

# Shooting Set-Ups

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Shooting set-ups are something we are faced with constantly. Whether it's a hero shot of a hunter with a deer or a product shot we need to complete a story we're writing. At times it can be difficult at best to come up with a new idea or to not just throw the stuff on a table and snap it. Keep in mind that great photography can help you sell a not so flashy story. You need to make every picture its best!

Lighting and context are the two things that I think can make or break this type of photo. A well lit, interesting product shot can surprisingly garner a lot of attention. A poorly shot one can get you a lot of negative feedback. On the same tact, a well thought out and lit hero shot can really set off the story of the hunt while a poorly prepared shot with antlers lost in tree branches and a shadow through the hunters face from the brim of a hat can instantly negate any accompanying manuscript.

**PRODUCT:** What is the purpose of the product at hand? Where would you most likely see it in action? What does it do or what is its greatest attributes? What is its environment? These are just a few things that need to be considered. Typically we're not going to be shooting large items, ie; trucks, 4 wheelers, etc. We're going to be shooting small stuff. Get yourself a macro lens. It will help you through these situations immensely! We'll most likely be shooting guns, bows, bullets, binoculars and the like. Keep in mind that these items are small and need to be "featured" in your photo, not just "in" the photo.

**LENS SELECTION** can help you. Wide angle lenses offer great depth of field, and distort perspective allowing a tiny object to look monstrous. A word of caution; they can also distort the item making it look totally different than it should. Keep your camera square, parallel, and your subjects centered. (The greatest amount of distortion comes from the edges of a wide angle lens). A wide angle will allow you to fill or place items in the background that are related to your main subject giving "context" to the product.

A long lens, (100mm and above), can help you isolate a subject from its surroundings and draw all the attention to the product. Long lenses have a much shorter depth of field and angle of view than wide lenses. Having the ability to switch lenses as well as the variety of lenses to switch to, can make your photography work much better for you. Although there are some drawbacks in the use of super zooms, they come with most kit cameras and can be made to work. Using long lenses can be a very effective way to set off your photography.

**HERO SHOTS:** Everybody shoots hero shots. There are probably more danged hero shots floating around than there are any other photos in the outdoor industry. How do you make yours look different, and thus better? Perspective. Lighting. Attention to detail. Willingness to try something different. Just because you haven't seen a hero shot of a hunter and their deer shot from directly above doesn't mean it's wrong. You just haven't seen it, and neither have most other people. Try it. It may work.

We all go through life seeing the world somewhere between 5-6 feet off the ground. That's also where most people shoot their photos from. Been there. Seen that. Shoot from an angle that you don't normally see things from. Above, below, etc. It will make for a totally different and unique photo.

Some quick tips for getting better basic hero shots include:

Highlight the antlers against a clean sky or something that is blank in order to be able to see each of the tines. You gotta see all the tines. It's a hunter thing.

Get the tongue of the deer/critter back in its mouth. Cut it off if you have to, it's dead; it ain't gonna mind a bit.

Unscented baby wipes in your camera bag have a lot of uses beyond cleaning your fingers and knife after the above step. Use them to clean the muzzle, face, side, whatever, of blood on your critter. Also your hero can usually use a quick cleaning.

Always have a pair of glass taxidermy eyes with you in your camera bag. Pop them in before the shoot and you never have to worry about the creepy, you just cut my tongue out, glowing eyes look.

If you refuse to get your flash off the camera and insist on using your built in flash, turn the whole thing upside down so that the flash is at the bottom of the camera. Doing this will negate that shadow from the hunters hat brim. You'll look and feel stupid the first time you do it but you won't mind it once you see the difference in your photos.

**Never, Never, NEVER:** Shoot your hero shot in a garage, or the bed of a pick-up, or across the hood. No excuses. It's dark, it's raining, it's snowing... Do it tomorrow. It will change soon enough. Set the deer into a position that it can be easily prepared for photography. Fold the legs beneath it, etc.

**Never, Never, NEVER:** Allow your hero to ride the animal. Have some respect; it ain't a carnival ride after all.

**Never, Never, NEVER:** Allow any beer cans/bottles, pop cans, wrappers, bloody wipes, etc. to get into your photo.

**LIGHTING** can instantly make or break a photo. Get your flash off your camera. Again, **GET YOUR FLASH OFF YOUR CAMERA!!!** Separate yourself from the hordes of snapshot shooters and **GET YOUR FLASH OFF YOUR CAMERA!!!** There are several, easy and somewhat inexpensive ways to do this. A cord is available for about every camera model on the market today that fits on the hotshoe of the camera

and has another end that attaches to the hotshoe of the flash. Using one of these gains you the ability to get your flash an arm length away from the camera. Good, but not great. An optical slave will allow you to use the pop up flash on your camera to trigger one or more other strobes that can see the flash on the camera. Now you can place flashes in a lot of different places in a scene, (or just out of a scene). Getting better! Wireless radio remotes. Now we're talking. They're not really cheap, but they do a job that can't be done any other way and provide results that can't be replicated. I use, and have what some might call a rather unhealthy relationship with a product called a Pocket Wizard. One Pocket Wizard goes on to the hotshoe of your camera. The others, and you could have a hundred or more, go on each of your flashes. The camera based one sends out a radio signal that all the others pick up on when you press the shutter button and they in turn fire their respective flash. The beauty of the radio type is that it does not have to be seen by the main flash and I can set them up to several hundred feet away from the camera. I can also hide the Wizards and flashes behind trees, rocks, people, etc, and they will still fire.