

Mailman School of Public Health

Smartphone Photography Guide



- **Fill the Frame:** Get close to your subject to eliminate distractions. Look for contrast between your subject and the background. Use existing frames, like arches and windows to bring focus to them. If you are taking photos of children or pets, get down to their height.
- **Don't Zoom:** Many smartphone cameras offer a digital zoom function, but this will pixelate your image. Either get closer to your subject, or crop the photo later to get the framing you want.
- **Follow the Rule of Thirds:** If you drew two horizontal lines and two vertical lines across the screen, the points where they intersect are the best places to position subjects (see below). This places them slightly off-center.
- **Lighting:** Strive for well-lit places. Natural light is best, (outdoors or next to a big window,) or a well-lit room is fine too, (turn all the lights if you can). Position yourself so that the strongest light source is in front of your subject/at your back. If you must shoot a subject that is backlit or exposed to harsh light and shadow, only then use the camera's flash. Remember, good light gives a scene depth and makes things look interesting.
- **Keep Still:** The more steady you keep your camera phone, the clearer your image will be. Stand/sit firmly and use two hands to hold the phone. This is especially important in low-light situations. If you are taking a photo in low light, lean your camera phone (or the hand holding it) against a stable object like a table or tree. Also note, sometimes there is a lag between when you press the shutter button and when the photo is taken, so hold steady until you see the preview image appear on screen.



- **Find a Moment:** What if you're at interesting location, the lighting is perfect, but nothing's happening? Wait for someone to walk by, or position a person or object in frame to create a sense of scale, and bring life to your landscape.
- **Take Many Photos:** The best part about digital photography is the ability to take many shots quickly and at no extra cost. Take multiple shots, or experiment with new angles on the same subjects, to catch them looking their best, then delete the rest later.
- **Editing:** Don't use the same filters and effects everyone has built into their camera phones. If you need to make edits, use a dedicated editing app like SnapSeed, Photoshop Express, or iPhoto to adjust contrast, sharpness, or color temperature.
- **Quality/size:** Some camera phones allow you to choose the resolution of your photos in the settings. Choose the highest resolution available.
- **Permissions:** Always get permission to photograph people and distribute the content online. For videos/photos that you may share with the School, get permission for them to be published on the Columbia University Mailman School of Public Health's channels (website, social media, youtube, etc.). Written consent is best, (Contact [Anne Foulke Toner](#) for a photo release form template,) but fellow Mailman students, faculty, and staff, as well as people who may not be literate can give verbal consent. Before capturing a child's image, always ask for permission from the parent/guardian. You do not need permission if the people are in a public space (i.e. on the street), in a public crowd, or not identifiable. A HIPPA release is required for patients in the USA.