

**U3A CAMERA CLUB**  
**4 SEPTEMBER – AGENDA**  
**VENUE: THE RAFT CAFE**

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**1. View our Homework – WINTER WONDERLAND**

**2. Brian Lissette - TRIPODS**

**3. Tutorial Videos:**

13 Smartphone Photography tips & tricks [18.25]  
[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=\\_ZYGsx1i5L8](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_ZYGsx1i5L8)

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**Next meeting: 2 OCTOBER 2023**  
**Homework : Silhouette Photography**

**Amazing Silhouette Photography Ideas [1.00]**  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EX7suykU2Og>

**Using your CAMERA:**

01-Creating a Simple Silhouette - The Slanted Lens [5.43]:  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fNgTe5jfQPk>

02-Amazing Silhouette Photography Examples [1.00]:  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EX7suykU2Og>

03- How to Get Awesome Silhouettes - Bethany Kay [3.43]:  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7QA4WA2Av5o>

**Extras to be viewed at your leisure:**

How to Get a Silhouette in a Photograph - PhotographyTV [3.52]:  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Hpnre9tse6k>

Silhouette Street Photography - How to Get the Perfect Shot – EYExplore [4.23]:  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-DwLO7cb1F0>

**Using your PHONE:**

04-Mastering Silhouette Photography with Your iPhone: A Step-by-Step Guide [10.45]:  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qVVPidIJ5sA>

**Snapseed Tutorial:**

05-Snapseed - Tune Image & Center Focus [8.34]:  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=50rZ42-Miwc>

**Reading:** 10 Tips for Taking Stunning Silhouette Photos with Your Smartphone:  
<https://www.eyem.com/blog/10-tips-for-taking-stunning-silhouette-photos-with-your-smartphone>

**Free Online Silhouette Maker**

<https://www.fotor.com/features/silhouette-maker/>

Turn a photo into silhouette online in just a few clicks with Fotor's powerful silhouette maker, you can create impressive silhouette art effortlessly.

06-How to edit photos with Fotor [2.25]  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PyJ4OvTdtLM>

**Silhouettes from today's homework images:**



Peter G – Lunch at Ruapehu



John B – Coronet Peak

# Silhouette Photography: The Ultimate Guide (+ 16 Tips)

<https://digital-photography-school.com/how-to-photograph-silhouettes/>

Silhouettes are a wonderful way to convey drama, mystery, emotion, and mood. They often stand out thanks to their simplicity and incredible storytelling capabilities, not to mention the breathtaking colors and shapes.

But creating top-notch silhouette photography can be hard, especially when you're just starting out – and that's where this article comes in handy. Below, I share all the essential details for anyone hoping to become a silhouette master, including:

- How to choose the right subject and location
- How to handle different lighting scenarios
- How to choose the best settings
- Creative ideas to spice up your silhouette shots
- Much more!

So if you're ready to discover everything you ever wanted to know about photographing silhouettes, let's dive right in!

## What is silhouette photography?

Silhouette photography is all about capturing subjects so that they lack detail. The focus is on creating striking black shapes against a beautifully exposed background. It's a technique that emphasizes the shape and form of the subject, resulting in minimalistic and graphic effects:



Silhouettes also allow you to showcase the vibrant colors of the sky behind your subject, adding an extra level of visual impact. Imagine capturing a stunning sunset or sunrise with the silhouette of a tree or a person standing tall against the vivid hues of the sky.

The best part? Silhouette photography is accessible to everyone, regardless of the equipment you own. Whether you're shooting with a high-end mirrorless model or a smartphone, you can try your hand at capturing these compelling shots, making it an ideal creative outlet for photographers of all levels!

## **When should you try silhouette photography?**

If you're looking to add some pizzazz to your portfolio or spice up your social media feed, silhouette photography is the way to go. These graphic, eye-catching shots can truly make your work stand out.

I talk a lot about light later on in this article, but in general, sunrise and sunset are like magic hours for silhouette photography. The soft, warm light during these times creates the perfect backdrop for your subjects to take center stage as striking silhouettes. If you already like photographing during the golden hours, then you're off to a great start.



You can capture silhouettes of pretty much any subject – people, buildings, animals, trees, flowers – given the right light, but they're not ideal for all occasions. Silhouettes tend to lean towards the artsy side, so if you're doing more formal photography (e.g., a real-estate photoshoot), you might want to opt for more straightforward shots.

Happily, silhouette photography is not limited to any specific skill level or equipment. Anyone can dive into this captivating genre without breaking the bank or spending hours learning new techniques, so if you're on the fence about trying out silhouettes, I highly recommend giving it a go. It's a whole lot of fun, and you never know what magical results you might create. Plus, you'll have the opportunity to explore a new world of colors and shapes!

