

Street Photography — Workbook

This workbook turns the course into a repeatable street practice. Each section maps to a course module: you will lock in fast settings and zone focusing, drill light and the decisive moment, build the nerve and ethics to work close, and edit your take into a real series. Fill the logs and templates on every outing so that within a month you have a tested shooting system, a clear personal ethic, and one finished, sequenced body of work to show.

The Street Photographer's Camera Setup

Lock in a small kit, a fast forgiving exposure, and zone-focus distances so the camera never costs you a moment.

Worksheet: My Street Kit and Default Settings

Fill this for the camera you will actually carry. Commit to one focal length and write down the go-to exposure and focus settings you will dial in before stepping out, so setup never costs you a moment on the street. Camera body (compact / mirrorless / fixed-lens / phone)

Chosen focal length, full-frame equivalent (28 / 35 / 50mm)

Shooting mode (Aperture priority + Auto ISO / Manual + Auto ISO)

Default aperture (e.g. f/8)

Minimum shutter speed floor (e.g. 1/500s)

Auto ISO ceiling (e.g. 6400)

Exposure compensation default (e.g. -1/3 to protect highlights)

File format (RAW confirmed) and shutter mode (silent / mechanical)

Exercise: Judge-the-Distance Drill

Before relying on zone focusing, train your eye to estimate distance. Pick objects on the street, guess the distance, then pace it out (one adult stride is roughly 0.75m) to check.

- How close was your guess at 2 meters, and at 3 meters?

- At f/8 with your lens, what near-to-far range is acceptably sharp when focused at 3 meters?

- What is the hyperfocal distance for your lens at f/8 (from PhotoPills or a DOF chart)?

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- Which two go-to focus settings will you memorize: a near zone and a hyperfocal everything-sharp setting?
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Exercise: Zone-Focus Capture Test

Set manual focus to a fixed distance (around 3m) and f/8, then shoot ten frames of people walking past without ever refocusing. Frame, anticipate, and fire only when subjects enter the zone.

- How many of the ten frames landed acceptably sharp inside the zone?
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- Did firing with no focus lag let you catch moments you would have missed with autofocus?
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- Were any frames soft because the subject fell outside your prefocused zone, and how will you adjust?
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- Did f/8 give you enough margin, or do you need f/11 for more depth?
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Checklist: Pre-Walk Setup Check

- One focal length chosen and committed to
- Aperture set for a deep zone (f/8 or f/11 in daylight)
- Shutter floor fast enough to freeze walkers (1/250s or faster)
- Auto ISO on with a generous ceiling
- Exposure compensation set to protect highlights if needed
- Manual focus or snap-focus prefocused to your near zone
- Hyperfocal setting noted for everything-in-focus shooting
- Shooting RAW, battery charged, card empty, camera silent

Light, Shadow, and the Decisive Moment

Train yourself to find the light first, anticipate moments, and compose a layered frame before the subject arrives.

Exercise: Fish a Patch of Light

Find a strong pool or shaft of light (a gap between buildings, a bright doorway, light off a window) and stay there. Expose for the highlight, prefocus on the lit zone, and wait for the right person to walk in.

- What was the light source and what time of day produced it?
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- What exposure compensation did you use to keep the highlight and let shadows fall dark?
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- How long did you wait before a subject completed the frame, and what kind of figure worked best?
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- What would the same spot offer at a different hour (golden hour, midday, blue hour)?
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Worksheet: Scene-Building Plan

Pick one location and plan to work it rather than grab a single shot. Fill the static elements you can pre-compose, then record what finally completed the picture.

Location and what drew you to it

Light type and direction (hard sun / backlight / reflection / neon)

Background and leading lines already in the frame

Prefocus distance and aperture set

Type of subject or gesture you are waiting for

Number of attempts before a frame worked

What the successful subject added (color / gesture / silhouette)

Best time of day to return to this scene

Exercise: Anticipation and Layering Drill

Practice photographing the future. Read trajectories, prefire at the peak, and try to stack a foreground, midground, and background into one frame.

- Did predicting where a subject would be (one to two seconds ahead) let you catch the peak?
 - Which frame has the clearest three layers (foreground, midground, background)?
 - Did you find a juxtaposition (a person echoing a poster, a sign, or another person)?
 - What distractions at the frame edges or background hurt otherwise good moments?
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Checklist: Seeing-and-Timing Check

- [] Looked for the light first, then waited for a subject
 - [] Exposed for the highlights; let shadows go dark for drama
 - [] Pre-composed the static frame before anyone entered it
 - [] Anticipated the moment instead of only reacting
 - [] Checked the background for poles, clutter, and bright distractions
 - [] Watched the frame edges for clipped limbs and half figures
 - [] Worked the scene with many attempts, not a single grab
 - [] Tried layering, juxtaposition, or reflection in at least one frame
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Working with People: Confidence, Ethics, and the Law

Build the nerve to shoot close, define a personal ethic before you need it, and know your general rights in public.

