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## Understanding Your iPhone Camera

Before heading outdoors, it's important to get familiar with your iPhone's camera capabilities and settings. Modern iPhones (12 and above) have powerful cameras with features that can rival dedicated cameras in many situations. In this section, we cover the basics of using your iPhone camera effectively:

- **Keep the Lens Clean:** A simple but critical step – always ensure your iPhone's camera lenses are clean. Since your phone is often in a pocket or bag, the lenses can pick up dust and fingerprints. A dirty lens can make photos look hazy or blurry. Gently wipe the lens with a soft cloth before shooting. If your images look “hazy,” a dirty lens is likely the cause, so wipe it off for a clear image. This quick fix instantly improves image clarity.
- **Know Your Lenses (0.5×, 1×, 2×/3×):** iPhone 12 and later models come with multiple built-in lenses. For example, the 0.5× ultra-wide lens captures expansive scenes, the 1× wide lens is your general-purpose camera, and if you have a Pro model, a 2× or 3× telephoto lens helps you zoom in optically on distant subjects. Rather than using digital zoom (which can degrade quality), switch between these lenses for the best results. Use the ultra-wide for broad landscapes or tight spaces, the wide lens for everyday shots, and the telephoto for portraits or far-away subjects – this way you get closer without losing detail.
- **Enable the Grid for Composition:** Turn on the camera grid in your iPhone settings (go to **Settings > Camera > Grid** and switch it on). The grid overlays two horizontal and two vertical lines on your viewfinder, dividing it into nine squares. These gridlines help you compose your shots using the “Rule of Thirds,” a classic photography guideline. Key elements (like the horizon or your main subject) can be aligned along these lines or their intersections to create a balanced and eye-pleasing composition. Don't worry – the grid is only a guide and won't appear in your final photo. With practice, it will train your eye for better composition.

*Using the iPhone's grid overlay helps you compose with the Rule of Thirds. In the example above, the gridlines (enabled in Settings) divide the scene, making it easier to align the horizon and subjects creatively. Keeping the horizon level and on a lower or upper gridline often produces a more professional-looking landscape.*

- **Hold Steady & Use the Volume Shutter:** Blurry shots are usually due to camera shake. For sharper photos, hold your iPhone with both hands and tuck your elbows in to stabilize. You can also use the iPhone's volume buttons as shutter buttons – when the Camera app is open, pressing the volume up or down button will take a photo . This often gives a more stable grip (like a traditional camera) compared to tapping the on-screen shutter. It's especially useful for shooting in landscape orientation or one-handed. Alternatively, you can prop your phone on a stable surface or use a tripod for maximum stability (more on tripods later). If you have EarPods with volume controls or an Apple Watch, those can act as remote shutters too – helpful for reducing shake or including yourself in the photo.
- **Tap to Focus, Adjust Exposure:** The iPhone camera normally auto-focuses and auto-exposes, but you can manually control these for better results. Tap on your subject on the screen to set focus – a yellow square will appear, indicating the focus point . This ensures your subject (whether a person's face or a flower) is sharp. Alongside the focus box, you'll see a small sun icon. Slide it up or down to adjust brightness (exposure) before taking the shot . Sliding up makes the image brighter and sliding down makes it darker. Use this if the photo looks too dark or blown out – for example, if your subject is backlit by a bright sky, tapping the subject and increasing exposure can brighten their face, or lowering exposure can prevent a bright sky from washing out. This manual tweak helps capture images closer to how you want them to look, rather than relying entirely on auto settings .
- **Lock Focus/Exposure When Needed:** If you want to recompose your shot or prevent the camera from refocusing between shots, use the AE/AF Lock (Auto Exposure/Auto Focus Lock). To do this, tap and hold on the screen at the desired focus point until you see “AE/AF LOCK” at the top of the screen . Now the focus and exposure are locked on that area – you can reframe the shot without the camera readjusting. This is useful in tricky lighting (to avoid the phone hunting exposure) or when shooting a series of photos of the same scene. To unlock, just tap the screen again.
- **Understand Live Photos and Burst:** By default, iPhones may take Live Photos (a short video clip with each picture). Live Photos can be fun (they allow you to pick a different frame or create effects), but they also take more space. You can turn Live mode off if not needed. For action scenes (like a pet running or someone jumping), consider using Burst mode to capture multiple frames quickly. On newer iPhones, you can activate burst by dragging the shutter button to the left (in Photo mode) or by enabling the volume-up for burst in settings. This way, you can pick the sharpest or best-timed shot from the burst. It's a handy way to ensure you don't miss the perfect moment during fast action. (Note: Portrait mode doesn't support burst, so for moving subjects, regular Photo mode is preferable.)

By mastering these basics of your iPhone camera – keeping the lens clean, using gridlines, steadying your shot, and controlling focus/exposure – you'll set a strong foundation for great photos. Next, we'll explore the universal pillars of good photography: composition and lighting.