

How to be a good model

by Tony Land



Note how the colors on the structure of the Doc Paulson contrast nicely with the blue water. Shooting up helps simplify our background, and this tends to make for a more pleasing composition.

Here at Divetech one of my many jobs is serving as one of our photo pros. From time to time this means I get to dive with our guests and take photos of them for social media, and for the guests themselves to have as complementary souvenirs.

There are days where this is a wonderful experience where I cannot believe I am being paid to do such a thing. There are other times where I could be paid a million dollars and I don't want to get in the water.

Aside from some of the technical failures one periodically gets when

shooting underwater, what is the variable? Most often the visibility in the Cayman Islands is amazing, and the conditions are favorable. So what's the difference between a good day and a bad day shooting divers in the water?

The diver. The subject. The person or persons I am trying to shoot. Sometimes divers just don't have a good understanding of how they can be a good subject for the photographer, and when this is the case, my job becomes very difficult. It's also hard to explain to the client

afterwards why I don't have any good shots to give them.

So with that in mind, here's my quick article with 6 easy steps on "How to be a good model."

I'll begin with the basics. If you are not an underwater photographer, allow me to explain the 3 golden rules of the sport. Even though you are not the person taking the pictures, understanding a few basics will help understand what is going through a photographers mind when shooting divers underwater.

The 3 rules of underwater

photography:

- Get close
- Get closer
- Shoot up

Of course rules are meant to be broken, but most often adhering to these principles will help yield good shots.

Get close. When you think you are too close, get closer. Photographer like myself will commonly shoot super-wide angle lenses, and this requires the subject to be almost within arm's reach of my camera.

Shoot up helps simplify our

background, and this tends to make for a more pleasing composition. More on this later.

Good photographs are simple. They draw your eye to the subject and have a simple balance of foreground and background. Often the best shots are where the subject and background are contrasting in some way. Contrast may be accomplished with depth of field, or most often with underwater photography, by contrasting colors. Do you remember your color wheel from school? Opposite sides of the color wheel contrast nicely. Caribbean water is obviously, blue. And colors such as reds, oranges and yellows contrast nicely with blue.

So without further ado, here are a few tips if you want to have some great images of yourself, and become a favorite dive buddy for your underwater photographer friends...

Be predictable

My particular photographic style is to shoot divers, in conjunction with some of the reef elements the diver is diving amongst. The corals and sponges of the reef provide the color contrast I just spoke about, and work well when they can fit into the frame. This is all part of the composition.

To do this, while I swim with the diver(s) I am constantly looking for reef elements I can frame the diver with. I need to coordinate these spots with where I think the diver will go. So the worse thing for me is to watch a diver swimming along a straight line, for me to swim ahead and set up a shot where I think the diver will be, only for them to abruptly change directions, and swim away from me. This brings me to my next point:



This was a test shot I dug out of the trash to illustrate a point. I had thought the divers would swim to this gap in the coral reef, which is where I took this test. After I took this shot, they turned and swam away from me.

Don't worry about hitting the camera

The reason most people make abrupt turns from where I want them to be, is they are worried they are going to hit my camera. Remember rules 1 & 2 I said above. I need to be close to you to get the shot. How close? Usually about 3-4 feet away.

Divers get freaked out when they are this close to an underwater camera rig. More so when they realize how much the setup costs. But I'm here to tell you not to worry. I will get out of your way at the last second.

Swim at the camera

As I said above, when shooting photos, I constantly look for corals, sponges, or reef features that will compliment the shot. I also look for spots where I can physically fit into without disturbing the corals around me. So when I find that spot, and frame my shot, I'll need the diver to swim into a



This diver is about 3 feet from my camera lens. Although he looks further away, this is the result of the wide angle lenses commonly used in underwater photography. Get closer!

small range where I have composed. If you'd like a great shot of yourself underwater, swim at my lens. Don't worry about hitting me, I will get out of your way. But get close. Often the best shots are just outside of arm's length. Remember rules 1 and 2 above! Get close!

Go slowly

There are a lot of variables involved in making a good shot. Every shot is different, depending a number of factors. Even on the same dive, differences in depth, surroundings, and most importantly, where the sun is, will all affect my camera and strobe settings for the shot. This is ok, but it does take time to get these settings correct.

Once I select my spot to shoot from, I must do the following:

- Compose, or frame the shot
- Get my exposure settings correct for the ambient



I managed to salvage this shot using Lightroom as I didn't have enough time when I took the shot to properly expose the image, or set my strobes correctly.

light and sun direction

- Get my strobe power settings correct
- Get my strobe placement correct
- Take a test shot to verify my settings are correct, if not, repeat steps 2-4

All of these things take time to do. Over the years I've gotten pretty proficient at getting the shot set rapidly, but I still need a few seconds to accomplish it.

I've had customers who watch me swim past them as fast as I can to give myself more setup time, only for them to swim after me just as fast. When I turn around, the subject diver is right on top of me, and I have no

time to set up the shot. Swim slowly!

