

# How to Take Better Photos with Your iPhone

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Tim Brookes



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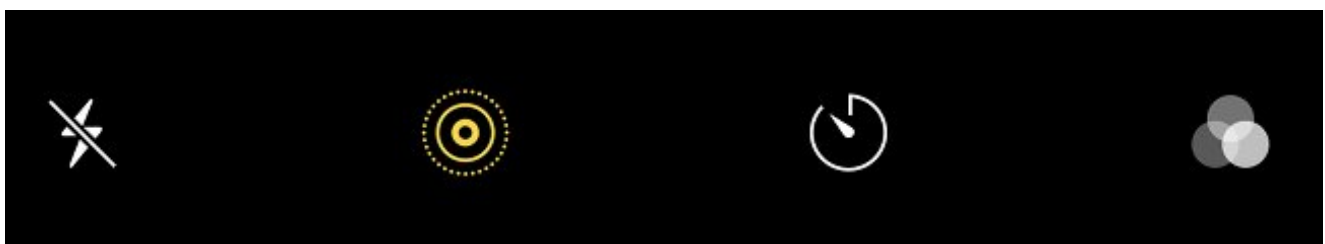
Your iPhone takes great photos, but you can always improve them. For example, you can control the exposure, take more time to compose before you hit the shutter, and make better use of the tools available to you.

In fact, you could take a crash course in iPhoneography right now.

## How to Launch and Use the iPhone Camera

You can use the shortcut in the bottom-right corner of the iOS Lock screen to launch the camera. Either press hard and release the icon (if you have an iPhone with [3D Touch](#)) or swipe upward. You can also launch the camera [via Control Center](#) or ask Siri to launch it for you.

When the camera opens, you see all the available features at the top of the screen (as shown below).



From left to right these are:

- **Flash:** Choose between Auto, On, or Off.
- **Live Photos:** Tap the yellow icon to capture Live Photos alongside your still shots. Live Photos capture a small amount of video and audio when you press the shutter.
- **Timer:** Choose three or 10 seconds or Off.
- **Filters:** You can preview filters while you shoot. You can also disable them in postproduction if you want.

At the bottom of the screen are the various modes in which you can shoot. If you leave your camera settings in the default, it resets to Photo mode every time you relaunch the Photos app.

You can swipe left or right to access the following modes:

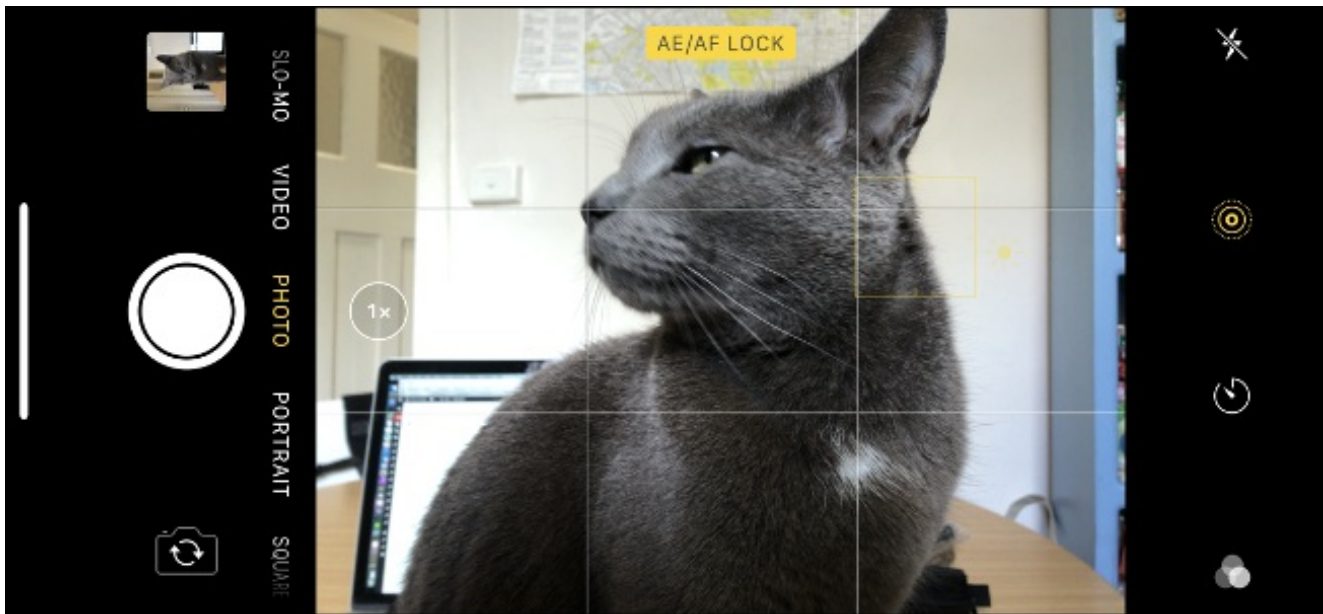
- **Photo:** Still photos with the option of Live Photos.
- **Video:** Shoot videos at the quality stated in the Camera settings.
- **Time-Lapse:** This is an automatic time-lapse mode that shoots still images at “dynamic intervals” to create time-lapse videos.
- **Slo-Mo:** Record slow-motion video at the quality stated in the Camera settings.
- **Portrait:** Devices with more than one camera can use this mode to add depth-of-field and lighting effects to portraits and other objects.
- **Square:** Capture square-format images.
- **Pano:** Shoot panoramic images by moving your phone horizontally. Your device automatically stitches the images together.

