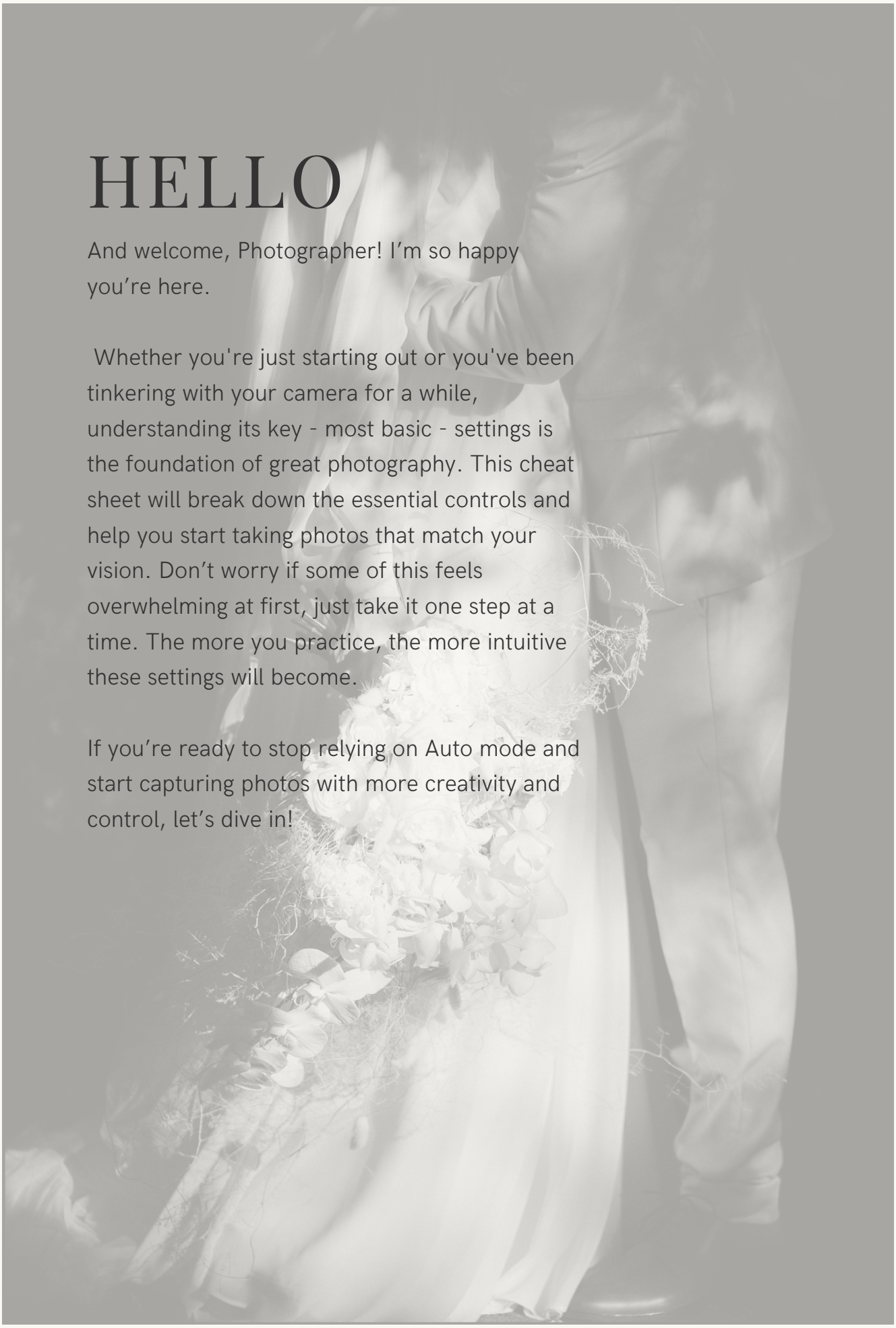
THE ULTIMATE PHOTOGRAPHERS'

CHEAT SHEET

TO UNDERSTANDING YOUR CAMERA

PAINTING WITH LIGHT EXPLAINED



HELLO

And welcome, Photographer! I’m so happy you’re here.

Whether you're just starting out or you've been tinkering with your camera for a while, understanding its key - most basic - settings is the foundation of great photography. This cheat sheet will break down the essential controls and help you start taking photos that match your vision. Don’t worry if some of this feels overwhelming at first, just take it one step at a time. The more you practice, the more intuitive these settings will become.

If you’re ready to stop relying on Auto mode and start capturing photos with more creativity and control, let’s dive in!

THE CHEAT SHEET

The next few pages are a summary of the basic camera settings that every camera has, regardless of the brand you're shooting with. This is your sign to start playing around, practicing and experimenting!