## **Tips and tricks for stunning silhouettes**

In this section, we'll delve into practical tips that will take your silhouette shots to the next level. Get ready to elevate your photography game, starting with:

## 1. Find a flat or raised location

When it comes to capturing stunning silhouette shots, the location plays a crucial role. The right environment will help you achieve that captivating contrast between your subject and the sky, while the wrong environment will distract the viewer or even prevent you from creating a crisp silhouette.

First and foremost, opt for locations that offer a flat or raised vantage point. Why is this important? Well, silhouettes tend to work best when your subject is framed against the sky, with the dark figure standing out against the bright background.

Beaches are a popular choice for silhouette photography because their flat landscapes make it easy to position your subject against the vast expanse of the sky. The uninterrupted low horizon provides the ideal opportunity to capture the outline of your subject in all its glory. Prairies are another solid option, though you'll need to be careful to prevent high grasses from obscuring portions of your subject.

But what if you can't find a flat location nearby? Don't worry, you can still create captivating silhouettes in areas where your subjects are raised off the ground. Bridges, hills, boardwalks, mountains, and even parking garage roofs can serve as elevated platforms to showcase your silhouetted subjects against the backdrop of the sky.



Pro tip: Crouching down low to the ground can also work wonders, especially when your subject isn't already raised above you. Don't be afraid to get dirty!

## 2. Choose a strong subject



Almost any object can be made into a silhouette. However, some objects work better for silhouettes than others.

First, I recommend choosing a subject that has a strong and recognizable shape – one that'll be interesting in its two-dimensional form. Silhouettes can't draw on colors, textures, and tones to make themselves appealing, so the shape needs to be distinct.

People make great silhouette subjects, but if they're doing something interesting – running, jumping, or riding a bike – the shot will look even better. The best silhouette shots often feature props, such as a bike, a basketball, or a skateboard.

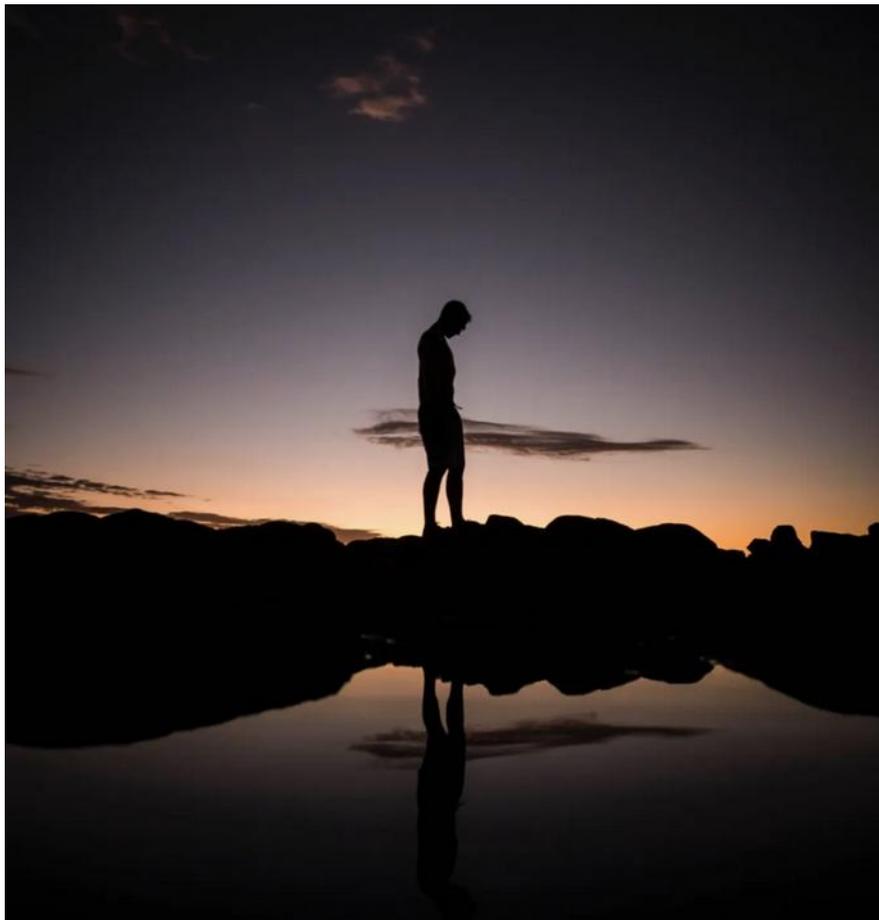


### **3. Make sure your flash is off**

Silhouette photograph often involves shooting in dim light (at the start and the end of the day), and most silhouette subjects look pretty dark, too. Therefore, if you have your camera in Auto mode, it may try to turn on the flash, which will ruin the shot.

