



SALA

HOW TO PHOTOGRAPH YOUR WORK



CAMERA

The first thing you'll need to source in order to photograph your work is a **digital camera**. This may be a dSLR (digital Single Lens Reflex) camera, a point-and-shoot (compact) camera, or even a smartphone.

If you are shooting with a camera, you'll need to put a **memory card** into the camera to store your photographs.

If you are shooting with a smartphone, make sure that you have a way of transferring the photographs to where you need them (eg, to a computer).

One way to do this is to use the phone to email the files to yourself, and then open up your emails on a computer. You could also connect your phone to a computer using a cable.

If you are able to source a **tripod** that fits your camera, this will be helpful (especially if you are photographing more than one artwork).

SETUP

If you are photographing a series of artworks, you'll want to spend more time perfecting your setup on the first artwork, so that you will be able to photograph the rest of the works with ease and consistency.

If you have a tripod, set it up in front of where your artwork/s will be. If you don't have a tripod, you could rest the camera on a table or shoebox. If you are taking handheld photographs, just be mindful of trying to take photographs of each artwork from the same spot and angle each time if you can.

It is important to try to face the artworks square on, so that your work doesn't look distorted by perspective.



BACKGROUND

Framed / 2D work

If you make 2D work that is intended to be displayed on a wall, it is a good idea to convey this by photographing the work hung on a wall.

Leaning the work against a wall is less desirable, but if this is your only option, do your best to make sure that the wall is plain and clean, and you can get in close to the work or crop to the edges so that the focus is on the work.

You could also photograph the work on an easel but bear in mind how this might affect the interpretation of the work.

3D work

If you have small sculptural work you may want to photograph it on a **tabletop**.

Tabletops often have glossy or textured surfaces which may be distracting from your work. Consider putting a large **piece of paper** in a neutral colour on the table instead. If your piece of paper is large enough, you can bend it slightly so that it sits beneath your object but also rises up behind it, forming a **seamless studio background**. You can do this with blutack or masking tape and a table against a wall. You could also use a neutral-coloured sheet that has been ironed.

Velvet (not crushed velvet) is another material that will absorb light and can be an excellent backdrop. Try black velvet unless a colour makes sense for your work. You can buy velvet from craft stores.



LIGHTING

INDOORS

If you are photographing your work indoors, take note of how many light sources there are. Natural light (from the sun) and artificial light are different colours, and sometimes a combination of the two can look odd.

If you find that you have a good light source but that it is very strong on one side of the artwork and the light is not evenly distributed, consider using a makeshift reflector. For a small artwork, a white piece of paper should do the trick. For a larger artwork, a white bed sheet held up in the right place might work. The idea is to bounce light back onto the artwork in the area that is currently not getting enough light.

If you are relying on a **lamp** or light source that is too severe when directed straight at your artwork, consider **angling the light at the ceiling**. If you have a white ceiling, the harsh light should become softer because it will be reaching the artwork from multiple angles instead of one.

OUTDOORS

If you are photographing your work outside in direct sun, consider waiting for the sun to go behind a cloud so that the light will be softer, and shadows will not be as harsh.

If you are photographing your work in the shade, you should get a fairly even spread of light unless there are objects reflecting light unevenly onto your work (eg, a white/silver car parked in a driveway may bounce extra light onto an artwork being photographed in a garage.)

[How to photograph your work with a smartphone.](#)

FRAMED ARTWORK

If you are photographing artwork framed under glass, you will find the reflections challenging. Look at [this tutorial](#) for a walk-through of some of those challenges. **It is important that you don't use your camera's built-in flash.**

If the work is small enough, you can ask someone to hold a black sheet up behind you to eliminate glare, or pin one on the wall close behind you.

See the example to the right: the first image is just photographed on the wall using a smartphone, and the second image is photographed in the same way but with a black sheet being held up immediately behind the person taking the picture. Notice that it removes window glare and also gives more consistent contrast.



CLOSEUP

Taking some detail or closeup photographs can help the viewer to understand the material, texture, scale and intricacies of your work. If appropriate, consider taking closeup photographs of your work.



EDITING

Ideally you won't need to edit your images much, if at all. However sometimes editing helps to correct imperfections in the photograph.

For example, if you took your photographs outside but in the shade, your works might look extra blue in the photographs. This is normal, and can be remedied by editing the white balance/warmth, either through the built-in editing options in a smartphone or through free online software like [Fotor](#), [Luna Pic](#) or [Photopea](#).

You can use editing to brighten the photograph, increase the contrast, and crop the photograph. The idea is to get the photograph to look as close as possible to how the artwork looks in real life, not to misrepresent it.

Consider whether you need to digitally crop some unnecessary parts of the photograph out.

Most basic photo-editing programs offer some automatic options - it can be worth trying these out. They aren't fool-proof though, and if they make your photograph look less realistic rather than improving it, just 'undo' that action. Usually there are auto options relating to brightness and contrast, colour temperature, and straightening (usually called autotransform).

Further reading:
[Editing.photos on iPhone](#)

[Luna Pic Review](#)

[How to crop a photo with Photopea](#)



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Image Credits:

- Photography Tour with Rosina Possingham, 2019, photo Sam Roberts
- Photography Tour with Rosina Possingham, 2019, photo Sam Roberts
- Bring the Baby Tour, 2019, photo Sam Roberts
- Margaret Worth, As One, 2019, stainless steel with patina, dichroic foil, corten steel, 235 x 150 x 150 cm. Presented by Country Arts SA in partnership with Arts South Australia and Government House, and supported by SALA Festival, photo Sam Roberts
- glass frame test, photo Steph Fuller
- glass frame test with black sheet, photo Steph Fuller
- *Conversations with Line* at Whitechapel Art Gallery, 2019, photo Dawn Clarke
- LunaPic toolbar
- Bring the Baby Tour, 2019, photo Sam Roberts
- Peter Colbey, Leader of the Pack, 2019, scrap metal, 110x120x40cm, Governor's Garden exhibition, 2019, photo Sam Roberts.