

# Picture This !!

How to photograph your Pen.

The purpose of this article is to provide pointers on how to take pictures of your pens with a simple digital Point and Shoot camera. The aim is to end up with a photograph that shows off your pen to it's best advantage without a bunch of technical jargon or special equipment.

Except for the very cheapest models, most digital cameras are very much alike and share the vast majority of features, regardless of make.

Luckily the industry has developed a number of standard symbols used on these cameras which allows me to explain certain functions and features regardless of where they are located on your particular camera.

For example: If you want to take pictures of a small object located very close to the camera lens, (called the "Macro" mode of operation) just look for a button with a little flower symbol on it. Conversely if you want to take a picture of something far away, (called the "Landscape" mode) look for a button with a mountain symbol on it. Etc. Etc. Etc.





Above are two examples of different brands of cameras and their basic controls



**Controls on my Kodak Camera**

It is of tremendous help to refer to your camera's operating manual as we go along, just in case you have trouble activating a certain function or operation. If you no longer have the manual for your camera, go to the manufacturers web site and you can download a copy or just read it on line. ( Heavens, you might actually have to read the darned thing! )

To make things a little easier, I will break the subject up into several Chapters in order not to overwhelm

folks with too much info all at once.

This way it becomes a series of manageable steps, rather than one huge task. (which it isn't, but can appear so at first. )

The whole point is to make this as easy as possible.

OK, LET'S GET STARTED !!!!!

The task at hand is as follows:

When taking a picture of a Pen, you are trying to take a picture of a relatively small object, but with lots of detailed features which are important to show the true character of the object.

That means you have to get the camera close to the object and it has to be in perfect focus.

Also, to reveal the great finish you gave your pen, you need the right amount and type of light.

Start with your camera in the "Automatic" mode !

Let's take these tasks one at a time.!

Distance:

You want to get close enough to the pen so that it will fill the whole picture frame.!!

Of course you can simply hold the camera close enough to the pen until it appears to fill the whole frame of your camera's LCD screen. But that method has a couple of drawbacks.

First, you will be in a rather uncomfortable position most of the time, making it hard to hold the camera steady and the object accurately centered.

Second, you will probably block the light you need for a decent image.

But the camera can help you out with this!

By using the camera's Telephoto feature you can bring the pen closer via electronic/optical means.

While standing or sitting in a comfortable position, just activate the Telephoto feature until the pen fills the frame. ( Check your operating manual if you don't know how to do this )

Focus:

This is where most good pictures get ruined UNNECESSARILY!!

Once you get the hang of it, focusing is a piece of cake.

Cameras are basically designed to take pictures of objects from quite a few feet to many miles away.

Focusing on things close up is tricky when using the normal operating settings of your camera.

But again the camera can help you with this also.

Set the camera to the "Macro" mode of operation. Look for a button with a little flower symbol on it.

(again, check your manual if you have trouble with this). This sets the camera lens to operate at close range.

The camera will probably refocus automatically, giving you a much sharper picture already. In some cameras you may have to depress the shutter button part way to see final focus.

Lighting:

Place a light of some kind, a simple desktop lamp will do, near the pen and slightly to the side of the camera.

A simple 75 or 100Watt bulb will do. DO NOT use Fluorescent lights, they give off a very cold looking light, not something you want to influence the appearance of your pen.

This brings up the use of Flash!! The Flash also gives a very cold light, very much like a fluorescent Light bulb, which is what a flash basically is. Find the Flash control on your camera!

Try taking a few pics with and without flash and see what happens. Some cameras are very good at taking pictures without flash, some are definitely not. This has to do with the lens and lens control mechanism in your particular camera.

If neither one of them does the trick for you, try the REDEYE feature if your camera has it. (almost all cameras do ) In this mode, the camera actually flashes twice, the first flash is designed to partially close people's pupils and the second one actually takes the picture. However, the second flash is a little weaker in this case, thus resulting in a light that is not so stark and gives a softer appearance to the object.

Take a few pictures:

Now that you have achieved a nicely focused picture that fills the frame, Find a way to steady your camera by holding it with your elbows at your sides or resting it on something and shoot away.

( today we are very lucky that we don't have to take the film to be developed only to find out the pics were bad. We don't even have to pay for it. )

You should have gotten some decent pictures at the end of all this. !!

But you are still not entirely happy with the results? The pictures don't really POP out at you ??

Well, that's where we have a few tricks up our sleeves that can make those pictures come alive.

