

ERIC KIM

STREET PHOTOGRAPHY GUIDEBOOK

Courage. Composition. Contact. Chaos.

A field manual for seeing harder and shooting from the gut.

THE STREET IS THE ~~GYM~~ FOR YOUR EYES.

Street photography is not about permission from reality. Reality is already moving. Your job is to move with it. Walk. See. Smile. Risk. Get closer. Shoot from the gut. Edit with cruelty. Publish with generosity. Repeat until fear becomes fuel.

EK COMMANDS

- No perfect camera. Use what is in your hand.
- No hiding in theory. Walk the street.
- No middle distance. Get close or get far.
- No cowardly editing. Kill weak frames.
- No boring life. Photograph the life you actually live.

THE PROMISE

- More courage.
- Sharper eyes.
- Cleaner compositions.
- Better edits.
- More personal work.

INSANELY PRACTICAL STREET PHOTOGRAPHY

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- 01 Manifesto: The Street Is the Gym
- 02 Camera as Courage Device
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- 10 Avoid the Middle Distance
- 11 Work the Scene / Contact Sheets
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USE THIS BOOK

Read one lesson. Walk outside. Shoot for one hour. Repeat. This is not a museum. This is a machine.

YOUR CAMERA IS NOT A STATUS OBJECT.

It is a courage machine. A perception weapon. A tiny excuse to walk harder, look deeper, and make contact with the world.

01 Keep it simple

One camera. One lens. One setting you trust. Complexity is fear wearing a technical costume.

02 Be ready

Camera in hand. Wrist loose. Eyes hungry. When the street strikes, you answer immediately.

03 Move your body

Composition is not in the menu. It is in your feet, knees, shoulders, and nerve.

04 Shoot first, theorize later

The street rewards action. Your archive teaches you after the fact.

THE BEST CAMERA IS THE ONE THAT MAKES YOU FEARLESS.

COURAGE WITHOUT CRUELTY.

Street photography needs nerve, but nerve does not require disrespect. Photograph humanity like you are part of humanity. Strong images and human decency can coexist.

RESPECT

Do not photograph to humiliate. Make images that reveal life, not cheap superiority.

SMILE

A smile disarms fear. Your energy enters the frame before your camera does.

EXPLAIN

If someone asks, be honest: "I am a street photographer. I thought the moment was beautiful."

DELETE

When a situation feels truly wrong, walk away or delete. No photo is worth losing your humanity.

OWN IT

Do not hide behind fake invisibility. Be bold enough to be seen making pictures.

THANK

If you interact, thank people. Make the street warmer than you found it.

THE ETHIC: BE FEARLESS AND KIND AT THE SAME TIME.

PHOTO 01



Jazz Hands: Shoot Your Personality

Hollywood. A face, a gesture, a blast of light, and the photographer close enough to be part of the event.

WHY IT WORKS

The frame has frontal energy. The hands reach toward the viewer. The sun flare makes the moment feel loud. It is not polite distance; it is contact.

FIELD DRILL

For one walk, only photograph gestures: hands, open mouths, pointing, reaching, laughing.

LESSON 1

GET CLOSE OR GET FAR

The dead zone is the middle distance: too far for intimacy, too close for context. Strong street photos often choose a side.

THE OPERATING RULES

- 1 If the subject is the emotion, move closer until the frame feels alive.
- 2 If the scene is the story, move far enough to make the geometry intentional.
- 3 Do not zoom with cowardice. Move your feet, knees, shoulders, and nerve.
- 4 Use the .7 meter drill to train your body to tolerate proximity.

CLOSER OR FARTHER

THE .7 METER CHALLENGE

- Set focus to roughly one-arm distance.
- Shoot 36 frames only at that distance.
- Ask permission when needed; shoot candid when natural.
- Afterward, mark which frames feel physically alive.

PHOTO 02



Hearts Tattoo: Intimacy at Night

Downtown LA. Fresh, darkness, a direct face, street lights turning into a constellation around the subject.

WHY IT WORKS

The photo works because the background almost disappears. The face carries the frame. The darkness is not a flaw; it is pressure.

