

Key Ingredients for Black and White Images

1 Look for Contrast

One of the elements that can give interest to a black and white shot is contrast. Because you can't use colour to distinguish one element of your image from another the tonal variances become all the more important. This doesn't mean you need to look for stark contrasts in every shot you want to convert to black and white – the subject matter will come into play there – but you should take a moment and ponder how the contrast will come into play when you're composing your shot. With the help of light you can get great contrast. Contrast will bring the tonal differences in your photography as you can't use colour. With side lighting, for example, you'll get longer shadows.

Contrast is important because when there is a distinct contrast, with dark shades and bright light, you'll be able to see things you didn't see before.

2 Wait for the Right Light

Linked to contrast, the lighting in a black and white shot can be very important. For example -h3 or direct lighting will often add to contrast. Side lighting will reveal any texture that a subject might have and in portraits will accentuate features also light from any one direction will create shadows. All of these techniques can add interest to a black and white image – however they can also be distracting – so play with light with care!

3 Shapes and Patterns

Patterns or shapes that can sometimes almost go unseen in colour mainly due to the colour itself drawing attention but can come alive in a black and white shot. Black and White shots that rely on patterns can often take on an abstract quality. So if you're wanting to take a shot and you'd like to give emphasis to the patterns, choose black and white tones instead of colour.

4 Capture Texture

I've already mentioned this above when talking about side lighting -but revealing the texture of a subject can add a new dimension to an image. The sidelight does this by creating shadows.

A Tip for Black and White Landscapes

When shooting black and white landscapes look for 'active skies'. I was given this advice by a photographer a few months ago who showed me some examples of his own black and white landscape work. The skies in his images were breathtaking with wonderful cloud formations and what often looked like storms about to break. Having skies with so much 'action' in them added mood and a really dynamic look and feel to his images. Without this active element the images looked rather empty and dull. I think the same principle could be applied to most types of black and white images that have large parts of them dominated by any one thing.

If a large part of your image is all the same tone the image can look quite lifeless (unless of course you're going for a more minimalist look.

Black and White Photography Tips

Shoot in RAW If you have the opportunity to use RAW, then do it! It will open up many new possibilities and give you more control of your image's appearance. I know many readers of DPS can't shoot in RAW mainly because their camera doesn't offer it, or conversely don't shoot in RAW because they either don't know how or they don't like to. For the most control in the post production phase of converting your colour images into black and white ones – you'll want to shoot in RAW if your camera allows it.

Of course shooting in JPEG doesn't stop you shooting in black and white – but if it's an option, give RAW a go ... you might be surprised by what it offers you in post production.

The negative aspect of RAW files is that it needs to be processed later. If you use RAW files, your computer, rather than your camera will process the records and generate a picture file from it. If you don't have that function on your camera, then don't worry, carry on reading and you'll see that there are plenty of other ways to get great black and white photographs.

Shoot in Colour If your camera doesn't allow you to shoot in RAW or you choose not to – shoot in colour and do your conversion to black and white later on your computer. While most digital cameras offer you the option to shoot in Black and White and can produce some reasonable results you have more control over your end results if you have the colour data to work with in your conversion on your computer. There is an exception to shooting in Colour and it's when you're taking note of point I above about shooting in RAW. When shooting in RAW and switching to Black and White mode you see your results in the LCD in black and white but the camera actually records all of the information including colour – the best of both worlds. But if you're shooting in JPEG -shoot in colour and do the conversion later.

Low ISO In photography, an ISO number is an indication of the sensitivity of the image sensor, where a higher number indicates higher sensitivity. The higher the ISO is, the more are the possibilities to take pictures in low light without the use of flash. For black and white photography, use the lowest ISO. When you use high ISO the noise will become more obvious. Noise in photography is like the "grain" in film, where the film doesn't become as smooth as you'd wish. The higher your ISO is, the more unpleasant 'noise' will show in your photo. Therefore shady and dull days are actually great for black and white photographs. Remember, always shoot with the lowest possible ISO setting available. While this is something that most of us do in colour photography it is particularly important when it comes to black and white where noise created by ISO can become even more obvious. If you're after this 'noise' or grain you can always add it later in your post production – but it's harder to go the other way and take noise out.

When to Shoot Many digital photographers actually prefer to shoot images for Black and White in low contrast situations. So, as we said before, a dark or overcast day can be a great time to shoot outdoor shots. Ironically these are the days those who shoot only in colour sit at home complaining about the 'poor light'. So next time you find yourself with a dark and gloomy day – shoot some black and white.

Composition Most of the general tips on how to compose or frame a good shot apply just as well to black and white photography as they do when shooting in colour – however the main obvious difference is you're unable to use colour to lead the eye into or around your shot. This means you need to train yourself to look at shapes, tones and textures in your frame as points of interest. Pay particular attention to shadows and highlights which will become a feature of your shot. Black and white photography can basically look good in most situations and circumstances. Monochrome photography is good for bringing a sensitive experience and story into a shoot, it tends to add depth and gives the opportunity to explore an object or person more personally and more directly due to the graphic elements that it conveys, especially thanks to a good contrast. Therefore it's also well matched for abstract photos. When taking pictures or large spaces, like landscapes or foliage; make sure that the same tone isn't flowing through all the elements in your photography as this will give it a rather boring and dead look. Most black and white images are supposed to be dramatic and leave a striking impact on the viewer. One way of doing this is by finding a movement, like an unsteady wave in a sea or a moving sky. Something that isn't really all that dramatic in real life can become much more intense when a glimpse of it is caught in camera.

