

Get streetwise and realise the photographic potential in your urban wonderland



© Ernesto Conder

01 Less is more
In terms of equipment, less is more. If you are traipsing the streets of a city for hours on end you'll want to cut down on the baggage, so a good pair of walking shoes and a comfortable camera strap should not be negotiated. Additionally you'll want to blend in to catch subjects unawares; erecting a tripod or using a telephoto lens won't suggest subtlety.

Street Photography

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© Alan Abercrombie

03

Stolen moments

The key to successful street shooting is to be on the lookout for an opportunity before it happens. Anticipate action by scouring groups for potential clashes or bonds, judge the atmosphere of a crowd and react to body language and facial expressions.



© Blake-Extra Cole



© Dom Bower

02 Off the beaten track
Street photography is not tourist photography, so go off the beaten track and capture what is being done behind the scenes. Going out at an unusual time can help you find great shots and because street photography is not dependent on perfect light settings, you have no excuse not to get out early and stay out till late.

04 True colours
Colourful clothing or backgrounds can sometimes be a distraction when you want to concentrate on facial expression and gesture, and for this reason the genre lends itself to black and white. However, there will be opportunities where lurid and gaudy colours collide and it would be a crime to convert.

05

In the background

By paying attention to the background, you can catch some stolen moments. Look for billboards, signs, graffiti or other visual elements that could be used to make humorous, ironic or incongruous statements.

© Julian Kilby



© Guy Gagnon

09

Off the streets

Despite its name, the genre does lend itself to other recreational areas, especially those where people expect cameras to be present. For example, try the seaside, fairgrounds, parks, sporting events, or the zoo.



© Joe Buxton



© Guy Gagnon

“Exploit the diagonal lines and perspectives of the urban architecture”

06 Dare to go diagonal
Street photography expert Guy Gagnon (www.guygagnon.com) advises: “By playing with angles and available geometries you provide force and dynamism, and a kind of harmony between the man and the urban architecture.”



© Joe Buxton

07 Opposites attract

Look for compositions that reveal dichotomy to build a story or challenge a viewer's presumptions. Try splitting the composition between the reflections on the ground and the scene above, or capture part of a building half in the dark, half in the light.



© Guy Gagnon

08 What a performance
Street entertainers make ideal subjects, but try to capture from a different viewpoint. Whether it's a parade, buskers, free runners, skateboarders or break-dancers, they offer a something a little different to your average street scene. Experiment with your compositions and choose a high shutter speed to capture the action.



10 New angle
Get down low or find a higher viewpoint for an unusual angle, says pro Joe Buxton (www.joebuxton.com). “Multi-story car parks are great for this, as you don't have to shoot through glass and give a high viewpoint in town centres. Be careful that your camera is secured; the last thing you want is to drop your camera and hurt someone.”

11 Practise makes perfect

“With your camera pre-set, pick a spot on the street and proceed with calmness, sensitivity and poise,” advises Joseph Szabo, who has photographed Jones Beach, one of America’s busiest beaches, for over 30 years (www.michaelhoppengallery.com). “With practise, you’ll make great street photographs.”



© Joseph Szabo



© Martin Amis

12 Fortune favours the brave

Robert Capa once said: “If your pictures aren’t good enough, you’re not close enough.” Shots taken in the thick of the action will draw the viewer in, so force yourself to press the button and prepare to deal with the consequences. Better that than regretting missing an opportunity that will never happen again.



© Jonny Mobasher

13 Fun in the sun

Use the sun’s glare to your advantage. When the sun is low in urban environments it produces long shadows and shafts of light, creating high-contrast patchworks. This can trouble a camera’s meter, so make sure you use the Manual mode and expose for the highlights.

14 Ready to pounce

The opportunity for a great shot may be fleeting, so be cued up and ready to shoot. Have your camera out, finger at the ready and for when the situation demands, matrix metering and autofocus activated.



© Michael Talbot

15 Revise and revisit

There’s a myth that all street photography is ‘shot from the hip’, but this just isn’t the case. If you see a scene that has potential, don’t be afraid to revisit the same location and spend some time there to get a better shot. Revisit in different weather conditions and different times of year to see a change.

Frozen motion

Movement is a key part of capturing the human zoo, so keep those shutter speeds fast and that hand steady or find something to support your camera. To capture people moving across the frame, a minimum of 1/125 sec is recommended and an ISO no slower than 400.



© Joe Crane



© Andrew Stark



© Ruth Orkin

Street wallpaper

“I prefer it if my subjects don’t know I’m there, or else are too busy to be aware of my presence,” Ruth Orkin claims in an unpublished biography. “I would try very hard not to move unless it was absolutely necessary and not to press the shutter unless there was some other noise to cover the sound. I called it ‘blending in with the wallpaper.’”



© Chad Coombs



© Seth Taras

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Life through a lens

Exaggerating perspective will help set your subject in context and provide a more forgiving depth of field – that’s why most street photographers say a lightweight wide-angle lens is their weapon of choice. Also consider fisheye lenses and the potential for panoramic shots.

19 Expect the expected

People are generally more suspicious in today’s social climate, which makes street photography a potential minefield of hot-tempered confrontation. Try shooting subjects in places where people expect shots to be taken, but be aware that you may be regarded with suspicion. Smile, be polite and be willing to delete images if the subject asks.

20 Location, location, location

Places where people interact with one another are a prime target for street photography: street corners, pedestrian crossings, outside public houses, bus stops, workers pouring onto the streets at rush hour, etc. As crowding increases people’s personal space decreases, allowing you and your camera to get much closer.



© Joe Buxton