Photographing still-life with a smartphone Lightroom camera

As a communication professional, you should be taking high-quality photos and videos. In the absence of having a dedicated camera on hand, your smartphone is pretty good at image capture. As an example, here are some tips on using a smartphone to photograph objects.

Note one of my obsessions: it is always useful to mock up design proposals. Remember the packaging project, where a smartphone was used to take adequate photos for a slideshow presentation, like a PowerPoint.

You can improvise if you do not have a tripod. Use a time delay to prevent camera shake (when your finger activates the camera button).

This is the resulting photo. Digital cropping will simulate a less wide-angle lens.

Crop in Photoshop

Remove background blemishes in Photoshop

Make changes as you wish

Or just show with no background

Lightroom exercise

Modern smartphones can take surprisingly good pictures – this is because of a combination of advanced miniature camera technology and software for clever pre- and post-image production.

You potentially get a better result if you shoot in "camera raw" (digital negative), as more digital information is then available for post-production adjustments. For this, Adobe's Lightroom application is useful. Lightroom can be installed on your smartphone, tablet and computer – and images can be synced across devices.

Below you will install the application, and take a photo with your smartphone for editing on your computer.

1. Install the Adobe Creative Cloud app on your smartphone. Open, and log in with your Adobe account.
2. Install the Lightroom app on your smartphone.
3. Then install Lightroom on your computer, using the Creative Cloud install functionality.
4. Open the Lightroom app on your smartphone. Make sure that your smartphone is WiFi connected, and then take a photo using the Lightroom camera.
5. Then open Lightroom on your computer, and confirm that this same photo has been synced there.
6. The Lightroom application on your computer is similar to the Photoshop Camera Raw filter that you learned in Photoshop Lesson 1. So experiment. Satisfy yourself that you can crop, manipulate light and colour, etc. The tools are on the right near the top.
7. To continue in Photoshop, right-click on the image and go Edit in Photoshop, or press ⇧⌘E.

8. As a next exercise, take a high-quality still-life image, like of a water bottle, book or object in your possession (keys, makeup etc.), using the tips below.
9. Improve the image first in Lightroom then in Photoshop.
10. Optionally, send me a before-and-after result to the designated Microsoft Teams space, so that I can admire your work.

If you have time, experiment also with HDR in Lightroom. With HDR, or High Dynamic Range, multiple exposures are (automatically) merged to a single shot, to enhance details in shadows and highlights. This is helpful in mixed-light situations.

Tips on how to use your Lightroom smartphone camera to take a still-life

The screenshot above is taken from a Samsung smartphone. This is very similar to an iPhone.

From the dropdown 1., select the Professional mode. From 2., set the timer to maybe 5 seconds so that activating the shutter with your finger does not cause camera-shake.

SS in 3. is for shutter speed and 4. is ISO. Because a smartphone has a fixed size aperture, these are the only two parameters of exposure. So click on 4. and set the ISO to as low as possible for the best quality photo. To compensate, the camera will decrease the shutter speed.

You are now ready to take the photo.