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HOW TO DO ANYTHING ON YOUR MAC

## Take Better iPhone Photos

You can squeeze a surprising amount of quality out of the iPhone's 2-megapixel camera—these tips will help.

Anyone already familiar with the iPhone's camera and photo capabilities knows that, while it shines as a handheld photo manager, its camera hardware isn't going to knock anyone's socks off. The good news is that we're likely only weeks away from a new iPhone, probably with an improved camera.

Regardless of what improvements are on the way—or how long it might be before you can get the new model—there are a number of simple tricks that can help you take better photos with your existing iPhone right now. Plus, these techniques will still apply, mostly, to any new model, regardless of its specific upgrades. **BY CHRISTOPHER DACK**

### >>>WHAT YOU NEED

LEVEL:  
easy

- >> iPhone (any model)
- >> Soft cloth for cleaning the lens
- >> A willingness to experiment



See what a difference a clean lens can make?

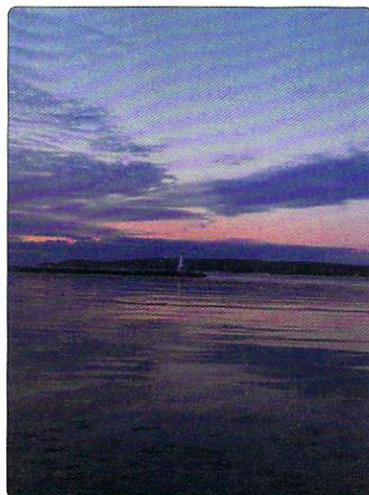
### 1 Clean the Lens

This one seems like a no-brainer, but a clean lens will capture better photos than lenses smudged with fingerprints or dirt. And since the iPhone is such a multipurpose tool and lacks any type of lens cap, its lens gets smudged easily and often. As with any camera lens, it's best to use a very soft, lint-free cloth. If the lens is merely dusty, a light wipe should clear it. But if it is smudged, you might need to "fog" it with your breath before cleaning.

## 2 Rotate the iPhone

Holding the iPhone vertically while taking a photo results in a vertically oriented photograph, and turning it to be horizontal takes a horizontally oriented photo. Obvious, right? Still, some people forget. (Ironically, with other kinds of cameras, most people shoot horizontally by habit and forget that they can turn the camera vertically.)

The iPhone shoots in a 4:3 aspect ratio, which is closer to being square than many cameras' 3:2 aspect ratio, so the difference between shooting horizontally and vertically isn't quite as notable as with some cameras. But, when faced with a landscape-type scene, or when shooting a group of people, remember to try the horizontal orientation, and you might be surprised by how much better your subject fits into the frame.



Some photos just look better in landscape orientation—actual landscapes, for example.

## 3 Avoid Camera Shake

Blurry, shaky images are common in iPhone photos, particularly shots taken in low light. Turns out that the stance most people use for snapping these photos is probably the worst for steady shots: standing casually, iPhone in one hand, held out away from the body. In this posture, every part of your body will contribute tremors to your phone. To steady the phone, use the same techniques that professional photographers and target shooters use.

Try planting your feet wider to provide a more stable base for your body. If you can lean, either backward or sideways, against a wall, car, tree, or anything else, you'll be amazed how much steadier your shots are once your legs and torso are taken largely out of the equation by being braced.

Also try gripping your "shooting wrist" with your opposite hand and holding your breath while taking the shot. In fact, hold your breath and remain as steady as possible until the photo pops up onscreen—prematurely moving the phone or exhaling can introduce camera shake while the iPhone is processing the photo, creating a blurred image.



Bracing your body and controlling your breathing can help you steady your phone and take less-blurry images.

## 4 Press, Compose, Release

The shutter release on the iPhone is odd in two ways: First, it's an onscreen button rather than a hardware button, so it gives you no tactile feedback. Second, the iPhone takes the photo when the button is released, not when it's pressed. This can reinforce some bad instincts when it comes to composing pictures, specifically the instinct to center subjects within the frame.

