

Concert & Music Photography — Workbook

This workbook turns the course into reps. Each section maps to one module and mixes drills, fill-in worksheets, and night-of checklists you can take into a real pit. Work through it as you shoot your first few shows, and keep the templates as the operating system for your music-photography practice.

Camera Settings for Dark Stages

Lock in a low-light kit and prove you can hit sharp, well-exposed frames before you ever stand in a pit.

Exercise: Dark-Room Settings Drill

Recreate stage conditions at home: dim the lights to a single lamp or colored bulb, have a friend move slowly through the light, and shoot. The goal is repeatable sharp frames, not pretty photos.

- Set Manual + Auto ISO, shutter 1/250, aperture wide open. Shoot 20 frames. How many are tack-sharp on the eye?

- Now switch to a deep red bulb. Dial -1 EV exposure compensation and check the RGB histogram. Is the red channel still clipping?

- Drop the shutter to 1/100 and repeat. Describe exactly how the motion blur changes.

- What ISO did Auto ISO choose at each setting, and at what point does the noise become unacceptable to you?

Worksheet: My Baseline Concert Settings Card

Fill this in for your specific camera and lens, then save it to your phone. This is the setup you dial in the moment you arrive at a venue.

Camera body

Primary lens and its widest aperture

Backup lens and its widest aperture

Default shutter speed (moving performer)

Slow-ballad shutter speed

High-energy shutter speed

Auto ISO ceiling

Default exposure compensation

Metering mode

Autofocus mode and area

File format

Checklist: Low-Light Kit Audit

- I own at least one lens that opens to f/2.8 or faster
- I have a fast prime (f/1.8 or faster) for the darkest rooms
- I have two charged spare batteries
- I have two formatted memory cards
- My camera is set to shoot RAW
- I have enabled the RGB histogram and highlight-clipping warning in playback
- I have musician's earplugs in my bag

The Three-Song Rule and Pit Workflow

Prepare to execute a timed nine-to-twelve-minute assignment cleanly and share a cramped pit professionally.

Worksheet: Three-Song Shot Priority Plan

Before a show, write your shot list in priority order so you are executing, not deciding, once the lights drop. Number them so you know what to abandon if time runs out.

Priority 1 shot (what + framing)

Priority 2 shot

Priority 3 shot

Priority 4 shot

Priority 5 shot

Band members to capture by name

Planned position changes during the 3 songs

Shot I will drop first if time is short

Exercise: Opener-Set Exposure Test

At a real show, use the support act's set to calibrate before the headliner. This drill builds the habit of arriving early and testing.

- During the opener, what shutter/ISO combination gave you sharp, correctly exposed faces?

- Where on this specific stage does clean white front light hit, and where are the dead-red zones?

- How does the lighting change on a big chorus or drop, and how will you time around it?

- What one adjustment will you make to your baseline settings for the headliner?

Checklist: Pit Etiquette and Safety Checklist

- I will keep moving and not camp the center spot
- I will crouch low when not actively shooting
- Flash is off and will stay off unless explicitly permitted
- Earplugs are in
- I have located the pit exit and the security lead
- I am wearing closed-toe shoes and dark, non-reflective clothing
- I will help, not hinder, the other photographers in the pit

Worksheet: Show-Night Run Sheet

Fill this in for each show so the same workflow runs every time, even under pressure.

Artist and venue

Doors / set time

PR or list contact name

Access terms (songs, pit or soundboard, waiver?)

Will-call / check-in location

Cards formatted and batteries packed? (Y/N)

Backup plan after the pit (where I dump files)

Delivery deadline and recipient

Access, Credentials, and Artist Relationships

Build the portfolio-to-pass ladder and the correspondence habits that keep you credentialed.

Exercise: Build Your First No-Pass Portfolio

You need images before anyone grants a pass. This exercise gets you shooting where no credential is required.

- List three local or DIY venues near you where you can buy a ticket and shoot.

- Identify two unsigned or small local bands playing soon that you can photograph.

- Draft the message you will send a band offering free, credited photos in exchange for permission.

- Which 12 to 20 frames from these shoots will become your pitch portfolio?

Worksheet: Photo-Pass Request Draft

Write out your standard pass request once so you can reuse it. Fill every field; a complete request gets approved without back-and-forth.

Subject line (Photo pass request, Artist, Venue, Date)

Publication I am shooting for + link

Show date, venue, city

Portfolio link

Statement accepting 3-song / no-flash terms

My full legal name for the photo list

Date I will send the request (1-2 weeks ahead)

Planned follow-up date

Checklist: Relationship-Building Habits

- I delivered edited selects within 24 to 48 hours
- I tagged the band, venue, and support acts correctly
- I sent the band a small credited gallery of their best shots
- I thanked the security lead and PR contact after the show
- I logged the contact and outcome in my tracker
- I reached out to at least one contact this month without asking for anything

Editing, Licensing, and Selling Your Work

Turn raw files into a tight set and license them legally and profitably.

Exercise: Two-Pass Cull and Edit Sprint

Take one real or practice concert import and run the full pipeline against a timer to build speed.

- Pass one: flag keepers and reject blurred/blurred frames. How many of your starting frames survived?

- Pass two: from near-duplicates, pick the single strongest. What is your final select count (target 10 to 25)?

- Edit one frame in the course's order (white balance, highlights/shadows, points, noise, crop, sharpen). How long did it take?

- Decide color or black and white for the set and justify the choice in one sentence.

- How long did the whole cull-to-selects process take, and where did you lose time?

Worksheet: Editorial vs Commercial Decision Sheet

For a specific intended use of one of your images, work through this to decide whether you need a release or permission.

Image and the artist shown

Intended use (describe exactly)

Is this editorial or commercial?

Is the person identifiable?

Do my photo-pass terms restrict this use?

Model release needed? (Y/N)

Property/venue release needed? (Y/N)

Trademark/logo concerns on stage? (Y/N)

Action before I proceed

Worksheet: License Quote Builder

Use this to price a single licensing request fairly and consistently. Leave the final fee blank until you have weighed every factor.

Client and type (blog / band / label / brand)

Specific usage requested

Exclusive or non-exclusive?

Duration

Territory

Reach (local / national / global)

Am I retaining copyright? (Y/N)

Final quoted fee

Checklist: Pre-Delivery and Licensing Checklist

- Final set is tight and consistent in look
- Copyright and contact are embedded in file metadata
- Files are named artist-venue-date-frame
- Web exports (sRGB, ~2048px) and full-res exports are both ready
- The paid arrangement is confirmed in writing (fee, usage, copyright retained)
- This license is logged so I will not double-license an exclusive image

Your Action Plan

1. Assemble a minimum kit: one body, one fast lens (f/2.8 or faster), two batteries, two cards, and earplugs.
2. Run the dark-room settings drill at home until you can produce sharp frames on demand, and save your baseline settings card.
3. Shoot two or three local or DIY shows where no pass is required and build a 12-to-20-image portfolio.
4. Offer those bands free, credited galleries and start your contact tracker.
5. Pitch one small music blog to cover a specific upcoming show, then request the photo pass from PR using your draft.
6. Shoot that show using your three-song shot-priority plan and show-night run sheet.
7. Cull and edit to a tight set within 48 hours and deliver, properly named and with embedded copyright.
8. Run the editorial-vs-commercial decision sheet before any non-editorial use of an image.
9. Price any licensing request with the quote builder and confirm every paid deal in writing.
10. Review your contact tracker monthly and nurture the relationships that brought you the most access.

