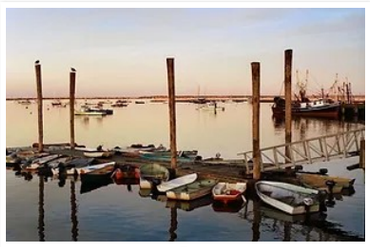
Landscape Basics

What You Will Need

- A sturdy tripod.
- A selection of lenses. Always be prepared.
- Lens wipes. I suggest Zeiss.
- A fully charged battery and don't forget your media card or film.
- Polarizer filter, neutral density filter, graduated neutral density filter and UV filter.
- Cable release or wireless remote release.
- Rain gear. Don't get caught in a storm with soaked camera equipment.
- A compass. Know where the sun will be.
- Food and water.



Getting the Shot

- Scout a nice place to shoot in advance. Note where the light is coming from. Good light is essential. Scan the area, look for subjects of interest in both the foreground and background.
- Arrive at your location early. Have your equipment ready. Don't be caught scrambling to choose your lens and filters.
- Pick a focal point. A focal point is your point of interest. Use the Rule of Thirds to create depth in your photo by arranging your point of interest so that it sits on one of the intersection points of the grid.
- Use an appropriate lens to emphasize your point of interest. If it's a boat at the lead edge of a lake, use a wide angle to emphasize the boat. If it's the sun over the desert, use a telephoto to make the sun bigger. Know what your subject is.
- Set your camera for it's lowest ISO. You don't want sensor noise in your landscape photos.
- Shoot in RAW mode. You need every bit of information possible in your image file and you'll want complete control in post processing. Only shoot jpeg if you have no choice.
- Use a sturdy tripod and a cable release. Camera shake will negate all your hard work in less than a second. Lock up your mirror if you have that option.
- Take several meter readings of your subject and the background. Keep in mind that a large differences in exposure must be noticed and addressed.
- Shoot in manual exposure mode. You'll need firm control of your exposure
- Be patient and let the light change in your favor if necessary. Ansel Adams waited hours for the light to change.
- Determine which filter you will need. If you are lucky you may have perfect light, but that is not likely. Use filters to control the extremes of light in your scene. Use a graduated nd filter to balance the exposure between sky and ground. Use a polarizer to deepen a blue sky or remove glare from water. Use a UV to reduce bluish haze especially when you are using a telephoto lens. Use a neutral density filter to reduce shutter speed which allows you to blur clouds and soften ocean waves. Think about what you want before you start clicking away.
- Use a small aperture for a large depth of field. F11 is usually sufficient when you are using a wide angle lens. Avoid using an aperture smaller than f16, though, because diffraction is an issue on digital cameras.
- Bracket your shutter speed. Take 3 shots, one underexposed, one overexposed and one in the middle. You can choose the best of the three in post processing.
- Use manual focus. Auto focus is inconsistent.
- Focus on a spot one-third of the distance into the scene. If you focus on infinity the foreground will be blurred. If you focus on the immediate foreground the background will be blurred.
- Take several pics. Adjust your filters and settings as necessary.
- Use converging lines to create depth and lead the viewers eye.
- Use color to your advantage. Golden Hour is a pleasing time of day to shoot landscapes, but you must be prepared as the light changes quickly. Colorful object attract the eye. Choose focal points that have color. Use contrasting colors to create depth and separate foreground from background.
- Try shooting a panoramic of large scenes. When shooting panoramics I suggest using a 50mm lens to avoid distortion. Use a tripod and make sure it's level. Shoot either horizontally or vertically but remember to slightly overlap each photo that you take. Shoot with extra space in each shot. Don't get to close or it will cause issues when you stitch the pics together. Follow the landscape tips already discussed. If you shoot a f2.8 instead of f11 you will have problems. Beware of fast moving clouds, or active water because they will cause inconsistencies in your stitched panoramic. Don't go too large. It needs to be viewable as one print or on one monitor.

Problems

Problems will arise. With experience you will recognize them quickly.

- Low Light - You need light to get the shot. At some point the light fades to a point where it is insufficient. Very long exposure times create noise. Unless your desperate, try another day.
- Harsh Light - If your scene is uncomfortable to view with the naked eye, it will be uncomfortable to view in a photo. Look for a different vantage point or wait for better light.
- Backlight - Backlight may have artistic value in silhouettes but it has little to no value in landscape photography. Backlit landscapes have no color definition, fogged details and annoying light artifacts. Don't waste your time unless you know the light will change. Look for a better spot or pick a better time of day.
- High Contrast - While contrast is necessary to define shapes, high contrast images have no detail. If your scene contains areas of widely varied exposures, you may need to wait for better light or use techniques which allow you to capture details in specific areas with multiple images then combine them together to make one image. This is called HDR and it requires practice and specialized software to get it right.
- The Scene is Too Large - You are photographing a bridge but it doesn't fit in the viewfinder. You need to stitch together a panoramic if you're wide angle lens isn't wide enough.
- Obstructions - Sometimes you find the angle you want but there's something in the way. Options, stand in front of it, rise above it (with a ladder, not intellectually), remove it in Photoshop or just move it out of the way.
- Insufficient Depth of Field - You are using a telephoto and you can't get the depth of field you require. You can Focus Stack. Focus stacking is a technique in which you take multiple images of the same scene but each image is focused on a different point from near to far in the viewfinder. The images are then combined to make one image that is completely in focus. This is a highly technical process which requires practice, patience, software and a comfortable understanding of image processing.