



## Module 11: **Landscape**

### Module overview

In this module you'll learn about the following:

- Ansel Adams
- Preparing for Landscape Shoots
- Composing Landscapes
- Other Types of Landscape
- Landscape Tips



“There are always two people in every picture:  
the photographer and the viewer.”

**Ansel Adams**  
(1902 – 1984)

**Tip:** when you're starting out, don't worry too much about the type of lens you have.

Some people think they need to buy a certain lens to take good landscapes, but you don't. It's better to get the most out of what you have.

If you find a field of photography that you love (like landscapes), then you can start to invest in some more specialised equipment.

## 11.1 Ansel Adams

It's almost impossible to talk about landscape photography without mentioning Ansel Adams.



"Ansel Adams and camera" – photo by J. Malcolm Greany

Although he did shoot portraits and did use colour film (including a colour portrait of then US President Jimmy Carter, which was the first time a presidential portrait was photographed as opposed to painted), Ansel Adams will always be remembered for his black and white landscape photography.

As well as his eye for composition, one of the things that elevated Adams above most of his contemporaries was his use of the darkroom. When using film, the processed negatives are made into prints using a darkroom, so named because it is a light-tight environment used to expose the negative image on to photographic paper, thus creating a positive image. When printing black and white images, a red light is the only source of illumination.

Adams would spend hours in the darkroom perfecting his prints to make sure the exposure was accurate and that the images had strong shadows, highlights and midtones.

**Tip:** even if you think you have the perfect shot, it's always worth taking a few extra shots with different exposures.

He achieved this by using the technique of “burning” and “dodging”. Essentially, burning is underexposing and dodging is overexposing, and it's a technique that is still used with digital photography, except that you're working in a “light room” instead of darkroom.



An example of digital burning and dodging to help illustrate the concepts.

Adams would create masks from black card and use them to protect parts of the photographic paper from the light of the projected negative. Using this process, he was able to manipulate his prints skilfully to give them maximum impact.



*The Tetons and the Snake River* (1942). Can you spot the areas that were burned and dodged?

**Tip:** if you're going to be shooting all day, then take some supplies with you. Food, water, first aid kit and anything else you think you might need.

There's nothing worse than trying to shoot when you have a headache from being dehydrated.

Adams was ahead of his time: many of his methods and techniques have been carried forward into digital photography and he is still seen as the benchmark for great landscape photography.



Through digital editing, it's possible to use Adams' techniques to transform your landscape images.



**Tip:** it sounds like plain old common sense but if you're heading off to a secluded area to take photographs, make sure someone knows where you are because you never know what might happen.

If you fall and injure yourself in an area that has no phone reception you could be in really trouble if no one knows you are there.

## 11.2 Preparing for Landscape Shoots

Selecting your location is the most important thing to consider. It helps to explore the location with or without your camera. You can also look online for photos of that area, but actually it's better to look around yourself. Look for interesting scenes and see if there's any high ground to shoot from.

Early morning and late afternoon are the best times to shoot. You can shoot at midday, but the light is usually harsher then, so it depends on the look you're trying to achieve.



Shooting from high ground can give you a great panoramic view of your location. Look for details in your shot and think about the way you are framing and composing it. Remember that other things might catch your eye: just because you're shooting outdoors doesn't mean that every shot has to be a wide, sweeping vista. Look for interesting close-up shots, too.



**Tip:** the weather can be a big factor when it comes to shooting landscapes. Be prepared for rain, and if there are strong winds, then you'll probably have to increase your shutter speed to avoid any unwanted motion blur.

## 11.3 Composing Landscapes



Don't be discouraged if the sky is cloudy; use it as part of your composition.

Depth of field should also be a consideration, as having everything in sharp focus isn't always the best option. In this example, a shallow depth of field makes the scene more striking. Also, think about whether your images should be in black and white. On a foggy day, a lot of the colour could be subdued; hence, converting your images to high contrast black and white can give them more impact.

Just be sure to adjust your settings – have your ISO at 400 and your white balance set to cloudy.



This time we have a medium depth of field. The town, which is the focal point of the image, is in sharp focus, but the background and foreground are in a slightly softer focus. Try playing around with your aperture settings to see which depth of field works best for each shot.

**Tip:** think about framing and shooting through objects. If you see an abandoned farmhouse in the middle of a field, try shooting through the window and use it as a framing device.

In autumn, you can shoot through the branches of trees. Use a large aperture to blur the branches; this can give your image more depth.



If you're shooting during the Magic Hour, use all the time you have. If it's morning, start shooting as soon as the sun appears. If it's evening, keep shooting until the sun disappears. If you catch the sun rising or setting over your background, this can create strong silhouettes.



In both of these examples, water has been used to create horizontal symmetry. If you're using the Rule of Thirds, then try to get the horizon close to the top or bottom horizontal third line.

If you're ignoring the Rule of Thirds, then placing the horizon centrally increases the horizontal symmetry.

**Tip:** if you're using the Rule of Thirds, then look for points of interest – things that pass through the intersecting lines on the grid.

