

REFLECTIONS



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The Wonderful World of Filters – (Part II The Graduated Neutral Density Filter)

by Michael A. Di Stefano, MNEC

I told you about the most important filter to have, the Polarizer, in Part I of this article. Now, let us talk about the filter I feel is the second most important, the Graduated Neutral Density Filter. It has many slightly different names, Graduated ND Filter, Split Neutral Density Filter, Reverse Graduated Neutral Density Filter, and Colored Graduated Filter.

No matter what type of photography you tend to shoot, everyone shoots landscapes too. For great landscape images to pop, you need dramatic lighting to give depth and texture to the image. With dramatic lighting also comes a host of problems to overcome. One such problem is uneven lighting in your composition. An early morning or late afternoon set-up is one where there most likely will be areas in bright direct sunlight and other areas in deep shadows. You can expose for the bright areas, and the details in the shadows will be lost. On the other hand, you can exposure for the shadow area and the bright area will be blown out. There is no one exposure that can render both areas correctly. First, you must train yourself to recognize this situation when it presents itself. The human eye is a wonderful and vastly superior sensor of light than film or the best digital chip being produced. Becoming aware of this unseen problem, and knowing how to deal with it, will greatly improve your final image.

All film and sensors can only record a certain range of light levels. For slide film, it is the narrowest, about 3-4 stops from brightest white to darkest black. Color negative print film can capture a wider range of about 5-7 stops, and B&W about 8-10 stops. With digital cameras, this exposure latitude is measured by the sensor's dynamic range, and displayed by the histogram readout. In most cases, dramatic lighting far exceeds

the range of slide film, and pushes the limits of color negative print film. As for digital sensors, I am no expert and do not know the exact limits of the technology, but I have read there are similar restrictions that need to be dealt with.

So, what is one to do if the brightness of the scene is more than what your film or sensor can handle? The answer is, change the range of brightness. This is where the Graduated ND filter comes in. This filter has one half clear glass or resin plastic, and the other half tinted with a neutral gray coloring. The tinting is in degrees of f-stops. Usually 1, 2 and 3 stops of tinting, meaning that a 1-stop filter will hold back 1 stop of light from passing through it. The 2 and 3 hold back 2 stops and 3 stops respectively. In the middle where the clear meets the tinting is what is called the transition. The transition zone can be what is called hard or soft. A soft transition is where the tinting changes from its dark area to clear more gradually and over a longer length of distance of the filter. A hard transition is the opposite, where the tint changes more abruptly over a short distance. The soft transition is easier to work with, as it is less noticeable if not properly positioned or there is an irregular boundary between the light and dark areas in your composition. The hard transition works best in situations where the boundary between light and dark is straight and well defined. A characteristic of Graduated ND filters is that the smaller the f-stop used in your exposure the more pronounced the transition will appear in the final image. This is also a determination factor for using a hard vs. soft transition.

Most photographers are familiar which the circular screw-on filters, but this is one case where you want to seriously consider a rectangular filter system. If you buy a round screw-on Graduated ND filter, the transition will always be in the center of the viewfinder. You will only be able to compose images where the light and dark boundary is in the middle of your composition. That is

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Color Slides	Martha Kerns
B&W Prints	Ken Wiedemann
Color Prints	Ray Guillette
PSA/NECCC	Dan Charbonnet
Multi-screen	Martha Kerns

STONY BROOK CAMERA CLUB

PURPOSE: To promote enjoyment and proficiency in all aspects of photography through education by mutual exchange of knowledge and experience; and, to promote a broad appreciation of our environment.

MEETINGS: Meetings will be held on the first and third Thursdays of each month, except for no meetings in July and August. Other Workshops and Print/Slide Study Nights may be scheduled on the second and fourth Thursdays. Consult the SBCC Calendar of Events. All meetings start at 7:30 P.M. The regular meeting place is Stony Brook Audubon Preserve, Norfolk, MA off Route 115. At other times activities are scheduled in other nearby locations.

DUES: Individuals: \$30.00, Families: \$40.00, and \$15.00 for students and members over 65 years of age. To be eligible for competitions, dues must be paid by the first competition in November.

