
WHAT GETS YOU FIRED UP? HOW TO GET AND STAY INSPIRED TO SHOOT GREAT IMAGES

Quick Guide
Written by Leanne Cleaveley



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“What should I photograph?” said every photographer at least once in their lives. It is a fact that shooting every day can help you become a better photographer, but how do you stay inspired and excited enough to do that? It can be a real challenge finding photographic inspiration, but I have learned a few techniques that keep me ‘fired up’ for photography, and I would like to share them with you.

It hasn’t always been easy to feel inspired to shoot. When I first began photography, I committed to a 365-day challenge, to shoot something every day for a whole year. *A whole year!* I admit, at times it felt like a slog, but I also learned a few ways to maintain the excitement that I felt on the good photography days, and I’ll share those tips in this guide.

I am going to offer you a variety of ways to keep yourself interested and excited. I realize not all these strategies are for everyone, but even one or two new ideas may keep you out of the photographic doldrums that we all find ourselves in from time to time.

By the end of this guide, I hope that you will have a better understanding of what gets you fired up for photography and a few new ideas for maintaining your excitement in your craft. I hope you will have gained some insight into:

- What gets you excited and how that can influence your photography interests
- How joining a weekly challenge can help keep you engaged and interested in photography
- How a forum can support your photographic passion and provide inspiration
- How sharing a goal with others can help you stick with it
- Where to look for photographic inspiration

 **Recommended Reading:** If you want to avoid boredom and repetition in your photography, you can inject some creativity into your work by using the fun and challenging assignments in our Creativity Catalog. [Go here now to take a look!](#)



Photograph by Leanne Cleaveley



Photograph by Leanne Cleaveley

My children and travel are huge sources of photographic inspiration for me. This image combines two of my passions from a trip to the Alberta Badlands. What gets you fired up to take photographs?

WHAT GETS YOU FIRED UP?

My first question is, “What gets you fired up?” You can think about what you usually like to photograph, but if you go broader and think about things in your life that you get excited about, you will often find they have a connection to your photography. For example, it is no coincidence that I love to garden and that I often shoot plants and insects.

Make a list (mental or literal) of the things that interest you. Use this list as a cheat sheet next time you are looking for ideas for what to photograph.

My list would look something like this:

- Family – My children are a great source of joy and inspiration for my photography. I love shooting their sporting events, milestones, and everyday moments.
- Nature – From hikes to working in my garden, I get quite excited about the natural world and often find myself photographing it.




