Better Smartphone Photos

Small Habits, Big Difference | Level B2 | EnglishBridges.com

Before You Read

Discuss these questions with a partner.

1. What do you photograph most often with your phone, and what do you do with the photos afterward?
2. Think of a phone photo that disappointed you. What went wrong?
3. How might the photos people take, and the way they share them, differ by country, age, or personality?

Reading: Better Smartphone Photos

Many people take a photo of a sunset or a dinner with friends and then feel disappointed. The colors look flat, the faces are dark, and the picture is a little blurry. People now take around two trillion photos a year, and more than nine in ten are taken on phones. When a photo fails to **capture** a moment, the phone is rarely the **culprit**. A few small habits usually make the difference.

The first habit is simple. Remember to wipe the lens before you shoot. A single fingerprint or **smudge** can make a whole image look soft and **hazy**. Light matters even more. Avoid using the flash whenever you can. Its light is **harsh**, and it creates hard shadows. Soft light from a window or a cloudy sky is far more **flattering**. Many photographers love the golden hour shortly after sunrise and before sunset. In Singapore, near the equator, it lasts only around 25 minutes. In cities such as Berlin, it can last close to an hour at some times of year. If the sun is behind a person, the camera may turn them into a dark **silhouette**.

Modern phones usually record several quick frames and **merge** them into one picture. In night mode, the phone collects light for a few seconds, so try to hold it **steady**. Tapping the screen sets the focus and the **exposure**, meaning how bright or dark the image will be. Pinching the screen to zoom is a common mistake. The phone often just **crops** the image and enlarges it, so fine detail is lost. It is **tempting** to zoom in, but it is usually better to walk closer. The photographer Robert Capa is often quoted on this point. "If your photographs aren't good enough, you're not close enough." Try moving a few steps closer.

The rest of the frame matters too. A grid on the screen helps you place the subject or the horizon away from the center. Check the edges for **clutter**, such as a trash can or a stranger's elbow. Keep the horizon level, because a **tilted** sea can make a calm scene feel wrong. Finally, take several shots and choose the best one later. When you edit, keep the changes **subtle** and avoid strong filters.

Vocabulary: Fill in the Blank

Complete each sentence with a word or phrase from the box. Use each one once.

tilted	**merge**	**crops**	**clutter**	**steady**	**silhouette**	**capture**	**hazy**	**exposure**	**culprit**	**harsh**
smudge	**flattering**	**tempting**								

1. The film tries to _____ what life was like in the 1950s.
2. The police are still looking for the _____ who broke the window.
3. There was a _____ of ink on the corner of the letter.
4. My memory of that holiday is a little _____ because I was very young.
5. The _____ winter made life difficult for the farmers.
6. That color is very _____ on you. It brings out your eyes.
7. At sunset, we could see the _____ of a ship on the horizon.
8. The two lanes of traffic _____ into one just before the bridge.
9. She has had a _____ job at the same hospital for ten years.
10. Long _____ to loud music can damage your hearing.
11. My sister always _____ her photos into squares before she posts them.
12. It is _____ to buy the cheapest phone, but it may not last long.
13. Our garage is full of _____: old bikes, boxes, and broken chairs.
14. She _____ her head to one side and smiled.

Word Partners: Collocations and Word Families

Part A. Collocations

Match the two halves to make common phrases. Write the letter on the line.

1. capture	_____	**a.** the clutter
2. harsh	_____	**b.** income
3. a hazy	_____	**c.** offer
4. a steady	_____	**d.** difference
5. exposure	_____	**e.** the moment
6. a tempting	_____	**f.** memory
7. clear away	_____	**g.** criticism
8. a subtle	_____	**h.** to sunlight

Now choose three of the phrases and write your own sentences.

Part B. Word families

Complete each sentence with the correct form of the word in brackets.

1. The teacher spoke _____ to the students who arrived late. (*harsh*)
2. The colors of the sky changed _____ as the sun went down. (*subtle*)
3. After the _____ of the two banks, many branches closed. (*merge*)
4. Do not _____ your phone to strong sunlight for hours. (*exposure*)
5. I tried to resist the _____ to check my phone during the movie. (*tempting*)
6. House prices have risen _____ for the last five years. (*steady*)

Comprehension Questions

Answer in full sentences.