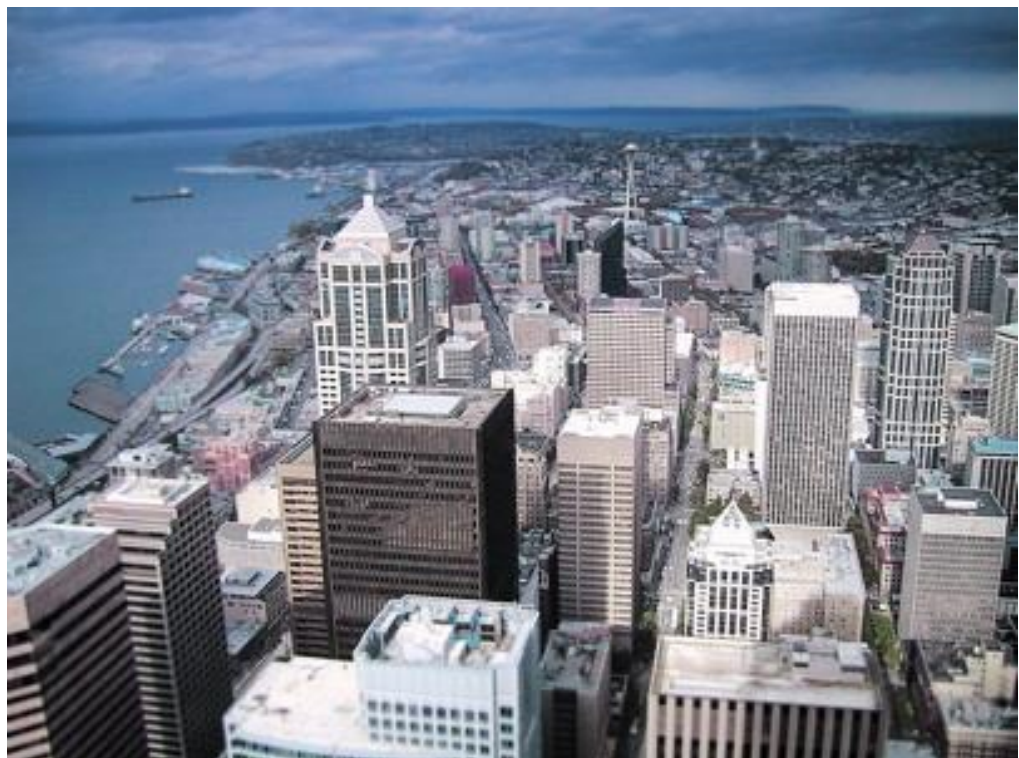
If you have live view overlay options, try using the different grid overlays to help you with your composition.

## 11.4 Other Types of Landscape



Landscape photography is not limited to fields, rivers, lakes and mountains. You can take a landscape shot anywhere. If you live in a city, try capturing urban landscapes.

Shooting urban landscapes (or cityscapes) can be difficult at ground level: unless you're shooting upwards, it's difficult to get the sense of scale. When shooting upwards, it helps to use your widest lens. Usually, you will get better shots from an elevated position; often, the higher, the better.



Do you have access to the tallest building in the city? If so, use it.



**Tip:** think about scale: is there something in the frame that will give the viewer a good idea about how big or small things are?

Look for something that gives the viewer a frame of reference.

Another great thing about shooting cityscapes is that you're not limited to daylight hours. A city at night can provide plenty of illumination.



If you live by or are visiting the coast, then seascapes can be an interesting alternative.



Keep an eye on your shutter speed, especially if you're shooting from a boat.

**Tip:** if you're shooting near unnatural objects, like electrical pylons and wind turbines, you have two choices: disregard them and make sure they're not in the frame or make them the focal point of the composition.

If you want the sea to look flat and you're in a stable position, then you can use a slower shutter speed. A faster shutter speed will freeze the movement of the water.



As with all landscape photography, if you see interesting cloud formations, then add them to your composition. Clouds as far as the eye can see will add depth to your images.

## 11.5 Summary

- Landscape photography is not just limited to natural environments.
- Choose your locations carefully.
- Be prepared for bad weather.
- Think about composition.
- If there's a body of water in your scene, then look for vertical symmetry.
- Depth is important, but remember that the depth of field doesn't always need to be deep.
- Filters: a polarising filter is good for cloudy skies and a neutral density filter is good for sunny days.
- Exposure bracketing can help you to get the correct exposure and can be used for HDR images.

## **Assessment 11**

- 1) What is the name of the darkroom technique popularised by Ansel Adams?
- 2) True or False? You need a special lens to take good landscape photographs.
- 3) What is burning?
- 4) What is dodging?
- 5) If you're following the Rule of Thirds, should the horizon be in the centre of the image?
- 6) What can help you to create horizontal symmetry?
- 7) True or False? A cityscape is not a landscape.
- 8) If there is a wind blowing when you're shooting trees, what should you do?
- 9) On an overcast day, what ISO setting should you use?
- 10) True or False? A tripod is always necessary for landscape photography.

### **11.7 Assignment**

Think about the best place in your local area to take landscape photographs. If you can't think of anywhere, then do some research. It might help to go there ahead of time and look around. If you have a smart phone, you can use it to take reference shots and avail of them to plan your shoot.

Think about the equipment you'll need and what type of shots you want to take, but also be prepared to improvise on the day. When you've planned your shoot, try and take at least 100 photos; and for everything you shoot, try variations. For example, if you've shot something with a deep depth of field, try shooting it again with a shallow depth of field; if you've shot flowing water with a fast shutter speed, try and shoot it again with a slow shutter speed. Get as much variety as you can.