Face the camera somewhat

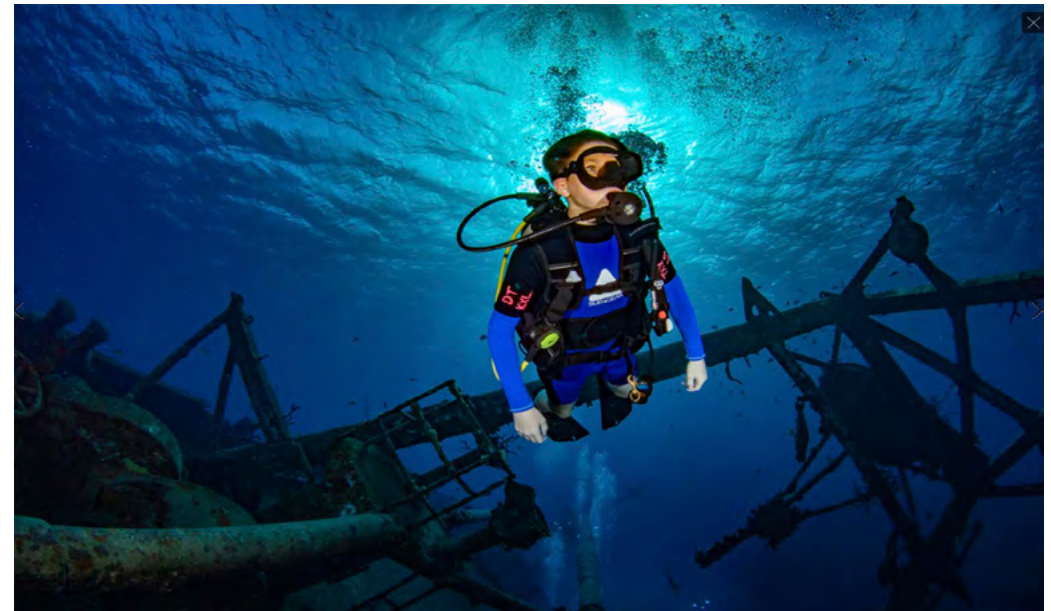
No one likes shots of peoples's asses. Well maybe some people do, but that discussion is best left for some risque Reddit subforums. For diving, the best shots are head-on.

Years ago I dived with a co-worker who would always turn away from me as soon as I pointed the camera at him. For months I just assumed he didn't like having his picture taken, so I stopped trying. I later learned he was told by a 'photo pro' to never look at the camera, so



Diver butt shots aren't as good.

Even if you aren't looking at the camera, facing it somewhat makes for a more appealing photograph.





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he diligently followed this advice for years.

In my humble opinion, this advice could not be more wrong. I'm unsure if this was the actual advice given, or if it was something misunderstood. Shots of people's backs or even sides are generally not good ones.

There's a range of angles that make for pleasing diver composition. I won't overload you with angles and details, so the simple rule of thumb is face the camera with your head, and part of your torso.

While you don't need to stare

into the lens of the camera, your face should be at such an angle that all you'd need to do to see the camera is move your eyes. If you need to move your head to see the camera, that doesn't work well for the shot. But whatever you do, please don't turn away, unless of course you just don't want your photo taken.

Stay off the bottom

In the 3 golden rules I mentioned above, you'll note the 3rd rule is 'shoot up.' Good photos are generally simple photos. When shooting down,

a cluttered reef background can take away from your subject. Shooting up allows one to capture a water background, making for a simple composition with your subject. Of course, this cannot happen, unless the photographer can get below you to shoot up, so you need to allow him or her room to do this. Also, crawling along the bottom of the dive site gives you more opportunity to hit things unintentionally with your fins, dangling gear, or your body. Stay up and stay off the bottom of the dive site.

Aim for good trim and posture

Good photography is all about good composition. Composition is simply defined as 'arranging the objects in your photographic frame so they have an appealing look.'

Some objects cannot be moved, such as the reef structure, or corals that live on it. Other things can be moved, and those things of course are the divers. We of course don't need to have GUE-like perfect trim and form, but having a reasonable diving posture is helpful to creating a good photograph.

Watch your breathing

The last tip I can offer, is probably one of the most important. To watch your breathing cycle. After I've gotten my composition, test

shot, strobe placement, and exposure figured out, and the diver is actually swimming where I want them to be the last variable is their breathing pattern.

Nothing ruins a shot like a face full of exhaled bubbles, so I try to time my shot when you are inhaling. This is a complex balance between the proper distance for my composition and strobe power, so hopefully I can capture you in this narrow distance without bubbles obstructing your face. For some divers it seems like they are one big exhalation.

Summary

Of course you are diving to have fun. Unless you are the subject of a paid photo shoot, just go dive and have fun. If I happen to be in the water with you, most often I will give you any shots I take of you, even if they don't meet my own definition of a 'great shot.' But if you want those shots to be amazing photos you can frame and hang on your wall, follow the tips I've given you above.

Have fun and safe diving!

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Guidelines for contributors

The response to UwP has been nothing short of fantastic. We are looking for interesting, well illustrated articles about underwater photography. We are looking for work from existing names but would also like to discover some of the new talent out there and that could be you! UwP is the perfect publication for you to increase your profile in the underwater photography community.

The type of articles we're looking for fall into five main categories:

Uw photo techniques - Balanced light, composition, etc

Locations - Photo friendly dive sites, countries or liveaboards,

Subjects -, Anything from whale sharks to nudibranchs in full detail

Equipment reviews - Detailed appraisals of the latest equipment

Personalities - Interviews/features about leading underwater photographers

**If you have an idea for an article,
contact me first before putting pen to paper.
E mail peter@uwpmag.com**

How to submit articles

To keep UwP simple and financially viable, we can only accept submissions by e mail and they need to be done in the following way:

1. The text should be saved as a TEXT file and attached to the e mail

2. Images must be attached to the e mail and they need to be 150dpi

Size - Maximum length 20cm i.e. horizontal pictures would be 20 cm wide and verticals would be 20cm high.

File type - Save your image as a JPG file and set the compression to "Medium" quality. This should result in images no larger than about 120k which can be transmitted quickly. If we want larger sizes we will contact you.

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