Exercise: Closing-the-Distance Drill

Push past the fear in graded steps. Start where cameras are expected, then work toward ordinary passersby, getting closer than feels comfortable with a wide lens.

- Where did you start (busker, market, protest) and how did it feel versus what you feared?
 - Did shooting from the hip or the look-past technique keep you candid and calm?
 - What was the closest you got to a stranger, and did anyone actually react?
 - When someone noticed, what defused it (a smile, honesty, a nod), and what will you do next time?
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Worksheet: My Personal Street Ethics Statement

Decide your lines now, before you are standing in front of a hard moment. Write a short personal policy you can act on by reflex.

The test I apply (e.g. would I be content if the subject saw this photo and caption)

My rule on vulnerable people (homeless, distressed, disabled)

My rule on photographing children

My response to a delete request (e.g. delete on request, no exceptions)

Whether I punch up/sideways, never down (dignity over the cheap shot)

My honesty rule on captions and staged-vs-candid

When I will lower the camera and walk on

My rule on consent for anything I publish prominently

Worksheet: Local Law Quick-Reference

This course gives general education, not legal advice. Research and record the actual rules where you shoot so you can act with confidence. Verify with a local source before relying on this.

Country / region / city I shoot in

General rule for photographing people in public here

Whether a model release is needed for editorial / art vs commercial use

Stronger image-rights rules that apply (e.g. France, Germany, Quebec)

Places that are private property despite public access (malls, stations)

Whether anyone can force me to delete photos or hand over a card here

Rules on photographing police / government buildings here

Source I verified this with (and date checked)

Checklist: On-the-Street Conduct Check

- Working close with a wide lens, not hiding behind a long zoom
- Calm and confident body language; not sneaking or hesitating
- Friendly and honest when noticed; a smile ready
- Subjects' dignity respected; no mocking or punching down
- Extra care around vulnerable people and children
- Personal ethics statement followed, not just the law
- Aware of public-vs-private property lines at this location
- Ready to lower the camera and move on if a moment turns tense

From Frames to a Body of Work

Cull ruthlessly, sequence your keepers into a themed series, and build a consistent practice you actually share.

Exercise: Ruthless Edit Pass

Take one full outing's take, let it rest a few days, then cull it in two passes in Lightroom, Capture One, or Photo Mechanic. Be honest: separate a real photograph from a moment that mattered only to you.

- How many frames did you shoot, and how many survived the first pass?

- How many true keepers remained after the second pass (one per outing is a good result)?

- Which rejected frame did you want to keep for sentimental reasons, and why did it have to go?

- Does each keeper work instantly without you explaining it?

Worksheet: Series Definition Sheet

Turn scattered keepers into a project. Look for a recurring thread in your strongest frames, then name it and set a constraint to focus your shooting.

Recurring thread I noticed (color / subject / light / mood)

Project name

One-sentence point of view (what this series is really about)

Constraint I will impose (one focal length / B&W / one area / one time of day)

Consistent edit look for the series (contrast, color or B&W, crop style)

Target number of final images

Frames I have so far that fit

Gaps to shoot next to complete the arc

Exercise: Sequence the Series

Lay your final selects out as small prints or thumbnails on a table or contact sheet. Arrange them for flow and meaning, then test the order.

- What is your opening frame and why does it set the tone?

- What is your closing frame and how does it resolve the series?

- Where did you create rhythm by alternating busy and quiet, or light and dark?

- Which strong single image did you cut because it broke the thread?

Checklist: Finish-and-Share Check

- [] Take rested before editing so the picture is judged, not the memory
- [] Two-pass cull done; final select set kept small
- [] Edits honest and documentary (no added or removed elements)
- [] Consistent look applied across the whole series
- [] Series has a named theme and a clear point of view
- [] Sequence has a strong opener, flow, and a strong closer
- [] Work put somewhere it can be seen and honestly critiqued
- [] One finite deliverable made (zine, print set, or curated online set)

Your Action Plan

1. Build your default street setup (one focal length, f/8, fast shutter floor, Auto ISO, RAW) and save it as your pre-walk preset.
2. Run the judge-the-distance and zone-focus tests until you can prefocus by eye and fire with no lag.
3. Spend one outing fishing patches of light: find the light first, then wait for the subject to enter it.
4. Work a single scene for an hour, pre-composing a layered frame and anticipating the moment instead of grabbing singles.
5. Do the closing-the-distance drill, starting where cameras are expected and working toward ordinary passersby up close.
6. Write your personal street ethics statement and research your local law quick-reference before shooting strangers again.
7. Shoot consistently for several outings, logging each one, and let the takes rest before editing.
8. Run a ruthless two-pass edit on each take down to your true keepers (aim for one strong frame per outing).
9. Find the recurring thread in your keepers, name a project, and set a constraint to shoot deliberately into it.
10. Sequence ten of your strongest frames into a finished, shareable series (a small zine or curated online set) and get honest critique.