You see, to capture a silhouette, you need to have as little light as possible on the front of your subject. The goal is to keep the subject dark and the background bright, not the other way around.

So make sure that flash is off! You may need to set your camera to Aperture Priority mode or Manual mode to control the flash (and as I discuss below, these modes are highly useful for silhouette shooting anyway!).



#### 4. Get the light right

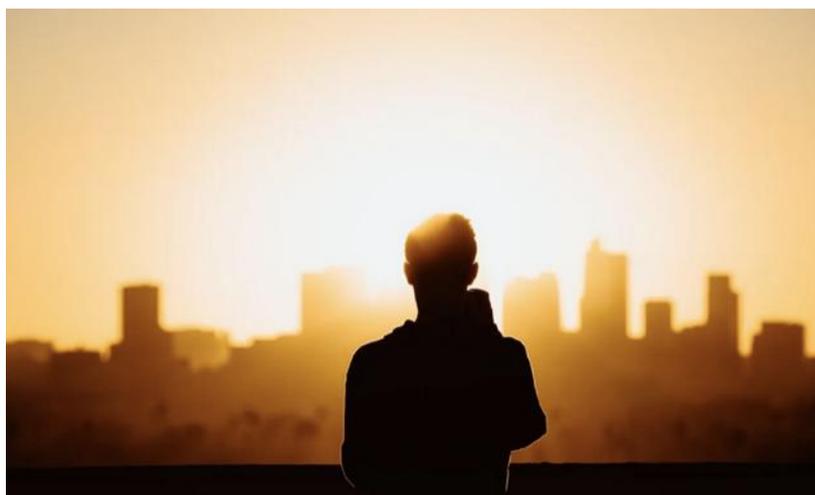
Silhouette lighting doesn't work like normal photographic lighting. To capture a conventional shot, you generally want to ensure that your subject is lit from the front (so that the sun is coming from over your shoulder and striking your subject) or the side (so that the sun is off to your right or left and is striking one half of the subject).

But when you're shooting silhouettes, you'll need to reverse this approach. Find the scene's main light source, then ensure that it's shining from the back of the subject, not the front. Remember, the goal is to keep the background bright and the subject dark. You don't need the light to come from directly behind the subject, but the brighter the background, the better.



That's why it's easy to create silhouettes at sunrise or sunset; you can position yourself so that you're shooting into the low sun, and you can frame the dark subject with the bright sky in the background. However, it is possible to capture silhouettes during the middle of the day. You just have to figure out a way to shoot your subject against strong light. For instance, you can:

- Crouch down so that your subjects are framed against the high afternoon sun
- Photograph from below (e.g., folks walking over a bridge)
- Seek out shadowy subjects walking by a brightly lit wall
- Photograph indoors against a bright window



## 5. Frame your subject with negative space

Even once you've chosen the right subject and found the right light, you'll need to pay careful attention to your composition. The best silhouette shots tend to feature a single subject (or group of subjects) surrounded by empty space, like this:



The empty space (**also known as negative space**) helps the shot breathe, and it also focuses the viewer on the main subject.

One trick is to shoot when the sky is bright and cloudless; that way, you don't have to deal with any distracting clouds. You might also try photographing in areas with lots of empty space (e.g., fields, grassy plains, parking lots).

That said, you can also capture fantastic silhouettes that feature more than just a subject plus negative space. Don't restrict yourself, but do make sure that you only include subjects that contribute to the shot.

## 6. Prevent shape intersections

If your silhouette composition includes multiple shapes, do your best to keep them separate. A person walking can look great, and a tree can look great, but if the person and the tree overlap, you'll end up with a confusing mess. The two shapes will merge into one, and the viewer won't know what's happening.

Instead, carefully observe the scene and isolate only those shapes that are highly distinct. If you want to include multiple shapes that are currently overlapping, try changing your angle until the shapes separate.

Alternatively, if you're photographing a moving subject, you can always wait until it changes position.



One related tip: If you're photographing people, you probably want to silhouette them in profile, not head-on. That way, their features (nose, mouth, and eyes) will be outlined, and they'll be more recognizable to the viewer.

## 7. Carefully adjust your exposure for the best results

Most modern cameras are pretty good at exposing photos so that everything is nice and bright. That can cause a problem; after all, you don't want your subject to turn out nice and bright in a silhouette shot.