At the bottom of the screen, you see the shutter button (white for stills, red for video). There’s also a shortcut to the last photo you took in the Camera Roll at the bottom left, and a button to switch to the front-facing camera at the bottom right.

If you want to change the video quality settings, head to Settings > Camera. With the basics out of the way, we can now move on to some practical tips.

## Control Focus and Exposure

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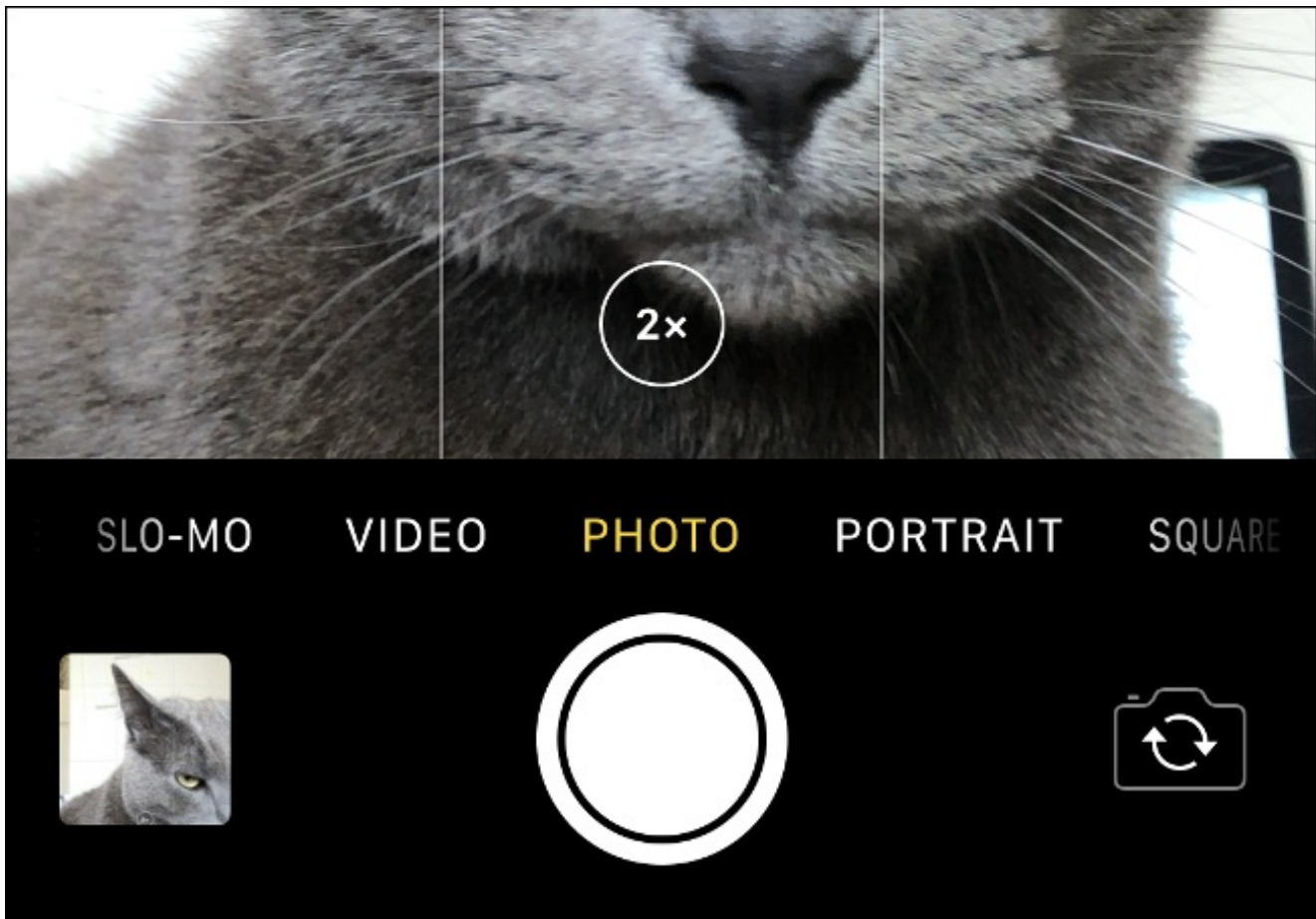
The Camera app allows you to touch the scene to set focus and exposure in a single move. To lock this setting, tap and hold the photo preview screen until you see “AE/AF Lock” at the top. This makes it much easier to adjust the composition and maintain the current focus and exposure settings.

