

Photo Guide

Getting the best shot with the gear you've got.

By the designers and editors of *Popular Woodworking*

Professional-quality photos help our readers build on their woodworking skills. Applying these tips, your photos will give readers what they want.

Lighting is Key

The most crucial part of photographing your work is the lighting. However, there's no one-size-fits-all setup. Different wood species, project sizes, and even finishes will require careful attention to get the best shot.

Plan for the light. Before beginning production, think about the type of light that will best showcase your project (natural light, ambient light or both). Then plan your production schedule so that you'll have consistent lighting for all the shots you take. It takes some planning if you're shooting over multiple days. Consistent lighting is key—we can't overemphasize this.

Choosing the Right Light

The best light to use is ample, diffuse light (such as a bay of windows or a bright light in a soft box). These lights shine in a single direction and will illuminate the focal area of the shot and generate natural shadows.

You can definitely use the lighting you already have installed in your shop. This lighting, referred to as ambient light, remains the same at all times so you can shoot throughout the day.

The main light source should come from the front of the shot, often to the left or right of your camera. If more light is needed, place an additional light source a few feet in front of the project to the left or right of your tripod. Spend time and get the lighting right on your first shot, and strive to use the same setup as you continue through the project for consistent lighting.

Watch for Shadows

If you have harsh shadows, the light is either too close to the subject or is too small. The larger the light source, the softer the light can be. You can also experiment with "bouncing" light off white- or light-colored surfaces instead of pointing it directly at the project.



- Maintain a consistent light source for the whole shoot.
- Primary light source should be to the left or right of your camera.
- Secondary light source, if needed, could be natural light through a window

Before deciding you've gotten the lighting right, be sure to check your first photographs on a large screen. The small screen on your camera or phone is too small to see the details.

Focus is Important

The lead image must show the completed project in full detail. That means the entire piece should be in focus.

In a step-by-step photo, the focus may be on a tool or process. For example, the subject of a saw removing excess wood (example at right).

The top image, at right, is in focus with strong depth of field and clearly shows the sawing action. The readers' eyes are drawn to the saw and the action of the saw. If you're struggling to get the focus correct, try changing your camera mode to aperture priority and move your f-stop to at least 8 (you want a higher number, if possible). Shooting at f/8 - f/10 will help you keep all the details crisp and in focus.



DO keep the saw, wood and hands in focus with the background soft.
DON'T blur; a photo without focus fails.

Opening Photos

To the right, is an example of a stellar opening image by James McConnell. Consider the angle of the piece, note the background is clean and uncluttered, and there's crisp focus on each detail.

Opening photos work when these “rules” are applied:

- **Subject is placed as the focus.**

Keep the subject(s) several feet from the background objects to let natural depth of field showcase what matters most—the project.

- **Background is “workshop clean.”**

Sweep up the workspace, put away tools, and remove unnecessary clutter. Stage your photo. In this image, the background isn't bare or sparse, but the background also is not distracting. Remember, you do not always need to photograph your final project in the wood shop. Furniture in its new location in your home works, too, as well as furniture photographs taken outside or in non-typical settings.

- **Angle changes the view.** Be sure to experiment with the angle of your photos. The first angle you chose may be the best, however, you won't know until you try several angles. If you find several angles look nice, share them all with us. Think about the things you'd be curious to see before deciding to build the project; that's exactly what we want to share.

Step-by-Step Photos

The step-by-step photos are key to the readers' success in following the plans and instructions. Pay close attention to details.

The two, smaller step-by-step photos above of building the bar stool are good examples. On the left, we see the leg assembly, the glue bottle and all of the legs' pieces. The background isn't distracting, the focus is on the action, and it shows the full picture of that step.

The image on the right shows a more detailed step. The step includes a leg, a pencil and the line drawn to show where to cut. What makes this image strong is the attention to detail. The



focus on the line and the front of the pencil and the leg are sharp.

7 Keys to Stellar Photos

1. Get the light right, then keep it consistent.
2. Focus on the subject.
3. Experiment with angles.
4. Stage the background and don't let it be a distraction.
5. View photos on a larger screen before making final decisions.
6. Remember that opening shots have different requirements than step-by-step shots.
7. Submit photos in correct specs.

■ SUBMISSION PHOTO SPECS

- RAW, tiff or jpegs (*RAW preferred)
- 300 ppi
- RGB color mode
- Do NOT sharpen images, add effects or make any clipping paths

■ ONLINE RESOURCES

Camera basics such as shutter speed, aperture and ISO:

■ <http://photographylife.com/photography-basics>

DSLR guidance:

■ <http://digital-photography-school.com/21-setting-techniques-and-rules-that-all-new-camera-owners-should-know>

Smartphone photos:

■ <http://photographyconcentrate.com/introduction-to-smartphone-photography>

Camera issues? Need photography advice?

Contact Danielle Lowery, Senior Designer, at danielle.lowery@fwmedia.com or by calling (513) 531-2690 ext. 11489.