CAMERA SETTING	WHAT IT DOES	WHY IT'S IMPORTANT	HOW TO ADJUST
APERTURE (f-stop)	Controls the size of the opening in the lens (how much light enters). A lower f-stop (e.g., f/1.8) = more light and a blurred background (bokeh). A higher f-stop (e.g., f/8) = less light and a sharper background.	Affects exposure, depth of field (focus area), and how "soft" or "sharp" the background looks.	Use the dial or aperture ring on your lens. Look for the f-number (e.g., f/2.8, f/5.6).
SHUTTER SPEED	Controls how long the camera's shutter remains open to expose the sensor to light. A fast shutter (e.g., 1/1000) freezes motion, while a slow shutter (e.g., 1/30) captures motion blur.	Crucial for controlling motion, freezing moments, and ensuring sharp images (especially in low light).	Adjust using the main dial or shutter button (usually marked with fractions like 1/500, 1/60).
ISO	Controls the camera's sensitivity to light. Higher ISO (e.g., 1600) lets you shoot in lower light but adds noise. Lower ISO (e.g., 100) produces cleaner images but needs more light.	Affects exposure and image quality. The right balance avoids grainy images while capturing enough light.	Find the ISO setting in the menu or use a dedicated button on your camera (typically a number like 100, 200, 800).
WHITE BALANCE	Adjusts the color tone of your photos based on the lighting conditions (e.g., daylight, tungsten). Correct white balance ensures true-to-life colors.	Ensures your photos don't look too blue or orange, depending on the lighting.	Use the WB button or menu to choose presets (e.g., Tungsten, Daylight) or manually set it for accuracy.

CAMERA SETTING	WHAT IT DOES	WHY IT'S IMPORTANT	HOW TO ADJUST
FOCUS MODE	Determines how the camera focuses: Auto (AF) or Manual (MF). Some cameras offer different AF modes like Single, Continuous, and Hybrid.	Essential for keeping subjects sharp in wedding photography, especially when moving or in low light.	Switch between AF and MF on the lens or camera body. In AF, choose between Single AF (AF-S), Continuous AF (AF-C), or Hybrid (Auto).
EXPOSURE COMPENSATION	Adjusts the brightness of the image without changing aperture, shutter speed, or ISO. You can make photos lighter (+) or darker (-).	Helps fine-tune exposure when shooting in tricky lighting (e.g., backlit scenes or dark indoor venues).	Adjust using the dial with a +/- symbol. Increase or decrease the exposure.
DRIVE MODE	Determines how many shots the camera takes with each press of the shutter button: single shot, continuous (burst), or timer.	Useful for capturing multiple frames during important moments like a first kiss or cake cutting.	Set using the drive mode dial/menu (usually marked with symbols like 1 for single, 3 for continuous).
METERING MODE	Determines how the camera measures light for exposure. Common modes: Evaluative, Spot, and Center-weighted.	Helps control exposure accuracy based on different lighting conditions. Evaluative works in most situations.	Access through the menu or a button (usually marked with an icon like a light meter or a dot).
DEPTH OF FIELD (SEE ALSO APERTURE)	The range of distance in the image that appears in focus. A shallow depth of field (e.g., f/2.8) blurs the background, while a large depth of field (e.g., f/8) keeps more in focus.	Critical for wedding portraits to separate subjects from the background or to keep all elements sharp in group shots.	Control using aperture (f-stop). Lower f-stop = shallow DoF, higher f-stop = wide DoF.

CAMERA SETTING	WHAT IT DOES	WHY IT'S IMPORTANT	HOW TO ADJUST
RAW VS JPEG	RAW files are unprocessed and allow for more post-processing flexibility; JPEGs are processed and compressed, with smaller file sizes.	Use RAW for maximum editing control, especially in wedding photography where colors and lighting need fine-tuning.	Choose in the camera's image quality settings. RAW files are larger but offer better editing potential.
LANDSCAPE MODE	A pre-set that automatically adjusts settings for landscape shots, favoring a deeper depth of field and lower ISO for sharper, wider scenes.	Ideal for wide, scenic shots where you want everything in focus.	Choose via the mode dial on your camera.
PORTRAIT MODE	A pre-set that creates a shallow depth of field for blurred backgrounds and focuses on the subject's face.	Perfect for capturing people, highlighting them with a soft background (like during bridal portraits).	Choose via the mode dial or on the camera's automatic mode options.
FLASH	Controls how the flash behaves: On, Off, Auto, or Rear Curtain Sync. The flash adds light to your shot, especially in low-light situations.	Flash is important in indoor or dark venues, but it's essential to use it carefully to avoid harsh shadows.	Adjust via the flash menu or the flash button. Use an external flash for more control over light direction.
AUTO	Fully automatic mode where the camera decides all settings (aperture, shutter speed, ISO, white balance).	Easiest for beginners, but it doesn't give you control over creative elements like depth of field or motion.	Set using the mode dial (usually marked as a green square or "AUTO").

