back right away, that's not necessarily a bad sign; they're likely busy people and get requests like yours all the time. It's okay to continue to email them a brief, polite email once every month or two, always sending one or two appropriate images; the goal is that one of the images will get them interested enough to email you back.
4. If you're interested in doing a certain type of photography (e.g. adventure, fashion, or food) but don't have much work like that already in your portfolio, then you need to create a body of work that shows your capabilities. You can often negotiate a trade-for-prints deal with models so that you can each use the images for your own portfolios. And a producer will often help you do a test shoot so that you can build your portfolio up as well. The images you produce need to be of the highest caliber; remember, you're trying to show what you can do, and elicit an emotional response in a potential client.

5. In addition to trying to forge relationships with Art Producers, it can be incredibly helpful to connect with Creative Directors. If they love your work, they will lobby their Art Producer to consider you for a job. Find out if there's a local group for advertising agencies and start to go to some of their events (which might include annual awards show, monthly lectures, or social groups, like a bowling league). If you don't know anyone, it might take a while until you can create some genuine connections, but it's worth it if you're looking for that first lucky break.
6. Find out if there is a nearby local chapter of one of the following national photography groups, and get on their mailing lists. They will usually have talks, demonstrations, and seminars, many of which will be geared toward commercial photography.

+ [American Photographic Artists](#)

+ [American Society of Media Photographers](#)

+ [Professional Photographers of America](#)

CHAPTER 8

# COMMERCIAL CASE STUDY: CANON SHOOT





# COMMERCIAL CASE STUDY: CANON SHOOT

"THERE ARE THINGS I'M CONSTANTLY TELLING MYSELF. CHANGE THE FOCAL LENGTH. TAKE A LOOK AT SOMETHING DIFFERENT. DON'T GET TRAPPED INTO ONE LENS OR ONE FOCAL LENGTH. DON'T GET TRAPPED INTO THIS ONE SHOT THAT YOU'RE TRYING TO GET."

For this shoot, Canon hired Jimmy to show off the capabilities of a mirrorless camera, the EOS R. He shot the campaign on the Waddington Range, in southwestern British Columbia. The range is extremely rugged, and its highest peak, Mt. Waddington, tops out at 4,019 meters (13,186 feet). The range is difficult to access; Mt. Waddington was originally referred to as "Mystery Mountain" because no one knew very much about it.

Working with a commercial client is always a balancing act: you weigh what they're asking for against what you know is possible. Sometimes a client will ask for something that seems impossible (either because of the schedule or the budget) and it's part of your job to educate them so that they fully understand the ramifications of their requests. As always, being open-minded and thinking of creative solutions will be the best approach. Jimmy offers the following tips for achieving success on commercial shoots:

- 1. Vet your crew properly.** Ideally, you will have worked together in the past, but if not, you shouldn't just depend on recommendations; talk with the candidate before you agree to hire him or her to make sure it'll be a good fit.

- 2. Allocate your resources appropriately.**

Make sure your expenditures on crew and gear align with the creative brief, budget, and schedule.

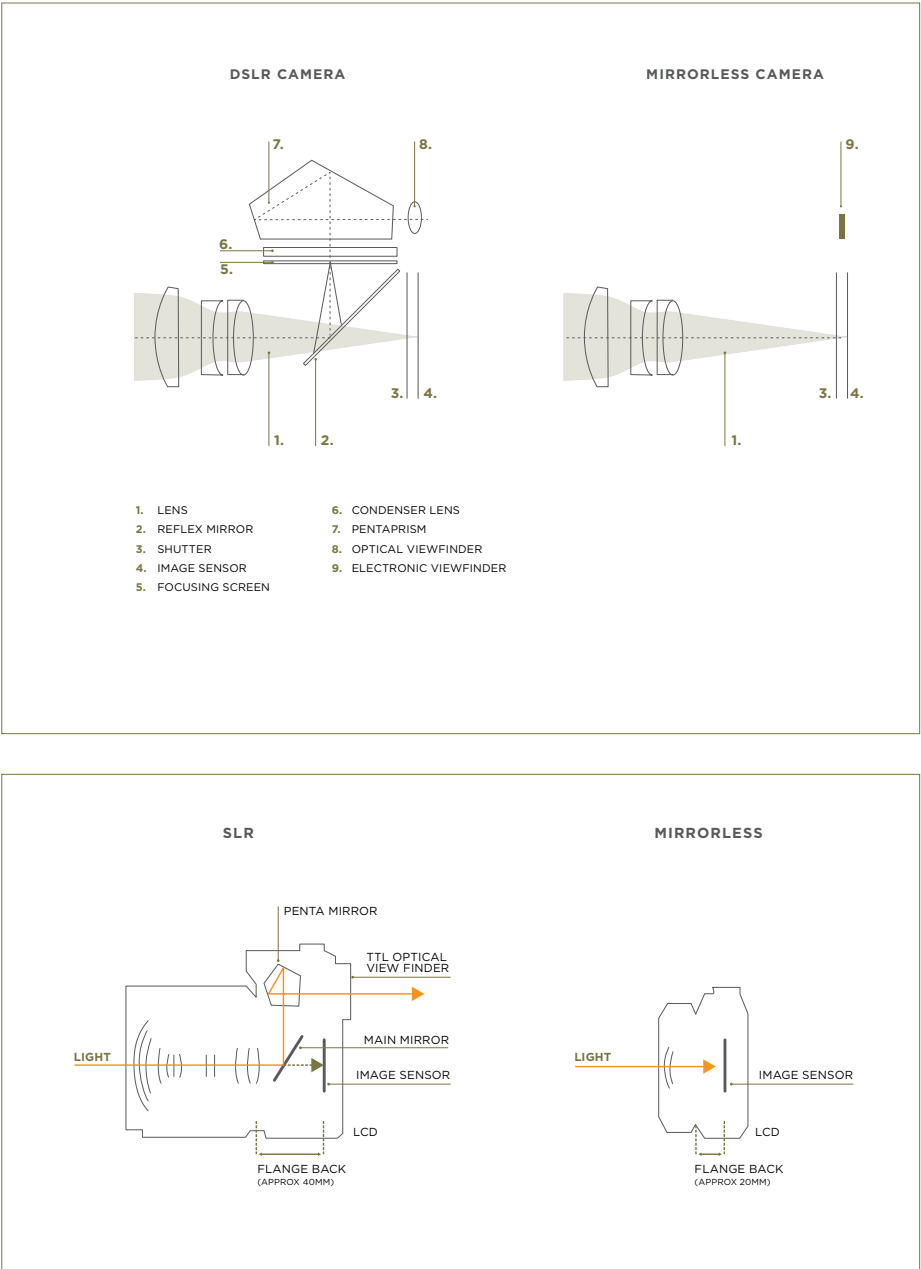
- 3. Be efficient with your time.** Organize your shooting plan so that shots with similar locations or lighting setups are all shot together. Since company moves take time, make sure you've maximized the potential of your location before you break and move to the next.

- 4. Get a variety of images for each scenario.** Give yourself options in editing by shooting wider and close up, horizontal and vertical. You'll be amazed at how different a scene will look just by changing your lens, or re-orienting your camera.

Learn more about camera types:

Mirrorless cameras are the new wave of photography. They are smaller than DSLRs because, as the name suggests, there’s no mirror inside. Here is an overview of the major differences between the two types of cameras:

| DSLR (Digital Single Lens Reflex)   | Mirrorless   |
|---|--|
| Well established, wide support by third-party vendors, which can result in more choices and lower prices  | Newer technology; less common, with fewer choices of lenses and accessories (but that is changing quickly) |
| Needs to be quite large because of mirror system, which makes it somewhat heavy   | Can be much smaller since there is no mirror, allowing it to be much lighter                               |
| Optical viewfinder; you are literally seeing through the lens, meaning you have to take a photo and then look at it to make sure your exposure is correct | Electronic viewfinder; you see what the photo will look like before you press the shutter button           |
| Blazing fast autofocus, which is essential for sports and events  | Slower focus (but again, mirrorless is starting to catch up)   |
| Long battery life   | Short battery life (due to electronic viewfinder)  |



## Dive deeper on composition:

### Isolating your subject

In this photo, Jimmy isolates his subject in two different ways: color and brightness levels. The subject stands out because of his bright red coat, and also because Jimmy positioned himself so that there was a relatively bright, white area behind the subject. Both of these choices help make the subject pop against the background.