Read more: <http://digital-photography-school.com/5-black-and-white-photography-tips#ixzzlrt0AJT8D>

Black and White Photography Tips

#1: Shoot in RAW. Many times when shooting for black and white, the photo just doesn't turn out right when finally reviewing it on the computer. By shooting in RAW, you'll be able to change your mind later if the photo wasn't as great in black and white as you'd hoped.

#2: Give your photo some Silver Effex. Silver Effex Pro 2 is a Photoshop or Lightroom plugin that does one thing – it makes black and white photos look incredible. In theory, you could replicate everything that Silver Effex Pro 2 does using Photoshop, but I have to confess that I have never been able to do it. Black and whites look absolutely stunning in Silver Effex Pro 2. The program is a bit pricey, but it is worth the money if you have a passion for black and white. In fact, when looking at black and whites produced by other photographers, I like to think I can tell that Silver Effex Pro 2 was used on the image.

#3: To visualize in black and white, only pay attention to lines, shadows, and shapes. This trick is a very helpful aid to photographers in pre-visualizing a black and white image even though we live in a colour world.

#4: Pay special attention to noise. With the outstanding low light performance of modern DSLR cameras, in addition to the noise removal programs at our disposal, photographers are used to getting away with noise.

#5: Look for contrast. In my experience, the best black and white photos usually have some portion of the photo that is near to pure white, and some portion of the photo that is near to black. This increased contrast adds interest to the scene.

#6: Find a wide range of greys. Having white and black in the image will help add interest to a picture, but if other areas do not have a wide range of varying tones or grey, the photo will most likely look dull. A wider range of greys can be achieved by using a flash to throw highlights and shadows over certain areas of the photo.

#7: Use a polarizer. When shooting around reflective surfaces such as water or leaves, use a polarizer to cut the reflections of the sun's light. When colour is removed from the photo, these specular highlights can be a distraction to the overall composition.

#8: Watch for texture. As long as texture is not front-lit, it will show contrast in fine details, which makes it a compelling subject for black and white. This is why black and white photos of old items such as barns or antiques are so compelling – they have a lot of weathered texture.

#9: Use the correct terminology. Black and white, monochrome, grey scale. "Monochrome" means that a colour is placed on a neutral background. Therefore, black and white images, which put black on a white background, are a type of monochrome image. Grey scale is merely a way to show black and white images on a computer, which uses a reduced set of shades of grey.

#10: Look for patterns. Patterns are interesting because of their ordered repetition. Colour merely distracts us from giving the pattern our attention. By using black and white, images of patterns are far more compelling. Once you start looking for patterns to shoot in black and white, you'll notice them everywhere: cars in a parking lot, the shoes of a wedding party standing in line, or a row of bushes.

#11: Long exposures love black and white. This tip was on the fantastic Digital Photography School Website and I decided to try it on an image I had taken a few months ago. I didn't like the picture and had almost deleted it until I read that tip and applied black and white to the image.

#12: B&W isn't a replacement for bad lighting, but it can soften the blow. I took a photo of a deer as an example of a photo that looked terrible in colour, but it looks nice in black and white. I had shot the photo at high-noon and because I had used a polarizer, I was able to cut out the reflections on the leaves and mask the fact that it was shot in terrible light.

#13: Don't get fooled. I confess to have made this mistake many times. Sometimes I have shot a photo that includes very little colour. For example, a close-up of a penguin, or a night sky or a dalmatian dog. When I see these photos in Lightroom, I often reach for the black and white tools immediately, but I am always disappointed. If the photo is practically colour blind to begin with, it probably won't look as good in black and white as would in colour.

#14: Shoot in HDR!!! I'm actually surprised how little attention is given to black and white HDRs on the web. I am so convinced of the merit of the black and white HDR. HDR is great for black and white photography because it exaggerates the dynamic range and edges. Nothing pops quite like a black and white HDR!

#15: HSL is the secret sauce. The last black-and-white tip is probably the most important. When post-processing a black and white, you absolutely MUST tweak the colours in the HSL panel in Photoshop or Lightroom. An exact tutorial on how to do this would be a blog post of its own, but your black and whites will look TEN TIMES better with if you were to use an HSL adjustment.



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Monochrome photographs are timeless, especially black and white photographs. Not only do they enhance emotional substance they also have a disposition of making photos look more artistic. They can be used in many different scenarios as it's not required to think about all the different colours that should look good together and will match the amount of light available. Additionally, for those who love to play with colour, black and white photography doesn't necessarily need to be boring as there are so many different shades to choose from. Grey scale is the spectrum of black and white that evolves into shades and different depths of grey. So when speaking of grey scale we're speaking of how we measure the different tones of grey.