

A PHOTOGRAPHER'S MANTRAS
(Developed by David H. Wells
www.davidhwells.com
for his photography students, slightly
modified and with notes by Harold Levine)

1. **The eye goes to white.** The viewer's eye will go directly to any white in the final image. Make sure the white area(s) in your image is/are intentional, not accidental.
2. **Meter the light, not the subject.** You'll always get the best reading by measuring the light itself not the subject. The darker or lighter an object the more or less light it send to your film, making darker or lighter parts of the final image. Best to take a spot reading off a gray card or something that looks medium-gray that is in the same light as the subject. Remember: a black cat and a snowman both photograph as gray if they're metered directly.
3. **Photograph fewer subjects with more film.** Using 36-exposure 35mm **slide** film, David has his class bracket each shot 3 times (Normal, Under and Over exposed) for 12 images per roll, and asks that each roll contains only one or two subjects. Pick a subject carefully, then "work" it ... lots of angles and approaches.
4. **Resolve the light.** Don't take the picture until you're sure the role of light in the image is working to your advantage, conveying whatever message you want to convey.
5. **Resolve the background.** Same with the background. No more trees growing out of your subjects' heads! Once you've composed the pictures, scan the background to make sure it's good for the picture.
6. **Resolve the angle.** Know why you're shooting from the angle you've chosen and use the power of looking up or down on your subject as part of the final image's message.
7. **Go from "big picture" to medium distance to close detail.** A great way to approach a subject, especially in travel or documentary photography, to give your pictures a visual variety.

8. **Understand the “Wells Point.”** David (Wells) uses the term “Wells Point” to describe the time of day when a person’s shadow is the same length as the person. You can shoot in the morning until you hit the Wells Point, or in the afternoon once it’s past. In between the sun is too high, and the shadows created by the mid-day light are too harsh, for good pictures.
9. **All good flash is fill flash.** Meter the background, then add subtle flash (generally at lower than full power).
10. **At twilight, by the time the sky looks good, it’s too late.** There’s a magic time when the sky has the same exposure value as the interior lights from buildings or the neon signs.

Other Notes from David Wells’ Class

Know how to operate your camera on full manual mode. Turn off the automatic aperture and/or shutter controls and yet leave on the auto focus on your camera. Make the decisions yourself as to what shutter speed and aperture are best for this particular image. Now take a roll of pictures. You’re not a photographer until you can do this.