

# The Keys To Getting Better Fish Pictures Are They Fit To Print?

By Stan Fagerstrom

I'd heard about the huge rainbow trout the guy had caught a couple of days before I ran into him at a local coffee shop. As soon as we both had been served I introduced myself. "I hear you caught that huge trout out of Elk Lake," I said. "I didn't think there were any fish that size left in there as much pressure as it gets these days." I went on to tell him I was doing a magazine piece about the lake and that I'd love to run a picture of his new lake record along with my story. "Did you get any good pictures of it?" I asked. "Yeah," he said, "I got a few. "As a matter of fact I've got a couple right here in my briefcase." He opened a compartment of his briefcase and pulled out a manila envelope. "Here's what it looked like," he said as he handed me a half dozen prints.

I wish I could tell you the guy's prints did credit to his catch. I can't. In fact, he couldn't have done a lousier job of getting his pictures if he had spent six months learning how to screw up taking fish photos. Now I don't consider myself a leading authority on fish photos or any other kind photography. But I darn sure do know some of the essential basics.

I went to work for a daily newspaper as a general assignment reporter way back in 1946. They handed me a Speed Graphic---the camera once used by just about everybody in news photography---at about the same time I was given a typewriter. If somebody would give me a couple of bucks for every mistake I've made since with one camera or another, I'd fly south of the border and buy a condo close to the bass fishing paradise they call El Salto Lake. But a guy can learn from his mistakes. When coming up with pictures to support your stories is part of your job as a daily newspaper reporter, you'd darn well better learn from your mistakes or seek other employment.



When a bassin' man boats a beauty like the one I'm holding here you can believe it's a memory maker. And it's great to have that memory recorded as was done here.

My newspaper's city editor made that abundantly clear the first time I returned from the county fair with less than satisfactory photos. I hadn't been chewed out like that since I'd smarted off once to my first sergeant during my Army infantry basic training in World War II. That same city editor later also became the country coroner. I must have learned something about picture taking because he eventually had me accompany him whenever there was a new corpse that required his presence. "Fagerstrom" he'd bark as

soon as he had that kind of call, “grab a camera. Some guy just got shot down on 8<sup>th</sup> Avenue.” I wound up taking pictures for his records as well as for the newspaper. There were times during some of those coroner’s calls that I caught myself wishing I’d never learned how to use a camera in the first place. It was not a fun part of my days as a reporter.

Photography has changed so much, and in recent years so fast, it’s hard to believe. Today there’s just no excuse for not getting reasonably good photos of the fish you catch. If you’re not getting those good photos now, chances are it’s not the camera’s fault. It might well be the spot you’ve selected for the pictures to be taken.

Your fishing adventures are memory makers. You’ll find you treasure many of them ever more deeply as the years go by. It’s great to have quality pictures to refresh and maintain those memories.

A good fishing trip is a memory maker. There’s simply no better way to keep those memories fresh and to share them with others than with the pictures you took or had taken at the time. Getting good pictures has never been easier. As far as I’m concerned, if you’re still fooling around with film you’re making a mistake. Get a digital camera. It’s a decision you’ll never regret. Digital cameras come with different price tags. Like most everything else, you’re likely to get about what you pay for. Digital camera technology has made tremendous strides over the past decade. Today you can get one that takes darn good pictures for about half of what you paid less than 10 years ago.

For longer than some readers probably care to remember I’ve been stressing the need to practice casting accuracy as a means of putting more fish in the boat. Practice with your digital camera is also essential if you want to get acceptable pictures once fish are caught. And why not practice? If you go digital you’re not messing with expensive film. It’s not going to cost you a dime to learn something about digital photography once you have a camera. Just spend a couple of hours shooting whatever you choose. You can review your results as each picture is taken.

I’m not going to get into the countless details and the ins and outs of professional photography. I’ve shot or set up pictures that someone else actually shot thousands of times over the past half century. Some of those photos have been published everywhere from newspapers to magazines and calendar covers. Currently I use them to support a variety of Internet writing just



That's a nice bass but this is a lousy photo of it. The cameraman should have asked his subject to move the fish away from in front of the subject's face. The picture also lacks sharpness. That's indicative of camera movement. A good shot would also have gotten rid of all that clutter that doesn't need to be included.

as you're seeing here. I still don't view myself as a picture taking expert. I merely regard photography as something that's essential to support my writing.