For almost total control, tap and hold to lock the exposure and focus, and then slide your finger up or down to adjust the exposure value. Often, the item you want to focus on (a cocktail, for example) isn’t necessarily the part of the image you want to expose for (the sunset, for example).

This is an important skill to master because Apple’s Camera app tends to get the exposure wrong. Much of the time, the app overexposes images and loses details in the highlights and colors, especially in shots of the sky. This is particularly true when you shoot silhouette images, like an outline of a person with the sun as a backdrop.

## Use the Telephoto Lens (or Your Feet) to Zoom

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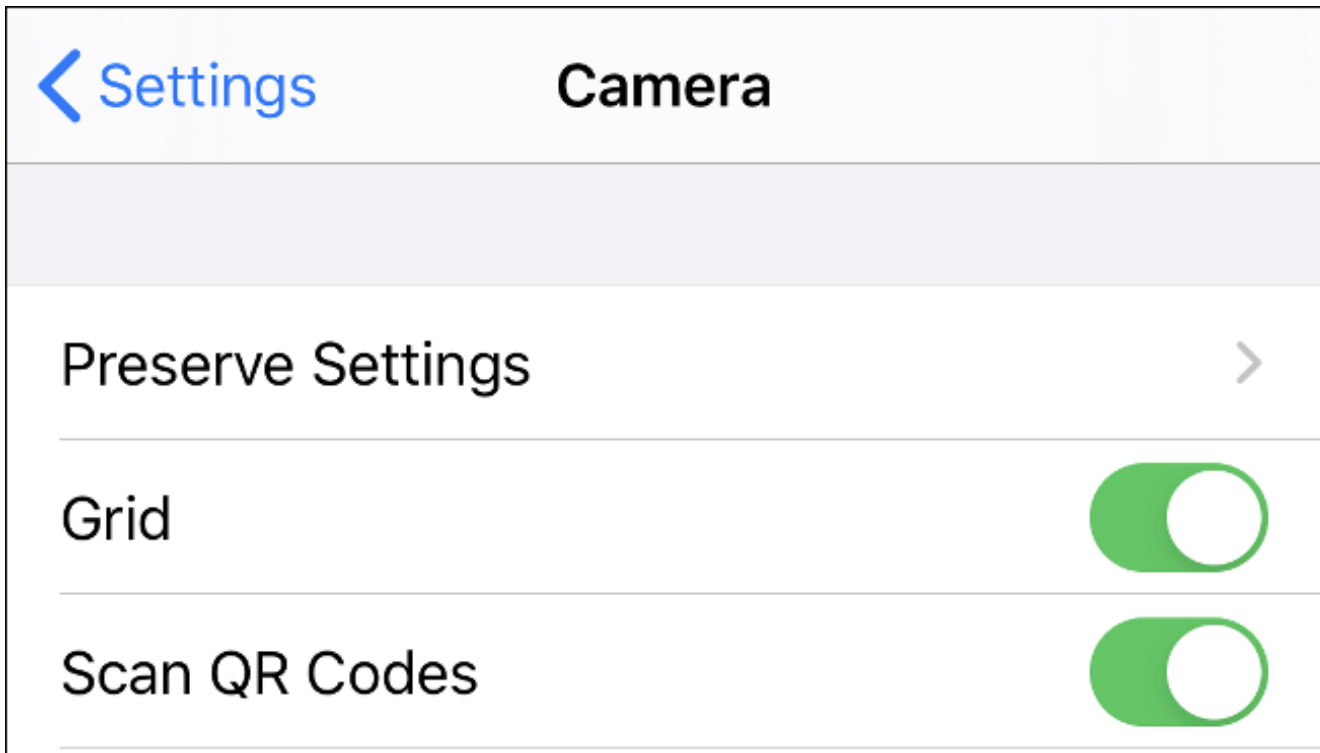
Almost every iPhone since the iPhone 6s Plus has had at least two cameras. In the Camera app, these are denoted by the small "1x" label next to the shutter button. Tap the "1x" to switch to another camera. On the iPhone 11, you can choose ".5" for ultra-wide, or "2" for telephoto.

If you want to zoom in on your subject, it's best to do so by single tapping the "1x." This guarantees the best quality image because it relies solely on optics rather than digital zoom, which stretches and resamples the image. If you "pinch to zoom" beyond the "2x" point, it degrades image quality.

All iPhones tend to perform best when you use the standard wide camera, denoted by the "1x" label. These lenses have wider apertures, which means better low-light performance and softer "bokeh" or depth-of-field effects. Getting close to your subject and shooting with your strongest lens is a simple recipe for capturing high-quality images.

Luckily, breaking these rules isn't the cardinal sin many photographers once believed. Smarter software means less noise in images, and who's counting pixels in 2019, anyway? It's good to remember if you're concerned about quality, but don't hamstring your creativity.

## Compose with a Grid



Head to Settings > Camera and toggle-On the “Grid” option to see a grid overlay while you shoot your images. The overlay follows the “rule of thirds,” which splits an image into nine sections. While it can be helpful (especially to novice photographers), the rule of thirds is not the be-all, end-all of composition.

