Pet photography - Cats & Dogs

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Cats and dogs provide many things, including companionship, joy and entertainment – but cooperation for great photographs is not usually one of them. Here's how you can improve your odds of success…



• Unless you're photographing them from behind or when they're asleep (which can be a useful option!), getting your pet's eye(s) pin-sharp is key to a successful image. Remember that cats and dogs suffer from red-eye just like us – well, actually, it's more likely to be blue,

green or yellow-eye, depending largely on the colour of their fur – so avoid flash and jack up the ISO instead.

• If you have feel you really have to use flash – for example, to make a black pet stand out against an unavoidable dark background, or to stop a pale-furred pet merging with a light background – bounce if off the ceiling or wall. Better still, throw the background beyond focus with a wide aperture (e.g. f/2.8, f/4) to make your pet stand out more.

• Metering for fur can be tricky, especially if your pet is very dark or pale, so be prepared to play around with exposure compensation; add it for pale pets, and reduce it for dark ones to keep their fur's colour rendition naturalistic, and check the histogram (underexposure results in your histogram bunching to the left with a gap on the right-hand edge, while with overexposure it bunches to the right, with a gap on the left edge). The belt-and-braces approach is to shoot in NEF (RAW), so you'll be able to make any necessary adjustments later.

• When pets are awake and active, getting a good photo can be a real challenge. Bright light is best as it enables you to set a fast shutter speed to avoid blurriness. Raising the ISO also lessens the amount of light the camera needs, so combining good light and a higher ISO can really boost your chances of good pictures. On a nice sunny day, leave your ISO fairly low e.g. 200 or 400. If it's cloudy, there will be less light and you may need to go up to ISO 800 or 1000. If you're indoors, you may need to push that up to ISO 1600 or above. Let the shutter speed be your guide.

• You'll need to be shooting at around 1/500sec or above to freeze your pet in action. Setting the exposure mode to shutter priority gives you more control over the shutter speed – just use the main command dial (near your right thumb) to dial in a higher shutter speed, and the camera will select the correct aperture.

• Set your camera's autofocus system to Continuous to keep your pet in focus as it dashes around. Since cats – and many dogs – like chasing after lights, it might be a good idea to turn off the AF Assist illuminator, since that sometimes becomes a distraction for them while you're trying to take pictures. Some COOPLIX feature Pet mode, which automatically captures your

dog or cat's expressions when they look directly at the camera, and also disables the AF-assist illuminator, as well as button and shutter sounds.

• Experiment with different angles. Try placing the camera on the floor and tilting it up towards them; conversely, go for a high viewpoint to capture their face looking up at you quizzically. Zoom in for a tight crop or use a macro lens to exclude distracting elements and capture details of fur, paws and whiskers. A wide aperture (e.g. f/2.8, f/4) creates a shallow depth of field resulting in a defocused foreground and background, to ensure your pet is the main focal point.

Quick tips

• Enlist someone to help you manage your pet – perhaps talking to them or waving a favourite toy to attract their attention and ensure those alert, ears-up poses.

• For indoor shots, go for a spot with a lot of natural light or a big window. If you don't like the surroundings, hang a sheet or drape a blanket over a chair for a solid background.

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