Climber with headlamp stands on rock ledge at night. Photo by Jimmy Chin.

### Negative Space

Negative space simply means that there's a large area of the photo that's mostly "empty," used to balance a photo. In this photo, the white snowy/cloudy areas are the negative space, balancing the warm rock and colorful climber on the left. Art Directors on commercial shoots love negative space, because it gives them room to place their text over a photo, without covering up any important details.



Climbers on wall with snow and clouds in the background. Photo by Jimmy Chin.



**Exercises for creative shooting:**

1. Practice maximizing your shooting options without moving. Stand in one location and find as many good photos as you can without moving position. Rotate around, squat down, and try different focal lengths. Do your best to find every interesting possibility without actually taking a step.
2. Practice shooting with negative space by selecting a subject that stands out against the sky (like a statue, a tree, or a single tall building). Start by taking photos where the subject is vertically centered, then take variations of the photo where it gets progressively lower in the frame. How low can you go? You might be surprised at how striking an image you can create by purposely leaving most of the image “empty.”
3. Practice isolating your subject from the background to make it pop. Have a friend wear all dark colors, and then shoot him/her against lighter-colored backgrounds. Figure out the best position so that your friend has a clean silhouette, without any encumbrances. You can also have your friend wear a single, strong color and shoot so that the color pops out in the scene.
4. Practice shooting starbursts. Catch either sunrise or sunset, and use different focal lengths to get familiar with how that affects the size of the rays; you’ll likely find that wider lenses give you more of a distinct burst. Take a few different photos, setting your camera to the smallest aperture (e.g. f22), and then opening up (e.g. f16, f11) so that later you can compare the different ways the lens renders the sun flare. Also, try experimenting with the sun when it’s partially obscured, like partly behind a mountain or tree, to see how that affects the flare. Lastly, you can also do this at night, with a tripod, by shooting discrete points of light (for example, a street-light). Later, when you’re processing the images, make notes about which lenses and f-stops give you the nicest looking flares.

CHAPTER 9

# HIGH-STAKES PHOTOGRAPHY



# HIGH-STAKES PHOTOGRAPHY

“YOU’LL FIND THAT MANAGING RISK BECOMES A HUGE PART OF YOUR JOB.”

Before you can shoot a subject, you need to have extensive knowledge of that subject; this is especially true for adventure photography, where there is a physical risk if you’re going into remote or dangerous situations. If you’re hanging off the side of a mountain, you need to have done your homework about safety procedures before you get your camera out and start shooting. Spend time learning the craft necessary to be good enough at the activity so that it becomes familiar and even second nature. Once you’ve built a foundation of skills, and you’ve got some space in your brain to think about other things at the same time, then you can start to add photography into the mix.

Consequence x probability = risk. If both the consequences of a certain event and the probability that the event will happen are high, then the risk is very high. The more time you spend doing something, the better you get at it; and the better you get at assessing consequences and probability, the better you get at assessing risk. Being proficient at this activity will also help you assess the difference between perceived risks and actual risks, so that you can make the best decisions when you’re in a difficult spot.

It’s important to have a vision for the shoot, and a plan to execute that vision. But it’s equally important to have a backup plan in case things don’t work out as you’d hoped. Before a shoot, spend some time thinking of different ways you might be able to communicate the same message in a slightly different way. Having a Plan B (or Plans C and D) will help you pivot to a new scenario if things aren’t working out with your original idea.

Even if things are working out exactly as you planned, and you’re getting all the shots you’d planned for, be open to the serendipity of the day. Take a moment every now and then to assess your options; you might find that better shots are right under your nose.



**Dive deeper:**

There are many books about achieving success through practice, and also learning from failure. Here are a few:

- + *Outliers* by Malcolm Gladwell. Little, Brown, & Company, 2008.
- + *The Value of Failure* by Shane Lester. Learning Strategies for Success, 2016.
- + *Adapt: Why Success Always Starts with Failure* by Tim Harford. Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2011.
- + *How to Fail at Almost Everything and Still Win Big* by Scott Adams. Penguin, 2013.
- + *Failing Forward* by John C. Maxwell. Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2007.

Jon Krakauer's book, *Into Thin Air* (Villard Books, 1997), is a harrowing account of the 1996 disaster on Mount Everest in which eight climbers were killed, and a sobering account of risk and its consequences.

Read this 2015 *National Geographic* [interview](#) with Jimmy in which he talks about climbing and risk.

**Exercise:**

Plan a shoot somewhere near your home. Even if it's low risk, take stock of the things that could go wrong and calculate the objective risk to you and your subject. Then execute that shoot, and note whether or not everything goes according to plan. While you're shooting, make sure you keep your mind open to other options that present themselves to you.

CHAPTER 10

# PHOTO STUDIES: CREATIVE PARTNERSHIPS



# PHOTO STUDIES: CREATIVE PARTNERSHIPS



“YOU REALLY WANT TO WORK WITH PEOPLE WHO ELEVATE YOUR GAME, WHO REALLY PUSH YOU.”

## **Antarctica With Conrad Anker**

Working with a creative partner can push you farther than you would be able to go on your own. In the best partnerships, each person brings unique skills to the table, and it's crucial that you listen to each other and rely upon each other's expertise. If you're lucky enough to work with a creative partner for a long time, the level of trust will be so strong that it will be easier to face your fears together.

Strong creative partnerships have also forced Jimmy to invent new ways to shoot. For example, in 2011 he enlisted a crew of climbers to drag a crane up to the top of Yosemite Falls to create a unique perspective of climber Dean Potter.

Having a long-term creative partnership with accomplished climber Conrad Anker has allowed Jimmy to travel to places that are remote and difficult to access, such as Meru and Queen Maud Land. In both cases, being pushed and supported by his creative partnerships allowed Jimmy to create images that are unique and iconic. In these photos of Queen Maud Land in Antarctica, Jimmy's photos evoke another world. His and Conrad's climbing skills—and trust in each other—allowed the two of them to make indelible imagery.

Photos by Jimmy Chin.













**Learn more about climbing:**

Jimmy has photographed many different types of climbs. Each presents its own unique opportunities and challenges:

- + **Mountaineering:** Climbing and hiking to reach the top of a mountain, using whatever tools are necessary, including ropes, harnesses, and belays. Sometimes called alpinism.
- + **Free-Climbing:** rock climbing without the assistance of devices such as pegs placed in the rock, but occasionally using ropes and belays.
- + **Soloing:** Climbing alone, without any ropes, harnesses, or protective equipment.
- + **BASE Jumping:** Parachuting or wingsuit flying from a fixed structure or cliff.
- + **Highline Walking:** Balancing along a suspended length of flat webbing that is tensioned between two anchors. Sometimes called slacklining.

**Learn more about Jimmy's creative partnerships:**

The 2015 film *Meru*, co-directed by Jimmy and Elizabeth Chai Vasarhelyi, documents the ascent of the "Shark's Fin" on Meru Peak, by Jimmy, Conrad Anker, and Renan Ozturk. The climb was incredibly difficult, but the trust the men had in each other allowed them to succeed.

Experience Jimmy and Conrad's 2017 trip to Queen Maud Land (along with four other explorers) through this [interactive website](#), which includes photos, maps, videos, and audio diary recordings from the team.

Dean Potter (1972-2015) was an American climber, highline walker, and BASE jumper. He set speed records for multiple climbs, and died in a wingsuit flying accident in Yosemite. This [short film](#) from *National Geographic* gives a brief glimpse into what made Dean tick.

Watch this [short film](#) by Jimmy of Dean Potter's highline walk over Yosemite Falls.

**Dive deeper on creative collaboration:**

Read Vera John-Steiner's book, *Creative Collaboration* (Oxford University Press, 2006) which examines creative alliances between famous artists and scientists.



CHAPTER 11

# BUILDING AND LEADING A TEAM



# BUILDING AND LEADING A TEAM

“TAKE RESPONSIBILITY AND LEAD BY EXAMPLE.”

