

How To Take Good Pet Photos



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The Gear And Settings

What Gear Do You Need?

Basically any camera body will do, what's more important here is the lens, and I recommend a telephoto zoom lens, something like at 70-300mm f4.5-5.6 lens, or a 70-200mm f4 or 42.8 lens.

The purpose of the longer lens is twofold:

- First, it lets you shoot from farther away from the pet, making it less likely you'll distract them
- Second, it gets you shallower depth of field, which makes it easier to remove distracting elements from the photo.

What Focus Settings To Use

For almost all pet photography situations, you'll want to use tracking focus, since most pets are going to be unlikely to cooperate with you.

Along with the tracking focus, depending on your camera, you'll want to designate the focus point or focus point grouping to be used when tracking your subject.

Make sure you take the time to test the different tracking focus options to insure that you select the best performing option your camera offers

If the pet is sleeping, or is very well trained, you can use single shot focus with a single focus point to focus on the pet's eye. Outside of that, I'd recommend tracking focus.

What Drive Setting To Use

In almost any pet photography situation you'll want to use burst mode. Pets are unpredictable and energetic, and if you want to capture that perfect moment, capturing bursts of images will help.

Just be sure to be targeted with your bursts. Don't just shoot a million photos. I promise you'll regret it later if you do when you have to go through all of those photos.

What White Balance Setting To Use

Choose a white balance that's appropriate for the lighting you are shooting in. Often the white balance presets your camera offers will do a great job, but in a pinch you can set a custom white balance using a grey or white card.

The steps for setting a custom white balance vary from camera to camera and are included in the references later in this guide. Check the table of contents for your camera.

What Metering Mode To Use

When setting your ISO, Aperture, and Shutter Speed to dial in your exposure, you want to make sure the pet is properly exposed. To achieve that, use spot metering to get your exposure reading off of the pet.

Be aware that for most cameras, the metering spot is locked to the center focus point, so you'll want that point over the pet when setting your exposure.

What ISO, Aperture, And Shutter Speed To Use

Because every situation is different, there is no way for me to tell you exactly what ISO, Aperture, and Shutter Speed settings to use. However, I can give you a process that you can use to choose the best settings for the situation you are shooting in.

Included in this guide are two printable flowcharts that you can use when trying to set your ISO, Aperture and Shutter Speed settings.

The basic process is to choose your primary setting. For pets, the primary setting could be Aperture or Shutter Speed, but I'd recommend Shutter Speed, since more often than not, the pet will probably be moving, and you'll want to insure you have a sharp photo with your Shutter Speed.

So you choose a Shutter Speed that will get you a sharp photo, say 1/500.

Then you choose an aperture, and for pet photography, I'd recommend a large aperture for shallower depth of field. This will make it easier to eliminate distractions from the photo.

With your Shutter Speed and Aperture set, you choose an ISO that brings your exposure indicator to 0 EV.

Take a test photo to verify the exposure, adjust if necessary, and then you're good to go.

Again, later in this guide you'll find two printable flowcharts, one for using Shutter Speed as your primary setting, and one for using Aperture as your primary setting.

Preparing And Shooting Good Pet Photos

Shoot In Good Light

This is so critical to actually getting good photos. If you're shooting in crappy, dim, unflattering light, then the photos are going to suck.

This fix is so easy, just plan the shoot at a time and place with good light. Maybe it's a room in the house with lots of big windows on a sunny day, or maybe it's outside in the morning or afternoon when the sun is low in the sky.

Or maybe you bring flash or constant lights in to light the space up. Either way, get into good light and you'll be well on your way to amazing photos!

Choose A Place The Pet Is Comfortable

If the pet isn't comfortable, getting good photos is going to be a huge challenge at best, and impossible at worst. Just like with people, the pet needs to be comfortable in order for you to capture its true personality and energy.

Places that would work can be in the home, or in the yard, or at a park the pet frequents.

You can shoot pets in a studio, but you'll need to give them time to get comfortable before you start shooting, which means you'll need to add that time into your planning.

