

STANLEY LEARY

People & Location Photographer

www.StanleyLeary.com

The Psychology of the Telephoto Lens

February 2009



Give Stanley a call for your next project at 770.998.3504 or email him at stanley@stanleyleary.com.

Links

- [Bio](#)
- [Blog](#)
- [Calendar](#)
- [Client List](#)
- [Past e.Newsletters](#)
- [360 Spherical Panoramas](#)

Speaking Engagements

THE ART INSITUTE OF ATLANTA

Guest Lecturer, Feb 2009
Teaching Business Practices in
Photography program.

UNIVERSITY OF THE NATIONS, KONA, HAWAII

The Psychology of the Telephoto Lens



Editor's note: I'm sending this out early because February is a packed month for me. In addition to my shooting schedule I am speaking to students at the Art Institute of Atlanta, students in the photography school for Youth With a Mission campus in Kona, Hawaii ([click here for link](#)) and speaking to my colleagues at the Southwestern Photojournalism Conference in Fort Worth, Texas (www.swpic.org) late in the month.

When you increase the depth-of-field with a telephoto lens (stop it down) so that the background is sharper the background will appear closer to the subject than it will with a wide-angle lens. Objects in a photograph made with a telephoto lens make those objects appear closer together than in "real life." The longer (more powerful) the lens the closer together they will appear as well as closer to you. It's a powerful tool. You can use it to make all kinds of statements.

A sports photographer may use this technique to show a baseball pitcher in his windup; the scoreboard in the background shows a full count and the bottom of the 9th; You can see, again from the scoreboard brought up close behind the pitcher that it is a no-hitter. Now that's a story telling and powerful photograph all because of the creative use of telephoto lenses and selective

Guest Lecturer, Feb 2009
Teaching Lighting, Portraiture and
Business Practices in School of
Photography program.

SOUTHWESTERN
PHOTOJOURNALISM
CONFERENCE, FORT
WORTH, TEXAS

Guest Speaker, Feb 2009
Teaching Business Practices

“What I need is a telephoto lens.” We’ve all said this. It doesn’t take long to discover we can’t get close enough to our subjects with a “normal” lens.



If you have kids in sports or the performing arts or if your interest is photographing birds or wild animals either rules or common sense keep our subjects just too far away for interesting photos without a long lens.

Professional photographers reach for their telephoto lenses for the same reason – to fill the frame with the subject.

If they can, the professional photographer may use their longer lenses to tie a subject to its soundings. In the last

focus.

If the photographer had used a shallow depth-of-field you couldn’t read the scoreboard or if a wide-angle lens was used the scoreboard would have been too far away to read.

In portrait photography a medium telephoto lens shows faces in a normal perspective as compared to the distortion a wide-angle lens. A moderate telephoto lens of say 80mm to 100mm lens on a 35mm camera will put you about five to seven feet from the subject for a head and shoulder’s photograph.

When photographing wildlife the rule of thumb is to use a minimum of 300 mm lens fill the frame. You usually don’t want to be five to seven feet from wildlife. That’s why wildlife photographers use 400mm, 500mm, 600mm or even as long as 800mm lenses.



When you begin to shop for a telephoto lens you’ll find many choices for the same focal

newsletter I talked about using wide-angle lenses to show a person in their environment. This can still be accomplished with the use of remote control cameras put in place prior to an event. A remotely controlled camera taking pictures up close of a lion feeding on a carcass beats than risking your life.

One of the most creative tools a photographer has is controlling depth-of-field. Depth-of-field is simply the area in focus in front of and behind the point focused of focus. Telephoto lenses have shallow depth-of-field as compared to wide-angle lenses. With either lens the smaller the f-stop (f16 vs. f8) the deeper the depth-of-field. Of course, the reverse is true. With either type of lens the depth-of-field is shallower the more open the f-number (f4 vs. f5.6).

By controlling (limiting) the depth-of-field you can force the viewer 's attention to only what you want them to see. Take a picture of a football receiver catching the ball. If the depth-of-field was deep and almost everything was in equal focus the player and the ball would be lost in the color and detail of the crowd in the stands in the

length lens. Nikon makes lenses that cost a few hundred dollars on to up to \$25,000. The *f*-stop (aperture) is a big factor in the cost. The lower the number (faster the lens) the more expensive and heavier the lens.

There are two advantages to the faster lenses. First of all the faster lenses, like *f*/2.8, allow taking photos in less light. This is important for the wildlife photographer in the woods at dawn or dusk when the animals are out.

The second advantage of the faster lenses – they allow for more shallow depth-of –field.



It is possible to rent these longer, faster lenses from some rental houses in major cities

background. If the same picture were made using a telephoto lens with a shallow depth-of-field you can isolate the player and the ball from the rest of the picture thus calling attention to what you want the viewer to see.

Portrait photographers use medium telephoto lenses to call attention to the face and not the background both in indoor and outdoor portraits.

instead of buying them.

Before mounting a lens on your camera ask yourself, "What do I want to say with this picture? What effect will help me to communicate this message to my audience?"

What lens will it be?

When you next reach for a telephoto lens it may be for more than just to make the subject appear closer. Just as wide-angle lenses not only include more stuff, any lens is a tool that can be used to make your point.

[unsubscribe](#)

[subscribe](#)

1420 Parkmont Drive, Roswell, Georgia 30076