Most of you will already have tried most of the things discussed so far, but we had to start somewhere.

In the next section we will discuss the things Studio Photographers do to make the images look professional.

Except we will not invest a few thousand \$\$ in special equipment.

Stuff you have around the house will work quite well. But then you don't have to produce thousands of pictures like the professionals do.

Tips and Tricks.

Here we will try to make your "nice" image really POP!!

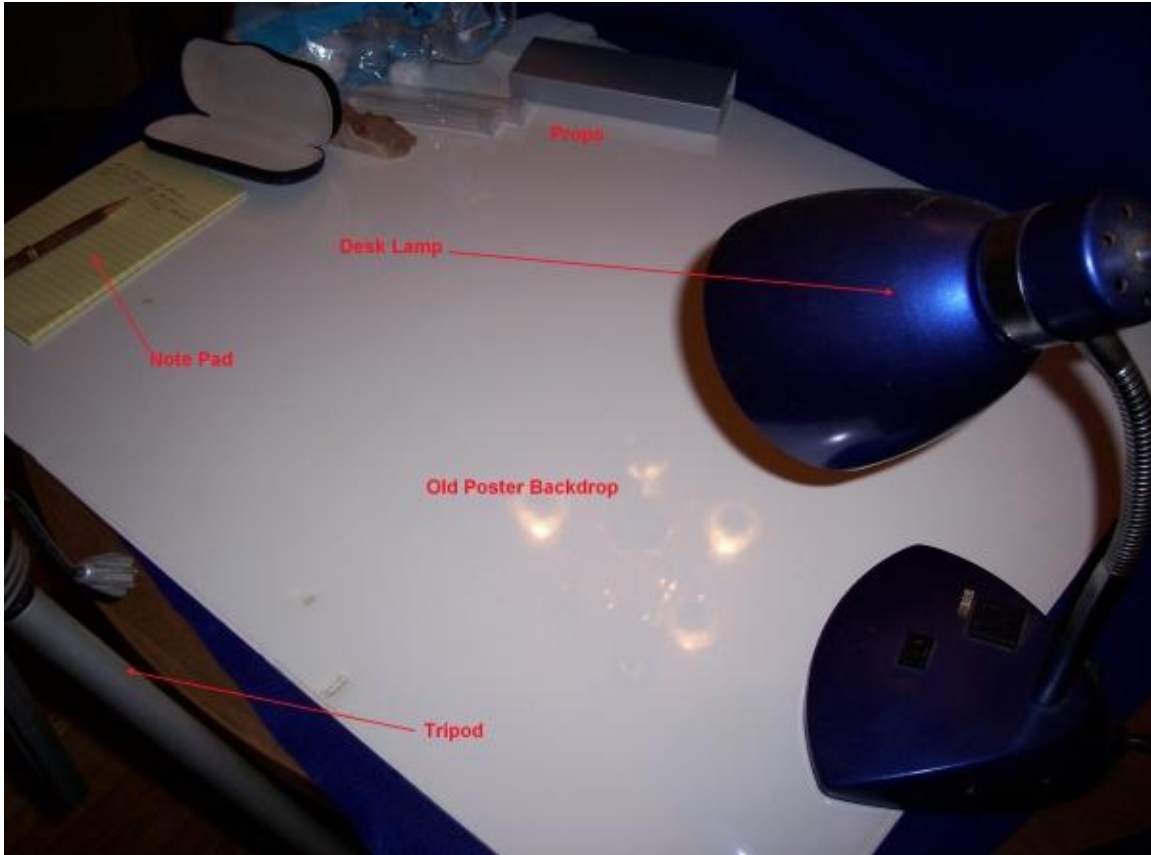
Backdrops:

In general terms, light colored, smooth backdrops work very well for Pens. Since pens contain a wealth of very small detail, a busy backdrop will draw the eye more towards the backdrop, thus de-emphasizing the pen details.

That does NOT mean you can't use some imaginative props in the picture. Just don't let them overwhelm the pen. Also, some woods or Acrylics stand out more next to a smooth or rough, dark or light prop in the frame.

PLAY with it !! You will soon find a few favourites. Even a simple rock with a few shiny crystals in it may look spectacular. What about putting your Pen into a Crystal Clear Martini Glass ??

For the backdrop I use the back of an old poster which is nice and smooth and can be put on any table to serve as a back drop. I use the dining room table for picture taking. I can clear everything away in less than a minute.



