

Shadowy shapes move about in the silent dark. The sounds of water and sloshing chemicals as students agitate miracles of captured light create a feeling of being in a distant place. A ripple of laughter from a quiet conversation breaks through the hushed silence.

I stumble trying to find enlarger number thirteen; a girl points me to the darkest corner. I have a lens, checked out from a nineteen-year-old “skate-rat” listening to The Ramones. I stand, helpless, next to a square box with knobs and dials protruding above the dull yellow light projected onto a frame designed to hold paper. Kerry Jones, my professor, hustles over, takes the lens from my hand, and slams it into place, turns some of the knobs and points to a glowing button. “It will turn the light on for three seconds with each push,” he says. “Put your negative in this holder and your paper in this frame; the negative holder goes in this slot – make sure it is flat.” He tears a piece of my photo paper in half explaining how to make a test strip. He checks on a couple students and leaves me alone in the dark.

When I decided I wanted to learn photography, it seemed a natural choice to sign up for a beginning class at my local university. I asked around and discovered another alternative – professional photographers who offered private lessons. The task ahead of me, then, was to determine where a beginning student would get the most value, dollar for dollar, and highest quality of instruction – from photography classes at a university or from a private professional photographer. I had certain questions that needed to be answered. What kind of photography was I interested in? How much was each type of instruction going to cost me? And finally, who would be the best instructor to meet my needs?

I began with an investigation of the different photographic styles. Two major photographic styles are prevalent today: photojournalism and artistic. Photojournalism is the recording of an event. This style is most often associated with photos seen in newspapers or magazines. But it also includes record keeping, the most common form of photography. Record keeping is the shot of Jimmy's sixth birthday party or those vacation shots of the Grand Canyon. According to the Photo Marketing Association, ninety percent of photographs taken in 2005 were record keeping.

Because record keeping is such a popular type of photography, many industries have developed to enhance photos. Digital editing software comes in many varieties and price points to manipulate digital images. This software can be used by photographers using either digital or on scanned film images. It can be used to enhance photographs through such techniques as removing red-eye, an unfortunate side-affect of flash photography, or changing the contrast to better highlight the subject. Cropping out unwanted background or centering the subject are other common uses. Scrap-booking is another method used to improve the presentation of photographs. The scrap-booking industry is a multi-billion dollar a year business centered on improving the presentation of our photographs. Both editing software and scrap-booking are so popular because most people don't take balanced and well-composed pictures.

The need for instruction in the art of photography is very evident. The common maxim seems to be, "buy a camera and you're a photographer; buy a piano and you own a piano," quoted Robert Hall, professional photographer in Lehi, Utah. For Hall, most people would benefit from training; otherwise you limit your ability to express yourself.

"Images can be conceptual or perceptual," says Hall. "A picture of a car accident is conceptual; perceptual comes from within." Hall considers his work to be perceptual. He wants

people to feel something when they look at one of his photographs, not wonder where it was taken. He describes the difference between photojournalism and artistic photography with a question, “Are your images documentary or do they go beyond documentary to feeling, art?”

Artistic photography is all about expression. Just as in a painted picture, the artist uses the photographic medium to express an idea, create a mood, or evoke an emotion. Artistic photography spans the same genres as other forms of art; masters of lens and light create nudes, industrial, surreal, and impressionistic styles, as well as everything in between. But artistic photography also has a place in the repertoire of everyone who owns a camera. Those shots of the Grand Canyon, if composed properly and with artistic intent, might just end up framed above the fireplace. The ability to take a shot that has meaning is the difference between a picture of fifteen six-year-olds eating cake and a memory that captures the giggles and playfulness of the moment your little Jimmy makes his first life-long friend. Instruction in the art of photography, then, can be seen as valuable for anyone with a desire to take pictures.

My past experiences with photography had been poor at best; I had a little 110 camera when I was in elementary school that took grainy shots of people I don't remember. When my first child was born, I bought a mid-level 35 mm camera, but probably only developed twenty of the hundreds of rolls of film I shot. Since then, I picked up a point-and-shoot digital that allowed me to capture memories and see them again – not just accumulate more rolls of film in the refrigerator. This time it would be different. I just knew that if I actually learned how to take quality photographs and use the equipment properly, I would have more success and enjoy the experience.

