



**Twenty-Five Tips for
Creating Memorable
Sunrise & Sunset Photos**

Beaches, Bays & Beyond

by

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There are no rules for good photographs, there are only good photographs.

– Ansel Adams

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Enough said. Here's the notice:

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About the Author / Photographer



Thanks for checking out my little e-book of photo tips. I'm a photographer by passion, not profession. That stated, I do have a Certificate in Professional Photography from the New York Institute of Photography. By day I'm Vice President of JDB Engineering, Inc. (www.jdbengineering.com) and my background is marketing and business development in the design and construction industry.

Over the past few years I've been fortunate to have several books that I've written and photographed get published by major niche publishers: Schiffer Publishing, The History Press, and Arcadia Publishing.

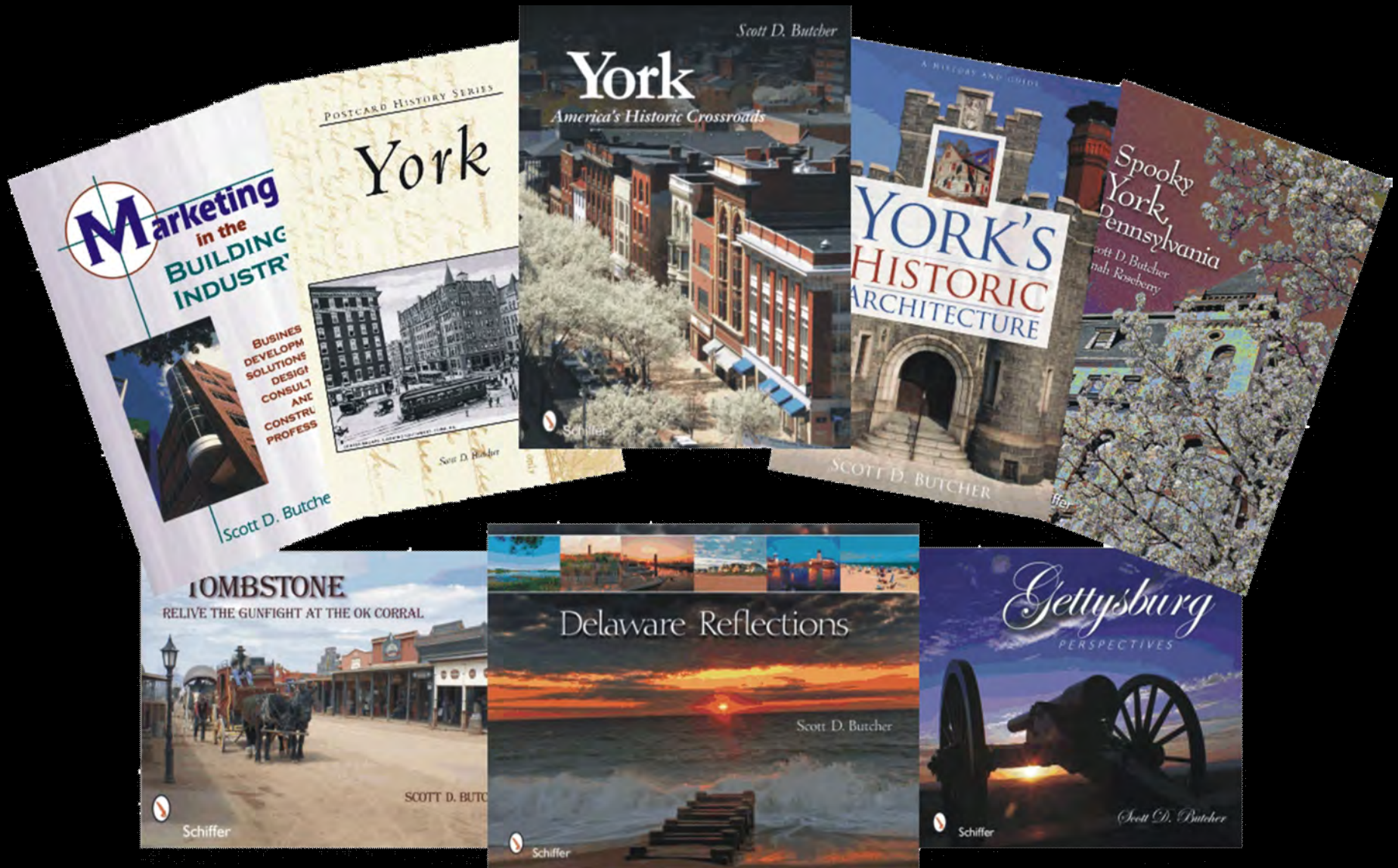
I specialize in what I've branded "Short Attention Span History": in this day and age of blogs, status updates, and Tweets, we've all become accustomed to getting information in short bursts. Many of my books have been called either "photo legacy" books or "photo documentary" books. They feature vibrant, full-color photos, with short but information-packed captions that provide a wealth information about the subject.