## Leadership and Collaboration

To be an effective leader you need to keep your eyes on the big picture, think ahead, and anticipate the needs of the production. You and your team also need a shared vision. That vision doesn't necessarily have to be 100% yours; in fact, you'll find that by collaborating with other people, your shared vision will be stronger.

Building relationships takes time and experience. If you've never worked with someone before, you should make time to do a test shoot together to get a feel for how the other likes to work, before you're on a high-stakes shoot.

## The Preproduction Meeting

Having a preproduction meeting is a key component of any successful shoot. Each member should understand his or her responsibilities, as well as the larger objective you are all working toward. Discuss all the specifics of the shoot during the prepro meeting—logistics, gear, personnel, and schedule—so that the crew has a clear and thorough understanding of the plan. This preparation will help you work quickly and cohesively on the shoot.

However, no matter how much prep you do for a shoot, something unexpected will happen. When it does, you'll be glad you surrounded yourself with a trusted group of people, who will help you come up with creative solutions. Have an open mind and be ready to solve problems on the fly.

## Resources for preproduction:

For your prepro meeting you should have a production book, which acts as the “bible” for the shoot, listing contact info, shot lists, and the schedule. If you have a producer, he or she should make this for you; but if you're self-producing, here's a [comprehensive outline](#) of what should be included in the book.

Photo shoots can have crews of varying sizes. Sometimes the photographer will be the only person on the crew, doing everything alone. But other times, there will be one or more crew members. Here are some key positions and responsibilities on a crew:

- + **Producer:** Responsible for the entire production. Makes sure the photographer and the crew have all the resources they need. Keeps the project on budget and on schedule.
- + **Production Coordinator:** Works with the producer to keep everything running smoothly.
- + **Production Assistant:** Entry-level position, a PA might do just about anything on a production, from getting coffee to holding a reflector.
- + **Photo Assistant:** Works directly with the photographer to craft the images, by carrying equipment, setting up lights and modifiers, and helping with lens changes.
- + **Digital Tech:** Responsible for the actual files during the shoot, the digitech reviews photos as they are being shot, applying a pre-set look that has been established with the photographer, so that the clients are seeing edited images from the start. Digitechs also ensure safety of the data, making backups as necessary.

- + **Hair/Makeup Stylist:** Responsible for the hair and makeup of the talent. On a large shoot this might be two different people.
- + **Wardrobe Stylist:** Responsible for the clothing of the talent.
- + **Art Director:** Responsible for the overall styling of the production.
- + **Prop Stylist:** Responsible for any props. If the props are food, this is called a Food Stylist.
- + **Set Designer:** Designs and fabricates any set needs for studio shoots.
- + **Medic:** On shoots with a high risk factor, a dedicated safety person is necessary to ensure everyone on the shoot stays out of harm's way, and plan for worst-case scenarios.
- + **Location Scout:** Finds the location for shooting, negotiates the price, and gets release forms. Ensures the crew has parking and bathrooms. Might also be on set during the shoot if the location is sensitive, to make sure it is protected.
- + **Casting Director:** Works with the producer and photographer to find on-camera talent.
- + **Catering/Craft Services:** Makes sure the crew is nourished and hydrated during the shoot. Craft Services are snacks and drinks; catering is for when the crew takes a meal break.

Wonderful Machine has some [concrete advice](#) on steps you should take when hiring a crew, everything from making a budget to thanking them when the shoot is over.

### Dive deeper:

Jimmy's trusted collaborator [Conrad Anker](#) is one of the most prolific explorers and mountaineers living today. He has climbed Everest three times, and is the team leader of the North Face climbing team. Conrad's book, *The Lost Explorer: Finding Mallory on Mount Everest* (Simon & Schuster, 1999) chronicles Conrad's discovery of the remains of George Mallory, one of the two British climbers who died attempting Everest in 1924.

In their book, *Creativity, Inc.: Overcoming the Unseen Forces That Stand in the Way of True Inspiration* (Random House, 2014), journalist Amy Wallace and Pixar Animation Studios co-founder Ed Catmull reveal their secrets for managing creativity in the business world. You can read [an excerpt](#) of the book, in which Catmull shares how Pixar uses collaboration and candor to help people find their way through murky creative projects.

Linda Hill's book, *Collective Genius* (Harvard Business Review Press, 2014) describes how companies can harness the power of their entire team through creative collaboration. Her TED talk, "[How to Manage for Collective Creativity](#)" calls upon her research of successful leaders at Google and Pixar to explain why we need to rethink our ideas of what makes a good leader.

[Read this interview](#) with legendary directors J.J. Abrams, Alfonso Cuarón, and Joss Whedon about collaboration and filmmaking.

Jimmy talks about the importance of the crew not getting in the way of the climbing. This was—quite literally—a life-and-death matter when it came to shooting Alex Honnold climbing El Capitan in *Free Solo* (2018). Jimmy and his co-director on the film (spouse Elizabeth Chai Vasarhelyi) created a [short documentary](#) for the *New York Times* about shooting *Free Solo*, and the ethical responsibilities of their camera crew possibly affecting Alex's performance during the historic climb.



**Learn through collaboration:**

- + If you don't have much experience working with a crew, talk to a few other photographers or producers to find out what assistants they recommend. Then reach out to those assistants and offer to buy them a coffee so you can have a short meeting. This is a great way to build your network and also meet some cool people at the same time. Learn how they like to work, and ask them if there are any personal projects they'd be interested in collaborating on. You'll likely find a natural affinity for one or two of them. Reach out afterwards to see if they'd be interested in testing out one of their ideas together. Set up a shoot, and have them assist you. Ideally you'll not only make some interesting images, but you'll develop a working relationship that will pay dividends for many years.
- + Similarly, if you're interested in shooting portraits but don't have a lot of experience, you can set up a trade-for-prints shoot with a model and a hair/makeup artist. A TFP shoot allows all of you to build your portfolios, and gain valuable experience working with other people on set.
- + If you're just starting out and haven't run your own photo shoot yet, start by assisting other photographers. Start small and offer to help any photographers you already know before reaching out to other professionals. Seeing how different photographers work—not only the tools they use, but how they plan and execute their shoots—is an incredible way to learn first-hand how to be successful.

CHAPTER 12

# PHOTO STUDIES: MOUNTAIN ARCHITECTURE



# PHOTO STUDIES: MOUNTAIN ARCHITECTURE

"AT THE END OF THE DAY, PROBABLY  
THE GREATEST DESIGNER IS NATURE."

**The Bugaboos:** Make the Line the Subject

Jimmy shot this photo in the Bugaboos, a mountain range in eastern British Columbia which is popular with mountain climbers because of its beauty and variety of climbing routes. He used basic tools of good composition to bring balance and interest to the scene. Note how there is a

continuous line of the ridge, which leads your eye to the summit. This is called a "leading line." The line is further emphasized because it divides the bright, sun-lit area from the darker, shadow-filled side of the mountain. The main subject is certainly the peak in the upper right, but the leading line of the ridge which leads to the peak is equally important in bringing visual interest and balance to the photo. The photo also uses the rule of thirds, where the main subject is positioned along the right vertical-third line.



Bugaboo Mountains.  
Photo by Jimmy Chin.









**The Howser Towers: A Mountain Portrait**

Jimmy took this photo of the Howser Towers, which are the tallest peaks in the Bugaboos, reaching 3,412 meters (11,194 feet). In this photo, Jimmy didn't follow the traditional rules of composition; instead, he centered the main subject, which is typically frowned upon for a landscape shot. But in this case it works because the mountain has such

presence. In fact, Jimmy refers to it as a “mountain portrait.” In portrait photography, it's common to center the subject in the frame, and that's probably what was subconsciously going through Jimmy's mind when he shot this photo. He even put the peaks of the mountain in the upper third of the frame, which is where you typically place the eyes of a person if you're making a portrait.



▲  
Bugaboo Mountains shrouded in fog.  
Photo by Jimmy Chin.

