

Night Photography Notes

by Tim Isaak

Tripod – Almost always used, avoid using centre column with wind/long exposure.

Hand-held – With less than f2.0 and ISO 400 or 800.

Lenses – fast prime lenses best; wide to normal angle are common, telephoto lengths less so.

Aperture – stop down one to two stops from widest for image quality, small apertures give “starburst” effect with stationary lights.

Shutter – In urban settings times from several seconds to 30 seconds common; rural or nature settings may require several minutes.

Auto Exposure – Often fails to read low-light correctly, will give underexposure, compensate with stops of overexposure. Sources of light will also influence auto exposure; use centre-weighted or spot metering from mid-tone area to correct.

Focusing – can be difficult; auto-focus may start to “hunt.” Use manual focus or lock auto-focus on part of scene that is well lit and/or has sharper edges. With wide angle lens set to infinity focus, scene will be in focus except for area close to camera.

Cable or Remote Release – Very good idea; can get by using self-timer feature combined with on-camera shutter release.

Film Speed – slow to medium, 50 to 200; higher speeds give grain or noise.

Multiple Exposures – To include telephoto moon in shot or produce effects with people or moving vehicles in a scene.

Flash – To illuminate shadowed areas near camera; bounce or diffuse to prevent harsh light.

Filters – use graduated neutral density to balance bright street or traffic lights; tungsten filter for harsh yellow or reddish light, but will slow shutter; neutral density or polarizing filter to create longer exposures.

Full Moon – Necessary in rural settings without artificial light. In urban settings the full moon lightens sky so it will appear dark blue instead of near-black.