NEWSLETTER: Published six times during the year for Aug/Sept, Oct/Nov, Dec/Jan, Feb/Mar, Apr/May, and Jun/Jul and solely for the information, guidance and enjoyment of the Stony Brook Camera Club, Norfolk, MA

OFFICERS: Elected annually and serve as the executive committee with two past presidents. The Stony Brook Camera Club is affiliated with the New England Camera Club Council and is a member of the Photographic Society of America

not likely, and very restrictive. A rectangular filter system has a holder that screws-on the lens. The filter is then slid into the folder and can be adjusted infinitely up and down and the holder can be turned to make the transition pass diagonal though the image. This gives the photographer all the freedom to compose his / her image anyway they want and the Graduated ND filter will be able to adapt. Examples of placement of the transition are the water line of a lake that is reflecting the sun lit mountains and sky, an edge between dark green pine trees and the light rock face of mountains, and the horizon of any seascape. An interesting variation of the Graduated ND filter is the Reverse Graduated ND filter. In this case, the darkest part of the tint is at the center transition boundary and it turns to a lighter tint as it moves away from the clear side. The reason for this is for many sunset or sunrise shots the sky is brightest at the horizon and turns darker as you look higher in the sky. The Reverse Graduated ND filter has the darkest tint in the middle to compensate for the brightest part of the sky being on the horizon. Another variation is the Colored Graduated Filter. Not only does this filter compensate for the difference in exposure of light and dark areas, but it also adds color to the tinted half of the filter. As with all filter use, the main intent is to make the image better without making it look like you used any filters. With Colored Graduated Filter that is easier said than done. I love my full collection of 12 or more Colored Graduated Filters but I have taken images that were not as subtle as I would like to see the effect come out.

How does one know which strength Graduated ND filter to use? You can simply measure the exposure difference with your camera's light meter. Set the camera on manual, and find the right exposure for the shadow areas. Then move your camera's spot meter to the bright area and read how many stops difference there is between the two areas. If for example there were a 3-stop difference, I would use a 2-stop Graduated ND filter. Why not a 3-stop filter? Well, bright areas are suppose to be lighter than dark areas. If you totally compensated for the differences in the bright and shadow areas the resulting image would be flat and lack that popping effect of dramatic lighting. In addition, it is helpful to bracket not only with exposure, but to also bracket by using different strength Graduated ND filters. But if you were to only get one filter, the 2 stop soft transition Graduated ND filter is the one you should get. The rational behind this thought is a 1-stop filter in a 2-stop difference from light to shadows is not going to be as effective as a 2-stop filter in a 3-4 stop difference from light to shadows. You can use a 2-stop filter in a 2-stop difference situation, but a 1-stop filter is useless in a 2-3 stop difference situation. The best is to have a 1 stop and 2 stop filter, either of which can be used alone, but the two together can be used as a 3 stop filter for really extreme lighting conditions.

The easiest way to position a Graduated ND filter is by using the depth of field preview button on your camera. By darkening the scene in the viewfinder, you will more easily be able to see the transition boundary and place it accurately in the composition. A 2-stop filter can be placed higher than normal if the difference is only 2 stops so that only the lightest portion of the filter is used. Always be careful to not let any edge of the filter be in the image area. It may not be visible with the lens wide open, but at the smaller apertures, the increased depth of field will show the edge of the filter even at the clear end.

As I have pointed out in past articles and workshops, you have to take control over your photographic experiences and see the potential in the scenes before you. Knowing when to use a Graduated ND filter, which strength to use, how to position it, and make it seem as though no filter was used will undoubtedly make your images rise to a higher level of proficiency and make for more dramatic images.

Just a quick note...It was another great year for Toys for Tots, 44 toys were donated! We made a lot of children happy this holiday season. Thank you again for your generous support of this worthy cause.

From the desk of Paul Burke:

SO YOU WANNA WIN A COMPETITION!

Eyes flaring! Teeth baring! The thrill of victory! The agony of defeat!

Welcome to Competition Night. Although the above is a bit dramatic, there's definitely a heightened level of electricity in the air on competition night. And this occurs, I am told, in each and every camera club.

The motivation to win a competition is varied. But it exists in a large number of members. Just look at the huge turnout and the number of entries on competition night.