Many images benefit from a rule-of-thirds approach, but many others do not. However, you can also use the grid to maintain a straight horizon, find and adhere to leading lines (lines that lead the viewer to your subject), and align your composition with the other vertical lines in a scene.

**RELATED: *Is the Rule of Thirds Really a Photography Rule?***

## Use Burst Mode (or Live Photos) for Action Shots

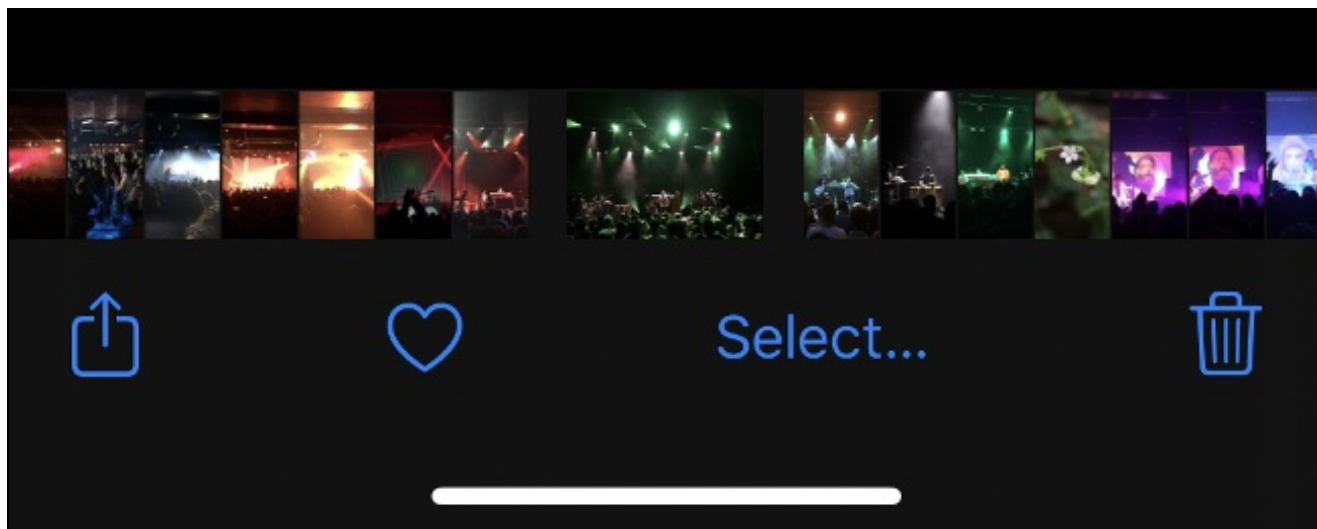
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Not long ago, the ability to shoot action photos or any fast-moving object with a smartphone was impossible. With a modern iPhone, though, you now have two options to do this. The first is Burst mode, which captures a series of images, and the second is to use the videos captured as part of Live Photos.

To use Burst mode, simply tap and hold the shutter button. Your device will continue to shoot photos until the buffer runs out (how long this takes depends entirely on the age of your device). Live Photos are not captured when you shoot in Burst mode. Instead, a series of high-quality images are saved to the Camera Roll.

