Better Smartphone Photos

Teacher's Key | Level B2 | EnglishBridges.com

Sections follow the student handout. Delete a section here when you delete it from the handout. The handout uses the short (quick) version of the reading.

Vocabulary: Fill in the Blank

1. capture
2. culprit
3. smudge
4. hazy
5. harsh
6. flattering
7. silhouette
8. merge
9. steady
10. exposure
11. crops
12. tempting
13. clutter
14. tilted

Word Partners

Part A. 1 e 2 g 3 f 4 b 5 h 6 c 7 a 8 d

Phrases: capture the moment; harsh criticism; a hazy memory; a steady income; exposure to sunlight; a tempting offer; clear away the clutter; a subtle difference.

Part B. 1 harshly 2 subtly 3 merger 4 expose 5 temptation 6 steadily

Comprehension Questions: Model Answers

1. *According to the writer, why do many phone photos disappoint, and is the phone usually to blame?*
The colors look flat, faces are dark, and the picture is blurry. The phone is rarely to blame; a few small habits usually cause the problem.

2. *About how many photos are taken each year, and what share are taken on phones?*
Around two trillion photos a year, and more than nine in ten of them are taken on phones.

3. *Why should you wipe the lens before taking a photo?*
A fingerprint or smudge can make the whole image look soft and hazy, and at night it can turn street lights into glowing stars.

4. *Why does the writer suggest avoiding the flash, and what kinds of light are better?*
Its light is harsh and creates hard shadows. Soft light from a window or a cloudy sky is more flattering, and the golden hour gives low, warm light.

5. *How does the length of the golden hour differ between Singapore and Berlin?*
In Singapore, near the equator, it lasts only around 25 minutes. In Berlin it can last close to an hour at some times of year.

6. *What do modern phones usually do when you press the button, and why should you hold the phone steady in night mode?*
They record several quick frames and merge them into one picture. In night mode the phone collects light for a few seconds, so moving it would make the photo blurry.

7. *What happens to the image when you pinch the screen to zoom, and what does the writer suggest instead?*
The phone often just crops and enlarges the image, so fine detail is lost. The writer suggests walking closer instead.

8. *What should you check at the edges of the frame, and why?*
Clutter, such as a trash can or a stranger's elbow, because it pulls the eye away from the subject.

9. *Which tip in the reading do you think would improve your own photos most? Explain why.*
   Open answer. A strong answer names one tip, explains what usually goes wrong in the student's own photos, and says how the tip would fix it.
10. *True, False, or Not Given: "The golden hour lasts longer in Singapore than in Berlin." Explain your answer using the reading.*
    False. The golden hour lasts only around 25 minutes in Singapore, but close to an hour in Berlin at some times of year.
11. *Yes, No, or Not Given: "The writer believes that strong filters usually improve phone photos." Explain your answer using the reading.*
    No. The writer says to keep changes subtle and avoid strong filters.
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?*
    (a) To support the advice to walk closer instead of zooming. The quote says that photos improve when the photographer gets closer.

True or False

1. **T.** Estimates suggest that more than nine in ten photos are taken on phones.
2. **F.** The phone is rarely the culprit. Small habits are usually the problem.
3. **T.** A fingerprint or smudge can make a whole image look soft and hazy.
4. **F.** The flash gives harsh light. Soft light from a window or a cloudy sky is more flattering.
5. **T.** Many photographers love the golden hour shortly after sunrise and before sunset.
6. **F.** It lasts around 25 minutes in Singapore but close to an hour in Berlin at some times of year.
7. **T.** The camera may turn them into a dark silhouette.
8. **F.** The phone often just crops and enlarges the image, so detail is lost.
9. **T.** The phone will focus there and set the exposure.
10. **F.** The writer says to keep changes subtle and avoid strong filters.

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

Model answers. Accept any answer that uses the form correctly and makes sense.

1. On weekends I really enjoy taking long walks by the river.
2. When I study, I try to avoid checking my phone.
3. I should really stop staying up so late.
4. Next year I hope to travel to Vietnam with my friends.
5. Before I leave home, I always remember to lock the door.
6. I enjoy cooking and watching old movies.
7. I have decided to learn how to swim.
8. I try to avoid staying up late the night before an exam.
9. I sometimes forget to take my umbrella.
10. I could try turning off the flash and moving closer to a window.

Accept any verb in the correct form. In Part B, item 5 can use try + -ing (experiment) or try + to (effort); try + -ing is the more natural answer.

Notes on the Evidence

Photo numbers: Photutorial estimated about 2.1 trillion photos taken in 2025 and put the smartphone share at about 94 percent (2024 data), as reported by PetaPixel (18 June 2025). Rise Above Research gives similar trillion-scale estimates. These are industry estimates, not counts, so the reading says "around two trillion" and "estimates suggest that more than nine in ten".

Golden hour: durations are from a DEV Community article that calculated golden hour (sun from about 6 degrees above the horizon down to the horizon) for 27 cities: Singapore about 24 to 26 minutes; Berlin about 40 minutes at the equinox and about 58 at the December solstice; London about 39 to 55 minutes. Definitions of golden hour vary between sources, so the reading says "around 25 minutes" and "close to an hour at some times of year". The reason (the sun crosses the horizon at a steeper angle near the equator) is standard astronomy.

How phones take photos: Google Research describes HDR+ (a burst of short frames aligned and merged) and Night Sight (up to about 15 handheld frames, capture continuing after the shutter press). Apple and other makers use similar multi-frame methods; details differ by phone. Zoom: Tom's Guide explains that phone "optical" zoom means switching between fixed lenses, that some presets (such as 2x on some phones) are crops from a high-resolution main sensor, and that zooming between or beyond the lenses is a digital crop. The reading therefore says the buttons are "usually where the camera gives its best quality", not that each one is a separate lens.

Capa quote: given on the Magnum Photos page for Robert Capa (born in Budapest, 1913). The reading says he "is famously quoted as saying" it, since the original context of the line is not well documented. The practical tips (clean lens, avoid flash, window light, tap to focus and slide for exposure, grid lines, take several shots, light editing) follow common published advice, for example NC State Extension (August 2025); the rule of thirds is a guideline, and the reading says so.