Perhaps you're new. Allow me to share some sage advice. *If you wanna win a competition, ya gotta follow the rules!*—like the rule of thirds, like having a leading line (in the proper direction of course), like having a clearly defined center of interest, like having the entire subject in focus...like “staying within the lines”, as my kindergarten teacher always harped.

I wonder where the art world would be today if Picasso and Dali “followed the rules”. Mmmm. Just this week, a Picasso crayon sketch that probably took Picasso 3 seconds to draw sold for \$40,000. If you happen to have seen that sketch, Picasso definitely didn't follow the rules.

So what's my point? My point is this: that although competition can be fun and help one achieve a high level of satisfaction, competitions may not be the be all and end all for camera club photographers.

More than one of our veteran photographers has advised, “take photographs that please you”. Now, one may never win a competition taking shots that please that person, but the results will definitely provide as much, if not more, satisfaction as winning a competition.

There was nothing more exciting and pleasurable to me than including in my recent member slide show, my “Ice Egg”, which drew more than a single chuckle and “What the heck's that?”, at one of last year's image study nights. However, to me it's a masterpiece of nature that I was able to capture on film.

When you take photographs that please you, the results represent all that is beautiful inside you, which is something no one else in the universe can duplicate. When you take photographs that please you, the result is that you become the artist that you and only you can be, for it represents the deepest beauty that you see in the magnificent world in which we live. So go for it!

If you still wanna win a competition, continue to take shots that please you and the artist within, then “go off line”, follow the rules, and win a competition. There's a need for both in the *club* and in the *world*.

Congratulations to Gail Hansche! She won the Grand Prize in the National Wildlife Federation's 34th Annual Photography Contest (2004)!

Here are the details from the desk of Dan Charbonnet:

Her photograph, “Alligator with Blue Crab in Mouth”, appeared in the National Wildlife Magazine with the following caption:

“Creeping along on her knees following a spoonbill on Sanibel Island in Florida, Hansche heard a splash, spun her camera around and started clicking. The result: this 8-foot alligator about to chomp a blue crab. *“It was a once in a lifetime photo,”* says the U. S. Postal Service worker. *“If I had looked to see what maid the splash, I never would've gotten the photo. It was over that fast.”* To freeze frame this life-and-death struggle, she used a 500mm lens with a 1.4x teleconverter.”

Her winner was chosen from over 2,000 entries received. Thirteen shots won various awards in the contest. The winners were selected by the editors of National Wildlife on the basis of originality and technical execution - and their potential for helping viewers gain a greater appreciation for the natural world.

Any members interested in entering next year's competition should visit the magazine's website at www.nwf.org/nationalwildlife and click on “Photo Zone.” The site also has other contest submissions.

And Congratulations to Chuck Call. He won First Place in a photo contest sponsored by Village Photo in Franklin, MA.

Also:

A terrific photographer and former club member, Ashish Kirtania, has wonderful photographs posted on his web site.

Check out: www.kirtaniaphoto.com.

Check out Gary Stanley's article in Vivid Light magazine (#39), "Let the Weather Affect Your Photography".

Here are a few of his tips:

“Shower Caps: Have you ever heard of people who take towels from hotel rooms? How about ashtrays? Maybe shampoo? It's free anyway, right? But shower caps? Yes, I know, this guy is strange! I have shown more workshop participants the value of something as simple as a shower cap to quickly cover your camera and lens when it starts to rain or when it's drizzling. By the way, you can buy the ones the beauty salons use. I paid \$3.50 for 50 of them at the place where I go. They are even a little bigger.

Plastic Bags: I usually keep a couple of 30 gallon plastic bags folded up in my photo vest so that if it starts to rain hard, I can quickly cover my entire camera, lens and most of my tripod and make a mad dash for the van if I want to. I also use the plastic bags to kneel on when the ground is wet, snowy or sandy.”

Also:

“Remember this important tip: "You can take a warm camera out in cold weather, but you can't take a cold camera suddenly into a warm environment." Condensation becomes an issue if you go from the outside cold into a warm house, or from an air-conditioned car out into the heat of a summer day. You can use a large gallon-size zip-lock plastic bag (or similar) when going from the cold into the heat (from outside, into the house), as condensation will form on the bag and not the camera.”

For the entire article go to:

<http://www.vividlight.com/articles/3904.htm>

Looking for used camera equipment, or wanting to sell some???