Clean The Space Up

When shooting in a home or other candid environment, you have to take the time to clean the space up and remove any distracting elements you can. Any kind of clutter that you can remove will dramatically improve your photos.

Obviously if you're working with a client, you need to work with the owner to clean up the space, rather than just tearing into it yourself.

Additionally, you'll want to do the cleanup well before you shoot so the activity doesn't get the pet all riled up.

Plan Around The Pet

Just like people, pets have their own daily cycles and rhythms, and you need to plan your shoots around those cycles to get the kind of photos you want to get.

Want energetic photos? Plan the shoot for the time of day when the pet is playful. Want cute sleepy photos? Plan to shoot when the pet is usually sleepy and relaxed.

Have Someone Help You With The Pet

Having someone help you manage the pet can make it MUCH easier to actually get the photos. An assistant that helps pose or engage the pet will let you focus on shooting and capturing the photos you want to get.

Be Patient

Pet photography is all about patience. Patience in the planning and preparation for the photos, but also patience in waiting for the right moment to press the shutter button and capture the moment.

You need to keep your eye to the camera, and the camera following the subject, so when the right moment arrives, you are ready to capture it.

Compose For The Pet

If you do nothing else I've covered in this guide, just getting down on their level when composing your photos will make a tremendous and immediate improvement to your pet photos.

Humans have a natural tendency to take photos from our normal, human point of view, but the problem with this is that it's not a very engaging angle, because more often than not, it's above the subject, looking down at them.

So get down on the pet's level and shoot from there!

Setting Custom White Balance

NOTES

1. The name may vary by camera, but this icon indicates the Custom White Balance setting:



2. Many cameras allow you to store multiple custom white balances and will show a sub menu with numbered options like this:



Canon

3. Take a photo of the gray card in the light you are shooting in
4. In the camera's menu, find the "Custom White Balance" option and press "set/ok"
5. Select the image of the gray card you just took and press "set/ok"
6. Enter the White Balance selection menu and choose the "Custom White Balance" option and press "set/ok"
7. Begin shooting

Fuji

1. Put the gray card in the lighting you are shooting in.
2. Enter the white balance selection menu and choose "Custom"
3. Choose custom 1, 2, or 3 and press "Menu/Ok"
4. The camera will show a target bounding box on the LCD. Fill that box with the gray card.
5. Press the shutter button to take a photo of the card
6. Begin shooting.

Nikon

1. Put the gray card in the lighting you are shooting in
2. Enter the camera menu and find White Balance, press the right directional button to enter the menu
3. In the white balance selection menu choose "PRE" and press the right directional button
4. Select the "Measure" option. A warning may appear to indicate you are going to overwrite the existing custom white balance. Press Yes/Ok
5. Take a photo of the gray card.
6. On success the camera should display a confirmation message.
7. Begin shooting.

Olympus

1. Put the gray card in the lighting you are shooting in.
2. Enter the White Balance selection menu and highlight “One Touch White Balance”
3. With “One Touch White Balance” highlighted, press the “Info” button.
4. Take a photo of the gray card.
5. Select “Yes” and press “Ok”
6. Begin shooting.

Pentax

1. Put the gray card in the light you are shooting in
2. In the White Balance selection menu choose Custom. Do not press set/ok.
3. Take a photo of the gray card.
4. Press set/ok
5. Begin shooting

Panasonic

6. Put the gray card in the light you are shooting in
7. In the White Balance selection menu choose Custom.
8. Take a photo of the gray card.
9. Begin shooting

Sony

1. Put the gray card in the light you are shooting in
2. In the White Balance selection menu choose Custom Set, then press set/ok.
3. An indicator circle should appear on the screen. Make sure it is over the gray card.
4. Press Set/Ok
5. In the confirmation screen use the directional pad to choose to register the white balance into one of the available custom slots on your camera.
6. Press set/ok
7. Begin shooting

Printables

The following pages are the printable portions of this guide, including:

