

Camera Basics Cheatsheet

Everything you need to leave Auto mode forever. Five cards. Print them, fold them, keep them in your bag. By Andre Mitin, working photographer in Luxembourg.

1 — The Exposure Triangle

Control	What it does	Side effect
Aperture (f/)	Controls light + depth of field	Smaller f = more light + shallower focus
Shutter speed	Controls light + motion	Faster = freeze; slower = blur
ISO	Sensor sensitivity	Higher = brighter but more noise

Rule: change one, compensate with another. Move aperture from f/8 to f/5.6 (1 stop more light) → cut shutter in half (1 stop less) → same exposure.

2 — Which Mode, When

Manual (M)

You set all three. Use in controlled light — studio, tripod, time to think.

Aperture priority (A/Av)

You set aperture, camera sets shutter. Default for most outdoor work.

Shutter priority (S/Tv)

You set shutter, camera sets aperture. Sports, kids, anything moving.

Program (P)

Camera picks both, you can shift. Fast-changing scenes when you need to react.

3 — Eight Composition Tools

One strong tool per frame beats five weak ones. Pick on purpose.

Rule of thirds	Put subject or horizon on a third line. Center is loud.
Leading lines	Roads, gaze, edges, light beams. Eyes follow lines.
Symmetry & balance	Commit fully or skew on purpose.
Figure / ground	Subject pops by tone, color, or focus.
Negative space	Emptiness gives weight.
Frame within frame	Adds depth without crop.
Color contrast	One dominant + one accent.
Camera angle	Move before you frame.

4 — Read the Light

Time of day	Quality	Use for
Golden hour (sunrise/sunset)	Warm, soft, low-angle	Portraits, landscapes, romance
Blue hour (post-sunset)	Cool, atmospheric, even	Cityscapes, mood, architecture
Midday sun	Hard, top-down, harsh shadows	Avoid, or use deep shade
Overcast	Soft, diffused, low contrast	Portraits, products, details
Window light (indoor)	Soft if curtained, hard if direct	Editorial portraits, still life

5 — The Five-Move Edit

In any RAW editor (Lightroom, Capture One, Darktable). Five moves, in order.

1. White balance

Set first. Everything shifts after WB.

2. Exposure

To match intent, not a centered histogram.

3. Contrast / tone curve

Gently. Pull shadows up or push highlights down.

4. Color (HSL)

One channel at a time. Subtle moves.

5. Crop

Only if there is a real distraction. Compose in camera.

Quick Reference — Settings by Scene

Scene	Mode	Aperture	Shutter	ISO
Portrait outdoor (golden h.)	A	f/2.0-f/2.8	auto (>1/200)	100-400
Street, daytime	A	f/5.6-f/8	auto (>1/125)	200-800
Indoor available light	A	f/1.8-f/2.8	auto (>1/60)	800-3200
Sports / kids	S	auto	1/500 or faster	auto, max 6400
Night / blue hour city	M	f/8	1-30 s	100 (tripod)
Studio portrait, one strobe	M	f/5.6-f/8	1/125	100

Want to actually practice this?

Lux Photo Club runs a 5-session Basic Photography Course in Luxembourg City. Five live sessions in a real studio with a working photographer. See it at luxphotoclub.com/courses