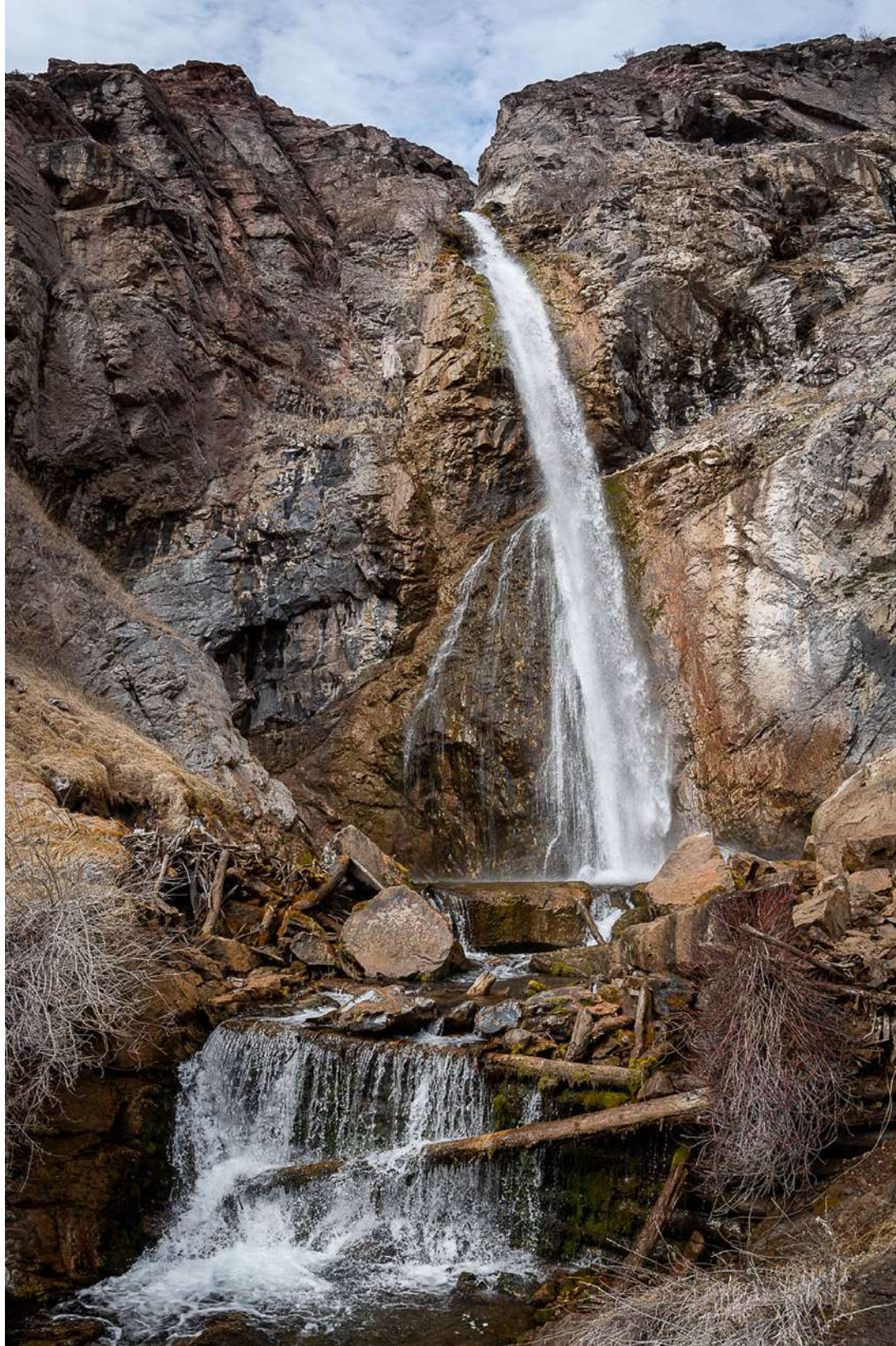
Photograph by Leanne Cleaveley

Taking photographs of the things you love can help keep you excited and inspired. This image offered a different take on books, one of my loves, in photographic form.

- Travel – Seeing new people and places is always a great inspiration for my photography. From landscapes to cityscapes, there is always something new to capture.
- Reading – I get ideas for new images from books I read. Sometimes I photograph my books!
- Crafting – I love to crochet and do other crafts, and sometimes I will even photograph them.
- Music – Song lyrics will often inspire me to shoot something new or photograph something in a different way. Sometimes a single line will have me thinking about how I might show that in photographic form.
- Weather and the Seasons – I love the changing of the seasons and often find myself pulled outside to look at the sunset or unusual clouds.

All the things on my list are great sources of inspiration for my photography. When I get *stuck* for ideas, these are places I can turn to in order to find something fresh and new. If I have been shooting flowers for days on end and can't get fired up for that subject, I look to some of my other interests to fuel my passion.

 **Key Lesson:** Make a list of things you get excited about and use that list for times when you find yourself in the photographic doldrums. The things you love can be a great source of inspiration for your photography.