FIELD DRILL

At night, make ten portraits where the background is almost black and the face becomes the whole universe.

LESSON 2

PHOTOGRAPH ACCORDING TO YOUR TEMPERAMENT

Do not imitate a dead master if your blood wants to move differently. Your personality is not a weakness; it is your photographic engine.

THE OPERATING RULES

- 1 Extrovert? Talk, smile, interact, get close.
- 2 Introvert? Wait, layer, observe, disappear into patience.
- 3 Restless? Hunt. Patient? Fish. Both are legitimate.
- 4 Your best style is the one that gives you more energy after shooting.

KNOW THYSELF

SELF-KNOWLEDGE FIELD TEST

- Shoot one hour silently.
- Shoot one hour interacting with strangers.
- Compare energy, fear, and image strength.
- Build your method around what feels most alive.

PHOTO 03



Pinnocchio Shadow: Light as Knife

A face in profile, a hard vertical slash of light, and a shadow that becomes a second character.

WHY IT WORKS

Light creates structure. The shadow is not decoration; it doubles the subject and makes the frame psychologically charged.

FIELD DRILL

Find one hard shaft of light. Stay there for 30 minutes. Let people enter and exit until the picture appears.

LESSON 3

FOLLOW THE LIGHT, THEN SUBTRACT

Great light makes ordinary subjects mythic. Bad backgrounds kill good subjects. The photographer's job is to subtract until the signal is brutal.

THE OPERATING RULES

- 1 Look for hard sunlight, doorways, windows, headlights, flash, and reflections.
- 2 Expose for the highlights to make shadows rich and graphic.
- 3 Move until the background becomes simple.
- 4 When in doubt, remove more from the frame.

LIGHT IS A KNIFE

LIGHT TRAP DRILL

- Choose one wall, corner, or patch of light.
- Do not leave for 20 minutes.
- Make 50 frames as people pass.
- Edit to the one image with the strongest silhouette or face.

PHOTO 04



Van Eyes: Found Surrealism

A vehicle becomes a face. The street turns into a joke staring back at you.

WHY IT WORKS

The photograph sees what most people walk past: a surreal human echo inside a banal object. Street photography is pattern recognition with a pulse.

FIELD DRILL

For one walk, photograph only accidental faces: posters, cars, mannequins, reflections, shadows.

LESSON 4

REALITY IS FULL OF VISUAL JOKES

Street photography is not only people. It is the collision between signs, bodies, ads, shadows, symbols, and timing.

THE OPERATING RULES

- 1 Read the street like a sentence: subject plus background equals meaning.
- 2 Look for signs that contradict or amplify the person in front of them.
- 3 Posters, mannequins, ads, reflections, and shadows are silent actors.
- 4 Humor is serious. A visual joke can reveal the truth faster than explanation.

THE STREET LAUGHS

JUXTAPOSITION HUNT

- Find 10 signs or advertisements.
- Wait until a person enters the right position.
- Make the sign and human talk to each other.
- Edit for the frame with the clearest collision.

PHOTO 05



Bus Stop Ad: Layers and Faces

A foreground passerby and two advertisement faces create a three-person composition that feels uncanny.

WHY IT WORKS

The bus stop is a stage. The real person, the printed faces, and the reflection build a layered social scene.

FIELD DRILL

Visit three bus stops. Make layered frames using posters, glass, waiting bodies, and reflected streets.

LESSON 5

LINGER LONGER THAN COMFORTABLE

The amateur sees a scene and leaves. The stronger photographer stays until the scene transforms.

THE OPERATING RULES

- 1 When something almost works, stay.
- 2 Work the scene from left, right, high, low, near, far.
- 3 Shoot through the awkwardness after you think you are done.
- 4 The first frame is often proof you noticed. The later frame is the photograph.

STAY

25 PERCENT MORE RULE

- When you think you have the shot, shoot 25 percent more.
- Change position after every five frames.
- Wait for gesture, eye contact, or a new subject.
- Compare the first frame to the best later frame.

PHOTO 06



Hanoi Train: Mood and Negative Space

A passenger in shadow, window light, a landscape moving outside. Quiet, cinematic, restrained.

