

HOW TO TAKE GREAT PHOTOS OF ANIMALS

HORSE PHOTOS

Equipment

- Use the best equipment you have available.
- 35mm adjustable camera is preferred.
- Telephoto lens (e.g., 70-210 zoom) is recommended.

Film

- 400 ASA film best bet for horse photos.
- Professional film and developing is worthwhile.



Lighting

- Best photos taken in morning light (everything is fresh and clean) or late afternoon. High noon is *not* a good choice.
- Front lighting (the sun is at your back) is generally best to put enough lighting on the subject to see details and muscling.
- Cloudy bright day is best for photos of horse and person together, especially if person is wearing a hat. Flash or reflector may also be used to eliminate shadows.
- Avoid shade of tree. Avoid taking photos inside barn.

Composing

- Background. Choose a clean, uncluttered background. (Avoid background mergers.) Solid-color preferred. Dark-colored background for light-colored horse; light-colored background for dark-colored horse. (Avoid color mergers.) Avoid reflective surfaces in background.
- Get close. Fill the frame. Avoid cutting off body parts, e.g., tips of ears, hooves, one leg, tail, etc. (Avoid border merger.)
- Place subject off center. "Rule of thirds." Allow space in the frame for the horse to move into.

- Choose a format. Rule of thumb: Vertical composition for vertical lines; horizontal composition for horizontal lines.
- Hold the camera steady. Keep the horizon line straight.

Assistance

- If the handler will appear in the photo, be sure he/she is dressed neatly and correctly for the purpose of the photo.
- Three people needed to photograph a horse:
 - 1 to handle the horse
 - 1 to take the photo
 - 1 to get the horse's attention.
- Remove other people and animals from the area if possible.

Posing

- Preparation: Clean horse. Horse should be in good condition. Well-groomed. Clean equipment. Well-fitted halter (lead shank on side away from camera or underneath).
- When everything else is ready, then bring in the horse! Have fly spray available. You don't want your horse swishing its tail.
- Stance should be appropriate for breed.
- Four legs! "V's." Technical tips for positioning the legs:
 - Hind "V" starts at stifle/gaskin. The "V" stops at the hocks. Cannon bone of hind leg nearest you should be straight; the far hind should be slightly ahead.
 - Front: The foreleg nearest you should come straight down; the far foreleg should be placed slightly behind.
 - Most of all the horse should look comfortable.
- Neck: Be sure the mane is down. Tape the mane on the off side. Combs hanging in the mane may work.



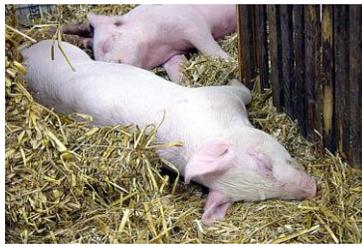
- Head turn: The head should turn slightly toward the camera — eye contact is important! You should see an outline of the far eye. Don't shoot a profile for most breeds. Use a flash outdoors or reflector to put catch light in the eyes.
- Level ground or slight elevation for front feet gives a nice top line.

Patience

- Vow to be patient! Ask yourself: “Am I having fun?” If not, *lighten up!*

LIVESTOCK PHOTOS

Animals, wild and domestic, are as much a part of Wisconsin's landscape as lakes, forests and bluffs. Young lambs frolicking in the bright springtime sunlight, cows and young calves resting in the coolness of a summer evening breeze, or young piglets tasting the warmth of their mother's nutrition are just a few of the picture postcard sights we might like to capture on film with our camera at Old McDonald's Farm, or any farm for that matter.



While capturing livestock on film can be fun and rewarding, it takes a bit more than pointing at your subject and tripping the shutter. It's wise to apply the golden rule of photography: “You shoot snapshots, you create photos.”

Strive to create a photo that tells a story and makes a positive picture for livestock agriculture. Avoid photos that are unfavorable, such as unkempt cattle, broken down buildings and fences, weedy fields, etc.

Common types of livestock photos:

- Natural settings: cows in pasture, baby pigs with their mothers, sheep grazing on a hillside.
- Human interest: animal or animals and a person or people in an unusual setting.

- Posed photos: animals set in a pose to display their positive phenotypic characteristics. Such photos are often used in livestock advertising and promotional work.

Planning

Regardless if you live on the farm where you are planning to take photos or are making a special visit to a farm, fair or other agriculture event to take photos, advance planning will pay big dividends. Taking that special photo can happen by chance, but more than likely, you will be most pleased with the photos that included prior planning. In making your plans, consider:

Subject

Think about your subject and the best location to photograph that animal. This is your choice as beauty is in the eye of the beholder. Cattle, sheep and swine photos can be beautiful and interesting.