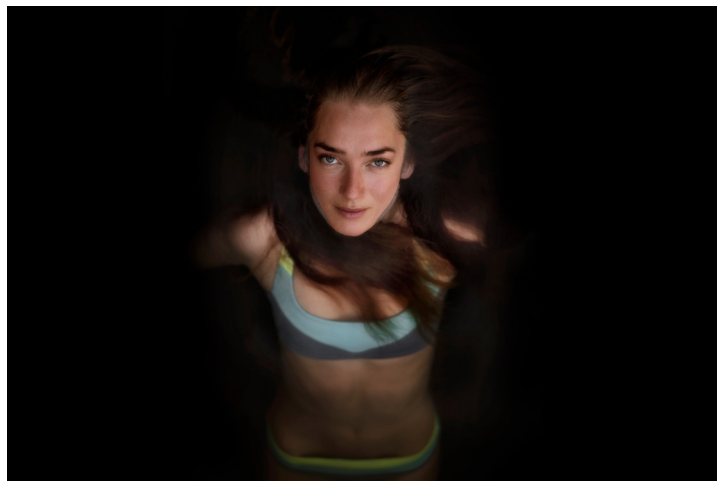
**Learn more about portrait composition:**

When you're shooting portraits of people, unless they're looking straight at the camera, you typically will want to leave a little bit of room for them to be facing toward the center of the photo. This rule of composition is called Direction of Sight, and it feels very natural because then the person has some room to be looking. Like all rules of composition, you can break them if you want to, but you should have a good reason to do so.

Photos by Jimmy Chin; mark up by MasterClass.



But you'll note that if the person is looking directly at the camera, then it's totally fine to center the subject in the frame left-to-right:





**Dive deeper:**

Watch a brief, [lyrical video](#) of Alex Honnold free solo climbing in the Bugaboos.

Alpinist Sandy Hill compiled a beautiful coffee-table book *Mountain: Portraits of High Places* (Rizzoli, 2011), filled with many “mountain portraits,” including images by Jimmy’s mentor, Galen Rowell, Ansel Adams, and many other well-known adventure photographers.

**Exercises**

- + Practice taking photos using the Rule of Thirds. Take multiple photos of the same subject, putting it on the different third-lines. Then photograph the subject dead center in the frame. Shoot a lot of photos. Later, take a look at the images and decide which ones you like best. Then show them to a photography mentor or friend you trust, asking them which ones they like best and why.
- + Keep on the lookout for ways you can add leading lines to your images. Is there a street or a fence that you can include in the photo to help draw your eye toward the main subject? And if it’s not a literal line that draws the eye, is there something else, like a person’s shadow, that you can use as a leading line?
- + Practice taking photos of people following the Direction of Sight rule, leaving some space for them to be looking toward the centerline of the frame. Also try taking some photos where you break this rule, and the person is looking out of the frame. When you look at them later, think about which photos you like, and why.
- + If you’re a more advanced photographer, try doing two (or all three!) of these assignments in a single frame, so that you’re incorporating the Rule of Thirds and leading lines into every shot.

CHAPTER 13

# EDITING



# EDITING

“YOU ARE TRYING TO GET TO THE VERY BEST IMAGES THAT YOU’VE SHOT. IT COMES DOWN TO VERY FINE DETAILS.”

When you’re editing a lot of images, it’s crucial to have systems in place to make the process efficient. Here are some of Jimmy’s best practices:

- + Import all the images into Lightroom (or whatever editing software you’re using).
- + Pick out any unusable images and throw them away.
- + Rename the remaining files with a system that identifies the shoot date and client (for example 20181012\_MasterClass\_0001 tells Jimmy that he did a shoot for MasterClass on 10/12/2018, and this is the first image).
- + Add keywords in Lightroom to make images easier to find later (e.g. “climbing” “Conrad” “Tetons” “sun flare”).
- + Cull your images down using the 5-star method (see below).
- + Have a backup system in place for all your files. This should be more than one backup kept in different locations.

## Jimmy’s 5-Star Method

Jimmy is systematic about how he edits his photos, to ensure he’s narrowing them down to the very best ones. He uses Lightroom’s ability to rank photos from 1 to 5 stars as an organizational method.

- + 1-Star: Remove any photos with obvious problems to narrow down to usable photos.
- + 2-Star: Narrow down to good photos. Group into series (see below).
- + 3-Star: Refine further to top five photos in each series.
- + 4-Star: Narrow the top five in each series down to two or three.
- + 5-Star: Narrow each series down to the single best photo. This is when it gets most brutal; you’re scrutinizing every detail of the photos to find the very best one.

## Resources

### Importing and File Naming

Adobe has well-written instructions on [how to import](#) your photos into Lightroom, as well as [how to rename](#) your files.

Lightroom is a powerful and flexible tool, offering multiple ways to do the same thing. There’s not just one “right” way to do things, so it’s helpful to research how different photographers use Lightroom to organize their workflow. Here are a few to get you started.

- + Amanda Ritchie, Londolozzi [“10 Easy Steps for Importing & Sorting your Photographs in Lightroom”](#)
- + Focus Photo School [“Lightroom Classic File And Folder Names Best Practices”](#)



- + Andrew Childress Envato Tuts+ [“Lightroom Workflow: Data Setup & Import Essentials”](#)
- + SLR Lounge, [“7 Tips for an Efficient Lightroom Workflow”](#)
- + Phlearn [“How to Import & Organize Photos in Lightroom”](#)

### Ranking and Editing

Adobe has [well-written instructions](#) on how to flag, label, and rate photos in Lightroom. They also offer a [video](#) with similar information.

Every photographer uses a slightly different method to organize and rank his or her photos. Research how different photographers go through this process and select the one that works best for you. Here are a few to get you started:

- + Victoria Bampton, Lightroom Queen [“My Rating Workflow”](#)
- + Andrew Childress, Envato Tuts+ [“Shooting Stars: Rating and Filtering Pictures in Lightroom”](#)
- + John Birch [“Star Rating Your Photographs”](#)
- + Tim Grey, Photofocus [“Star Rating Strategy”](#)
- + Phlearn [“The Ultimate Guide to Lightroom Workflow”](#)

### Backup strategies

You need to make sure that two things are regularly backed up: your Lightroom Catalog(s) and your actual photos. Don't skip this step; you're putting all your hard work at risk if you do. It's not a matter of “if” a drive will fail, but “when.”

Adobe has straightforward [documentation](#) on how to automatically backup your catalogs. There are many ways that you can make sure that your photos also get safely backed up. Research how different photographers make sure their data is safe, and pick a method that works for you. Here are a few to get you started:

- + Photography Life [“Photography Backup Workflow”](#)
- + David Baxter, Expert Photography [“Simple Lightroom Backup Tips and File System Troubleshooting”](#)
- + Scott Davenport, Petapixel [“Building a Comprehensive Photo Storage and Backup System”](#)
- + John Raymond Mireles, Medium [“How to Not Lose Your Photos: A Simple and Easy Backup Strategy for Photographers”](#)
- + Seagate [“Photographers Share Best Practices for Backing Up”](#)
- + Shawn C. Steiner, B&H Photo [“Choosing Storage! DAS/NAS Options for Photographers”](#)

### Lightroom and Photoshop

One of the key people on Adobe's team behind Lightroom and Photoshop is photographer and teacher Julieanne Kost. Her [blog](#) is a great place to expand your knowledge of Lightroom and Photoshop, with well-written instructions and easy-to-follow videos.

[Phlearn](#) is an excellent resource with hundreds of tutorials on Lightroom and Photoshop for photographers, with well-produced videos explaining everything in simple, clear language.

CHAPTER 14

# POST PROCESSING: CONRAD ON THE WALL



# POST-PROCESSING: CONRAD ON THE WALL

“THIS IS YOUR IMAGE. YOU WANT IT TO LOOK AS GOOD AS IT POSSIBLY CAN.”

A photo can be changed dramatically in post-processing, so when making decisions in post, consider your audience. Jimmy prefers a more natural look for his editorial work, but to satisfy his commercial clients he makes his images “pop” with increased contrast, clarity, and saturation. Make sure you know what look your client wants, ideally before you even shoot, so you can plan for the end images.

