

Geeske's 15 top tips for taking good pictures of your dogs...

Usually you will find Top 10 lists, but when you want to take good pictures of dogs, there are two essential components to work on - the technical side of photography and the training of your dog. Most pictures I have taken of Yoshka and many other dogs, I took by myself. That is only possible, if the dogs know basic commands and will stay in the place I assigned them and in the position I put them. If you have someone else to help who is good in handling dogs and puppies without stressing them, you might be able to get good pictures of untrained dogs/puppies – but it is sooo much easier with trained dogs.

Here are my top 5 training tips to take good dog pictures:

1. Teach your dog to look at you on command.

This is important for every day life and easily done. The “watch me” command associated with treats will focus your dog on you in any situation.

2. First teach your dog to sit, down, and stand.

Every dog should know these commands, even very young puppies. Very easily taught with treats and positive reinforcement.

3. Teach your dog to sit-stay, down-stay and stand-stay.

This takes a little more patience but again with consistency, timely treats and repetition, repetition, repetition it can easily be done.

4. Train your dog with distractions and in groups.

The best pictures often are of several dogs together. You need to train your dog to “behave” and obey with other dogs around.

5. Make every photography session short and fun.

Do not overdo it, be patient and keep the treats coming.

Here are my top 10 photography tips to take good dog pictures:

1. First and foremost, get down on the level of the dog.

Sometimes pictures from above are great, interesting and fun but most of the time you want to take a picture from the same level the dog is on. Get on your knees or even your stomach.

2. Pick an interesting back ground or an open area that fades away.

The best pose or expression of your dog cannot save a picture if it is cluttered with stuff in the back and/or foreground. By using the portrait setting or a small aperture you can get nice blurry backgrounds. Play with it to make sure you have enough of the dog still in focus.

3. The best light to take pictures of Leonbergers is overcast but not too dark.

On a bright, overcast day the contrast of the black mask and light coat is not as stark. There are fewer problems with shadow.

4. On clear days, make sure the sun is always in your back or on the face of the dog.

Shadows in the wrong place and a black blob as a face can make an otherwise beautiful picture fail.

5. If needed, use a flash.

Sometimes it works best to use a flash on a sunny day, that way the dark face of the dogs will be lightened and more visible.

6. The best way a flash works, inside or out, is somewhat removed from the lens.

Build in flashes are most problematic and often cause the red eye effect. A separately attached flash can make all the difference.

7. When you take pictures of standing dogs from the side, make sure you see all four legs.

This might not be always possible but a dog with four legs visible normally looks much better than with three or only two.

8. Frame the picture.

In general you want to make sure that the dog has “breathing” room, i.e. space around the outlines. On the other hand, the dog should be the focus of the picture and not be a small spec in the landscape.

9. Get up close and personal

Sometimes a great shot is of the detail with a narrow focus that cuts off part of the dog. Use the portrait setting of your camera but keep an eye on what the auto-focus looks at. Unless you have a good reason, focus on the dogs eyes and make sure you got just a little bit of reflection to capture the expression.

10. For action shots you almost need a SLR camera if you use digital.

Most compact digital cameras have a very long delay for action shots. You might get lucky but it is very difficult to get consistently good action shots. The SLR cameras are much better, most have a “sport mode” setting that helps capturing dogs in motion. In any case, keep in mind where the light is coming from....

Last not least, take many pictures (especially if you have a digital camera) and throw all but only the very best out.

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