One of the oldest, but still best, lessons that aspiring photographers learn is to throw subjects off-center in the frame—doing so usually makes a photo far more interesting. Because the iPhone's shutter button is easy to fumble around with and doesn't snap the photo right away when pressed, people tend to recompose the photo as they're shooting it, usually by re-centering the subject. To combat this, make a habit of pressing the iPhone's shutter button, then composing the shot, then releasing the button when you have the shot framed the way you want.



First press the shutter button, then compose the shot, which is taken when you release the button.

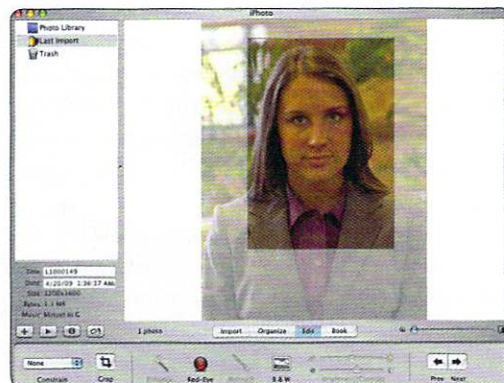
## Take Better iPhone Photos (cont.)

### 5 Back Off for Better Portraits

Ever noticed how most shots of people taken with cell-phone cameras look a little strange and unflattering? It's because of the perspective. They're taken from too close to the subject, distorting the person's features. The iPhone's camera takes in a field of view roughly equivalent to a 28mm lens (on a 35mm film camera). For reference, most professionals shoot portraits using a field of view equivalent to 85-135mm lenses. They shoot with longer lenses and back away from the subject because it yields a flatter, and more flattering, perspective.

You can take more flattering portrait shots too, simply by backing up a bit. (Obviously, when taking self-portraits, there's a limit since your arm is only so long, though people often make use of mirrors for self-portraits and get around this limitation.) Of course, the iPhone lacks a zoom lens, so backing up means taking a wider shot. However, if you're willing to do a little image editing, you can get around this by shooting wide and then cropping later.

A good trick here is to download your image directly from the iPhone onto the computer rather than emailing it to yourself. When you email a photo, the iPhone automatically downsizes it to 800x600 resolution; when you download it directly to your Mac, you get the full 1600x1200 resolution to work with. Then just crop it in iPhoto or your favorite photo-editing app.



Backing up gives you better portraits, but they're wider too—until you crop them, of course.

### 6 Find Plain Backgrounds

Compare amateur photos to those taken by pros, and you'll notice that the pro shots tend to have simple, often plain backgrounds. You usually want to draw attention in your shot to a single subject, whether that's a person or object. The easiest way to make that subject really pop is to deny viewers any interesting alternatives to look at, which a plain background accomplishes.

The iPhone and iPhone 3G have fixed-focus lenses on their cameras, so as of today, this is more of a general-photography tip. But it might not be too long before the iPhone gets an autofocus lens, and shooting against plain backgrounds helps to avoid autofocus errors, while cluttered backgrounds can confuse even sophisticated autofocus mechanisms.



A busy background can draw attention away from the photo's subject.

### 7 Succumb to Gadget Mania

Someday soon the iPhone will get a better camera, probably with autofocus, a zoom lens, and perhaps even some additional manual controls. Until then—and even after—several ingenious accessories can enhance the iPhone's camera functionality.

Griffin's Clarifi (\$34.99, [www.griffintechology.com](http://www.griffintechology.com)) is an iPhone case with a built-in close-up lens that covers the iPhone's lens, boosting its close-focusing capabilities from its (roughly) 18-inch native focusing distance to about 4 inches. This makes possible crisp pictures of business cards, documents, and other small objects with fine detail. A truly brilliant touch is that this close-up lens can slide to one side to allow the iPhone camera to operate normally.

Other accessory lenses allow you to go the other way: IGg, SNY, and Brando all make iPhone cases with detachable telescopic lenses, giving your iPhone true optical zoom capabilities. By the way, avoid iPhone apps that lend "digital zoom" to your iPhone photos—this is nothing more than upsizing and cropping. You can do better in iPhoto, and for free.



The Clarifi lets you take close-up photos of small objects and capture sharp detail.