When post-processing, it’s best to start with adjustments to the overall photo, then further refine the image with localized tools. You want to process the photos so that they are mostly complete, but it’s okay to save any fine-detailed processing until you know which image(s) the client is going to select. At that point you can finalize the post-processing, polishing it so that it looks perfect before delivering it to the client.

## Post-processing applications:

Like many photographers, Jimmy uses Adobe Lightroom to organize and process all his photos. Lightroom is a very deep and powerful tool, and combined with Adobe Photoshop, you can do pretty much anything you can think of while processing. Because Lightroom has so many capabilities, it can be a little intimidating to learn how it works. Fortunately there are a lot of tutorials available online, both free and paid. A good place to start is with Adobe’s own [tutorials](#) on how to master Lightroom. Online documentation for the application abounds. The main alternative to Adobe’s Lightroom is [Capture One](#), by Phase One. Like Lightroom, Capture One allows you to catalog and process all your photos. Both platforms have ardent evangelists arguing which is better; do

some Internet research and decide for yourself which is better suited to your needs.

## Working around the gutter:

Jimmy talks about needing to leave space for the gutter in a two-page spread, but what exactly is a gutter? The gutter is the space between the two pages in the spine of the magazine. If a photograph is spread across both pages, the very center of the photograph will be hard to see because of the way the pages curve. If you’re shooting a horizontal image that could be spread across two pages, you want to make sure that there’s no critical information in the middle of the image (which is yet another reason to use the Rule of Thirds when composing your photos).





## Lightroom's post-processing toolbox:

### Overall adjustments

Lightroom allows you to make overall adjustments to your images. Here are some of the basics of what that includes:

- + **White Balance:** Adjust temperature and tint so that the colors are correct.
- + **Exposure:** Overall brightness or darkness of the image.
  - **Highlights:** Control just the brighter parts of the image.
  - **Shadows:** Control just the darker parts of the image.
  - **Whites:** Set the brightest point in the image.
  - **Blacks:** Set the darkest point in the image.
- + **Contrast:** Adjust the contrast, or the variance between the light and dark parts of the image. Adding contrast makes your darks darker and your brights brighter.
- + **Clarity:** Adjust contrast, but just in the middle-tones of your photo. Increasing clarity has the effect of enhancing texture and brings a little grittiness to the image. Conversely, decreasing clarity can give your photos a dreamy quality.
- + **Saturation:** How much color information is in the photo.
- + **Sharpening:** A method in which contrast is increased anywhere a light area meets a dark area, thereby making the photo look sharper.
- + **Noise Reduction:** A method to smooth out any “noise” in a photo, which is usually caused by severely underexposing and/or shooting at a very high ISO. Noise is not grain, and is generally considered undesirable.

- + **Lens Corrections:** Corrects distortions made by the lens when capturing the image. Each lens is different, and Lightroom selects the correct setting for your lens automatically.
- + **Perspective Correction:** Corrects distortions made by shooting an image that's not quite square to your subject. For example, if you shoot a building from the ground you will need to tilt your camera up to capture the whole building; in the photo, the building's walls will look like they are angling toward the center of the frame instead of being straight up and down. Perspective Correction allows you to fix this so that the building looks square.
- + **Grain:** Allows you to add grain to an image for creative effect.
- + **Vignette:** Allows you to darken or brighten the edges of the image for creative effect.

### Localized Adjustments

Lightroom also allows you to adjust only one part of the image to make targeted changes. Many of the same tools listed above can be used with these local adjustments. Here are some of those tools:

- + **Radial Filter:** Allows you to affect an area inside (or outside) of a circular or oval shape.
- + **Graduated Filter:** Same as the radial filter, but with a straight line instead of a circle.
- + **Brush:** Allows you to “brush” on changes using a mouse or pen/tablet.
- + **HSL:** Allows you to change the hue, saturation, or luminance of a particular color. (For example, you could use HSL to make all the reds in a photo appear more orange, more saturated, and brighter.)

**Practice post-processing:**

1. Practice post-processing for different layouts: vertical, horizontal, and two-page spread. Can you think of creative ways to make the same photo work for multiple aspect ratios?
2. Practice post-processing the same photo in different styles. Start with making it look as natural as possible, then make another version that is more stylized. Lastly, keep going by adding more of a distinct look to your image, giving it a unique aesthetic. Now compare all three of the images, and you'll see the power of post-processing.

**Jimmy's post-processing:**

Compare the original photo (on the left) with the edited photo (on the right) to see the impact Jimmy achieves in post-processing.



Unedited



Edited



Unedited



Edited

CHAPTER 15

# POST- PROCESSING: PORTRAIT





# POST-PROCESSING: PORTRAIT

“WHAT YOU CAPTURE IN CAMERA IS YOUR RAW MATERIAL. PRODUCING THE BEST IMAGE IN CAMERA IS STILL THE GOAL. THAT ALLOWS YOU A LOT MORE LATITUDE IN THE POSTPRODUCTION PROCESS.”

When you post-process portraits, you’re continuing the line of thought you had when you were shooting—which involves paying close attention to the relationship between your subject and your background. When we look at a photo, our eyes are usually drawn to the brightest or most colorful part of the image, so when you process a photo you can balance the brightness and the colors to make sure your subject stands out.

Your subject’s eyes are usually the most important components of a portrait, so pay extra attention to them. You might need to use a radial filter to brighten the eye sockets, especially if you’re shooting with natural light. (When they’re not on top of mountains, portrait photographers will often use a light to fill in some of the shadows of their subject’s face, making it easier to see their features.)

Even though you might have planned for the final portrait to be in color, it’s good to experiment and see what it looks like in black and white, too. Sometimes an image with interesting lighting but lackluster colors will become much more powerful in black and white.

## **Dive deeper on portrait photography:**

Many world-class photographers have published books about shooting portrait photography. Here are just a few:

- + *Road to Seeing* by Dan Winters. New Riders, 2014.
- + *Mastering Portrait Photography* by Sarah Plater and Paul Wilkinson. Ammonite Press, 2016.
- + *The Photographer’s Guide to Posing: Techniques to Flatter Everyone* by Lindsay Adler. Rocky Nook, 2017.
- + *The Complete Portrait Manual: 200+ Tips and Techniques for Shooting Perfect Photos of People* by the editors of Popular Photography. Weldon Owen, 2016.
- + *Secrets of Great Portrait Photography: Photographs of the Famous and Infamous* by Brian Smith. New Riders, 2012.

You can also study the work of famous photographers who are well-known for their portraits. Here are just a few:

- + Richard Avedon
- + Annie Leibovitz
- + Diane Arbus
- + Steve McCurry
- + Dorothea Lange
- + Yousuf Karsh
- + Philippe Halsman
- + Helmut Newton
- + Lisa Kristine
- + Martin Schoeller

**Exercises:**

- + Post-process (or re-post-process) some of your favorite portraits. Does your subject stand out enough? If not, what are some things you could do to make that happen? Try brightening and darkening various parts of the image to see what effect that has on the overall look and feel of the portrait. You'll often find that subtly brightening the subject's face and applying a vignette around the edges of the frame will draw the viewer's eye exactly where you want.
- + Select one of the famous portrait photographers listed above, and do a close analysis of their work. What aspects of their photography are most essential to their signature style? Is it their use of lighting? Their lens choices? The way they pose their subjects? Their post-processing? Then set up a test shoot to try to imitate their style to see if you can recreate that look, and perhaps vary it slightly to give it your own twist.

**Jimmy's post-processing:**

Compare the original photo (above) with the edited photo (below) to see the impact Jimmy achieves in post-processing.



Unedited



Edited

CHAPTER 16

# GEAR: CAMERA, LENSES, POWER, AND STORAGE





# GEAR: CAMERA, LENSES, POWER, AND STORAGE

“SO WHEN I THINK ABOUT THE DIFFERENT MODES IN CAMERAS—I LIKE TO KEEP THINGS SIMPLE. IT’S GOOD TO HAVE YOUR GO-TO’S IN DIFFERENT SCENARIOS.”