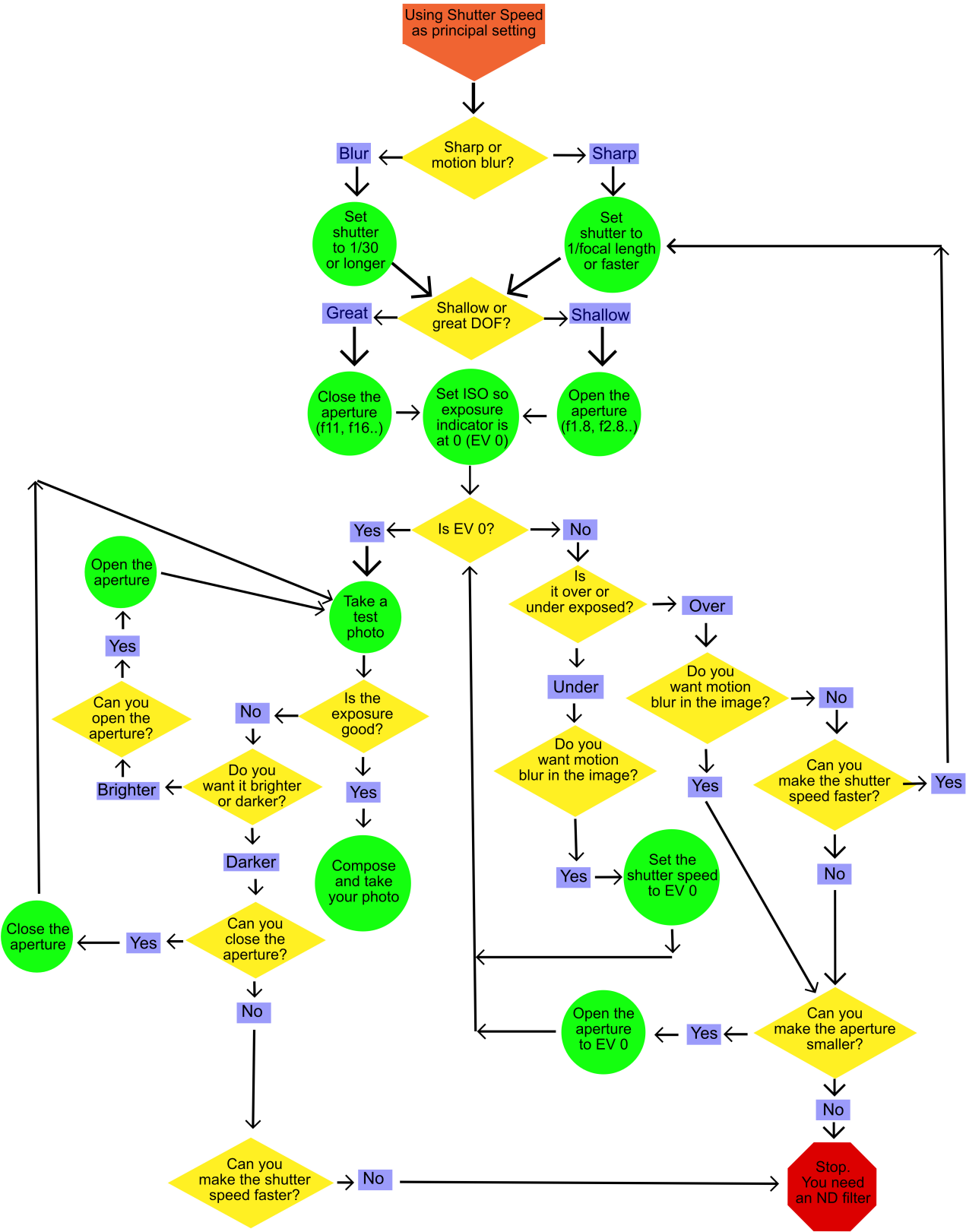
- Aperture as primary setting flowchart
- Shutter Speed as primary setting flowchart
- Pet Photography Photoshoot Checklist

