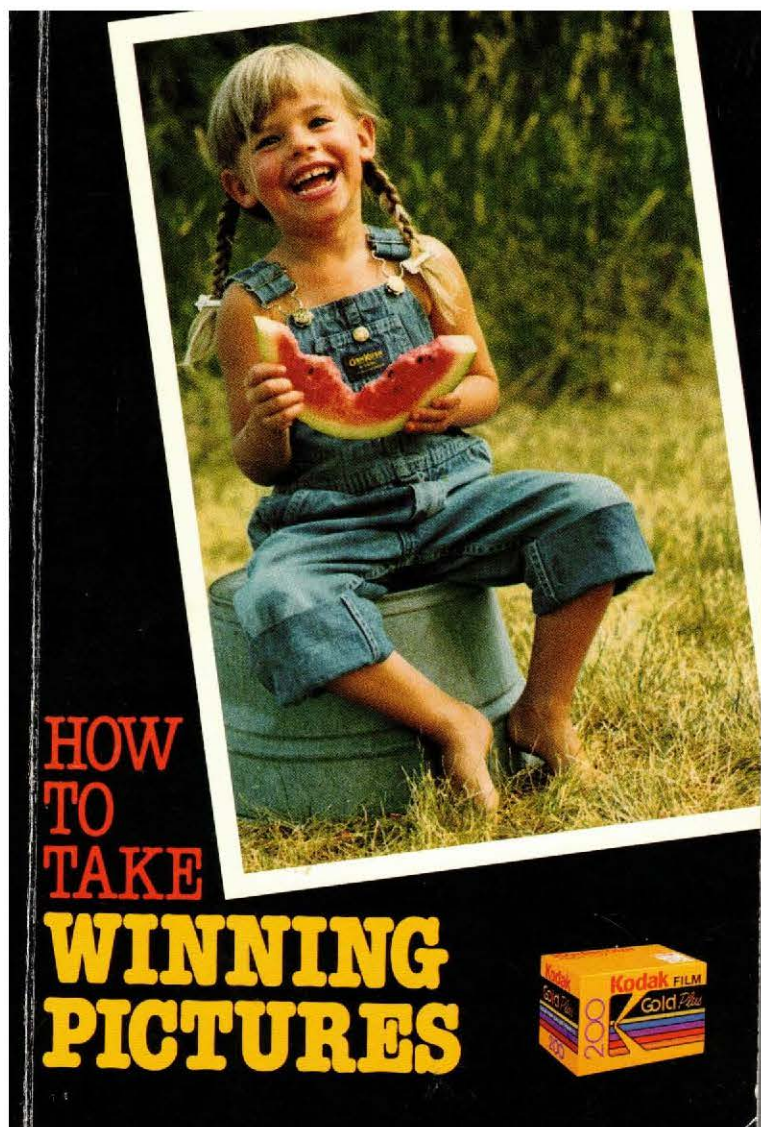




HOW TO TAKE **WINNING PICTURES**

Written for Kodak by Jeff Wignall

Consumer Imaging
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SOFT FOCUS

Lenses and other camera equipment can be manipulated to show scenes in a way new to the eye. For example, soft-focus and diffusion attachments bring to still photography what background violins bring to the cinema: an atmosphere of romance. And the same way that background strings can lull us into a particular frame of mind, so too can a simple technique like diffusion color a viewer's interpretation of a scene. By drawing the viewer's attention away from the specific details of a composition, you can concentrate their attention on mood.

Homemade Diffusers:



Lens misted by breath.

The simplest and most unpredictable method of diffusion is to mist the lens with your breath. After misting the lens, quickly put your eye to the viewfinder, and as the mist lifts, snap the shutter when the desired effect appears.

The most popular method of making homemade diffusion devices is to smear petroleum jelly on a clear glass filter

(such as a skylight filter). The advantage of this type of homemade diffusion is that you can adjust the effect while viewing through the lens, simply by resmearing the jelly. The disadvantage is that it's messy and you risk getting the glop on your lens. A safer, but more permanent alternative, is to use clear nail polish on an old filter. In either case, it's best to build up the density gradually until you get the desired effect.

For occasional use, you can try stretching a piece of nylon stocking over the front of a lens and securing it with an elastic band. As a variation on this method, try using colored stockings—particularly pastel hues.



A doughnut shape (center kept clear) of vaseline applied to an old haze filter was used to make this picture. Be careful to keep the lens free of vaseline.

Landscape and still life photographers first began using the technique more than a century ago in an attempt to capture the soft, dreamy quality of impressionistic paintings. Since then portrait photographers have also come to cherish the technique for its ability to discreetly soften facial lines and wrinkles, without the falseness that retouching often adds. Whatever the subject, soft-focus is at its best in sidelighted and backlighting situations, where luminous highlights spill into shadow regions to soften contrast and create a delicate high-key airiness.

Diffusion filters are available in varying degrees of effect, ranging from a gentle softening to an overall mistiness. There are also "clear spot" diffusers that leave the center of the image sharp. And diffusion lenses are specially made to create the romantic look.

SELECTIVE FOCUS



Selective focus is most easily achieved by focusing on a nearby subject with a medium telephoto lens set at a large aperture, such as $f/2.8$.

With an SLR camera you can use a large f-stop, such as $f/2.8$, with a normal or telephoto lens to emphasize the subject by contrasting it against a background that is distinctly out of focus. This technique is called selective focus. By restricting the zone of sharp focus, the viewer's eye is drawn instantly to the heart of the composition.

You can apply selective focus to your work in

several different ways. Its most useful application is in separating an individual subject from confusing or distracting surroundings—isolating one face from a crowd, for example. But it can also be used in a more subtle manner, to accentuate a telling detail of a larger subject. You might, for instance, photograph a potter at work by selectively focusing on his hands working the clay, while allowing his figure to fall out of focus. You can also use limited depth to turn out of focus foregrounds into natural frames—as with a single rose bud surrounded by a blur of green foliage.

Because only a small part of your picture will be in focus in most cases, it's imperative that you choose your point of focus with extreme care. Areas that are not meant to be sharp should be unquestionably out of focus.

Limiting Depth of Field

The two main considerations in limiting depth of field are focal length and aperture. The longer the focal length of the lens and the wider the aperture, the shallower the region of sharp focus will be. You can achieve some degree of selective focus with almost any lens (with the notable exception of super wide-angles, which have near-infinite depth of field), but generally those in the medium telephoto range (80 mm to 150 mm) will do the job best. Lenses shorter than this tend to produce a lot of inherent depth, and those much

longer frequently have only a few inches of depth, even at very small apertures.

Another factor that must be taken into account is the distance from lens to subject. The closer you are to your main subject, the less depth of field there will be with any given lens at any given f-stop. In other words, a 100 mm lens focused on a subject that's only 10 feet away will have considerably less depth than the same lens (at the same f-stop) focused on a subject that's 20 or 30 feet away. Moving closer aids selective focus.