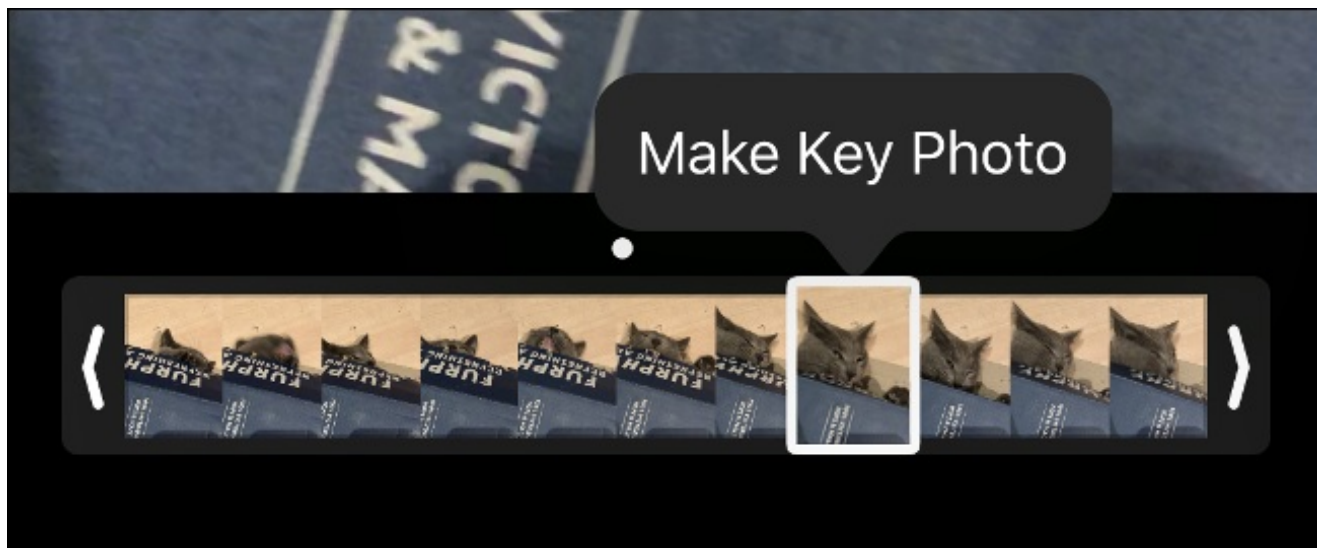


When you view the image in the Photos app, you see “Select...” at the bottom of the screen; tap it to choose the photos you would like to keep. Tap “Done,” and then choose either “Keep Everything” or “Keep Only X Favorites,” where “X” is the number of photos you selected.



Burst mode is the best way to capture high-quality still images of action, but Live Photos can be useful too. This is especially true if the action is over and you only managed to shoot a couple of Live Photos.

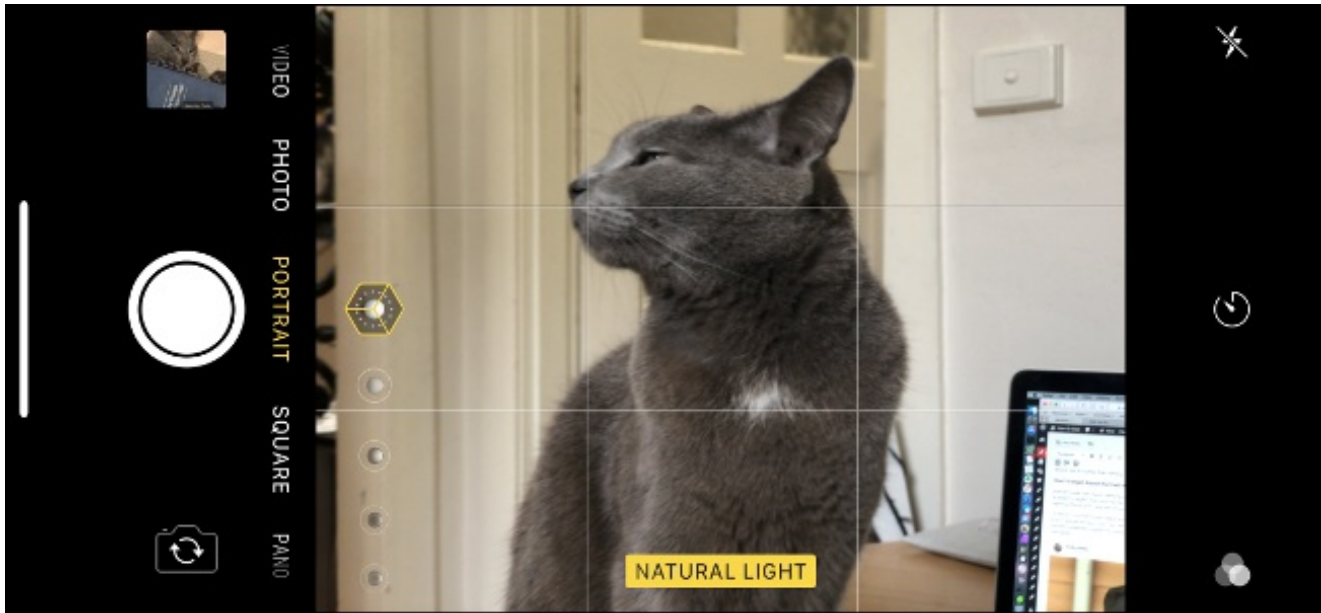
Find the image and tap “Edit” in the top-right corner. Tap the Live Photos icon at the bottom of the screen (several circles surrounded by a dotted line). Swipe left and right until you find an image you’re happy with, lift your finger, and then tap “Make Key Photo” to use this image.



Since this is a still image of a Live Photo video, it won't be at the same quality as a regular still photo. You'll notice degradation in the image quality when compared to a still image taken on the same device, but it's better than nothing.

## Use Portrait Mode

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Portrait mode uses depth-sensing technology to detect a subject's edges and blur the background to apply a simulated depth-of-field effect. You can also use it to apply a variety of simulated lighting effects post- and pre-shoot.

To shoot in Portrait mode, swipe the viewfinder and select it as the shooting mode in the Camera app. If you have an iPhone 11, you can shoot more than portraits in this mode. The iPhone 11 includes expanded support to use Portrait mode for pictures of pets and inanimate objects. However, the image above was taken with an iPhone X in Portrait mode, and it still detected the cat's face.

If you have an iPhone XS or later, you can use Depth Control to vary the strength of the depth-of-field effect. Find the photo you would like to change, tap "Edit" in the top-right corner, and the "Depth" slider should appear at the bottom of the screen. Drag it from left to right until you're happy with the effect, and then tap "Done" to save your image.

If you have an iPhone 7 Plus or later with two cameras, you can use Portrait mode. The technology has improved as iOS has matured, but edge-detection often makes or breaks a shot. When it works, the trickery is virtually undetectable. When it doesn't, it looks like an image that was poorly edited in Photoshop.