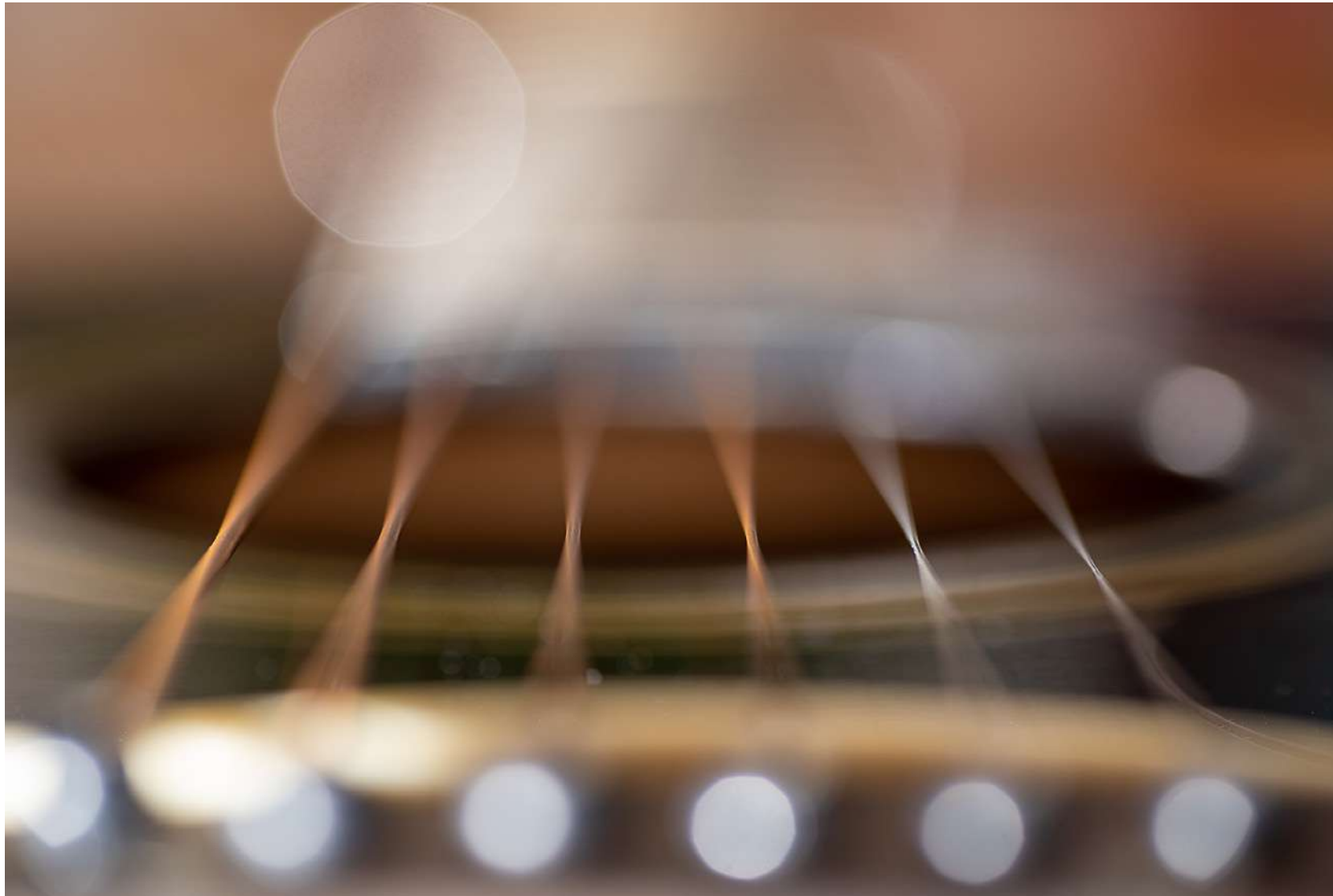
Photograph by Leanne Cleaveley

This image is a great example of why you should always grab your camera. There was a bit of a walk to get to this gorgeous waterfall, but with the right camera bag I felt good about navigating the trail and bringing my camera along. I'm sure glad I did, or I would have missed this shot!

The other piece of advice I would give is to have your camera with you when you do things you love. The biggest barrier to capturing great images is leaving your camera at home or in the camera bag. You can't get a great shot if you don't have your main piece of equipment with you.