WHY IT WORKS

The image proves that street feeling can happen in transit. The dark interior creates intimacy; the bright window gives the eye somewhere to breathe.

FIELD DRILL

Make ten photos from inside vehicles: tuk-tuk, bus, train, car, elevator. Use windows as frames.

LESSON 6

MONOCHROME SIMPLIFIES THE WORLD

Black and white removes the noise of color. You begin to see shapes, faces, light, shadows, edges, and soul.

THE OPERATING RULES

- 1 Use monochrome when color is distracting or weak.
- 2 Look for contrast first: bright against dark, face against shadow.
- 3 Let grain, blur, and imperfection increase mood.
- 4 A black-and-white photo must survive on form and emotion.

FORM OVER COLOR

MONOCHROME WEEK

- Set camera preview to black and white for seven days.
- Do not switch back to color while shooting.
- Each night, pick three frames for light and gesture only.
- Write one sentence: why this photo works without color.

PHOTO 07



Only in America: Flash Color Attack

Hollywood color. A direct flash. Pink shirt, blue can, palm trees, street attitude.

WHY IT WORKS

Flash freezes the moment and makes color punch. The subject confronts the camera; the whole frame feels immediate.

FIELD DRILL

Use flash in daylight for one hour. Photograph from the front, not the side. Make color aggressive.

LESSON 7

FLASH IS A COURAGE MULTIPLIER

Flash is not only technical. It changes your psychology. You become visible. The photo becomes visible. The moment becomes harder to ignore.

THE OPERATING RULES

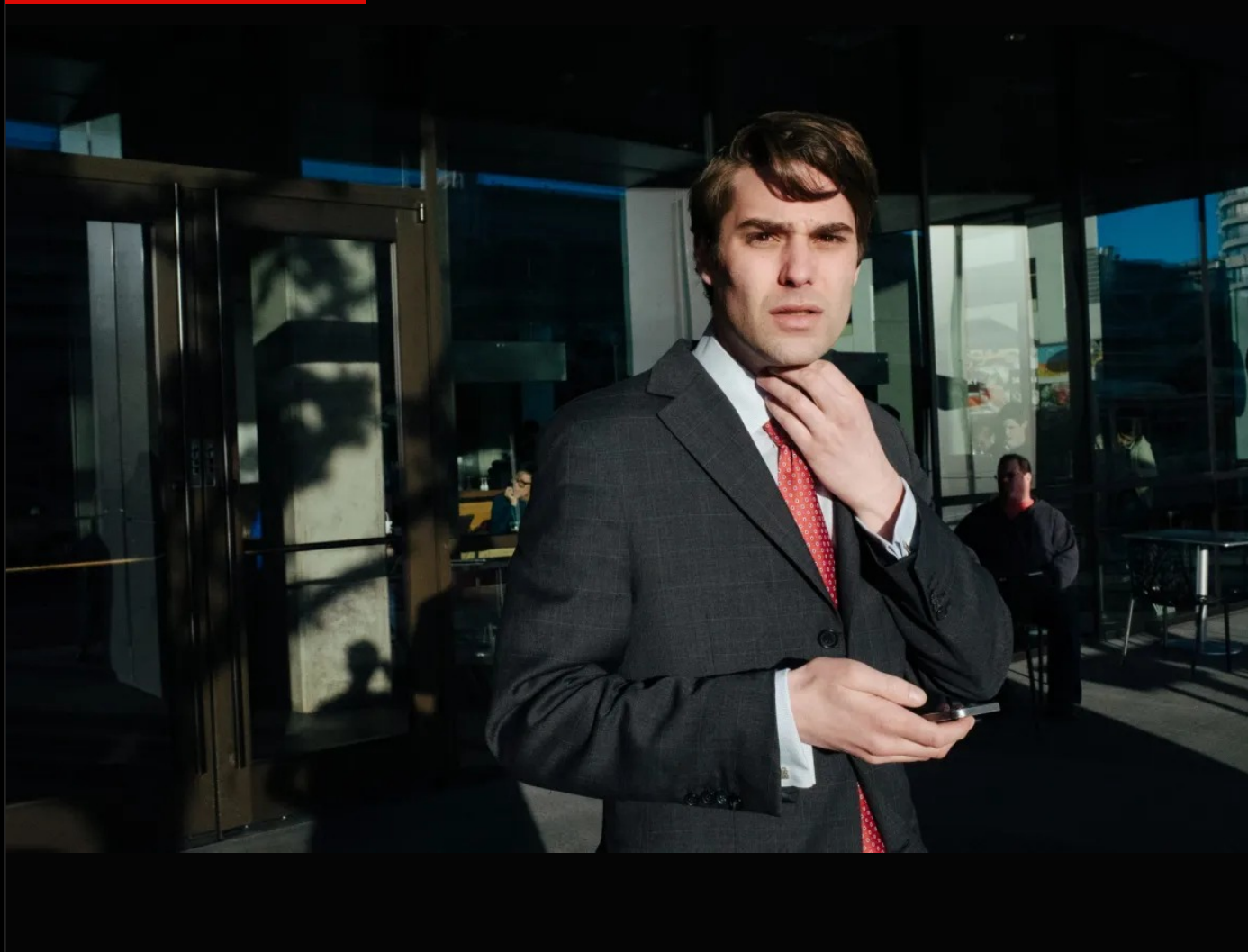
- 1 Flash adds contrast, freezes motion, and creates a distinct look.
- 2 Use it close. Flash from too far away feels weak.
- 3 Own your presence. Do not sneak and then flash like a thief.
- 4 Smile after the frame. Human warmth solves many tensions.