So what do you do? You trick your camera.

Simply set the camera to your shooting mode of choice (Aperture Priority can work great for this, but you can try Auto mode, too). Then point your camera at the brightest part of the scene and press the shutter button halfway. On many cameras, this will set the exposure, and as long as you keep the shutter button half-pressed, it'll remain locked in.

Next, while still partially depressing the shutter button, point your camera at your subject and frame up your composition. Finally, press the shutter button the rest of the way.

With most digital cameras, this will result in a silhouetted subject! Pointing your camera at the bright part of the scene will cause your camera to darken the exposure – and then, when you do take the shot, the main subject will be rendered as a dark silhouette.



Note that some cameras also have a spot metering mode that helps with the above technique. Spot metering causes the camera to set the exposure based on the central part of your frame; with it, you can tell your camera the exact portion of bright background you want to use to determine the exposure. So if you're not getting the shots you want using the technique discussed above, you can always try switching your metering mode and see if that helps.

## 8. Try shooting in Manual mode

The technique I discussed above often works well, but if you want even more control over your settings, I'd really recommend shooting in Manual mode.

Manual mode lets you input each and every exposure variable on your own. It can be a little difficult at first, but after a few hours of practice, you'll get the hang of it.

Once your camera is set to Manual, I'd recommend dialing in a low ISO (100 is a good starting value) and a mid-level aperture (such as f/6.3). Then point your camera at the brightest part of the scene, and adjust the shutter speed until the exposure bar in the viewfinder is balanced.

Take the first shot and review the results on your camera's LCD. If the image looks too dark, you can always lower the shutter speed, and if the image looks too bright, you can always increase the shutter speed instead.

(If you're working with very limited light and your shots are turning out dark, you can also widen the aperture or boost the ISO to increase the exposure, but do so sparingly; widening the aperture will limit the area of the photo that's in focus, while boosting the ISO will add unwanted noise to the image!)

I'd also recommend capturing the same shot using a variety of different exposures – just so you have slightly darker and slightly lighter versions as backup files.



## **9. Take steps to keep the subject sharp**

The best silhouette photograph tends to feature sharp, in-focus subjects.

Unfortunately, this can make the automatic metering process – described in Tip 6 – somewhat tricky. You see, pushing your shutter halfway down to get the metering right also means that your camera will focus on a spot in the background rather than on your subject.

If you're using the Manual mode shared above, you won't run into any issues. You can always acquire your exposure settings by pointing your camera at the background, dialing them in, then focusing on your subject. But if you prefer the Auto mode strategy, then you have two options.

First, if your camera offers manual focusing, you can prefocus on your subject. Then, when you meter off the background, the point of focus won't change. You can effectively frame up your composition before triggering the shutter.

Second, you can try adjusting the aperture to maximize your depth of field (i.e., the amount of your image that is in focus). For this, you'll need to set a small aperture (i.e., a large f-number, such as f/11 or f/16).

If the f-number is large enough and your subject isn't too close to the camera, you'll end up with a sharp subject and a sharp background, even if your camera is focused on the area behind your subject.

## **10. Incorporate reflections into your shots**

One trick that can apply that extra touch of magic to your shots? Adding reflections. Not only do reflections add pizzazz to your images, but they also break up the monotony of an all-black foreground.

Once you've found the perfect location for your silhouette shoot, keep your eyes peeled for a reflective surface in the foreground. Look out for small pools of water or wet areas, especially if you're shooting by the beach.



Once you've found a nice surface, don't just shoot without thinking. Instead, you'll need to adjust your angle to ensure that your entire subject is reflected. For example, if you're photographing a graceful jogger against the vibrant sunset, you wouldn't want the reflection to accidentally cut off their head! Try shooting from higher or lower vantage points until you achieve the best composition.

Keep in mind that incorporating reflections into your silhouette photography can require some patience. It's not always easy to stumble upon the perfect combination of a reflective foreground, a compelling subject, and a captivating background. But the reward is well worth the effort. Don't give up! Keep exploring, keep searching for those hidden gems, and you'll be amazed at the incredible opportunities that you uncover.

## 11. Try partial silhouette photography

While a total silhouette with a crisp, dark subject can be powerful, also consider capturing some partial silhouettes. I'm talking about photos that include some detail on the subject, like this:



As you can see, the subjects are dark, but they're not completely dark, and you can still see a bit of detail in the sand and the subjects' clothes.

