



Viewpoint Mike Smith

Don't necessarily be a slave to the mantra of getting everything right in camera – it very much depends on the image

Don't get it right in camera – that's my thought for the day. I'm not a proponent of wanting the finished article immediately. Photography for me is about the output, thinking about the end result and then pursuing the capture of that visualisation. Output involves delivering a final set of JPEGs to a customer, producing a fine art aluminium, ordering a canvas or making an instant print. Each output requires a very specific set of post-production processes in order to optimise it for presentation.

For this reason, and this reason alone, I shoot raw because I need to ensure the highest possible dynamic range, to allow me to process to whatever output is required. So shooting, from a technical perspective, becomes using the sensor to record as much information as possible – and that comes down to exposure.

You will have determined either aperture or shutter speed based upon the creative requirements of your shot (and possibly both). Your camera will have metered the scene and will let you know if you are over or underexposed. The only control you have left to play with is ISO.

For 95% of my shooting I leave this on auto, specifying a minimum shutter speed for the lens I am using and type of subject matter. One over the focal length (for a non-VR lens) or at least 1/100th for people images are good rules of thumb.

As long as you are focused appropriately, that should ensure a tack-sharp photo. But will it be well exposed? That depends on the metering – overexposed and you have white-point blinkies, underexposed and you get black-point blinkies. Some cameras are better than others but ultimately it depends on the scene and exposure mode you are using.

And, if you are going to maximise dynamic range, you must ensure that as much of your scene exposure is recorded by the 12-odd stops of light your camera can process. That means ignoring the brightness of the image on the back of the camera and, instead, viewing the histogram to ensure that the data shown is shifted as far to the right as possible, noting an acceptable amount of blinkies (turn that on in the display!).

Yes, there are occasions when raw isn't always suited to the job (high frame rates) or where scene exposure is very limited (live gigs) but for much photography, optimising for dynamic range will give you the greatest latitude in post-production.

So perhaps it's not so much a case of getting it right in camera, but getting exposure perfect in camera. If it suits your style of shooting, you might find that it expands your horizons.

Mike Smith is a London-based wedding and portrait photographer. Visit www.focali.co.uk

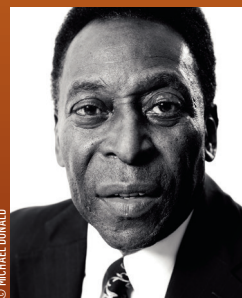
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Shoot raw, get the exposure right and let post-prod do the rest

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