BE SEEN

DAY FLASH DRILL

- Set flash on. Walk in bright light.
- Make 20 frames within two arm lengths.
- Prioritize gesture, color, and face.
- Review which frames feel impossible without flash.

PHOTO 08



Suits: The Power Portrait

A suited man adjusts his tie in hard light. Business costume, shadow, and hesitation collide.

WHY IT WORKS

The gesture makes the picture. Without the hand at the tie, it is a man in a suit. With the gesture, it becomes tension.

FIELD DRILL

For one walk, do not shoot until the hands do something. Hands reveal psychology.

LESSON 8

HUNT GESTURE LIKE PREY

A boring subject becomes alive the instant the body speaks: hand to face, mouth open, stride, lean, glance, touch.

THE OPERATING RULES

- 1 Watch hands first. Hands betray the inner state.
- 2 Wait for micro-drama: adjustment, reach, hesitation, surprise.
- 3 Shoot before the gesture peaks, during the peak, and after.
- 4 The best street photographs often happen in half a second.

HANDS TELL TRUTH

GESTURE SHEET

- Make a list: hands, mouth, eyes, stride, posture.
- Shoot 10 examples of each category.
- Print or grid them into a contact sheet.
- Notice which gesture type repeats in your strongest photos.

PHOTO 09



Far Scene: Intentional Distance

A lone figure on steps, a large house, hard light, and quiet space. The frame breathes.

WHY IT WORKS

Distance works because it feels deliberate. The subject is small, but the environment becomes the psychological subject.

FIELD DRILL

Make a frame where the person occupies less than 5 percent of the image but still carries the story.

LESSON 9

AVOID THE MIDDLE DISTANCE

Too many frames fail because they are neither intimate nor architectural. Choose physical intimacy or intentional distance.

THE OPERATING RULES

- 1 Close: faces, texture, gesture, confrontation, emotion.
- 2 Far: geometry, isolation, environment, social context.
- 3 Middle distance often looks accidental.
- 4 Crop by moving your body before you crop in software.

NO DEAD ZONE

TWO EXTREMES WALK

- For 30 minutes shoot only very close.
- For 30 minutes shoot only very far.
- No middle-distance frames allowed.
- Compare which extreme suits your temperament today.

PHOTO 10



1 / 13

2 / 13

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13 / 13

Contact Sheet: Work the Scene

Multiple frames from one situation, one selected image marked. This is the hidden labor behind the decisive frame.

WHY IT WORKS

Contact sheets destroy the myth of effortless genius. Strong photos are often mined from repetition, patience, and editing.