Location

Where you find your subject – open field, the county fair or barnyard – becomes the location. It will pay to take some time to scout out the area where you will be taking the photos and study the effect of sunlight, different angles, etc. It is best to take photos in a setting natural to the subject (open fields, pastures or lots) because it enhances the natural character of the subject.

Avoid taking photos inside of barns or among trees or dense vegetation.

- Lighting is generally poor or defused, which will create shadows and patterns. While these may be interesting, they also can be distracting.
- Light coming through windows, doors or cracks in barns can easily cause problems.
- Barns are not always clean.
- Safety factor of getting too close to your subject.

Select areas that are clear of debris and distracting elements like power lines or weeds. Some existing objects like an old log, an old fence or trees can enhance a photo and be used to frame your subject.

If you do not live on a farm or a farm with livestock, taking livestock photos will require making special plans to visit a farm.

- You can take photos from the roadside. Never enter a field or lots without permission.
- Fairs are excellent places to take livestock photos, but there again, secure permission from the owner or exhibitor of the animals before engaging in a photo session.
- Often special agricultural events offer petting zoos, etc., which will enable you to take very interesting animal photos.

Equipment

Today there are many cameras available to us in a wide range of prices, most capable of taking quality photos. Like all types of photography, the more high-tech the camera, the higher quality the photo, providing you are familiar with operating the equipment. Know your equipment.

- Film Speed: 100 or 200 ASA or ISO is best for bright sunny days; for cloudy, overcast days, 400 speed will be best.
- Flash: needed for indoor photos.
- Lenses: a wide-angle lens as well as a zoom lens will give you more flexibility and will enhance your photos.

Shooting Conditions

- Time of day: for animals in natural settings, pastures, etc., early morning and late evening are the best. Animals tend to be out and about at that time, in both winter and summer. Animals do not work easily in the heat of the day.
- Good sunlight will enhance photos for the most part.
- Give special consideration to sunlight through trees, sunlight on the snow and the effects of shadows.
- Weather conditions, such as rain, fog, ice and snow can make interesting photos, but require special attention.

Patience

The more patience you have and the calmer you are, the better your photos. If you are not familiar with the animal or animals you are

photographing, have someone with you that is acquainted to handle or take care of the animal(s). Always move slowly; talk quietly.

Practice

Keep records of your photos: location, time of day, amount of sunlight, as well as film speed and camera setting. Use this information in reviewing your photos. Study each photo and evaluate how you could have improved each photo. Be sure to identify, record and file your negatives or electronic photos.

Taking the Picture

Natural Setting Photos

- Be calm and quiet.
- Check your equipment, film speed, etc.
- Study various angles; look through your viewfinder or LCD.
- Get close.
- Get on the subject's eye level.
- Fill the frame.
- Have your helper get the animals attention, get the ears forward.
- Take several shots.
- Vertical versus horizontal.

Human Interest Photos

- You have more flexibility in changing the appearance of your location with human interest photos, e.g., you can move baby animals outdoors into a grassy area.
- Use subject matter that appeals to human nature, or tells a story, e.g.,
 baby pigs in a basket with a young person, a cow with its calf, or a lamb eating.
- If a person is in the photo, try to have the animal and person interacting.
- Fill the frame.
- You do not need to have the entire animal or entire person to have an interesting photo.
- A fair or petting zoo is a great place to take human interest photos.

Posed Photos

- Use a clean animal that has been worked with. Best to have them trimmed or clipped.
- Area with nothing but ground (or grass) and sky for the background works best.
- Best to have at least one other person helping you.
- Again, be calm and take your time.
- If the animal is haltered or being handled (sheep and beef cattle) get the animal set, and focus on the animal (usually focus on the front leg.) Remember the ears.
- If taking a natural pose, let the animal walk into its best pose.
- Hogs: use a pull pan with feed in it.
- Get close; fill the frame.
- Take several photos.

Safety

- Work quietly and calmly. No matter how well you know the animal, it can be spooked.
- Do not take chances, no matter how cute the photo may be. Do not take a risk, such as asking a child to milk a cow.
- Cows with calves, ewes with lambs, and sows with babies can be dangerous.
- Always ask permission to take photos, be it on a farm, at a fair or at an agricultural event.
- Avoid taking photos of animals and people at a show when the animal(s) are being groomed or are being led to and from the showing.

In Summary

- Be calm.
- Be cautious.
- Be courteous.
- Be creative.

PET PHOTOS

General Tips

1. *Groom before you shoot.* A clean, well-groomed and brushed subject is definitely going to come out best. Examine the corners

of your subject's eyes and gently remove any "tear matter." Avoid trying to bathe and photograph your pet on the same day. Take off any collars and chains.