Pet Photoshoot Checklist

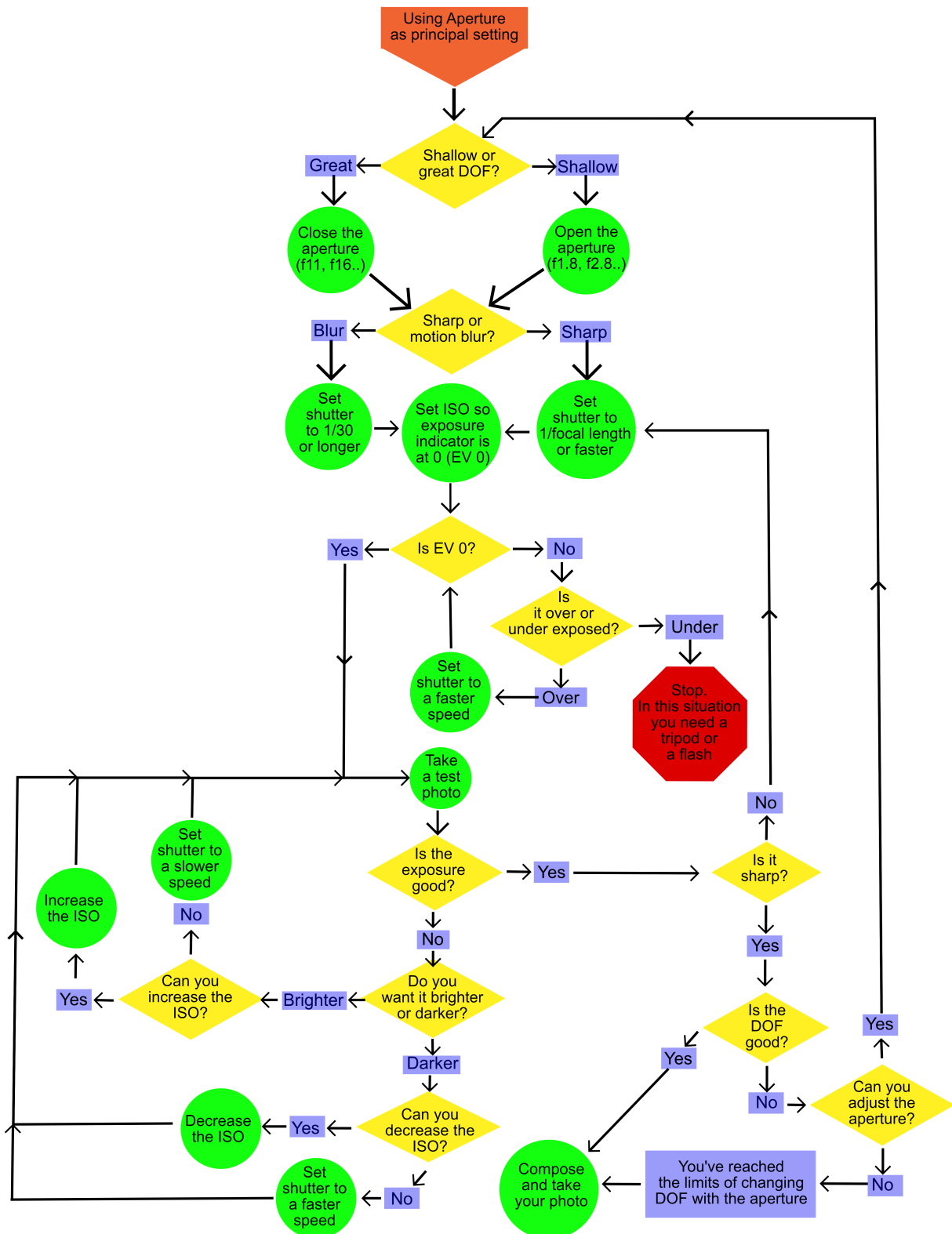
Use the blank rows for any additional items you'd like to add

[illegible]

Shutter Speed As Primary Flowchart



Aperture As Primary Flowchart



Conclusion

I hope you've found this guide useful! Choosing the right settings is just the beginning of taking great pet photos, and if you'd like to learn more about how to use and take control of your camera so that you can reliably take amazing pet photos that look exactly the way you want them to, check out my [Guide to Shooting in Manual Mode video course](#).

And then...

**GET OUT THERE
AND TAKE
SOME DAMN
PHOTOS!**