## Control the Camera with Your Apple Watch

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The Apple Watch does many things—you can even use it as a remote viewfinder and shutter for your iPhone camera. Simply launch the Camera app on your Apple Watch to launch the Camera app on your iPhone, too. When you close the app on your watch, the app on your phone also closes.

When the Camera app is open on your watch, a viewfinder shows you what your watch “sees.” This is perfect when you need to compose group photos or selfies but can’t reach the shutter. You can tap anywhere in the frame to change the focus and exposure (you can’t tap and hold to lock, or manually adjust the exposure by sliding, though).

You also have two buttons available: a shutter button and a three-second timer. When you use the timer function, the LED on your iPhone flashes, so you know when to smile.

## Shoot with the Volume Buttons

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This might seem like an obvious tip as this feature has been on iOS for years, but you can also use the volume buttons on the side of your device to shoot photos. You can use it to shoot stills, burst (just hold it down), or to start and stop recording video.



This grip can reduce camera shake. You're also less likely to obscure the screen with which you're trying to compose, or accidentally swipe into another mode, or take a burst shot. It also makes one-handed selfies easier to shoot with the front-facing camera—just be careful not to hit the Sleep/Wake button.

## Capture Long Exposures with Live Photos



Tim Brookes

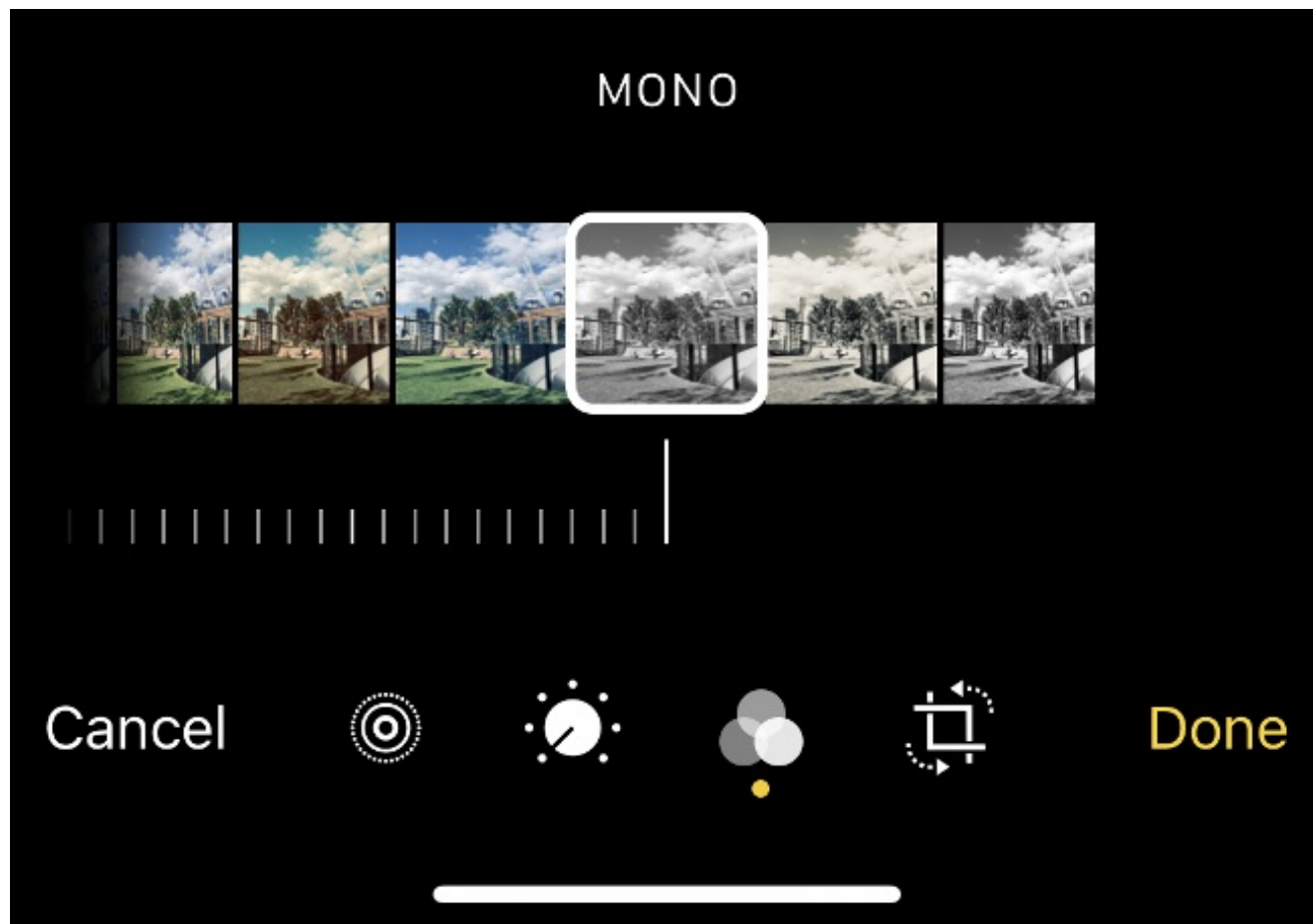
I know what you're thinking—long exposures on an iPhone? It's a lot easier than you might think. If you use Live Photos, you can turn virtually any scene into a long exposure. This works best in the same conditions in which you'd shoot a "regular" long exposure with an SLR or mirrorless camera. It also helps if you hold the camera very still (or, better yet, use a tripod).