Move past the complaint that it is too bulky or inconvenient to take along to these places by finding the right camera bag. If it is easy to carry, you will be more inclined to have it with you. And be sure that it carries what you need without becoming too heavy or awkward.

My favorite bag is a sling-style one that sits on my back. The bag has room for an extra lens and my flash, plus spare batteries, and a few other small items. I like that I can whip it around to access my camera quickly. I take it hiking, to my children's sporting events, and even for a drive out to the lake. If I didn't have it with me, I would miss so many great opportunities to shoot.



Photograph by Leanne Cleaveley

This image was inspired by a photo challenge on using depth of field for effect. I decided to shoot the guitar strings using an f-stop of 7.1 with a 90mm lens. The effect was a very narrow area of focus with lots of bokeh. Even better, my image inspired a fellow photographer to take some unique shots of their guitar.

JOIN A CHALLENGE

To encourage regular practice and development of new skills, I recommend you join a photography group that has a weekly challenge. A weekly challenge can provide you with a focus when you don't have one. The other benefit is that a challenge may encourage you to try something you never would have otherwise.

There are many online groups that offer weekly challenges. They can be very casual or super competitive. The casual ones may invite you to share your results and invite comments or critiques from others within the group. Competitive challenges may have a voting process and a winner. Watching the group for a week or two to get a feel for how it works is a great way to decide what is right for you.

Weekly challenges can be found on many websites including Flickr, Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram. You can also look for an online photography forum that offers weekly challenges. Some forums are quite public, and others require membership and offer a degree of privacy within the group.



Photograph by Leanne Cleaveley

Joining a challenge may nudge you into a new technique you have never tried before such as shooting double exposure images like the one shown in this image.

Weekly challenges can range from shooting images using a particular technique (e.g. light painting or double exposure) to capturing images that contain a particular color (e.g. photograph something red). They may also require you to work on your composition (e.g. vanishing point or repetition) and even editing skills (e.g. twirl effect or selective color).


You should look for challenges that offer support. If they offer guidelines, instructions, and feedback then you will get more out of your time with that group. Challenges that contain links to articles on a particular technique can be very helpful.

FIND A FORUM

I mentioned online photography forums as a potential source for finding weekly photography challenges, but a good forum can offer you so much more. This can be a place to connect with other photographers, share and critique images, and offer ideas on techniques, composition, and a myriad of other things.

A forum can be a great source of new ideas and inspiration. Just looking at the work of other photographers and reading the feedback, both positive and constructive, can guide your own photography practice. I am often inspired by the work of others and will find myself trying something I never would have thought of on my own.

Take the time to look around and observe forums you are interested in. You may have to join a forum to view discussions, but you can watch a bit before jumping in to see if the group suits your needs.

 **Key Lesson:** The right forum can not only keep you motivated but can also be a place where you can ask questions and develop a deeper understanding of photography. Look for a forum that suits your needs and offers ways to grow and learn.

Forums are only as good as the participants and administrators allow them to be. Be warned that you may run into tactless critics and even phishing scams. A good forum will have moderators dealing with such issues as they arise. Be sure

to report any you see and use caution when receiving direct messages from people you don't know.