## Lesson Primer: Lens Basics

### Focal length

Simply put, focal length is the measurement of distance (in millimeters) between the point of convergence of your lens and the sensor recording the image. Focal length is expressed by a number, and that number tells you how much of the scene your camera will be able to capture. Smaller numbers have a wider angle of view and show more of the scene; larger numbers have a narrower angle of view and show less.

| Leans | Angle of View    | Description  | Depth of Field  | Distortion of Space  |
|-------|------------------|--|---|--|
| 16mm  | Very wide        | Very wide view of the world. Great for landscape photography.  | Everything is in focus. Impossible to have a shallow depth of field.                    | Makes things seem farther away than they actually are. Exaggerates the size of anything very close to the camera.  |
| 35mm  | Wide             | Roughly what a cell phone would capture. Great for street photography.   | Pretty much everything is in focus unless your subject is very close to the camera.     | Less spatial distortion than a very wide lens, but it still makes things seem farther away than they actually are. |
| 50mm  | Normal           | Roughly the way the human eye sees the world. Good for just about any type of photography.                               | Easy to have a shallow or deep depth of field, depending on aperture.                   | Very little or none.   |
| 85mm  | Medium Telephoto | Great for isolating a subject from the background. Good for portrait photography.  | Easy to get a shallow depth of field.   | Makes things seem closer than they actually are.   |
| 200mm | Telephoto        | Ideal for picking out a distant subject, the way a telescope does. Good for compressing your subject and the background. | Quite often has a shallow depth of field unless everything you’re shooting is far away. | Makes things seem significantly closer than they actually are.   |

\*These focal lengths apply to full-frame cameras, which are what Jimmy shoots with. If you use a crop-sensor camera, then you’ll need to look up what the 35mm equivalent is for each lens.

Primes and zooms

There are two basic types of lenses: Primes and Zooms. Primes have a fixed focal length, making them faster and sharper. Zooms use a series of lenses to allow different focal lengths from a single lens, making them more flexible but not as fast.

Lens names, demystified

Lenses are referred to by their focal lengths. If there is a single focal length listed, it's a prime lens. If there are two numbers, it's a zoom lens, listing the minimum and maximum focal lengths. For example:

- + 50mm is a prime lens, with a 50mm focal length.
- + 16-35mm is a zoom lens, which can vary anywhere from 16mm to 35mm.

Additionally, sometimes the maximum aperture (or speed) of the lens is incorporated into the lens name. That's because it's possible to have lenses with the same focal length, but different maximum apertures. For example:

- + 24-70mm f/2.8 is a zoom lens, which can vary from 16mm to 35mm and can open up as fast as f/2.8.
- + 85mm f1.4 is a prime lens, which can open up as fast as f1.4.

Usually, when photographers are talking about lenses, they don't say "millimeters"; they'll refer to a lens as a "50" or a "16 to 35." And if they're mentioning the speed of the lens, they'll often only say the key numbers, so that an 85mm f1.4 lens becomes "85 one four."

Selecting the right lens for the job

If you're shooting in a studio, it's easy to have every single lens you own with you. But when you're out on location, you have to think about the shots you're going to make and prioritize which lenses to take. Jimmy will take as many lenses as he can comfortably carry.

Jimmy's cameras:

| Jimmy's Cameras                                       |   |
|---|---|
| <b>Canon 1Dx</b><br>High frame rate, great for action | <b>Canon 5D Mark IV</b><br>Smaller size, great for travel |

| Jimmy's Go-To Lens  |
|---|
| <b>24-70mm (f/2.8)</b><br>Good blend of slightly wide to slightly telephoto. A workhorse lens that can be used for just about anything. |

| Jimmy's Favorite Trinity of Lenses |  |
|------------------------------------|--|
| <b>16-35mm (f/2.8)</b>             | Good for landscapes and sweeping vistas.   |
| <b>24-70mm (f/2.8)</b>             | Workhorse, mentioned above.  |
| <b>70-200mm (f/2.8)</b>            | Good range from medium telephoto to telephoto, good for compressing the background and photographing things that are far away. |

| Other Lenses Jimmy Loves     |  |
|------------------------------|--|
| <b>14mm (f/2.8)</b>          | Slightly wider than the 16-35, gives you a more expansive view. Great for night photography too.     |
| <b>24mm (f/1.4)</b>          | Great for any type of wide shots; because it's a prime lens, it's sharper and faster than his zooms. |
| <b>35mm (f/1.4)</b>          | Same as the 24, just not quite as wide.  |
| <b>50mm (f/1.2)</b>          | A very fast lens, that lets in four times as much light as his 24-70.                                |
| <b>85mm (f/2.0)</b>          | Focal length and speed make this lens ideal for portraits.   |
| <b>100-400mm (f/4.5-5.6)</b> | Great for shooting things that are far away and compression shots.                                   |

Travel tips:

- + **Batteries:** Airlines have different rules about batteries—some permit you to carry them on, while others require you to check them. No matter where you’re flying, make sure you check the airline’s rules for batteries. It’s usually better to plan to bring everything into the plane’s cabin in your carry-on luggage.
- + **Carry-on only:** Your camera and lenses are very sensitive, so make sure your camera bag is small enough to be carried on board the plane. If you can, get a bag that meets international carry-on standards to safely carry your cameras and lenses onto any flight. Every airline is different, so check the specific standards of the airline you are flying.

| Jimmy's Travel Checklist |   |                                |   |                          |   |  |                |
|--------------------------|---|--------------------------------|---|--------------------------|---|--|----------------|
| Cameras                  | ✓ | 5D Mark IV                     | ✓ | Backup 5d Mark IV        | ✓ | 1DX (if needed for it's high frame rate) |                |
| Lenses                   | ✓ | 16-35                          | ✓ | 24-70                    | ✓ | 70-200                                   | ✓ Backup 24-70 |
| Power                    | ✓ | Fully charged camera batteries | ✓ | Lighting batteries       | ✓ | Solar charger (if needed)                |                |
| Media storage            | ✓ | Media cards                    | ✓ | Solid state hard drives* |   |  |                |

\*Note: Jimmy recommends using solid state drives (which have no moving parts), instead of traditional drives (which spin, and are more fragile) to back up your media.

CHAPTER 17

# SETTINGS: MODES, ISO, FOCUS, AND DEPTH OF FIELD

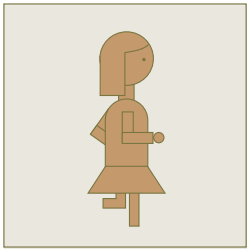




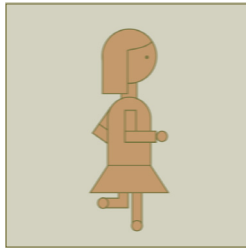
# SETTINGS: MODES, ISO, FOCUS, AND DEPTH OF FIELD

“WHAT I’M USUALLY LOOKING FOR IS  
THE STORY IN THE IMAGE.”

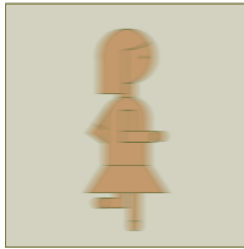
Shutter speed



1/500

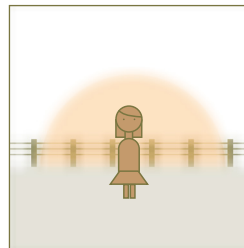
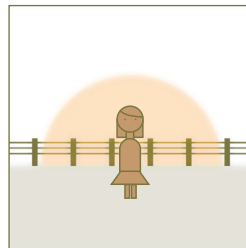
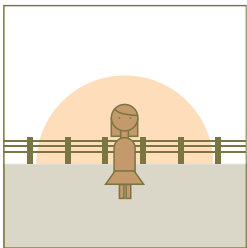