When I've given presentations, or participated in exhibits or shows, one of the comments I've often heard is, "My sunrise shots don't look like that." Well, there's really no reason that they can't, and hopefully this little e-book will provide you with enough tips to capture dramatic sunrise and sunset shots, too. Let me know how you make out! Shoot me an e-mail at sbutcher@yorklinks.net. I always enjoy getting feedback, so if you enjoyed this e-book, or any of my printed books, or if you have any questions, don't hesitate to contact me.

Happy shooting!

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Scott".

Books by Scott Butcher



Introduction

There's something magical about sunrise and sunset, and those periods immediately before and after. Maybe it's Mother Nature's kaleidoscope of color – the subtle pastel colors of sunrise, the fiery painted sky of sunset. Or maybe it's that period of morning solitude before the day really gets going ... or the romantic end to a day, framed by heavenly artistry.

Whatever the reason, we love sunrises and sunsets.

Some of us love to take pictures of them, too. The Ansel Adams quote, “There are no rules for good photographs, there are only good photographs” is true. Photography is a visual art, every bit as open to subjective interpretation as other visual arts. Yet while there may not be rules for what constitutes a “good” photograph, there are certainly many tips to help you realistically capture a scene, or even create an imaginative rendering of a beautiful setting.

That's why I wrote this e-book. For as much as we all relish the beauty of a vivid sunrise or sunset, we aren't always able to accurately photograph what our eyes see. And even if we have all the camera settings correct, that doesn't necessarily mean that the final image will do justice to the beauty that unfolded before our eyes.

So without further delay, here's *Twenty-Five Tips for Creating Memorable Sunrise & Sunset Photos*.



Scout out the location in advance, if possible. Scrambling for the “perfect” vantage point as the sun rises or sets may cause you to miss the best light. Or the boat.



Wear shoes. Even if you plan on sticking your piggies in the ocean, you'll be **walking in low light** with lots of broken shells, rocks, sticks, and jellyfish just waiting for the exposed flesh of your foot.

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Get there well **before** the sun touches the horizon (sunrise) and stay **after** the sun disappears (sunset). The most interesting colors and dramatic skies often occur during these times.



*Above: Santa Catalina Mountains, AZ
Right: Chesapeake City, MD*



Take a tripod. With the approach or fleeting of light, **you'll need it!** If you don't have one with you, don't fret! Use a large rock or a boardwalk railing or a parking meter or anything else you can find to help steady your camera. Many of today's cameras feature anti-shake technology, which allows you to have longer exposure times without need of a tripod – but it is better to be safe than sorry.



Clear day? Not a cloud in the sky? This often equates to a **boring photo** by itself. The sun rising over the ocean can be quite dull without texture in the sky.



