

# Left Brain-Right Brain Photography

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A friend and former photo student used to refer to the camera owner's manual as the "M" word. The anxiety she once felt with the technical and mechanical aspects of using a camera decreased with experience and practice, but there was a time when it stood in the way of expressing herself creatively. Another workshop participant is extremely comfortable with the technical side of photography and thrives on knowing all of the specialized functions of his camera and lenses. He, on the other hand, once had difficulty creating images that were little more than documents of a scene.

We are, as humans, a finely tuned combination of left and right brain functions. All individuals are more or less intuitive, usually more so in females than in males. For some, the ability of the right brain to influence instinctual creativity is more accessible than for others (often males) whose analytical or rational approach to making photographs is more evident.

Photography offers us the opportunity to balance our thinking with feeling, our intellect with intuition, as we respond to the world through our images. It is a way of expressing ourselves artistically but with technical competence.

Throughout my many years using a camera and teaching photography, I have observed how differently each of us goes about learning to make photographs. In addition to "seeing" our surroundings uniquely, some of us are more "left" or "right" brained than others. There is no clear delineation within most of us, we tend to have strengths and weaknesses in both areas of brain functions, which certainly impact more than our photography. Understanding how we learn will aid us in overcoming our learning obstacles.

As you read through the descriptions below, see if you can identify how similar each characteristic is to you. This will aid you in developing the other side to be more "whole-brained," and consequently more successful with your photography.

If the left mode is stronger within you, you may find that you examine, explain and rationalize the subjects in your photographs. You may come to photography with a sincere appreciation for its technical aspects, and knowledge of the camera's controls. You are certainly not afraid of the "M" word! Left brain photographs show or tell a story about a moment, event or place. They allow the viewer to understand exactly what took place, and are more journalistic in their approach.

Those with a stronger right mode may spontaneously jump into shooting a subject without much thought or planning. At first, technical aspects of camera use are often weaker for you. Your approach to making images might be to capture a sequence of time or document an action through a personal or more abstract interpretation. When others ask you to explain your photograph, you often have difficulty finding the right words. Right brain photographs give you an opportunity to become completely absorbed in your intuitive and impulsive side, which you love!

Don't confuse left brain photography with whether a person is thinking or not. Right brain shooters think also. They just think differently, in a less linear and more holistic way. Abstract pictures are often a direct result of using the right brain. Reacting to your surroundings without pre-judgment will result in images that reflect this aspect of your creativity.

## Exercises for developing left brain photography:

1. Experiment with aperture and shutter controls and write down what you have done. Photograph one subject from the same location at a variety of apertures to learn what each will look like. Keep your point of focus consistent so that you will have uniform results. Do the same with shutter speeds. Choose from some of the faster speeds, 1/250th to 1/1000th, and at the other extreme, 1/2 to 1/15th second. Of course, your ability to use various settings will depend on the speed of film you are using as well as type of lens, subject matter, available light, etc.
2. Explore the technical aspects of your camera and be able to explain how and why you employed them. As with the above, think about your point of focus; why did you choose it? In what direction is the light coming from? Did you use Matrix, Center-Weighted or Spot metering and why? What are your reasons for composing horizontally or vertically?
3. Document a passage of time during your travels. You may choose to add text to the images, as though you were submitting for publication.
4. Make a photograph of a person, trying to reveal the emotion of your subject but treating your subject as objectively as possible.

Don't forget to analyze your photographs after they are developed. You'll see how different techniques will yield varying results, and you'll be able to reproduce the results that work for you, in the future.

## Exercises for developing right brain photography:

1. Break the rules! Take chances with aperture and shutter controls while using Aperture and Shutter Priority modes. If you "think" that you need f-22 for depth of field, use a wide aperture such as f-5.6 instead and change your point of focus. Set a slower shutter speed than one that you would normally use for a specific shooting situation. Allow yourself to make mistakes.
2. When you think you're close enough, get closer. This is one of my favorite suggestions for improving your seeing, and my students tell me they hear me saying it when they are out shooting. Moving physically closer to your subject or zooming in allows you to create abstracts out of literal images and can show details which are often overlooked in the larger picture.
3. Bracket your exposures widely. Over and under-expose your subject at least 3 full f-stops for a roll or two of film to see what happens. (I would not do this over an entire trip.)
4. If you are using a tripod for sharp images, occasionally shake the tripod for a few frames. You may be pleasantly surprised!

When you look over the results of your experiments, remember to view them in the same spirit as you created them. You may not like them all, but some "mistakes" may turn into your favorites.

As you learn to use both hemispheres of your brain to make photographs, a wonderful side effect occurs. The development of left and right brain seeing crosses over to other areas of your life. Your visual intuition expands and nurtures your intuitive responses to the world. And your technical or mechanical abilities develop in other areas. Fine tuning these combinations of thinking and feeling, intellect and intuition, technique and aesthetic will help you to find your own vision and share it with others. The camera owner's manual, previously referred to as the "M" word will just be another tool, not to be feared!

WEDNESDAY, MAY 23, 2007

### HOW WILL THIS WORK?

1. Please arrive at 6:45 at the Paramount Theatre to participate. Since we have shot in the downtown area 3 times in the past two years, the actual shooting location will be traveled to by car within a 3 mile radius of the Paramount. We will depart the Paramount at 7:01 p.m. The location(s) of shooting will be revealed that night and all subjects will be able to be captured by walking on foot from the initial location where you will be instructed to park your cars. Remember this is an adventure - don't bother asking questions about where and all that cause we won't reveal it prior to the shoot.
2. You will declare your Brain as either a Right or Left Brain Photographer. Teams will be aligned using this method.
3. Each Team will receive a list of 20 Images to capture. No one will be allowed to wander off solo, this is a team project and you will learn from each other by shooting in a team Details will not be provided till the night of the event.
4. Camera Cards will be turned in approximately 8:45 p.m. and the images will be copied to a computer at this time. There are some "surprises" that will only be revealed the evening of the shoot and this will be a very challenging and fun photo shoot.

This Shoot Out will concentrate on skill with a camera. No cropping, photoshop or post processing allowed. You may shoot as many images as you wish of each subject, improving the composition, lighting, white balance, fill flash, or any other technical skills you wish to employ. However you must delete all but ONE image of the subject BEFORE proceeding to shoot another. Each camera card may only contain ONE image of any assigned SUBJECT. You are urged to practice deleting and retaking images with the digital camera you will be using for the Shoot Out in advance of this event. It's not enough to capture the subject, it will be evaluated for composition, cropping in camera, depth of field, white balance in addition to the artistry of the subject. There will be many challenges placed to you based on whether you are Right or Left Brained and I hope you will find this an adventure and great learning and sharing experience!

**LEFT  
BRAIN**

**RIGHT  
BRAIN**