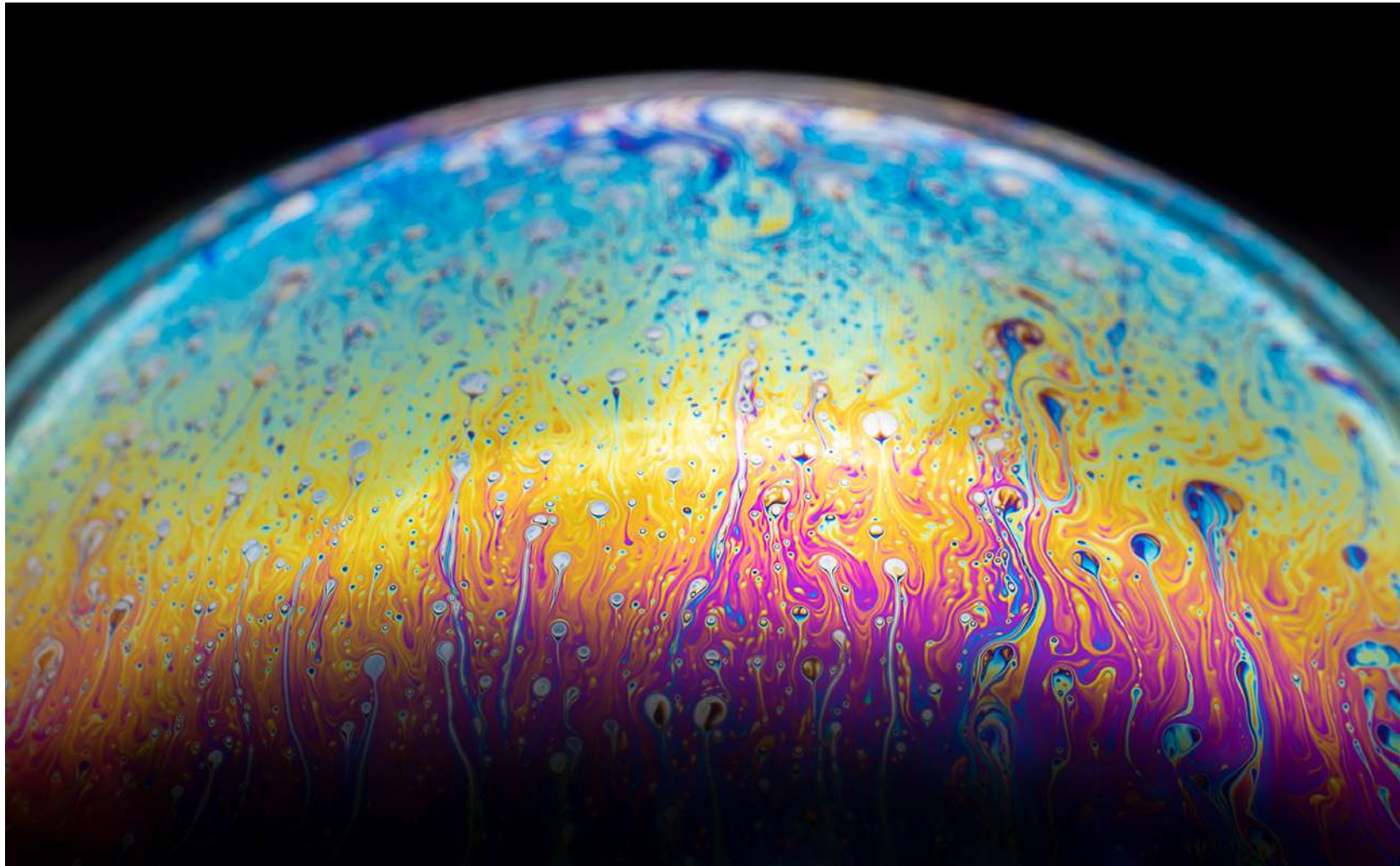
It can take a lot of bravery to share your images with people you don't know in an online forum, but with the right group, you can receive valuable feedback and inspiration.

Give yourself a goal and share it with others

If a forum feels a little too scary for you, why not start with a group of folks you already know? When I did my first 365-day photography challenge, I shared my goal with family and friends on Facebook.

If you have a group on a particular online platform, then use them to help support your goal. By committing, publicly, to others that you are going to do something, it puts a little more pressure on you to stick with it, and your group may even chime in with ideas of more things you can try to photograph, providing you with further inspiration.

One of the drawbacks of sharing only with your friends and family is that they may be too kind when you really want someone to critique your work. Your friends may not want to hurt your feelings, and if they aren't photographers or artists they may not be able to explain why a photograph falls flat for them. However, they can still offer a great cheering section and added encouragement to help you reach your photography goal.