Above: Delaware Seashore State Park, DE
Right: Nassau, Bahamas



Silhouette, silhouette, silhouette! The **most dramatic photos** occur when you have an object silhouetted against a vivid sky. This might be a jetty or a dock or a boat. Or perhaps even a lighthouse, tower, unique building, statue, or marker. This is one technique to use on those cloudless days to add more drama to an image. Trees and grasses work well, too, as do birds and fisherman.



Clouds are good. And bad. I've found that the **best photos come on days with partly cloudy skies** because they add a lot of color and texture. But sometimes the most **dramatic images** come on mostly cloudy days when the sun briefly peaks through and touches the bottom of the clouds.



Don't give up. Sometimes you may get up early and find that the sky is totally clouded over and lacks drama. But occasionally, after the sun has risen, **it peaks out well above the horizon and offers up a splash of color**. And sometimes the juxtaposition of light and dark within the clouds is the most interesting aspect of a photograph.



Turn around. Don't stay so focused on the sun rising or setting over the ocean, or whatever your primary subject may be, that you forget to turn around and see the drama unfolding behind you. These views are sometimes even more interesting!



Only zoom close into a **red-orange sun on or near the horizon**. A yellow sun, higher in the sky, can damage your camera (or worse, your eye!) if you zoom in too far. Plus, lens flare can ruin an otherwise excellent photo.



Okay, sometimes **lens flare** can become a focal point of an image.



Don't put your camera away after the sun has risen. The pastel light of the first hour after dawn is **ideal for picture taking**. Buildings take on a different color than during the middle of the day. Light is soft and diffuse. Shadows are not overpowering.



Above: Bethany Beach, DE
Right: Paradise Island, Nassau, Bahamas



If there is a beach, there might be a **bay nearby**, giving you the opportunity to photograph both the rising and setting sun over water. Or, in this case, a marina.



Little Assawoman Bay, DE

No two sunrises and sunsets are the same, and the colors change rapidly so you will want to **take lots of pictures**. You can always delete them later.



Rehoboth Beach, DE

Even though you are photographing a sunrise or sunset, **the sun itself does not have to be in your image**. Here is an example of a relatively lackluster sunrise. I was able to make the photograph more visually interesting by using the jetty as the subject, and not including the sun. The orange-colored wood on the side of the jetty shows that the sun is low on the horizon and off to the left of the image ... but not yet high enough in the sky to light the top of the jetty.



Remember to **pay attention to the foreground** – splashing waves, reflections, birds, rocks, etc. In some cases, the very stuff that might have cut your piggies, had you not followed Tip 2 and wore shoes.

Rehoboth Beach, DE



Try to use your camera's **sunset mode**. It might add too much color, but can also help bring out color or add interest to a lifeless scene. Don't rely on it, however: take photos of the scene with and without it. In this case, the sun was already below the horizon – the camera's sunset mode helped capture the warmth of the mountains that had been there only moments earlier, before I arrived at this spot.



Don't be afraid to include **large expanses of sky** and minimal amounts of land or horizon. Play around with different compositions of the same scene. Remember, you'll never get that exact same sunrise or sunset again.

Tortolita Mountains, AZ



Twilight (which, incidentally, is both the time immediately *after* the sun sets as well as the time immediately *before* the sun rises) is actually a **perfect time for “night” photography**, especially if you are aiming away from the brightest part of the sky. There is still detail in buildings and landscape features, but it is dark enough to appear as a night scene. The primary image to the left is a “night” scene of Dewey Beach; the smaller image was taken seconds earlier, facing the opposite direction.

Above: Dewey Beach, DE
Right: Dewey Beach, DE



Underexpose. Don't be fooled by your camera's metering system, which often senses too little light, resulting in a longer exposure that washes out the color. Slight underexposure has the opposite effect, creating rich, vibrant colors. Though I frequently shoot in manual mode, so I can control all of the settings, I'll also use automatic exposure and meter next to the brightest light source – so if the sun is visible, I'll take the meter reading next to the sun, then recompose my image.

