# Taking Better Blog Photos


**Kelly Larkin**
**Life & Style Blogger**
**kellyinthecity.com**


**Current Gear:**
**Canon 5D Mark III**
**50mm f/1.2 Lens (Style shoots)**
**24mm f/1.4 Lens (Interiors)**
**Canon Speedlite 600EX-RT**
**(Interiors and Events)**

**Have a Question?**
**Reach out:**
**Kelly@kellyinthecity.com**

## ABOUT:

While I did take a film photography class in the seventh grade, I learned everything I know about DSLR photography through the internet and trial and error. I had a brief stint as a wedding and event photographer in New York, but today I shoot mostly for my blog, other bloggers and freelance jobs. (And the occasional engagement/family session!) If you're looking to improve your photography skills, my best suggestion is to practice, and practice *often*. (Honestly, every day! Just keep that camera in your tote bag!) "Learning" DSLR photography is kind of like learning a new language. You can't expect to become fluent in French, for example, over night. But practice makes perfect, *oui?*

## GEAR:

One of the biggest misconceptions about DSLR photography is that the more expensive camera body you buy, the better your photos will be.

*Sometimes* that's the case, but buying a super expensive (and heavy!) camera can often actually *hinder* learning, as these models are far more complicated and confusing to operate if you don't have a lot of experience. My first DSLR camera was the Nikon D40x, which was a tiny, inexpensive little thing that isn't even produced anymore. But I credit so much of the knowledge I now have to the D40x, as it provided visual learning aids for shutter speed, aperture and ISO. It was also extremely light, and therefore tucking it into my tote bag on a daily basis wasn't a big deal. As a result, I practiced on my way home from work every day, and *improved*.

Don't know whether to go Canon or Nikon? You really can't go wrong. I shot with Nikon for *years* and loved my cameras to pieces, but I recently purchased a Canon because I fell in love with the company's super fast and sharp L-Series professional lenses. That said, I still shoot with a Nikon, too!

If you're just starting out, I suggest buying one of the following bodies: a Canon Rebel (T5, SL1, T5i or T6i) Nikon D3200/3300 or Nikon 5200/5300. Try 'em out at stores, and go for the best deal! (If this were my first DSLR purchase, I'd personally go with the least expensive model, as I did with my D40x.) You'll also need a **prime lens**.

A prime lens is a lens with a fixed focal length, or one that doesn't zoom. It's also used to achieve that lovely blurry background. (More on that below.) I recommend either the Nikon 35mm f/1.8 (or this one if you want to be able to one day use it on a full-frame camera, too) or the Canon 35mm f/2. (Read more about prime lenses and why you need one here: http://kellyinthecity.com/blogging-photography-prime-lens) Skip the camera kits if they're more expensive, as you won't need the lenses they come with!

If you're more well-versed in manual settings and looking for a body upgrade, I'd suggest the Canon 70D, Nikon D5500 or Nikon D7100/7200. Looking to move to full-frame? I still have my Nikon D610 and love it, and the Canon equivalent (which a friend has, and I also shoot with frequently) is the 6D. (It has nearly identical specs to my Canon—the 5D Mark III—but is a much better buy.)

Wondering where to buy? Amazon has amazing customer service!

## UNDERSTANDING SHUTTER SPEED, APERTURE AND ISO:

**Shutter speed** is the exposure time, or the length of time the camera's shutter is open to expose light to the image sensor. (Slow shutter speed = brighter images but potentially blurry if the subject is moving or your hand is shaking. High shutter speed = crisp and clear images, but

potentially darker. We try to brighten up these photos with higher ISO and wider aperture settings.)

**Aperture** is the size of the opening in your lens, also known as the F-Stop. Wider (lower) apertures let in more light, and smaller (higher) apertures let in less. Aperture is also what gets you that **blurry background**! The wider (lower) the aperture, the more depth of field and therefore blurrier background. The smaller (higher) the aperture, the more in focus everything is.

**ISO** sensitivity is the camera sensor's ability to capture light. In broad daylight, you would likely choose an ISO setting of somewhere in the 100-200 range. In shaded areas, perhaps somewhere in the 300-600 range. After the sun sets, or when shooting indoors, you'll likely need to go higher. Keep in mind that the higher the ISO, the "noisier" or grainier the photo becomes. Better sensors (meaning more advanced/expensive camera models) yield better results with higher ISO settings.