1/30

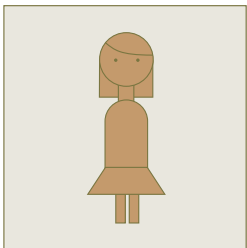


1/2

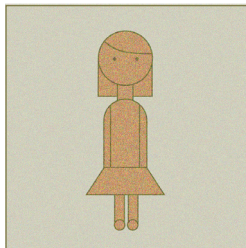
Aperture



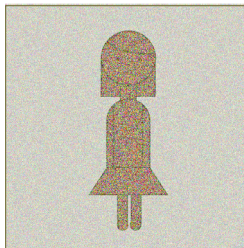
ISO



ISO 100



ISO 1600



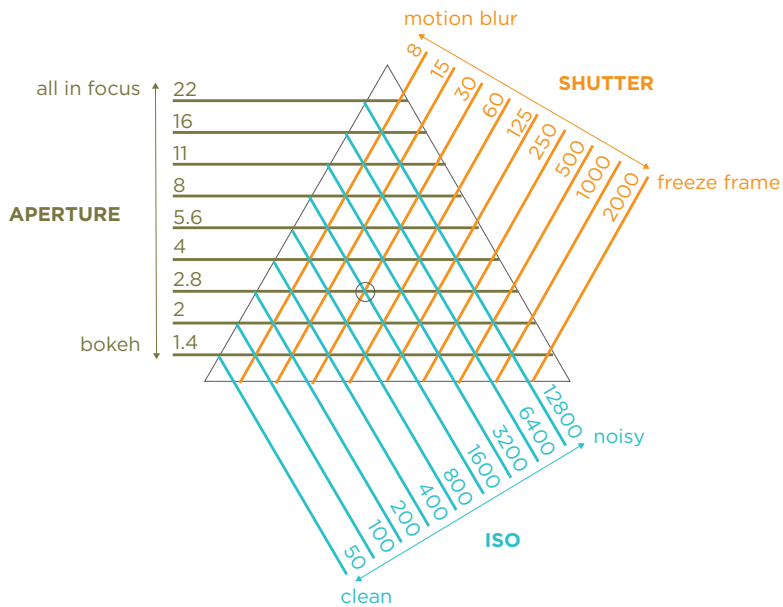
ISO 25600

## Lesson Primer: The Exposure Triangle

Understanding the Exposure Triangle is an important step to knowing how to use your camera. Your camera has three ways to control the amount of light that reaches its sensor:

- 1. Shutter Speed:** This is how long the shutter is open, expressed as a measurement of time. For example 1/100 means that your shutter is open for 1/100th of a second. Shutter speed allows you to freeze or blur a subject in motion.
- 2. Aperture:** This is how big the opening is that lets light in, expressed in f-stops. F-stops are counterintuitive, because the larger the number, the smaller the opening. For example, f/2.8 allows twice as much light into the camera as f/4, and 16 times as much light as f/11. Aperture affects the depth of field: larger openings create a shallower depth of field, while smaller openings make more of the image in focus.
- 3. ISO:** This is how sensitive your camera’s sensor is to light, expressed in a number. The higher the ISO number, the more sensitive your camera will be to light. But increased ISO will also increase digital noise in your images, so you typically want your ISO to be as low as possible as the native setting for your camera.

All three of these variables work in conjunction with one another to get the correct exposure for your images. For example, if you open up the aperture to let more light in, you will need to have either a faster shutter speed or a lower ISO to compensate for this additional light.



### Utilizing camera modes:

There are three main camera modes:

- + **Manual:** You set a specific shutter speed, aperture, and ISO. This is useful if you want complete control of your camera settings, and you have time to adjust them for each shot.
- + **Shutter Priority:** You set a specific shutter speed and the camera automatically selects the aperture. This is useful when your subject is on the move.
- + **Aperture Priority:** You set a specific aperture, and the camera automatically selects the shutter speed. This is useful when you want to control the depth of field.

Both Aperture Priority and Shutter Priority have their uses, and you'll often find yourself switching back and forth, depending on what you're shooting. It often makes sense to set your ISO to Auto when you're shooting in these modes, so that the camera has more flexibility to make decisions to get the shot right.

### Autofocus

If you are photographing a moving subject, you may use Continuous Autofocus (called "Servo" on Canon cameras). Continuous Autofocus tracks your subject as it moves through the frame, keeping the focal point where you want it. The faster your subject is moving, the harder it is to nail your focus. Continuous Autofocus is an important tool for action photographers—it gives you a much better chance that you'll get a crisp shot.

### Exposure compensation:

Sometimes you'll be shooting in Shutter Priority or Aperture Priority mode, and because part of the frame is very dark or very light, the camera gets confused and doesn't get the settings quite right on its own. For example, if you're shooting a portrait inside a building on a bright day, and you have your subject stand with the window to his back, the camera's not going to know if you want to expose for the subject's face, thereby overexposing the background, or if you want to expose for the outside, making your subject a silhouette. If you switch into Manual mode, you'll have control over this, of course, but if you're in a hurry, you can use the Exposure Compensation dial on your camera to override the camera's settings. By turning the dial, you're telling the camera to under- or overexpose the shot, giving you the desired look.

Note: Using Exposure Compensation like this can have unintended consequences, like raising your ISO or slowing your shutter speed. If that's the case, it's better to switch over to Manual mode to make sure you get the best exposure.

**Depth of Field:**

Controlling the amount of the photo that is in focus is one of the photographer's best tools to help draw the viewer's eye where you want it. For example, landscapes are typically shot so that everything is in focus, so photographers will shoot at small apertures (e.g. f11 or f16).



But you can create layering in your image by having only part of the photo in focus. If you have some foreground objects out of focus (for example, some leaves), they will give your image depth; the viewer will really feel like they're looking through those leaves at your main subject. To achieve this effect, shoot at a wider aperture (e.g. f/2.8 or f1.4).



**3:** Climber Cedar Wright's hand is in the foreground. Photo by Jimmy Chin.

**1-2:** Landscape photos by Jimmy Chin.

When you're shooting an image, you're telling a story to the viewer. It's your job to tell them where they should be looking, and directing their attention to the photo's key elements. There are a number of tools you can use to tell the "story" of your image.

- + **Shallow depth of field** immediately brings the viewer's attention to whatever is in focus in the photo.
- + The **Rule of Thirds** places your subject on the left-third or right-third of the frame, creating a pleasing composition.
- + **Leading lines** bring the viewer's eye through the frame. The viewer's eye will travel along the lines as it moves across your photo.
- + Once you've mastered some of the basic rules of composition you can begin to break them for dramatic effect. A great photo doesn't have to follow the basic rules of composition, but it's still critical to learn and internalize these rules so that it's clear you're breaking them not out of ignorance, but for stylistic reasons.

### Compressing shots:

To bring more drama in your photos, you can create scenes that aren't actually seeable by the human eye. One way to do this is through compression—using a very long lens to make the background appear a lot closer than it actually is. (Remember, wide angle lenses distort space by making the background appear farther away; telephoto lenses do the opposite.) The longer your lens, the more compression you can get. At 200mm, you can get some compression, but at 400mm you'll be able to create arresting images because you're making an image that we can't really see with our own eyes. Suddenly the background will look so close to your main subject that it starts to look a bit fantastic.



▲  
Photo by Jimmy Chin.

In the image above, the distance between the man and the mountain behind him is compressed; that mountain is actually really far away, but because it was shot with a very long lens, it looks like it's right behind him. That's the magic of compression.



**Exercises:****To better understand depth of field:**

1. Find something to photograph (any small object will work just fine) and put it pretty close to your camera.
  2. Put your camera in Aperture Priority mode, open up your aperture as wide as possible (ideally  $f/2.8$  or wider), and focus on the object.
  3. Take a picture, then close your aperture down a bit more (say,  $f5.6$ ) and shoot another photo. Lastly, close your aperture down even further (say,  $f16$ ) and take one more photo.
  4. Now look at all three photos and you'll see how with a smaller aperture (higher number f-stop) you get more of the photo in focus. Being able to understand how aperture affects the relationship of a subject to its background is one of the first steps to becoming a better photographer.
2. Put your camera in its continuous autofocus mode (on Canon cameras, like Jimmy uses, it's called "Servo" but it might have a different name on your camera, like "Continuous Autofocus.")
  3. Set your camera to Shutter Priority, and pick a fast shutter speed (if it's a cyclist, you might be able to shoot at  $1/1000$  of a second in order to freeze the action; for a fast-moving car, set it to  $1/2000$  or maybe even  $1/8000$ ).
  4. Practice focusing on the fast-moving objects, taking photos to see how well the autofocus is tracking. (Note that they might look in focus on the small screen on the back of your camera; you have to zoom way in, or look on a computer, to really evaluate the focus.)
  5. To challenge yourself, switch to a longer lens, because the longer the focal length, the more difficult it is to keep a subject in focus. Don't be frustrated if your first attempts fail; this is a skill that you can get better at if you practice.