I purchased a good quality SLR (single lens reflex) camera with a couple of good lenses, and enrolled in a beginning photography course at the University of Utah. But after sitting in a

classroom for weeks learning about the history of photography and the gestalt principles of closure and continuance, I still had not taken a single photograph or had any experience in the darkroom. The day finally came that the class was going to develop film. I received a handout on the process of developing the negatives and another on making a print. But I discovered that my professor was spread very thin with twenty-five students to help. So, my actual instruction came from another student who had done this one time before. This wasn't exactly the level of instruction I had paid hundreds of dollars to receive.

There are hundreds of photography classes taught across the United States every week. Local universities, junior and community colleges, hobby and photography stores, and even community education classes are available to the eager photography student. The cost for one of these courses will vary greatly, as will the quality. A course from a local community education class may cost as little as \$30, but it may be taught by an amateur who likes to take pictures; or for the lucky few, it will be taught by a professional photographic artist or photojournalist. But this route will be the most varied in quality. Hobby and photography stores may offer free classes for customers who purchase equipment from them. This isn't a bad option. But instruction will likely be limited to how to use the camera and what additional items the store can sell. Courses through a college or university will likely run in the \$200-\$400 range. These will usually also provide college credit. These courses have the most consistency in curriculum and equipment available for students to learn on.

Most of the instruction at universities is coming from professional photojournalists. Kerry Jones, my professor at the University of Utah, is an aerial photography professional working for a government agency. He also moonlights as a portrait photographer working at weddings, parties and events. His reason for teaching photography is to share his love of

capturing time – recording a moment and having the ability to look back on it later. Some of his favorite photos show his handicapped daughter at different ages.

The quality of the learning experience at a university or college varies by instructor, but there will be certain things common to all classes: the school's developing and printing facilities will be standardized and crammed into as small a space as possible, and the professor will have to split their time among many students. Additionally, the students may have to pay full tuition, although some continuing education courses are offered at a lower cost.

As an alternative, many professional photographers offer private instruction, although the cost and content will be widely varied. Most professionals will have a particular genre in which they specialize. If looking for an artistic photography instructor, find a professional whose art you enjoy. Hall suggests that the most important thing to look for is experience. "They should have a breadth of knowledge in processes and a depth in specialty." The cost for a professional's time could range from \$50 an hour to \$250 an hour. The student's objectives and level of proficiency can also affect the price.

Professional photographer Robert Hall teaches privately. He starts with the basics and then moves on to creativity. "Once simple processes are mastered, then the person can move on to the creative arts," he said. "A photograph is an opinion. If I'm a child, I have a limited voice; as an adult that voice grows. If I'm inexperienced with a camera, my images will be limited. If I am a master, I can express anything with a camera."

My second darkroom experience was very different from my first. In Hall's darkroom reside only three enlargers – classic accordion-style lens holders drop down from the ceiling looking like the large format cameras of old that Hall still uses. Hall hands me a packet of colored filters, six by six inch squares of translucent cellophane. He patiently explains how

combinations of color will affect a black and white negative and asks what tone and level of warmth I want in the picture. Together we make a test print. With that as a basis, he shows me how to adjust the focus and how to dodge and burn the print so that the corners of the print are darker, causing the eye to focus on the primary object. As I place the print in the developing solution, he tells me to place it face up at first so that I can see the magic as yesterday's light is revealed on the paper. Then to quickly flip it over so that the unexposed silver nitrate will more easily flow off of the paper as I gently slosh the solution. He shares the secret of knowing which solution my fingers were in last (base leaves them feeling slippery, a quick dunk in the water, which is an acid, brings back their texture). As I take this photograph out of the final water bath and we turn the lights on to look at it, I realize that this is a photo that says something. More than a record, I have created art.

In the end, the answers to my questions are individual and personal. Some may care more about what they can put around the image and less about the quality of the photograph. Some people may have a natural ability that doesn't need to be trained. But for me, the additional training from a professional artist made all the difference between a hasty, blurry image to record a place or event and an artistic creation that enabled the viewer to feel what I felt. "Photography opened up my ability to enjoy life when I don't have a camera," says Hall. "Sometimes a sunset can simply be my own."