

Exposure Bracketing

Exposure bracketing is a technique used in photography to allow the capture of High Dynamic Range (HDR) images using multiple exposures. I.e. to expose correctly for a bright sky and also expose correctly for shadows which would otherwise be blown out or under exposed and black.

Most modern medium – high-end digital cameras allow you to perform built in Auto Exposure Bracketing however entry-level cameras don't always. However they often do allow exposure compensation to allow manual Exposure Bracketing to occur.

Auto Exposure Bracketing

For this look at your menus and AE Bracketing. If you're unsure how to do this look up Bracketing and your camera model on Google or watch a You Tube video.

Set the camera to perform either 5 or 7 shots with a separation of 1 stop.

You will often also need to set the Continuous Shutter function so that the camera can take multiple automatic shots. Make sure the camera is in Manual mode.

Set your metering up to be matrix or full average metering across the whole sensor.

Use a tripod to ensure all images are registered.

Before activating auto bracketing, take a test shot to ensure the best possible base exposure and focus. In low light conditions you should aim to have a shutter speed of no longer than 4 seconds for a 7 shot sequence and 8 seconds for a 5 shots sequence. This is because many cameras only allow up to 30 seconds of exposure on their internal timers (however some camera makes will allow beyond this, so check). The last long exposure could be longer than 30 seconds.

Carefully take a sequence of 5 or 7 shots without jogging the camera, or use a remote release.

5 or 7 shots?

Taking 7 shots can give you more choice when selecting shots to blend later, you will only use 3 of them including the base 0 shot. If you can do it with 5, depending on the conditions then that might be OK.

Avoid doing bracketing under high wind conditions except for effect. Cluds will move through the frame quickly and may be ok but waving branches and trees cannot be registered.

Easiest Manual Bracketing

For cameras that don't have Auto Exposure bracketing, then you can still do this using the Exposure Compensation dial.

Check camera is in Manual Mode, Focus the shot and take a test image. Make sure the camera is getting the best exposure for this. Then assuming in focus switch the LENS To Manual to avoid refocusing at each shot.

Using the Exposure compensation Dial set to Zero, taken the base shot.

Move the dial to Minus 1 and take a shot, then -2 and -3. Then +1, +2 and +3.

Reset the dial to zero and take a shot with your hand in front of the lens to denote the end of the sequence before the start of the next.

Practise doing this as quickly as you can between shots as lighting conditions can change rapidly.

Remember to reset the settings back to normal shooting and the lens to auto when you have finished.

Exposure Blending

Choosing the right images

Back home at the Ranch, we now need to select the appropriate shots taken of the same sequence to blend.

Usually you will start with the Base (0) image

Look at the darker exposures and choose the one where you can just see the Light is NOT blown out and there is visible detail and colour in the sky.

Look at the lighter exposures and chose the one where you can see into the shadow or darker areas.

Blending

Select these three images in your blending package.

e.g. in Lightroom. It's Photo Merge > HDR

Ensure the package correctly aligns the images and then blends them without too much ghosting. (usually moving elements).

You should now have a blended RAW file to process in the normal way.