






1. **What's Your Camera Thinking?** – Before you snap the photo, press your shutter release button halfway down. At that point, the camera focuses. More important, if you're in AUTO or Program mode, the camera also "decides" how to take a picture by measuring light and then "choosing" the right shutter speed and aperture. You need to know its decision. If you can't read the shutter speed and aperture setting on the screen or in your viewfinder, press the INFO or DISP button or something similar (not the MENU button). Each press of that button usually shows you varying levels of information about your camera's current settings (other view options sometimes include a clean screen with no information or a black screen). Similarly, *when you're viewing a photo* (which you do on most cameras by pressing a button with a blue triangle), the same INFO or DISP button will toggle through displays of the settings your camera used for that particular photo. It's all there, including white balance, metering, ISO, and more.
2. **Have a Closer Look** – When you're looking at an image you've already taken, use your camera's telephoto and wide-angle control to zoom in or out on the image on the LCD screen. This can help you determine if the image you've captured is in focus. When zoomed in, you can scroll around the image using the round rocker-pad (the clock-like array of buttons) on the back of your camera to move left, right, up or down. Also, keep zooming out more and more in order to see a grid view of multiple shots.
3. **Image Size and Quality** – Memory is cheap. Shoot large, fine, and often. Set your camera's **image size to the largest possible** photo dimensions. You'll see some measure of pixels, such as 4000 across x 3000 down (which is 12 million pixels on a 12 mega-pixel camera). Many cameras have a separate setting for **image quality**, which you should set to the highest level (such as "high" or "superfine" or something similar). Yep, you'll get big images with large file sizes, but you can always shrink an image; you cannot turn a smaller one into something larger for printing without demoralizing loss of quality.
4. **Do Touch That Dial** – Many digital cameras have a dial on top with icons and letters. This is the first line of serious communication between you and your camera. Most people set the dial to **AUTO** and start shooting. This may be fine. But it's a bit like painting by numbers. AUTO mode limits the creativity of you and your camera. It can make your camera do things it shouldn't. At the very least, set your dial to **Program Mode (P)**. Don't fear Program Mode. You don't need to do any programming. *Program Mode is a form of AUTO mode* that offers you and your camera greater flexibility and creativity: the camera still decides how to take the photo —it chooses shutter speed and lens opening for you—but you've got more options for helping to get a better shot, including ordering the flash never to fire or to fire all the time. Or use one of the **Scene Modes**. These are pre-programmed camera settings for a particular situation in which you and your camera may find yourselves: sports, kids and pets, beach, sunrise, portrait, fireworks, etc. They're described in your manual. They work (most of the time), but also limit your control over other camera settings. 
5. **Control Your Flash** – Among the most important commands to have over your camera is whether or not its flash fires. Most every digital camera has a button somewhere with a little lightning bolt. In point-and-shoot cameras, it often brings up a menu with flash options, including forcing your flash to fire every time or preventing it from firing at all. In SLRs (and in some point-and-shoots), the button sometimes makes the camera's flash pop open for use and/or gives you access to a menu on your LCD for flash settings. In some cameras without a lightning bolt button, you control the flash simply by popping the flash up or down; when it's down it won't fire. In many cameras, AUTO mode gives you little to no control over your flash. If your flash is popping up and firing when you least expect it, **get out of AUTO mode**. At the very least, **get to Program Mode (P)** and control your flash on your own. 
6. **Exposure Compensation** – Every digital camera has a button or menu option that allows you to easily and gradually lighten or darken any image you are about to capture next. The button looks like what you see to the right. On point-and-shoots it's often a button on the back of the camera; otherwise hit the MENU button and search this option. When you press this button you'll see a scale that allows you to brighten or darken the image you are about to capture. Use it when your camera seems to be getting the photo's exposure wrong. If you must, err on the side of under-exposure (darker) rather than over-exposure. Remember, this button doesn't alter photos you've already taken. It allows you to lighten or darken the *next* photo you take and all subsequent photos until you change it again. One great use of this feature to darken shots of flowers in harsh sunlight. 
7. **Macro Photography** – Point-and-shoot cameras are practically microscopes. To get a super close-up, find your camera's universal button for macro photography: the tulip. Set the lens to *full wide-angle* (not zoomed) and *move your camera as close as possible* to the little thing you want to photograph. If you can't get the shot, back up just a bit. You must be stable when shooting macro; no movement on your part. Tripods help. Macro photography with digital SLRs depends on the lens you're using. Often the tulip setting on your SLR's dial doesn't help much for macro. 
8. **Metering and Focusing** – These are not the same. **Metering** is how your camera reads light and decides on its settings (shutter speed, aperture and ISO, for example) for the right exposure. It is exceedingly important. Digital cameras often have three metering options: grid, center-weighted and spot. (See my **Photography Fundamentals** sheet for details on these.) **Focusing** is about getting a sharp image. Cameras have various focusing options, including one that finds a person's face and focus on it, which you should avoid for nature photography. Actually, avoid it most of the time. Point-and-shoot nature photographers often use the center-focusing option. Consult your manual on focusing, but recognize that most point-and-shoot cameras do a great job focusing and that it shouldn't be a big problem for you. 
9. **Locking the Metering and Focus** – When you point your point-and-shoot for a photo and press the shutter-release button half way, it locks-in the proper exposure and focus settings *for as long as you hold your finger in place*. You can then move your camera to recompose the image —the proper exposure settings won't change *unless you lift your finger*. These are called **exposure lock** or **focus lock**. Knowing this can help you compose images with difficult lighting or with greater creativity. Some cameras lock only focus, some only metering, some both. *Many SLRs won't do this*. Instead they have a button (often marked with AEL or AFL or an *) for locking exposure. Check your manual.
10. **Other Settings and the MENU** – All digital cameras have various additional settings that may conspire to ruin your photos.
 - **White Balance** – Set it according to the light source: sunlight, clouds, incandescent bulb, your camera's flash, etc. Or set it to AUTO until you understand how critical this is for getting all colors right in your images.
 - The **MENU** button provides access to some of what's described in this document. But **MENU** options tend to control fundamental camera settings, such as screen brightness, image size and quality, power-saving options, date and time settings, formatting your memory card, digital zoom (turn it off) and others. MENU isn't something you normally use before taking a particular photo. Instead, use the camera's buttons for quick adjustments (flash, ISO, macro, metering) while you're out shooting.