1. According to the writer, why do many phone photos disappoint, and is the phone usually to blame?

2. About how many photos are taken each year, and what share are taken on phones?
3. Why should you wipe the lens before taking a photo?
4. Why does the writer suggest avoiding the flash, and what kinds of light are better?
5. How does the length of the golden hour differ between Singapore and Berlin?
6. What do modern phones usually do when you press the button, and why should you hold the phone steady in night mode?
7. What happens to the image when you pinch the screen to zoom, and what does the writer suggest instead?
8. What should you check at the edges of the frame, and why?
9. Which tip in the reading do you think would improve your own photos most? Explain why.
10. **True, False, or Not Given:** *"The golden hour lasts longer in Singapore than in Berlin."* Explain your answer using the reading.
11. **Yes, No, or Not Given:** *"The writer believes that strong filters usually improve phone photos."* Explain your answer using the reading.
12. **Author's purpose:** Why does the writer quote Robert Capa? Is it (a) to support the advice to walk closer instead of zooming, (b) to explain the history of war photography, or (c) to show that old cameras were better than phones?

True or False

Circle T (true) or F (false). Be ready to correct the false sentences.

1. More than nine in ten photos are taken on phones. **T / F**
2. The writer says the phone itself is usually the reason for a bad photo. **T / F**
3. A single fingerprint can make an image look hazy. **T / F**
4. The flash gives soft, flattering light. **T / F**
5. The golden hour is shortly after sunrise and before sunset. **T / F**
6. The golden hour lasts about the same length of time everywhere. **T / F**
7. If the sun is behind a person, they may appear as a dark silhouette. **T / F**
8. Pinching the screen to zoom always gives you a sharper picture. **T / F**
9. Tapping the screen sets the focus and the exposure. **T / F**
10. The writer recommends strong filters when you edit. **T / F**

Language Focus: Verbs Followed by -ing or to-Infinitive

Some verbs are followed by **-ing**: *avoid*, *enjoy*, *keep*, *finish*, *mind*. Others are followed by **to + base verb**: *fail*, *hope*, *decide*, *want*, *plan*.

Try and **remember** can take both, with different meanings. *Try to do* = make an effort. *Try doing* = do it as an experiment. *Remember to do* = a task. *Remember doing* = a memory.

From the reading:

"**Remember to wipe** the lens before you shoot."

"**Try moving** a few steps closer."

Tip: After a preposition, always use -ing: *before shooting*, *instead of zooming*.

Part A. Sentence starters

Finish each sentence so that it is true for you.

Verb + -ing

1. On weekends I really enjoy _____
2. When I study, I try to avoid _____
3. I should really stop _____

Verb + to-infinitive

4. Next year I hope _____
5. Before I leave home, I always remember _____

Part B. Questions

Answer each question in a full sentence. Try to answer using a verb + -ing or a verb + to-infinitive. Then ask a partner.

6. What do you enjoy doing on your days off?
7. What is something you have decided to learn this year?
8. What do you try to avoid doing the night before an exam or interview?
9. What do you sometimes forget to take with you when you leave home?
10. Your phone photos look too dark. What could you try doing?

Discussion Questions

Discuss with a partner or in a small group. Give reasons and examples.

1. Who takes the best photos in your family or group of friends? What do they do differently?
2. Do you prefer taking photos of people, places, food, or something else? Why?
3. How many photos do you think are on your phone right now? Do you ever delete them?
4. Do you usually edit your photos or add filters before you share them? Why or why not?
5. What is the best photo you have ever taken? What makes it special to you?
6. When is it rude to take photos, for example at concerts, in museums, or during meals?
7. Should people ask permission before they photograph strangers or post photos of friends online?
8. Have you ever been so busy taking photos that you did not really enjoy a moment?
9. Could a phone ever fully replace a dedicated camera for professional photographers? Why or why not?
10. Photos on social media are often carefully chosen and edited. How does this affect the way people see their own lives?
11. Phones now merge several frames and use software to improve every picture. At what point does an edited photo stop being a true record?
12. With trillions of photos taken every year, is each single photo less valuable than it was in the past?
13. Families once kept a few printed albums. How might people remember their lives differently in fifty years?
14. Should news organizations and photo competitions have special rules for heavily edited or AI-generated images?

Online Practice

Scan the code or visit **englishbridges.com/lessons/smartphone-photography** for the full reading, vocabulary activities, the Speed Challenge, typing practice, and AI conversation prompts.