2. *Get acquainted with your subject.* If you're asked to photograph an animal you don't know well, take time to get to know it before you start shooting pictures. Talk to your animal subjects in a soft, calm voice, and always move slowly around them.

3. *Look for something special.* Most pet subjects do have unique features. Make note of such individual characteristics and include or even emphasize them in the photographs you create.



4. *Keep shooting sessions short.* Most animals do not have a very long attention span, so try limiting your picture-taking to 10 minutes at a time or be prepared to take a break every 10 minutes. It's very often the first photo or two that turns out to be the best.
5. *Do a security check.* Make sure that your posing surface is rock solid with no shakes or (worse) flimsy supports.
6. *Try shooting at an angle.* Pose animal subjects at a 45-degree angle to the lens. Also try to get some shots of the subject looking directly into the camera and looking to the left and the right. Having a variety to pick from can't hurt, and the one that looks best in the final print isn't always the one you thought would be a winner as you were shooting.
7. *Have fun.* If you really enjoy photographing animals, your enthusiasm will inevitably be reflected in your results. A positive, upbeat attitude will put your subjects at ease and help you to create animal portraits that will please everybody, including you.

DOG PHOTOS

Making Friends

- If it's not your dog, allow as much time as necessary to become its friend.
- Snacks: Often a dog will become devoted to you quickly if you bribe it with a little treat. In addition, small hand-held snacks will help to rivet the dog's attention for certain shots.

Assistance

- Whether you plan to shoot indoors or out, an assistant is almost a "must" when photographing a dog. If possible, use the dog's owner. The owner will know the dog's tricks and will serve as its security blanket.
- If you are shooting a puppy, a bowl of warm milk will often make it pleasantly drowsy and docile.
- Liverwurst: For some reason few dogs can resist this food. If you want to photograph a dog kissing a child, wipe a slice of liverwurst over the child's cheek or hand (depending on what the parents permit). The dog will be there on cue eager to lick the delicious hands or face.

Props

- If the dog is a brunette, use a light-colored rug or mat. A blonde dog photographs best when placed on a medium-to-dark-colored rug or blanket.
- Try to introduce a child into the picture, particularly if the dog is a large species so viewers can see the size difference. Kids and small dogs (Pomeranian, Pekinese, Chihuahua, or miniature of any breed) work well, too, because the small dog will look more fragile and lovable when held in the lap or embrace of a charming youngster.



Confining the Dog

- Devise ways to confine the dog to a certain area.
- If you're indoors, a corner of a room is usually preferable because that leaves the dog just two, instead of four, directions in which to run away. It may help to use the dog's personal blanket to sit or lie on. Placing a small-to-average size dog on a table often helps to keep it confined to an area while you photograph.
- If you're outdoors, there's no need to run yourself ragged chasing the dog all over a lawn or park. If you have access to a backyard with a fence, or even a fenced-in field, the barrier provides a psychological barrier that most dogs will respect. However, unless the background enhances the composition, be sure to keep the dog away from the fence or other obtrusive background.

Posing and Composing

- To get animals to sit still for pictures, give them something specific to look at or listen to at the moment of exposure. Once you do this, be ready to shoot.
- Avoid command words. Many dogs respond to many common words, so avoid words like "come," "here," "out," and "sit," unless you want the dog to do what you're suggesting.
- Know your breed. Some breeds of dogs, German Shepherds and Dobermans, for example, should be photographed with their ears up or pricked, while others, such as most hounds, look best with their ears relaxed. Know the effect you want to achieve with each subject and, if in doubt, ask the owner or look at official breed illustrations in dog books.
- Go for a unique expression. One way to get it with a trained dog is to give the command, "stay," then ask the owner to walk slowly out of sight while you capture the dog's



expression. When you call the owner to return, a different expression will come across the dog's face, so be ready to capture it on film, too.

- Other attention getters for dogs are stock phrases such as "Where's your bone?" "Get the ball!" or "Where's the kitty?" Ask the owner what phrases this particular dog responds to, and use them. Also ask the owner to bring some of the dog's favorite food treat – it's one of the best ways to provoke an interested expression.
- The dog's head *is* the picture. Kneel, squat or lie on the floor if you must to show the dog's best feature, conformation and expression.
- Backgrounds should be as plain as possible in both color and texture. A plain-colored wall works best. A wool or rug texture is OK if it doesn't match the dog's coat too closely. To avoid shadows, keep the dog at a distance from the background so it won't cast a shadow.
- Black subjects, especially furry ones, do not reflect enough light to allow you to record shadow detail. For photographing black animals, open up your lens an extra stop or half-stop from the metered exposure. Try both settings to determine which is best for your subject.
- The opposite applies to white animals. Close down the aperture by a full or half stop because white reflects all light waves and white subjects therefore tend to be overexposed.
- Red eye (or green eye or blue eye – the color depends on the animal) happens when flash light reflects off the retina and back out through the pupil of the eye. The simplest solution is to get the flash head as far as possible from the lens axis, by either using a flash bracket, holding your flash off camera, or mounting your strobe on the light stand. Other things that may help: turn up the room lights so your subject's pupils will be smaller, use your camera's built-in red eye-reduction system, or shoot with a shorter focal-length lens or at a wider zoom lens setting – the re-eye effect is more pronounced with telephotos.