Indian River Inlet, DE



Look for reflections. The sun reflecting off water is an obvious choice, but sometimes the reflections of trees or buildings or structures can create a unique effect – in this case the arches of a historic bridge combining with their reflections to form circles. The effect is further enhanced because the neutral-colored bridge is bathed in the warmth of the early-morning sunlight.



Bad weather? Sometimes **inclement weather can be your friend**, creating textured or foreboding skies. This turned into a very rainy day at the beach, thanks to Hurricane Dennis, which was several hundred miles to the south. But the threatening skies arrived as the sun was coming up, creating a small window of good shooting conditions. These photos were taken just a few minutes apart.

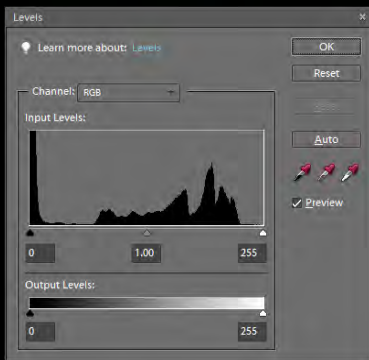
*Above: Bethany Beach, DE
Right: Bethany Beach, DE*



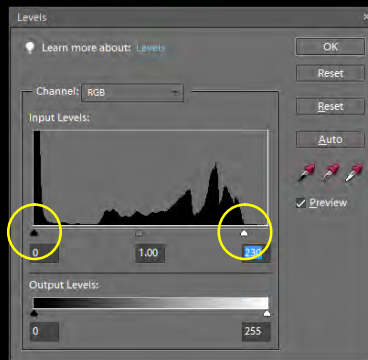
Like any other type of photography, when shooting sunrise or sunset photos, **composition is king**. Look at these four views from the battlefield at Gettysburg. By moving around ever so slightly, and changing the vantage point, I was able to get four very different options. The most boring photos result from taking your subject, in placing it in the center of your picture (just look at Tip 5). The image on the top right ended up on the cover of a book.



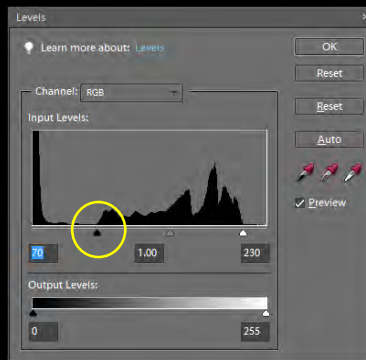
Despite all your planning, sometimes **desperate times call for desperate measures**. I was not planning to photograph this sunset. I wasn't anywhere special, actually: just at home. But when I looked out the window, I saw this sky and ran to grab my camera. The sun was already below the horizon and there was nothing exciting to silhouette in the foreground, so I ran into an adjacent cornfield and used the cornstalks to add a bit of dark texture.



Here's the photo exactly as I took it, and the corresponding Levels menu. (In Photoshop Elements, Image → Adjustments → Levels.)



A “standard” technique is to move your sliders to the darkest (left) and lightest (right) points. This didn't change much in the image.



Here I took the dark (left) slider and moved it to the right, creating an underexposed effect. Look at how this simple change made the sky far more vibrant.

Never feel guilty about photo-imaging. In fact, a little post-production is a very good thing – something that all professional photographers do. Landscape photographer Ansel Adams, a master of darkroom techniques, stated: **“You don't take a good photograph, you make it.”** Here's an example of bringing out color simply by tweaking the Levels – no other changes.

Okay, so this is the bonus tip.

If at first you **don't** succeed, try, try again. If at first you **do** succeed, don't get cocky: you're going to mess up next time, or the time after that.

And that is okay. You need to make mistakes to learn from them. So you might want to practice these techniques in your backyard or at a local park, pond or lake, before you head away on vacation: that way, you'll make the mistakes when it doesn't really matter!

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