FIELD DRILL

Choose one scene and make at least 25 frames. Mark your best frame. Then write why the others failed.

EDIT LIKE A BUTCHER. SEQUENCE LIKE A POET.

Shooting creates raw material. Editing creates meaning. The camera is generous. The editor must be ruthless.

1

DUMP

Import everything. Do not judge while your blood is still hot.

2

FIRST PASS

Flag only the frames that punch you in the gut.

3

KILL

Remove duplicates, almos, weak faces, dead edges.

4

PAIR

Find echoes: gesture, light, subject, mood.

5

SEQUENCE

Build rhythm: impact, breath, surprise, silence.

6

PUBLISH

Do not hoard. Publish, print, blog, zine, teach.

THE ONE QUESTION

**Would this
frame make a
stranger stop
scrolling, stop
walking, or
stop thinking?**

THE STREET OPERATING SYSTEM

Open this page before every walk. Then close the PDF and hunt.

01 LIGHT

Where is the hard light? Where are the shadows?

02 BACKGROUND

Can I make it cleaner by moving two steps?

03 DISTANCE

Am I too comfortable? Closer or farther.

04 GESTURE

Hands, eyes, mouths, stride, posture.

05 EDGES

Kill distractions at the frame edges.

06 LAYERS

Foreground, subject, background. Make depth.

07 HUMOR

Does reality contain a visual joke?

08 MYSTERY

Can the photo ask a question instead of explain?

09 REPETITION

Shapes, faces, signs, shadows repeating.

10 EXIT

Smile, thank, move. The street keeps flowing.

30 DAYS. ONE CAMERA. NO EXCUSES.

The goal is not portfolio perfection. The goal is courage density. Make daily contact with the world.

1 - 3

Camera in hand: shoot for one hour without checking the LCD.

16 - 18

Bus stop / cafe linger: wait until the scene changes.

4 - 6

Gesture hunt: hands, faces, stride, mouths, eye contact.

19 - 21

Flash courage: make 10 direct flash photographs.

7 - 9

Light hunt: only shoot hard light and deep shadow.

22 - 24

Personal street: photograph family, home, routes, rituals.

10 - 12

.7 meter drill: one-arm distance portraits or candid frames.

25 - 27

Contact sheet: work one scene until you are bored, then shoot 25% more.

13 - 15

Very far drill: make humans small inside strong geometry.

28 - 30

Edit 10 frames. Sequence 5. Publish 1 mini-zine/blog post.

FINAL OUTPUT: 30 DAYS -> 300+ FRAMES -> 10 SELECTS -> 1 PRINTED MINI-ZINE.

THE NEXT ~~PHOTOGRAPH~~ IS ALIVE.

Do not worship your archive. Do not ask the algorithm to bless your eyes.
Walk into the world and make a fresh proof of life. The street does not care
who you were yesterday. Good. Neither should you.

WALK MORE

SEE HARDER

GET CLOSER

EDIT RUTHLESSLY

PUBLISH GENEROUSLY

END OF GUIDE - BEGIN THE WALK.

PHOTO INDEX + SOURCE NOTES

Photo examples in this draft were selected from public Eric Kim Photography pages and the open-source photo/download ecosystem. Replace, reorder, or swap with higher-resolution originals before final publication.

01	Jazz Hands / Hollywood	erickimphotography.com/blog/70-street-photography-tips-for-beginners/
02	Hearts Tattoo / Downtown LA	erickimphotography.com/blog/70-street-photography-tips-for-beginners/
03	Pinnocchio Shadow	erickimphotography.com/blog/18-street-photography/
04	Van Eyes / Europe 2015	erickimphotography.com/blog/70-street-photography-tips-for-beginners/
05	Bus Stop Advertisement	erickimphotography.com/blog/70-street-photography-tips-for-beginners/
06	Hanoi Train Window	erickimphotography.com/blog/70-street-photography-tips-for-beginners/
07	Only in America / Flash Color	erickimphotography.com/blog/70-street-photography-tips-for-beginners/
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PUBLICATION NOTE

For a final commercial release, relink to the full-resolution originals, add exact credits/captions, and export a print edition plus a web-optimized PDF.