

# Double Exposure on Film

One of the great things about using film-based cameras is having fun with double exposures. Sure, you can take two photographs into photoshop and play with them until you have got some great double exposure effects. But that takes from the fun of waiting to see just what comes out when your film is developed.

In this article we will have a brief look at how to create some fantastic shots and the methods used to achieve them.

## Why use film?

With all the effects available in any decent editing suite and even some digital cameras having built-in multiple exposure features, why would anyone want to use a film-based camera to shoot double exposures?

Personally, one of the huge thrills for me in photography is getting that perfect shot straight from the camera. No editing, no faffing about with levels and tones. Just that perfect snap, raw and unedited.

Then there is the fact that no matter how much you play with photoshop to get that perfect double exposure look, it will always be two photos that were manipulated. Where is the fun in that?

For me I love the challenge and I love the anticipation; I love the fact that I set the shots up and they worked (or even if they didn't)

That is why I do it, the enormous sense of satisfaction I get from it and of course the fun factor.

## How to shoot double exposures

Firstly, check your camera to make sure it has the capability. A quick google or check of the manual should confirm this. Generally, rangefinders and TLR's require you to move onto the next frame before your next shot, this obviously removes the option of a straightforward double-exposure. However, many 35mm and 645 cameras do offer this function.

With some 35mm cameras the trick is to take your first exposure and hold the rewind button so your film cannot move. While you are holding it, press the rewind button and push the advance button to wind the film on without actually doing it. Your camera is now primed to take its second shot.

If your camera does not support it, you can always reload your exposed film and shoot over it again. Of course, keeping a record of what shot is where on the spool is essential if you are trying for a particular image. But still it is a fantastic trick for shooting double exposures on any camera.

A good hack for this method is to shoot a whole roll of texture images, for example flowers or buildings, whatever you want your background image to be, then reload

the film and simply shoot whatever portrait shots or pets, or whatever you had in mind on top of this roll.

Assuming that you're good to go, here are some settings and shot set ups that have had the best results for me.

- 1. Exposure Settings:** With normal single-exposure film photography we would try to err on the side of overexposure. With double exposure shots the trick is to underexpose each frame. Basically, cut each exposure in half. Either make your shutter speed twice as fast or to stop the aperture size down. Otherwise detail will be lost. However, don't be frightened to play with your settings, there are some photographers who will offer completely different advice, in some cases the exact opposite!
- 2. Use a White background:** Using a white background with one of your shots is a good way to play with some interesting effects. For example, take a shot of a human subject against a white background then find a background shot to superimpose it upon. The results can be stunning.
- 3. Bear in mind how detail will be influenced:** Remember that the shadows on your first shot will be filled by your second frame and the highlights of your first frame will be lost in the second frame. Make sense? To be sure, try taking the same shot double-exposure shot twice but reversing the order. The results can be startlingly different. A good rule of thumb is to remember that whatever is the main subject of your image should be shot second. The texture or secondary image should be your first shot.
- 4. Choose your subjects carefully:** Try to achieve a balance by layering a detailed photo with one that is simpler. And again, play about with the order, but you will likely find that the better shot is with the simpler photo layered on top of the 'busy' photo. Try using cool textures, fishnets, running streams mosaic floors, then overlaying them a face or any object that catches your photographer's eye.
- 5. Forget all that and just play with a single subject:** Or you could forget all the above and just have fun with a single subject. Try it from different angles or perspectives, hold your camera upside down and make it look like a reflection.
- 6. Remember where you place objects:** Obvious this one, if you want two shots of the same object side-by-side then remember where you placed them. Or in my case remember where you thought you placed them!

## Monochrome or Color

There is an argument that monochrome works better for double-exposure as it is easier to blend two images without those pesky colors getting in the way. I would argue that this is simply down to personal preference. Sure, it is probably easier to blend two monochrome images, but is it as much fun? And if you get a color one correct just as you planned it in your mind, then that is so much more satisfying.

I look at it like this, when I assess any potential shot, I see it in my minds eye how I want it to look. Basically, go with your gut instinct.

## Time to play

Your first attempts might be disasters or they might be masterpieces, it does not matter. The point is it is a learning curve, but its fun, play with the settings, try your own tricks. But above all, enjoy!