Learn the basic controls your camera has. You'll need to understand the importance of speed and ISO settings. You'll also need to determine the settings you want for some of the other controllable features. I always, for example, take every photo at the highest quality (most pixels) my camera permits. Shooting at the largest or finest setting won't let you get as many pictures on a single card, but I'd rather have a couple of good quality shots that retain quality if I choose to have them enlarged than a dozen that don't provide that option.

Something else that is of great importance in getting good fishing photos is learning how to properly use your camera's flash. You or the friends whose pictures you take are almost always going to be wearing a hat or cap. The shade headgear provides from the rays of the sun is great. The shadows they throw over your face aren't when it's picture taking time. Simply taking time to reposition your cap or doing the same for your subject can help. So can your camera's fill-in flash. Study what your camera's instruction booklet has to say about it. Once you've done that, get out and practice. Learn what your camera's flash can and can't do to eliminate shadows. Again, with a digital camera all it takes is your time and it's a cinch to be time well spent.



This is what happens when you don't take time to make sure your light is right or choose a proper background. Sometimes just a simple change of your shooting angle or camera settings can make a big difference in your picture.

Nothing sparks up a photo more than color. Often the backgrounds provided by Mother Nature don't provide that much of it. It's up to you to do so. One of the easiest ways to do this is to simply stick a couple of lightweight jackets in your boat. They should be in a solid bright color like red or yellow. Stay away from those that have a pattern. It's a simple matter to slip into one or another of these jackets when it's picture taking time. The silver coloration of trout or the greenish black of a bass stands out well against backgrounds of such colors. There's one other consideration where fish photography is concerned that has nothing to do with the equipment or the accessories. It's a consideration that's equally important and one that's overlooked again and again.

To begin with, get in close. All you really need in your photo is the subject and his fish. Forget about his feet. Make sure he isn't wearing a shirt or jacket that blends in with his catch. Check on the location of the sun. Swing the boat around so the sun is coming from behind the person doing the shooting. Check for any shadows the cameraman may be throwing on the subject. Now look at the background before you depress the shutter. I recommend shooting your pictures while you're still on the water. Almost always it's possible to swing the boat one way or the other so the background is free and clear. If it's nothing but clear sky, all the better. It's this background thing that messes up so many otherwise acceptable fish photos. And it's just not necessary.



The caption for this photo should read "Nice bass, lousy photo" for that's exactly what it is. Pay attention to what your background looks like before shooting the picture.

It's not just in your hands. If you're the one who is being pictured it's equally important that whoever is handling the camera knows what to do. Take five minutes before the trip starts to show a companion how your camera operates. Here again is the beauty of digital photography. Have him or her shoot a couple of pictures of you. Now view the results. It's easy to point out what's wrong and what's right. And you won't have that hassle when you've caught a good one and you want to get a quick photo and get it back into the water. I have a valued friend who runs a cracking good fishing resort. He has a fairly large crew of guides. Some of them speak little English. Years ago I saw some of the pictures these guides had taken. They had to have been a disappointment to the anglers involved. I suggested to my friend that he get his guides together and give them a few of the basics on taking pictures. My friend is a sharp operator. He doesn't miss a beat when it comes to sending his client's home happy. I've seen other pictures his guides have taken since we talked about the need for good photos. Most of them have been pretty darn good. Like you, I'd rather fish than take pictures. But I want to be happy with the results when I do. Follow the few simple steps I've outlined and odds are you'll get good results of your own.

### Highlights of a Good Picture

- Learn the basics of your camera
- Ensure shadows are eliminated (Proper lighting is essential; move your boat if needed)
- Avoid taking pictures with sunglasses on
- Choose a natural background (such as lakes, rivers, mountains or sky)
- Get in close (ensure that your subject and fish are all in the picture)
- Keep the fish held between the chest and chin level
- Hold the fish away from the body, without bowing it out
- Show lure in the mouth of the fish
- Talk to your friends of how to take a proper picture before going out



You can believe both this little gal and her father will one day treasure this picture. The father is Scott Wolfe, a veteran Oregon fishing guide. The successful angler is his daughter Erika