Place an ad in the next Reflections.

Send me an email (hennyapril@verizon.net) with all the information and I will post it in the next newsletter.

PHOTOGRAPHIC SOCIETY OF AMERICA
67th Annual International Conference of Photography



August 28 – September 3, 2005
Salt Lake City
UTAH

Multi-Screen 2004-2005

- | | |
|----------------|----------------------|
| 1. After Dark | 13. Machinery |
| 2. Bicycle(s) | 14. On the Beach |
| 3. Blue | 15. Part of a Flower |
| 4. Boat(s) | 16. Photojournalism |
| 5. Broken | 17. Seashore |
| 6. Church | 18. Shadow(s) |
| 7. Clock(s) | 19. Softness |
| 8. Door(s) | 20. Speckled |
| 9. Graveyard | 21. Sports |
| 10. Green | 22. Tree(s) |
| 11. Lighthouse | 23. Window(s) |
| 12. Lock(s) | 24. Winter Activity |

2004-2005 Stony Brook Camera Club Field Trip Schedule

FEBRUARY 19th, 2005

MAGIC WINGS, MA

MARCH 19th, 2005

WATERFALLS OF CONNECTICUT

APRIL 16th, 2005

LEXINGTON/CONCORD WALDEN POND, MA

MAY 21th and 22nd, 2005

MARTHA'S VINEYARD, MA

JUNE 11th, 2005

LUPINE FESTIVAL, NH

Paint Lic # 14590

Contractor Lic # 117164

HMD
Home Repairs
painting

Harry Davis

508 543-4588

2004-2005 PROGRAM SCHEDULE

<u>DATE</u>	<u>PRESENTER</u>	<u>MEETING THEME</u>
2/3/2005	All SBCC members	Competition #4
2/10/2005	4 SBCC VIP's	Workshop: Composition
2/17/2005	Digital Committee	Workshop: Color Management and Printing
2/24/2005	All SBCC members	Image Study - Prints, Slides, & Digital (moderator Ray Guillette)
3/3/2005	All SBCC members	Competition #5
3/10/2005	Rick Clorin	Workshop: Sports Plus
3/17/2005	Dick & Joan Shirley	Program: Same Place, Different Perspective
3/24/2005	All SBCC members	Image Study - Prints, Slides, & Digital (moderator Ray Guillette)
4/7/2005	All SBCC members	Competition #6
4/14/2005	All SBCC members	SBCC Multi-Screen Selections (moderator Martha Kerns)
4/21/2005	Guillette & Marshall	Program: David Hughes Show
4/28/2005	All SBCC members	Image Study - Prints, Slides, & Digital (moderator Ray Guillette)
4/29/2005	7 Hills Camera Club	Inter Club Multi-Screen Competition
5/5/2005	All SBCC members	Annual Business Meeting & Print/Slide/Digital Image of the Year
5/12/2005	Digital Committee	Program: T.B.A. (To be Announced)
5/19/2005	Jake Mosser	Program: Salmagundi
5/26/2005	All SBCC members	Image Study - Prints, Slides, & Digital (moderator Ray Guillette)
6/2/2005	Ray Guillette	Workshop/Program: Celebrating the Landscape
6/9/2005	All SBCC members	Annual Awards Banquet & Member's Digital Show

Something cute from the desk of Karl West:

It is a Computer Survival Kit.

For Christmas I got a see through plastic bag with all sorts of unusual items such as, an eraser, toothpick, marbles, etc. With it was a card that read: "The Band-Aid is to help you cure the virus. The toothpick is to help you pick the best websites. The eraser is to delete unwanted files. A paperclip is to help you keep your documents together. A cotton ball is to cushion the hard drive when it crashes. Marbles are to replace the ones you lose when a file is accidentally deleted. The "Smoothie". (a small hard candy), is because you are one."

Two Photography exhibits at the MFA in Boston:

January 11 – June 29, 2005 : Photographs by Hiroshi Sugimoto: The Sylvan Barnet and William Burto Collection

August 21 – December 31, 2005: Ansel Adams



STONY BROOK CAMERA CLUB "REFLECTIONS"

A PSA Award-Winning Newsletter

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FIRST CLASS MAIL