Photograph by Leanne Cleaveley

I was inspired by a fellow photographer's soap bubble images when I shot this image. I asked him how he created these images and then tried my own hand at them using his technique. Don't be afraid to ask someone how they do something as most photographers love to share.

BEG, BORROW, AND STEAL


This is one of my favorite ways to generate new ideas. As a photographer, you can't be expected to reinvent the wheel every day. There are thousands of great ideas out there already, so why not check them out and use them as inspiration for your images!


You can borrow other peoples' ideas and make them your own. Artists have been inspiring other artists for years. Whole artistic movements have been based on the idea of "beg, borrow, and steal."

Now, please don't actually steal someone's work, but if you see someone doing something interesting that gets you fired up, ask them how they do it (most photographers are generous with helping each other out) and try to do it yourself. You don't have to exactly replicate what they have done. Create your own version of it!

Where should you look? You will find examples of great photography online, in magazines, and books. Online is probably the easiest and most accessible to most people. Photo sharing sites have millions of images out there to peruse. You can refine a search by keeping it to a particular topic (e.g. waterdrop photography) or just browse at random until something grabs your interest.

I do love holding a printed photography magazine or book in my hands. The public library or local book store will have some great material for you to enjoy. And if there is something that they don't have, odds are they can order it for you.

 **Key Lesson:** Look to others for photographic inspiration. You can find ideas in magazines, books, online, in clubs, and classes. Don't be afraid to borrow someone's ideas and make them your own.

 **Recommended Reading:** If you want to avoid boredom and repetition in your photography, you can inject some creativity into your work by using the fun and challenging assignments in our Creativity Catalog. [Go here now to take a look!](#)

Another great source of ideas is a photography club or class. Many cities have clubs, and if one isn't available for you to join, you should consider starting your own. Classes will most likely have a cost and can range from in-person community-based courses to online instruction.



Photograph by Leanne Cleaveley

FIND YOUR MUSE

I hope that the above ideas have helped you in considering new ways to stay inspired to capture great images. You can use these when you are feeling stuck or even to prepare for the time when you eventually will.

All the above strategies have helped me on my photographic journey and continue to do so. Just writing this has me fired up to try some new things with my camera. I hope it has done the same for you and that you find (and hold onto) your photographic muse! Have fun, and happy shooting!



Photograph by Leanne Cleaveley

Self-Check Quiz:

- 1) What gets you excited about photography?
- 2) Where do you find inspiration?
- 3) Why is it important to carry your camera with you as much as possible?
- 4) Name two places where you can find weekly challenges.
- 5) What should you look for when finding a forum?

Learning Assignment:

Project #1

Go online and find a creative image that resonates with you. Find out what the photographer did by asking the photographer or researching the process. After gathering as much information as you can, try to replicate the process (adding your own personal style, of course) and share the image with your friends or in an online forum to get some feedback on how you did.

Project #2

Find a weekly challenge and dedicate yourself to completing it for a period of time (the next month or longer). Be sure to check-in at the start of the challenge to allow yourself time to plan and shoot. If there is reading to be done, make time for it. You don't have to share your image with the group, but doing so may make you more inclined to stick to your goal of doing more challenges.

Project #3

Take some time to research forums, group challenges, clubs, and classes to find one that fits your needs. Take the big step of joining a group and taking part in challenges, discussions, outings, or assignments. This kind of commitment can build good practice for you and help keep you motivated.



Hey there!

Let's get real for a minute... Learning photography can be super challenging! But we're here to help you every step of the way! Here are 3 of our most useful (*and FREE!*) photography resources:



3 Free Photography Cheat Sheets

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Leanne Cleaveley is a hobby photographer, part-time elementary school teacher, and full-time mother and wife. She loves reading, gardening, crafting and music – and contemplates ways to find more time in the day to pursue her hobbies. Her photographs can be found at [flickr](https://www.flickr.com/photos/leannecleaveley/).

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