

Taking Pictures with Your Phone

By Gene Rubel

As we get older and more active, many of us are turning more and more to our mobile phones to take and share pictures and videos as we travel or do things with our grandchildren. To be sure, mobile-phone cameras are not your father's Brownie camera. They have tons more capabilities, many of which you can master with a little understanding. Before we plunge into tips on shooting, editing, storing and sharing photos and videos, you should know that you can find classes – both in person and online – and YouTube videos to get more in-depth tips on doing all sorts of things with your specific phone's camera. We'll be more general here.

Shooting

Whether you have an iPhone or any of the Android-based phones, such as a Samsung, Google or LG to name just a few, there are certain basics. First and foremost, you need to have your phone powered on and be on the appropriate screen to tap the camera icon to activate the camera. Some phones allow you to go to the camera function without your passcode.

Once you activate the camera, the screen becomes your viewfinder. As a rule of thumb, your camera lens sees what you see on the screen. If you hold your phone vertically, you'll see more up and down. If you turn the phone horizontally, you'll get a wider view. Once you see which direction works better for your picture, you can zoom in on your subject if that's what you want to do. It's all done on the phone's screen.

To zoom in, simply put your thumb and forefinger together anywhere on the screen and pull them apart going up and down. Go as far as you want. To pan back out or undo the zoom, simply move your thumb and forefinger closer together.

You have the same controls for selfies, both as photos and videos.

You can always check your picture or video immediately after you shoot it. Depending on your phone, you may see a thumbnail of your image in a corner of the screen; just tap it. You can also exit from the camera app and open your photo or video app.

Editing

Editing capabilities vary widely depending on the phone and the user. The newer and more sophisticated your phone – including its operating system (OS), the more capability you'll have. But you should have a goal in mind for how you want your image to look unless you just want to play around with the image.

For photos, simple editing steps include cropping an image and adjusting the brightness. You can always see how much you want to crop by zooming in with your thumb and forefinger and moving the picture around. Once you've cropped a picture, you can adjust the lighting. Doing that usually involves tapping the edit function on the screen while you view the picture.

Some of the more advanced capabilities, depending on your phone and its OS, include straightening an image, adjusting contrast and adjusting highlights and shadows. All of them can help you compensate for adjustments you couldn't make or didn't make when recording your image. That's OK. Sometimes

you have to grab the photo opportunity when it happens and worry about editing later. That happens with all cameras.

In-camera video editing allows you to cut the length of your video, which can be especially useful when sharing it. You can also use the editing capability to “grab a frame” and save it as a photograph. It’s the camera-phone version of shooting rapid-fire multiple photographs. If you’re taking videos and pictures of your grandkids’ activities, it’s a great option.

However, most people prefer to do their editing on a computer. You can see things more easily on a bigger screen, and there are many photo/video editing apps available for all price and skill levels.

Storing

Your phone has limited and finite storage capacity. Older phones can have as little as 8 or 16 GB (gigabytes) of storage. Newer phones start with 64 GB, and you can do quite well with that or 128 GB. Storage space affects the price of the phone, so you’ll want to balance those factors if you’re buying new one. iPhones and some others come with finite storage capacity, while others allow you to add external devices. We should caution you that photos and videos can become large files and take up a lot of storage space, but music files and apps are taking larger bites out of your byte space.

We suggest a two-step approach.

First, look at how many photos and videos you actually need to keep on your phone and how big each is. We all keep too much stuff on our phones and computers, but if you’re traveling and using your phone as your primary camera, you’ll want to have enough space to keep your photos and videos. So, look at what you want to keep and manage your storage space to handle it.

Second, subscribe to cloud storage for your phone. Whether you use a service from Apple, Google, Amazon or anyone else, your phone will automatically upload your photos and videos to an online server. The cost can range from 99 cents to \$10 or so per month (you can find annual plans), but there’s a priceless benefit: You’ll never lose images in the cloud if you lose or damage your phone. Just be aware that some cloud storage services, such as iCloud will delete all photos from devices connected to it when you delete. Others, such as Google Photos, don’t delete them. Make sure you know the policies of your cloud provider.

Managing your storage of videos and photos on your phone and in the cloud is a topic in itself

Sharing

All phones give you the option to share photos and videos as soon as you take them, and that’s one of the best things about using your phone’s camera. However, file size affects “sharability,” especially with email.

When using email, you have the option to send a small file, and that likely will be good for viewing on another phone, tablet or computer. You can send a medium file if you need better viewing resolution. Either of those will easily go through an email server, especially if you send multiple photos (within reason). If you want to print a photo that you’re emailing, send the largest file possible, but you may be limited to one at a time. Video files are typically too large for some email uses.

You can also share images by text message, and they can be better for large files, such as videos. You can also share photos and videos over applications such as Facebook, Instagram and WhatsApp.

Two final notes:

1. Third-party applications are available – for free or at nominal cost – for just about anything you want to do with a phone's camera.
2. An online search will turn up all sorts of websites or YouTube channels to help you with photography with your specific phone.

Now, go out and have fun with your camera!