**To better understand compression:**

1. Have a friend stand in front of an interesting wall, and shoot with a "normal" lens (around 50mm).
2. Take a picture and then switch to a long lens (ideally, 200mm or longer) and re-photograph your friend.
3. Notice how much closer the wall looks to your friend in the second photo? That's because longer lenses compress space and make them appear closer. Try repeating this exercise using different subjects and different backgrounds and you'll begin to understand the drama that a longer lens brings to an image.

**To practice autofocus on fast-moving subjects:**

1. Go to a place where there are some bicyclists or cars, and situate yourself so that they're moving across your frame left-to-right (or vice versa).
4. Reflect: Do you find yourself drawn to certain types of compositions? Do you notice recurring compositional rules being followed across the decades (or centuries)? Are there any compositions that inspire you to try something similar in your own photographs?

CHAPTER 18

# CAREER ADVICE: BUILDING A BODY OF WORK



# CAREER ADVICE: BUILDING A BODY OF WORK

“PRODUCING THAT BODY OF WORK DOESN’T COME EASILY. THERE ARE NO SHORTCUTS.”

Ideas often start small and have to be carefully tended to as they mature. You need to feed yourself creatively. You need to think big. You need to figure out how that spark could be a larger story, and how you would tell that story from your unique point of view. Follow the ideas you’re most passionate about. It should be a calling. Think of a story you want to tell and go out and shoot it.

Don’t limit yourself when you’re in these initial stages by worry about HOW you’d actually execute the project. It’s more important to develop a great idea, and see how far you can take it. If the idea is truly great, later on you can do some creative problem-solving to figure out the “how.” If you feel overwhelmed with a complicated project, try breaking it down into smaller tasks, and then figuring out how you’ll accomplish those tasks one by one.

*“If you want a career in photography, clearly, you have to do the work. It’s about committing. It’s about being obsessive. You know, I always say you have to do your due diligence.”*

Everyone is a photographer nowadays, so it can be hard to get yourself noticed. Here are Jimmy’s tips for marketing yourself:

- + **Shoot your passions.** That passion will come through in the photos.
- + **Show your unique point of view.** Find your voice so that your photos are different than everyone else’s.

- + **Only put out your best work.** Be brutal when editing.
- + **Hustle.** Find ways to get your work in front of the right people.
- + **Be prepared for when you get a lucky break.** You need to have the confidence, experience, and body of work to show that you can deliver a strong set of images for a potential client.

## Resources

Creating a body of work takes time and perseverance. Here are some articles and videos to help you as you develop your artistic practice.

- + Magnum Photos [“Tips for Long-term Photographic Projects”](#)
- + Magnum Photos [“Locating the Self: Developing Your Photographic Practice”](#)
- + TED Talks [“The Creative Spark”](#)

Whether you’re already a photographer or you’re considering making a career change, these articles and books will help you on your journey.

- + Pamela Slim *Body of Work: Finding the Thread That Ties Your Story Together*. Portfolio, 2013.
- + Katy Cowan, Creative Boom [“All Change: How to ditch the job you hate and shift to a creative career”](#)
- + Anthony Bianciella, ASMP [“Making the Move to Photography as Second Career”](#)

### Exercises

Use all the tools you've learned in this MasterClass to answer these questions:

- + What story am I most passionate about shooting?
- + How do I tell this story from my unique point of view?
- + Whom can I look to for inspiration and guidance?
- + Who is my audience, and why should they care?
- + How do I describe this project in a compelling, concise way?
- + How can I continue to feed myself creatively?
- + What people can I collaborate with to improve my skills?
- + What resources do I need to execute this job?
- + What team can best help me achieve my vision?
- + How can I get the word out about my project?

Start working on a plan for a long term project that is personally meaningful to you. Research what has already been photographed on this topic, working to determine if you can look at it in a new and interesting way. Write down the steps you need to take in order to start making this project a reality, even if you're unsure how you'd do them. Then take a deep breath and begin.



CHAPTER 19

# BECOMING A PHOTOGRAPHER: JIMMY'S STORY



# BECOMING A PHOTOGRAPHER: JIMMY'S STORY

“YOU HAVE TO FIND SOMETHING THAT GIVES YOU MEANING AND GIVES YOU PURPOSE AND THAT YOU CAN'T NOT DO. THAT ALONE WILL GO A LONG WAYS.”

Jimmy found a spark of something that interested him—photography—and then worked to fan that spark into a flame. He used the same tactics that he used to learn how to climb: endless hours of practice, and a willingness to do whatever it takes to get the shot.

To be successful takes a lot of grit. When he was early in his photography career, Jimmy was so inspired by the work of Galen Rowell that he drove to Galen's office and waited for a week just so he could get a meeting. That dedication and perseverance is a common theme in everything Jimmy does, and is one of the major things he credits for his success.

You don't necessarily get to pick your own mentor; sometimes, he or she will be the one who finds you. To show that you're worthy of their time, you have to prove that you've got that fire and determination—as well as a dedication to your craft—by doing the work it takes to produce great images.

## Dive deeper into grit:

Social scientist Angela Lee Duckworth has studied why some people are successful, and it has nothing to do with IQ or social intelligence—it's grit. “Grit is passion and perseverance for very long-term goals,” she says in this [TED talk](#) about achieving long-term goals through due diligence.

“Grit is that mix of passion, perseverance, and self-discipline that keeps us moving forward in spite of obstacles” writes Daniel Coyle in *The Little Book of Talent: 52 Tips for Improving Your Skills* (Bantam, 2012). The book teaches you how to develop your talents to reach your full potential.

A growing body of scientific research shows that having a specific natural ability isn't the secret behind the best athletes and performers. In his book *Talent Is Overrated: What Really Separates World-Class Performers from Everybody Else* (Portfolio, 2008), Geoffrey Colvin argues that “deliberate practice”—a well-defined set of activities that world-class performers pursue diligently—is the key.

**Dive deeper into mentors:**

“The strongest relationships spring out of a real and often earned connection felt by both sides,” writes Facebook COO Sheryl Sandberg about mentorship in her bestseller *Lean In* (Knopf, 2013). She says to stop thinking that if you get a mentor, you will excel, but rather: “Excel and you will get a mentor.” If you do want to approach someone to be your mentor, there are many articles you can read to help you. Here are a few to get you started:

- + Sabina Nawaz, *Forbes* [“9 Tips To Land A Great Mentor: How To Ask A Stranger For Career Advice”](#)
- + Douglas Taurel, Backstage [“Why You Absolutely, Positively Need a Mentor”](#)
- + Molly Beck, The Muse [“Be My Mentor? Craft the Perfect Email to Someone You Admire”](#)

**More from Jimmy:**

In the animated video [\*Jimmy Chin: The Deeper Meaning of Climbing\*](#), created for *The Atlantic*, Jimmy describes climbing as a metaphor for dreaming of impossible goals, which are achievable through drive, passion, commitment, and mentorship.

In his [interview](#) with photographer (and Creative Live CEO) Chase Jarvis, Jimmy talks about learning his skills of climbing, photography, and filmmaking, and the roles mentors played in his success.

In the *National Geographic* article [\*Why Jimmy Chin Takes Pictures While Climbing and Skiing Mountains\*](#), Jimmy tells writer/climber Mark Synnott about his childhood, his obsession with climbing, and how his mentors helped him achieve success.



**CONCLUSION:** BE PRESENT ON YOUR JOURNEY

“WE PLACE SO MUCH ON THE ACHIEVEMENT AND LESS SO ON THE WORK. ON THE MOMENTS WHEN YOU’RE FIGHTING YOUR WAY THERE.

YOU CAN CHASE ACHIEVEMENTS LIKE YOU CAN CHASE MONEY. BUT IT WILL NEVER BE ENOUGH.”