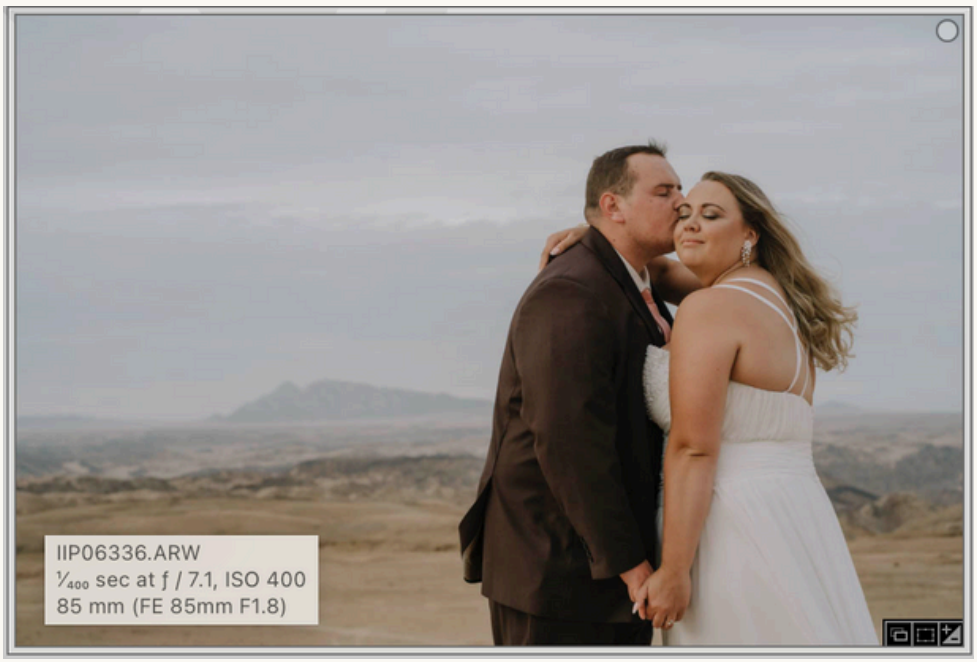
CAMERA SETTING	WHAT IT DOES	WHY IT'S IMPORTANT	HOW TO ADJUST
P (PROGRAM AUTO)	The camera automatically selects aperture and shutter speed, but you can adjust other settings like ISO and exposure compensation.	Gives more creative control than AUTO, but the camera still handles the exposure basics.	Set using the mode dial (P).
S (SHUTTER PRIORITY)	You choose the shutter speed, and the camera automatically adjusts the aperture to maintain proper exposure.	Useful for freezing action or controlling motion blur in moving subjects.	Set using the mode dial (S or Tv).
A (APERTURE PRIORITY)	You choose the aperture, and the camera automatically adjusts the shutter speed for proper exposure.	Best for controlling depth of field while letting the camera handle the exposure.	Set using the mode dial (A or Av).
M (MANUAL)	You have full control over both aperture and shutter speed. You set both parameters to get the desired exposure.	Provides maximum control over exposure, ideal for creative shots where you want full control.	Set using the mode dial (M).

A FEW EXAMPLES OF IMAGES WITH DIFFERENT CAMERA SETTINGS

THESE ARE ALL SETTINGS I ADJUST MANUALLY (M)

Close range (I was standing close to the couple), high shutter speed (to let in less light), low f-stop (blurry background), low ISO (it was bright out).