- To stop a pet's movement, use 1/125 sec. If you want to eliminate blur completely, shoot at 1/250 sec. or faster, or use electronic flash.

Sequences

- Plan ahead if you want to shoot an entire sequence, such as, retrieving a ball. Have the dog do the action several times so that you can shoot a different segment of the action each time. Start shooting the sequence as the ball is tossed. Next, aim the camera at the path the ball, and subsequently the dog, will follow. Toss the ball again and catch the dog on film as it catches the ball. Throw it once more and wait until it returns the ball to its master or starts chewing it.

CAT PHOTOS

Assistance

- When photographing a cat, just as in photographing a dog, or perhaps even more so, the cat's owner is your camera's best friend.

Props

- Keep things cushy. There's nothing a cat likes better than stretching out on a soft surface – a couch, chair, bed or rug – and that's where they like being photographed, too. Ask about your subject's favorite places for curling up and try to include them in your portrait session.
- Place a cushion on a table so you can confine the action. Often a cat won't jump off if you give it something to play with. Try placing a rubber mouse or ball in the center of the cushion and letting the cat discover it.
- Other props that might work: balls made of tinfoil, cardboard roll from toilet tissue, large leaf from a houseplant, nylon hose, shoelaces, and strip of old adhesive tape.



Posing and Composing

- Try visual stimulation. A peacock feather, spinning pinwheel or the time-honored bit of yarn usually will get a cat to look where you want.
- Make sounds to evoke response. Cats also respond to noises. Try rubbing your thumb and forefinger together or scratching the side of your camera with your fingernail. Keep such sounds on the quiet side; loud noises may scare your subjects.
- Use commands. Some cats are trained to respond to commands.
- Since cats as a species have small flat noses and almost non-existent jaws, a cat usually looks better when you photograph it full face. Shooting down on a cat is disastrous because the expression is lost. A face-to-face confrontation between cat and lens, or a slightly downward angle with the cat looking up at the camera, does justice to its best features and shows to advantage its most attractive expressions.
- Wait for wake-up time. Wait for it to wake up from a nap. More often than not it will yawn, so be ready to capture the “roar.”
- Try a two-cat portrait. Cats often come in pairs and getting both into the same shot can make for a more interesting portrait. Often one animal will look at the other, which makes an appealing shot. Also, try carrying one cat at a position beside or behind the camera while photographing the other one. You’ll usually get a fascinating expression.
- Suppose you want to photograph two cats, at attention, with both heads turned in the same direction. Have the owner stand at one side of the camera, uttering soothing cat talk while he smooths their fur and assures them of his undying devotion. At your whispered command, the owner stops stroking, lifts his hand above their heads, and snaps his fingers with a sharp crack.
- A cat washing itself is not a particularly interesting sight; but one cat busily washing



its brother or sister is always amusing. If you smear a bit of food just behind the top of one cat’s head, the other will probably wash it off without much coaxing.

- A cat will usually respond if its master gently throws a ball for it to catch or fetch. If you are focused on the spot where the ball will land, you may catch a dramatic pounce.

Difficult Subjects

- Cats, being cats, are often more difficult to pose than dogs. Do the kitty-cat cuddle for difficult subjects. Find a willing accomplice (the owner is probably best) to hide under some pretty fabric, cuddling kitty in its fold. Move in for a close-up portrait and the result is usually a cozy, cuddly look.
- The average Siamese is temperamental and uncooperative when you want to take its picture. Drape the cat’s owner with a large piece of black velvet. Then have the cat sit on its master’s lap. While the owner strokes it, relaxing its wariness about you and your camera, have the owner pause long enough between strokes to let you shoot. By cropping close to the cat, no one will suspect that it’s sitting on its master who has been rendered invisible thanks to the magic of black velvet.

Sources:

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Photos by Wayne Brabender, Wisconsin 4-H Photo Specialist, except horse photos on page 1 by Shirley Gates; dog and child photo in column 2, page 5, by Kelly Kozey, Taylor County 4-H member; and cat photo on page 6 by Sarah Ford, Portage County 4-H member.