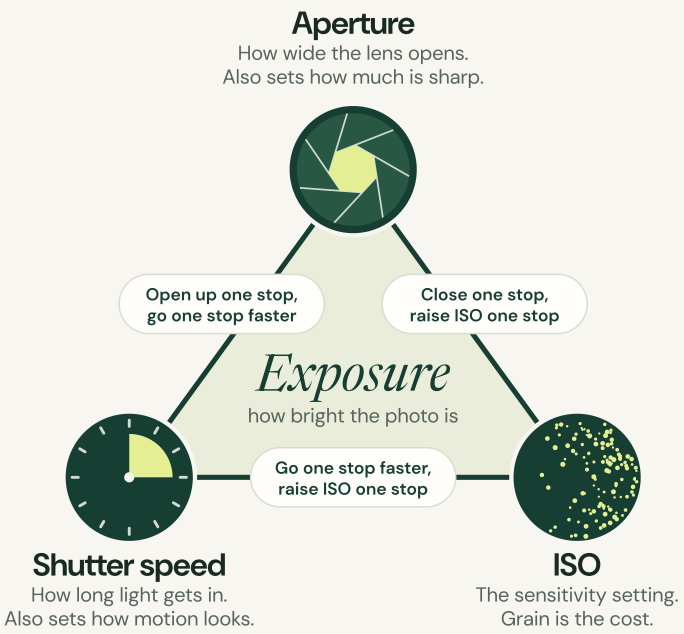
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Exposure triangle *cheat sheet*

Three settings make every photo lighter or darker.



Aperture

Low f-number: more light, softer background.

High f-number: less light, more in focus.

Shutter speed

Slow: more light, movement blurs.

Fast: less light, movement freezes.

ISO

Low: less sensitive, clean.

High: more sensitive, grainy.

Which one first

Subject moving: shutter speed.

Soft background: aperture.

ISO last, as low as the light allows.

Full stops

each step to the right halves the brightness

Aperture	f/1.4	f/2	f/2.8	f/4	f/5.6	f/8	f/11	f/16
Shutter	1/15	1/30	1/60	1/125	1/250	1/500	1/1000	1/2000
ISO	12,800	6400	3200	1600	800	400	200	100

Brighter photo → Darker photo

Same brightness, four ways

f/4	1/250	ISO 400	The starting point
f/2.8	1/500	ISO 400	Softer background
f/8	1/60	ISO 400	More in focus
f/4	1/1000	ISO 1600	Frozen, grainier

Handheld floor

Shutter at least **1 over the focal length** (full-frame equivalent). 50mm: 1/60. 200mm: 1/250.

Double it without stabilization. Moving subjects need more: 1/250 walking, 1/500 kids and pets, 1/1000 sport.

Fix it

THE PHOTO IS	CHANGE THIS	WHAT IT COSTS
Too dark	Lower the f-number, or slow the shutter, or raise ISO	Less in focus, or blur, or grain
Too bright	Lower ISO first, then a faster shutter	Nothing: cleaner and crisper
Subject blurred, rest sharp	Faster shutter. Double it until it freezes	Grain, or less in focus
All of it smeared	Faster than 1 over the focal length, or a tripod	Grain, or a tripod to carry
Grainy	Lower ISO. Open the aperture or slow the shutter	Less in focus, or blur
Background too sharp	Lower the f-number, step closer, zoom in	Less of the subject in focus
Not enough in focus	Raise the f-number: f/5.6 to f/8 for groups	Less light, so more grain

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