## MY STUDIO

### Focusing Revisited:

Yes, it rears its ugly head again. As mentioned before, incorrect focusing ruins more pictures than anything else.

THE SINGLE Biggest Cause of bad focus is due to camera movement while the picture is being taken.

But this is easily taken care of with two simple actions:

Put the camera on a Tripod ! ( This is the only piece of equipment I will ask you to get if you don't already have it. I get mine at Garage sales for between \$5.- and \$25.- )

Here is the second action to cure camera movement: Use the camera's internal time delay. (Look for a stylized picture of a clock face). When activated, the camera delays the taking of the picture after you press the shutter button. This time varies, typically between 10 and 30 seconds. Even when mounted on a tripod, pushing the shutter button vibrates the camera, resulting in a slightly blurred image. Using the time delay allows time for this vibration to die down and the image will be much sharper as a result.!

If you look very closely at the pictures you got with the above focusing methods, you will discover that the center of your picture is very sharp. But take a very close look at the ends of your Pen. !!

Notice that the ends are slightly fuzzier or less sharp than the middle ???

Without getting into a bunch of Techno-Blab, this is due to setting the lens to the "Macro" mode.

In the macro mode you told the lens to operate at very close range and this means that any part of the picture which is more than a few mm's away from the center of the lens setting (Closer OR Farther), is not in perfect focus. It is close, and most people won't notice. But if you want the image to really jump out at you, you'll need to correct even this small error.

You will have noticed that, so far, we have left the camera operating in the "Automatic Mode".!!

For this last step I will ask you to leave this comfort zone and to operate the camera in a mode other than

“Auto”

( Let me assure you that, if you have taken the steps outlined so far, you will already be creating some excellent images of your pens. You don't have to go any further than this. To achieve perfection, read on )

Most cameras have a setting on their “MODE” dial labeled “A”. This stands for “Aperture Priority “, meaning that you control the aperture of the lens setting and the camera will take care of the rest.

(“ Aperture is nothing more than a number that tells photographers how WIDE the lens will open )

It turns out, that the narrower the lens opening is, the more of the picture stays sharply focused ! Setting the lens opening to the smallest size will keep both ends AND the middle of your pen nicely focused.!!

So, go to Aperture (or A ) mode and set the aperture to “8” or more. ( most inexpensive Cameras won't go farther than this )



Notice that the center band of the Pen is crisp and sharp !

However, notice how blurred the bottom end of the Pen is.... Plus, the background is a bit busy...



Here is an image taken in the “Aperture Mode” with the Aperture set to “8”. Notice that the image of the pen is sharp from top to the tip.

...having a really sharp image can reveal slight defects in the pen itself. Notice the slight pock marks on the tip of the pen...The plating is not perfect here. Also, Always turn the clip up ! The plating on the clip’s sides usually look terrible. This one is no prize either...

But now we are really starting to nitpick. Most folks seeing these images would think them quite excellent !! You’ve got to stop somewhere !!!

Now, with your camera on the Tripod, the lighting adjusted so it’s reflection traces a line along the pen ( which makes your finish sparkle ) turn on the delay timer and shoot away. !!

Play around with your setup, props and lighting and enjoy your results !! You have earned it.

However, I have not even mentioned THE most important tool for improving your picture skills:

**TAKE NOTES !!!!!!!!!!!**

Have a pen handy (now, That shouldn’t be a problem surely ?) and write down your camera settings before you take each picture . Top Photographers have been giving this piece of advice ever since cameras were invented, and for a very good reason: After you have tried your second camera setup you will start forgetting how you took each picture. When you finally see the perfect result after downloading, you will have forgotten how you did it. Don’t bother trying to critique your images via the review screen on your camera. The LCD screen is way too small to show that kind of detail.

After you get a little proficient at taking your pen pictures, don’t be afraid to experiment! Thousands of setting combinations are available with most of today’s inexpensive cameras. Some of them can achieve some spectacular results. We have barely scratched the surface here.

I also left out another whole galaxy of imaging possibilities, the art of Image processing. For certain picture effects Image processing alone can take many hours of work. If this is your passion, go for it. Fantastic results can and are being achieved by today's amateurs.

My aim here was to cover the basics which would allow anyone with a basic digital camera to achieve excellent results !

I am more than happy to answer any questions anyone may have after reading this. If something doesn't work, give me a shout in the "Pen Photography" section of the forum.

Adolph