## USING "PRIORITY" SETTINGS:

*Don't* shoot on auto. Auto is for when you hand your mom your camera before your college graduation and hope for the best. Will you sometimes accidentally achieve some phenomenal results on auto? Yes. But do you want to leave it up to chance every time? Probably not.

That said, you probably shouldn't go right from operating your camera on auto to operating it on manual. (Confusion!) Instead, get to know your camera's priority settings, which are on the "mode dial" of your camera. "A" stands for Aperture Priority, for example. The camera lets you set the aperture, but then it does the rest of the work for you. Watch the shutter speed and ISO settings that the camera selects, and learn from them. Disagree with the camera? Good! It's a machine and you're a human. ;) Retake the same shot with the settings *you* think are right, and see which shot you like best. You'll be amazed at how quickly you learn.

## GETTING THAT BLURRY BACKGROUND:

The blurry background we all know and love is actually called "bokeh." And it's best achieved with a prime lens, meaning a lens with a fixed focal length, as I mentioned before. (One that doesn't zoom.) You've probably read or been told at some point that you should buy a 50mm lens, but only do this if you have a full-frame camera. (Nikon calls it "FX" and Canon simply calls it full-frame.) If you have a consumer-grade camera with a crop sensor (Nikon calls it DX-Format, and Canon calls it APS-C), you'll want to buy a 35mm lens, which is the equivalent of a 50mm on a full-frame camera. If you put a 50mm lens on a DX/APS-C camera, you'll have to back up really far for full-body shots! (No bueno.)

Anyway, bokeh is the effect of a soft, out-of-focus background. You get it when shooting your subject with a fast, prime lens at a **wide** aperture. (Meaning a low number, such as f/3.2 or lower.) Not too familiar with your camera's manual settings yet? Then shoot on Aperture Priority, and set your aperture to something like f/3.2 or f/2.8. You can go wider (lower) for up-close, detailed shots, but realize that the wider your

aperture, the greater the depth of field. So if you're shooting full-body photos at f/1.8, for example, you're likely going to see a whole lot of blur. (The subject's nose might be in focus, but everything else will look blurry.)

Don't assume that the wider the aperture the "better" the bokeh. Full-body? Stick with f/3.2 or f/2.8 so that the whole body is in focus, with only the background blurred out. A bracelet shot, though? Go wild. An aperture of f/1.8, for instance, will make for some beautiful photos, perhaps with a crystal or two in focus and the rest blurred out.

**Confused? Visit http://dofsimulator.net/en to see a GREAT simulation of how bokeh/depth of field works using a model.**

## CHOOSING A SHOOTING BUDDY:

Hiring a photographer for every photo shoot is expensive, and not exactly sustainable if you're still establishing yourself in the blogging world. Instead, shoot with someone you know… even if he or she isn't a professional photographer.

Shoot with someone you're comfortable with, and with someone who's *willing* to shoot you. Some significant others, family members and friends don't mind snapping pics on the reg, while others come to *hate* it. (No need to torture those you love!) Shooting with other bloggers is always a great idea because they're typically like-minded and understand what you're looking for, and you can repay the favor. But if you're more comfortable shooting with your mom or your best friend (and they're up for it), go with them!

Once you find your shooting buddy, don't expect him or her to learn how to operate your camera. That's just not fair! And even if they *did* want to learn, you'd likely have different styles. Simply have your shooter stand where you're going to stand while you set the settings, and then switch places. Easy!

## LEARNING TO EDIT:

Hands down, my favorite photo editing software is Lightroom. (Also available in subscription form.) It's inexpensive and does a phenomenal job… and editing with it takes far less time than it does with Photoshop. (I always like to say that Photoshop is for when you need to do something major, like add a T-Rex to a bridal party shot, making it look like a scene out of Jurassic Park. Lightroom is what you *actually* need on a daily basis.)

I do very little to my photos in Lightroom, but what I *do* do makes my photos **pop**. First, I adjust the sharpness to somewhere in the 60 to 70 range. After that, I bring my "blacks" down to the -50 to -70 range, and then I up my exposure to whatever seems right. If a photo feels too warm or too cold, I adjust the temperature slightly… and that's IT. So easy!

## QUESTIONS?

Drop me a line at kelly@kellyinthecity.com!