Sometimes, a touch of light makes the subject slightly more three-dimensional and real, which – depending on your goals – can work well. Plus, a bit of extra detail can add to the mysterious feel of the image.

And if you're not sure whether to create a full silhouette or a partial silhouette, that's okay; just bracket your shots! That's the beauty of bracketing: it will leave you with both total and partial silhouettes to choose from.

## 12. Include props for unique results

Most photographers create candid silhouettes of distant strangers, but if you're up for a bit of creative experimentation, why not try some posed shots? While I generally wouldn't recommend capturing only silhouette shots during a portrait photoshoot, incorporating a few well-placed silhouettes can provide your subject with some cool and artistic photos that stand out from the crowd.

And if you're really looking to elevate those images, try adding a prop or two. Whether it's umbrellas, hats, musical instruments, or any other object that catches your fancy, props can inject personality and storytelling into your silhouette images. Just imagine a silhouette of a musician with a guitar, or a dancer with a flowing scarf.



When adding props to your compositions, keep in mind that they should be highly visible and not overshadow your subject. Also, ensure that the prop doesn't intersect with your subject in a way that detracts from the clear outline you're trying to create.

Remember, incorporating props is all about adding that extra touch of creativity and fun to your silhouette photography. So don't be afraid to experiment and think outside the box. Let your imagination run wild!

### 13. Don't just photograph people

Most silhouette photographers focus on people, and people do make great silhouette subjects. But you can also capture beautiful – and original – shots by focusing on other interesting objects. For instance, you can create silhouettes of staircases (by getting down low and shooting upward), buildings, pets, planes, cars, and so much more.



Really, whenever you see a subject with a compelling shape, see if you can position yourself so that you have a nice backlighting effect, then try to shoot a clear silhouette. You'll often fail to get the result you're after, but occasionally the photos will look amazing.

#### **14. Use a flash as your main light source**

Throughout this article, I've talked about photographing silhouettes using natural light. But did you know that you can capture gorgeous shots using flash, too? One benefit of flash silhouette photography is that you can completely control the light direction and strength, which allows you to achieve all sorts of cool effects.



Working with flash can be a bit intimidating, but the goal is simply to make the background brighter than the subject. Position your subject in front of a light-colored backdrop (such as a white wall), point the flash at the wall, then take some shots, with the goal of overexposing the background while underexposing the subject.

You might also try positioning the flash behind your subject so that it's pointed directly at their back; this will create a rim-lit effect, which can look wonderfully artistic.

## 15. Spend some time processing your silhouette photos

Even if you nail the silhouette exposure in-camera, I'd recommend making a few minor tweaks using an editing program.

First, adjust the white balance until you get the results you want, then raise or lower the exposure to add or remove detail on the subject. You can also adjust specific tonal sliders for a more refined effect.



If you're after a punchy silhouette shot, try adding some contrast – and if the image features a beautiful sunrise or sunset in the background, consider boosting the vibrance or the saturation.

Finally, experiment by adding a vignette, creating an eye-catching color grade, or selectively dodging and burning different parts of the image.

## 16. Try a black-and-white conversion

While the vibrant colors that often accompany silhouettes can be breathtaking, there are times when the color can be a bit too distracting or overwhelming. That's when a black-and-white conversion comes to the rescue, allowing you to emphasize your subject's form over the background colors.

Applying a black-and-white conversion can help strip away the distractions and accentuate the interesting outline you've captured. Plus, by converting your silhouette photograph to black and white, you'll give the shot a timeless and artistic quality.



But here's the best part: If you try a B&W conversion and aren't entirely convinced by the black-and-white look, don't fret! If you use a non-destructive editor like Lightroom, you can easily revert back to the original color version without losing any precious details. This gives you the freedom to experiment and determine whether your shot looks best in color and monochrome.

So the next time you're editing your silhouette photos, consider giving the black-and-white conversion a try. It's a simple yet powerful technique that can bring out the subject while de-emphasizing the background, and it can add an extra layer of depth and artistry to an already captivating image!

### How to photograph silhouettes: final words

Now that we've reached the end of our journey into the captivating world of silhouette photography, I hope you're as excited as I am about all the incredible possibilities this technique offers. Remember, there are no rules when it comes to silhouettes. You can stick with vibrant colors that sing harmoniously or go for the drama of black and white. And don't be afraid to incorporate props for that extra touch of uniqueness – imagine a dancer twirling with an umbrella under a fiery sky! Now, armed with the knowledge we've shared, it's time for you to unleash your creativity. Grab your camera, and embrace the simplicity, the elegance, and the pure artistry of silhouettes!

<https://digital-photography-school.com/author/darren/>