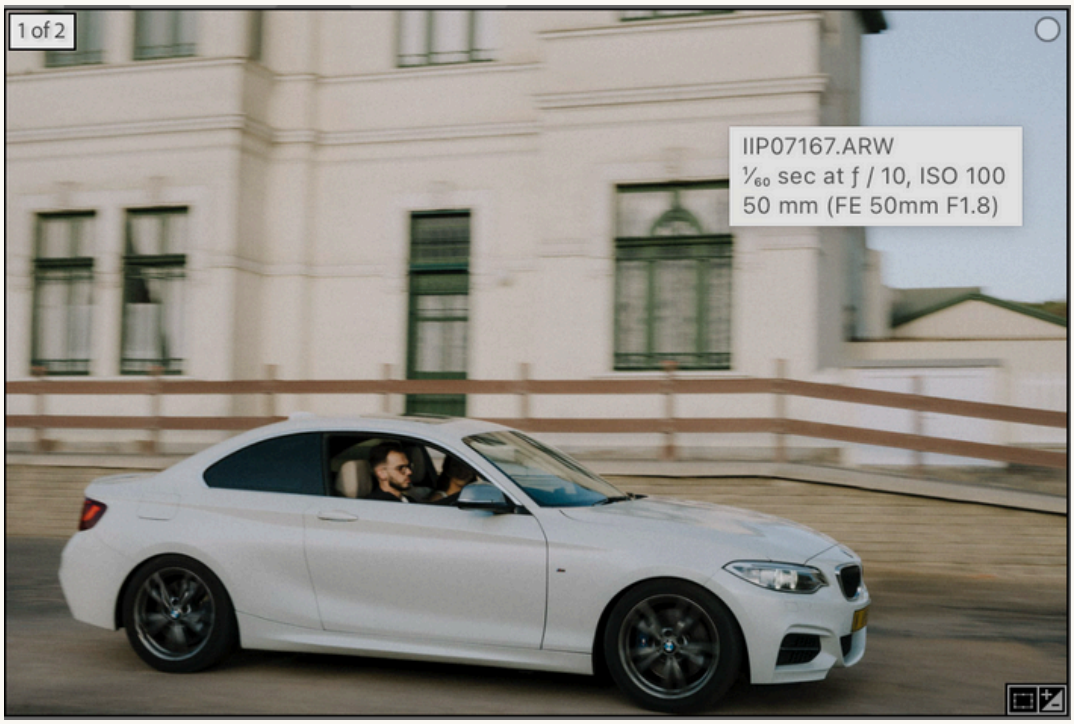
The closer you are to the subject, and the lower your f-stop, the more blurry your background will be.



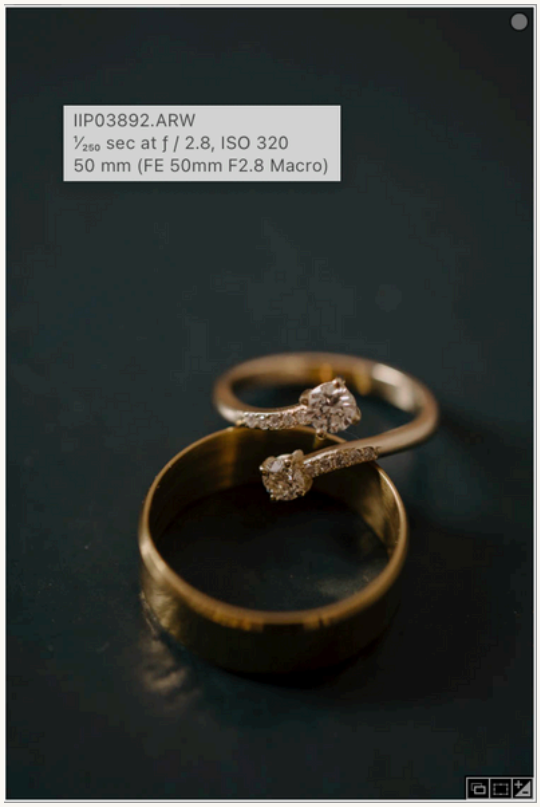
Farther range, lower shutter speed (the sun got hidden by clouds), high f-stop (to get the background a little more in focus), higher ISO (to let in more light because the f-stop was turned up).

The f-stop in this photo is turned up, because I wanted to make sure I get all the people in this photo in focus. When the f-stop is turned up, you have to adjust your ISO and shutter speed accordingly so your photo isn't too dark.

Very close range, low f-stop and high shutter speed so the subject is nicely in focus while the background is blurred.



Intentional motion blur: low shutter speed, high ƒ-stop and compensate with your ISO. Make sure you move with your subject so the subject is in as much focus as possible while the background blurs.



For very close detail shots, I use a macro lens. For product photography with a macro lens, I would suggest upping the aperture a little to get more parts of the product in focus.

The light streak photos! Amazing for receptions. In this case you need a flash pointed directly at the subject of the photo, very low shutter speed, to get the light streak effect, higher f-stop and low ISO so the photo isn't blown out by the flash.

Most of my photos I shoot back-lit (the sun behind the subject of the photo). I like to shoot with my aperture wide open (very low) so the blurred background gives a dreamy effect. The ISO in this photo is a bit higher than usual, because the light was fading. These settings are nice for couples portraits during sunset.

ISO, F-STOP AND SHUTTER SPEED - Form the exposure triangle. If one is adjusted, the other two need to be adjusted accordingly. These are the settings I use all the time while shooting manually. I never shoot in any other mode.

FOCUS MODE - I always shoot in AF-C

WHITE BALANCE - Can be adjusted in post, but for the most part, I shoot in AWB (Auto White Balance) or FLASH.

FLASH - I always shoot in TTL mode.


AND
THAT'S
A WRAP