



FP 101

# First Principles

## Rationale

I strongly believe that there is quite a lot of capability in your average low-cost digicam or Point and Shoot (P&S) camera that many people do not use in their food photography.

Why?

Because I was able to get some interesting images with my P&S by doing a few very fundamental things, other than pointing and shooting.

For example, I shot the photo you see in the bottom right of this page with my 4 MP Fujifilm Finepix S3100.

We will be learning some simple methods that will coax your P&S camera away from its snapshot ways, making it behave better in your home studio.

## Lesson 1: Objectives

- Learn the basics of any digital camera
- Explore white balance, exposure, and aperture settings
- Apply that experience to some food photography

### The basics of any digital camera are:

- a light-tight box
- a lens that lets the light in
- a sensor
- a little computer that does things with the data from the sensor

## First Project

We are going to dive deeper into the manual mode to learn what it has to offer us.

### Grab these things:

- camera
- tripod, mini-tripod or a stack of books or some such to put your camera on
- pen
- paper
- some small object or even food, something that will not go bad from sitting around though

### Find these in or around your house:

- a clear window that you can put a table next to
- a table
- a comfortable chair

Put your subject (banana, stuffed iguana, baby's binkie, sea shells, anything) on the table and either mount your camera on the table-top tripod, a regular tripod, or lodge it on a stack of books or the like. The latter is not the best idea, but it works in a pinch.

Make sure that your camera is set to Manual mode (definitely do not want that nasty on-camera flash going off).

Set your quality setting to the highest it can go. For my camera, that means a 2272x1704 pixels jpeg file.

Set your white balance to auto.

Set the EV or exposure compensation to auto.

Set the Aperture Priority to auto

If your camera has other manual setting, set those to auto also

Focus on your subject and take a photo

Making sure to record what conditions apply to which photo, take a shot at each of the different White Balance settings

After you complete that, set the White Balance back to auto

Next, do the same thing with Exposure Compensation, starting at the bottom of the available settings within EV to the top

Set it back to auto

Finally, keeping White Balance and Exposure Compensation at auto, take shots for each setting of the Aperture Priority selection.

## Outcomes

Which settings did you find worked best for your subject?

Notice how different your photo can look when you change just one of these selections slightly.

While your learning, you may want to go through this process for each new lighting situation that you encounter.

## Take Home Message

It is possible, with a little attention to detail and knowledge of your camera's manual settings (and never using the on-camera flash), to capture images of your subject that have good light qualities.

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## Second Project

If you feel like you have found some settings that are giving you a good image of your stand-in subject, it's time to put it to the test.

### Step One

- Select a food that you have found challenging in the past (except for a bowl of soup which is inherently frustrating to shoot; more on soup later) and put it where your previous subject was.

- Do not use the tripod.
- Shoot the food like you have in the past, using settings you may have used then. Perhaps you would have used the flash and have it set to a “creative” zone like “portrait” or some such.

### Step Two

- Now shoot your food with the setting sweetspots you found in the first project above

- Use a tripod
- See any difference?
- If not, be patient.
- Adjust the settings (one at a time) and see if it can get better.

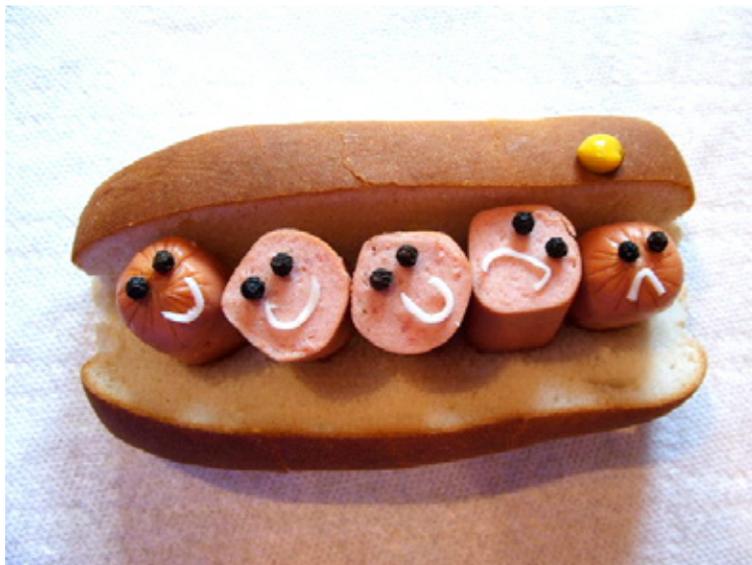
### Step Three

- Post your **before** and **after** photos to the flickr **Food Photo 101** group and then, if you wish, write a blog post about it (you can use the logo I have up at the group pool for your posts).

- Do not forget to **trackback** to the FP101-1 post so that we can get a notification of your post. I will then be able to include your hard work in the Sunday wrap up post. You can also simply email the link to me or Curt.

- Your after photos do not have to be perfect to share!!!
- We are looking for improvements right now, not the Ansel Adams of the food world.

**Can't wait to see what you all  
come up with!**



## Be Playful



## Get Close