After you shoot your Live Photo, head to the Photos app and tap the image you'd like to convert to a long exposure. Swipe up to reveal the "Effects" panel, tap "Long Exposure," and then wait. Your device generates the image based on the additional data captured in the Live Photo.

Traditional long-exposures hold the camera shutter open for the duration of the image. This results in smooth light trails and blurred motion. However, the iPhone stitches images together from the 45 frames in a Live Photo. You won't get smooth light trails, but you do get some interesting effects, as shown in the image above.

## Use Filters Before or After Shooting

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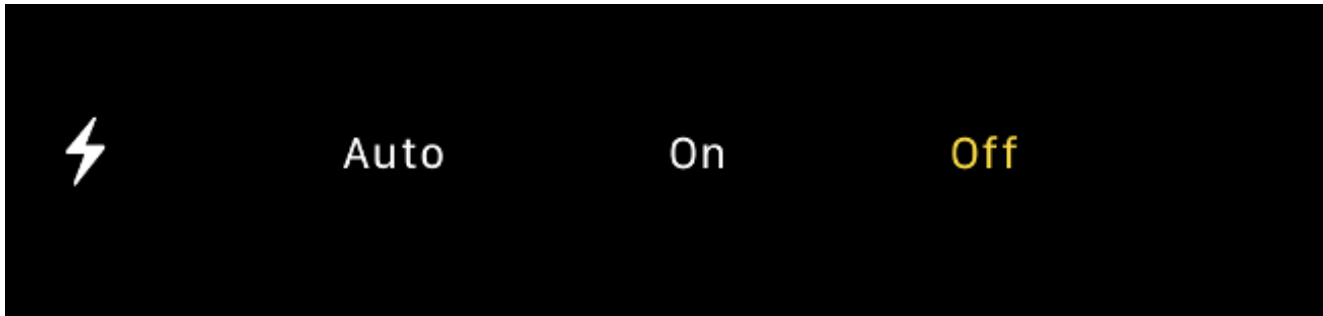
Did you know Apple's photo filters are all nondestructive? This means you can tap the Filters button at the top of the Camera app, apply any filter, and then shoot as many images as you want without committing to that filter.

To remove or try any other filter, head to the Photos app, find the image you want, tap "Edit," and then tap the filters button at the bottom of the screen. Tap "Original" to remove the current filter or choose another one.

You can also tap the ellipsis (...) in the top-right corner of the screen when choosing a filter to see filters from other apps. Be aware, though, that third-party filters aren't nondestructive and won't work quite the same as Apple's do.

## Avoid Flash Whenever Possible

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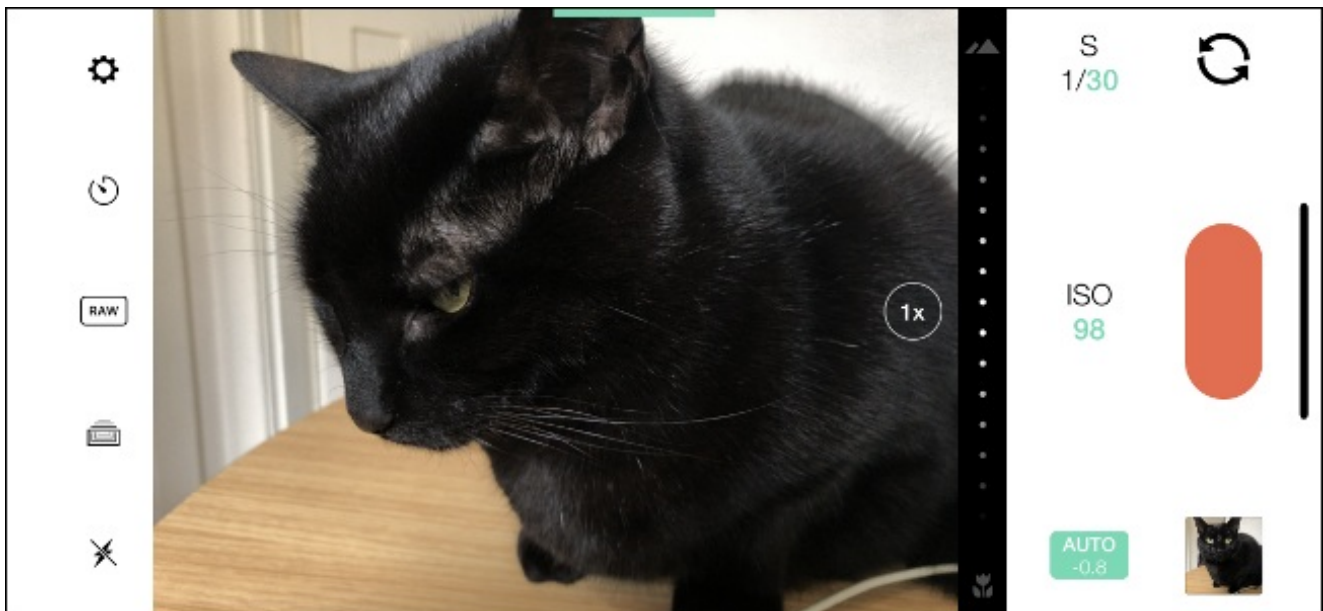


Most smartphone flashes are bad, and the iPhone's is no exception. It works fine in a pinch, but most of the time, it results in washed-out, unflattering images. You might also draw unwanted attention to yourself, particularly if you forget to turn off the flash, and it fires while you're on the bus or in class.

Instead of using the flash, seek out other light sources. Use the skills you've learned to lock and adjust your exposure and work with the environment. You'll get more interesting photos, more natural skin tones, and have to think creatively in the moment to find a solution. In short, you'll become a better photographer.

Flash still has its uses, though. You can use it as a key light in backlit conditions when your subject needs more light on her face. Aside from that, it's best to use flash only if you need to find your keys in the dark or scan documents with Notes.

## Shoot in RAW Format



You get more out of photos if you shoot them in RAW format, but this also generates a lot more data. The RAW format captures all of the "raw" data directly from the camera sensor. When you adjust the data, you can change the outcome of the image and do things like adjusting the white balance and exposure values in postproduction.

[VSCO](#) and [Adobe Lightroom](#) are two iPhone apps you can use to shoot photos in RAW format. VSCO is a much better choice as it's lightweight and gives you plenty of options to export your images. To use Adobe Lightroom, you have to sign up for an Adobe Creative Cloud account to export your images.

If you're prepared to open your wallet, then [Manual](#) (\$3.99) and [ProCam](#) (\$5.99) are great options. Each offers the ability to shoot in RAW format with full manual control over camera settings, like aperture and shutter speed. Manual has a cleaner, less intimidating interface, but ProCam has loads of video features, too.

## Focus After Shooting with Focos



Tim Brookes

Lytro was a startup that specialized in light field cameras for consumers. These expensive cameras captured enough information about a scene to enable refocusing a shot after it was taken. The technology didn't find its niche, and the company shut down in 2018.

Enter [Focos](#): an iPhone app that's essentially a virtual Lytro camera. It captures as much depth information as possible from iPhone models with multiple cameras, and then allows you to refocus any image in Portrait mode.



Focus is free to try, but a Pro subscription (\$0.99 per month) unlocks high-resolution exports, lens filters, and 3-D lighting effects.

## Step Back in Time with a Disposable Camera App



Tim Brookes

Digital photography is amazing, but it also leads us to be too disposable with our photography habits. Rather than composing carefully and shooting once, we're likely to spend more time shooting the same subject multiple times and put less thought into each squeeze of the shutter.

That's where disposable camera apps come in! They take you back to a time when you couldn't immediately review your results because you had to develop the film. This means you have to adopt a slightly different method of taking your photos.

[Huji Cam](#), [KD Pro](#), and [Grain Cam](#) are all free disposable camera apps. [Gudak](#) (\$1) is technically a premium app, although it's definitely cheaper than a roll of film.



None of these apps are perfect, but they're a lot of fun. They force you to be patient, creative, and a little bit carefree.

## Accessories

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If you love to take photos with your iPhone, you might benefit from a few accessories. At the top of the list is a tripod or tripod adapter for your iPhone. The Joby GripTight ONE is a small clamp you attach to your smartphone that has a standard tripod mount on the bottom. Manfrotto's Smartphone Clamp is a virtually identical option.

With a tripod mounting point on your iPhone, you can use any tripod you like. We recommend something like the GorillaPod 1K if you want to mount your iPhone in some interesting places.

Aftermarket lenses can also expand your options. Moment currently produces some of the best (and most expensive) lenses for the iPhone. You also have to use a Moment case to attach the lens, but the image quality is excellent. There's a good selection of lenses available, from a super-fisheye to an anamorphic. Oh, and don't forget to pick up an Ollclip, too.

Watch Video At:



<https://youtu.be/OZTUDB0w24o>

The final accessory any keen smartphone photographer should always have is a spare battery. Fortunately, there's a portable battery out there for every budget and pocket size.

## Take Better Photos

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The camera is a consistent high point in each annual iPhone refresh. Apple might not always take the crown for the best smartphone camera, but they rarely let shutterbugs down, either. The iPhone 11 is no exception. With iOS 13.2, the Deep Fusion Camera introduces new image-processing techniques to improve the level of detail in your images.

Armed with these tips, you'll take better smartphone photos than ever before.

**RELATED: *What Is the Deep Fusion Camera on the iPhone 11?***