

5 Things to Consider for Better Action Photography



Photography is a pervasive ingredient of society that we often take for granted. We see amazing photographs of celebrities, landscapes, pets, and sports figures that we enjoy for a split second before moving on with our day. Little thought is given to the effort behind these photographs until it is time for us to try to create a similar shot of Jonny or Susie's football game or the hairy guy that always dresses up like a knight in your amateur dramatics group (the one with the armour that may have fit back in his high school's rendition of Henry the 8th but doesn't anymore). You just *know* it'd be good to get some shots of him swinging that mace made of painted foam around, but you aren't quite sure how to do it.

As we get into a few tips that will help you accomplish your goal and get that shot, you will see that most of these concepts are pretty simple and easy to remember. The implementation, however, can be difficult. Trying to focus on a running football player, in wind gusts of 30 miles per hour, with your long telephoto lens acting as some sort of physics-defying wind magnet is more difficult than you might imagine!

Like with any other endeavour, practice will eventually make perfect (or at least get you close given some time).



So, let's get into some tips that can help your action photography get to that next level. The common denominator in this style of photography is speed. Pretty much every sport from back garden ballgames to the professional sport of your choice is going to involve people and

objects moving at a speed faster than your average photograph. The tips below discuss how to manage the increased speeds in such a manner that the end result is a photograph worth saving.

1. Lens Choice

First, lens choice. As a general rule, you want a lens that is as sharp and fast as possible. Depending on what you are shooting, you are likely going to want something that can get close to the action. If you are shooting a sport like motor racing, hockey, football, or anything else with a large playing surface, your best bet is to purchase or borrow a fast zoom lens such as a 70-200mm $f2.8$ or something similar. If you have good lighting, there are quite a few options for longer telephoto lenses that won't break the bank but that will still provide great images.



If you are shooting a sport or activity with a smaller surface that allows you to physically get closer to the action, something like a 50mm lens might be a good option providing you can actually get close enough to your subject without being pummelled by a fast-moving football. In these cases, don't be afraid to move around the edges of the playing surface to get different angles and compositions. Sometimes simply moving to the other side of the court, etc. will allow you to get the shot you are looking for.

Basically remember:

- Large playing surface = Use a zoom lens to get close to the action.
- Smaller playing surface = Move around!

What Kind of Motion Should You Show?

There are two approaches to photographing motion. You can *freeze* the motion in progress (we'll talk about this shortly) or you can *capture* it in a manner that shows the motion. If you choose that option, there are two ways to do it. You can either allow motion blur into the photograph, or you can pan along with your subject and blur the background to indicate motion. So, set your camera mode to "Shutter Priority" and let's jump right in!

2. Motion Blur



To introduce motion blur to a photo, simply lower the shutter speed enough that the sensor picks up a bit of your subject's movement. There are different ways of doing this. You can simply take the photo as you follow your subject with your camera and with a slower shutter speed they will leave "trails" as they progress through their motion. Or, if you know where your subject is going to end up (like a runner at the finish line or a baseball player at home plate, etc.) you can pre-focus on where they will end up and snap the picture as they move into the frame. This will also capture the motion while helping provide a sense of action to the shot. Another fun way to be creative with this is to use a slower shutter speed that shows motion blur while turning your flash on in *rear curtain sync* mode. This will fire your flash at the end of the exposure capturing both the

motion trails and a relatively sharp capture of your subject.

3. Capturing Motion

To capture a motion blurred background with a reasonably sharp subject, you actually slow the shutter speed down even more! Try using shutter priority and setting your shutter speed somewhere around 1/100th of a second or less. Don't forget to switch your focus and shooting mode to continuous with the highest frames per second setting your camera has, lock your focus as best you can on your subject, and hold the shutter throughout the entire sequence of motion that you want to capture. Just like in archery and jump shots, be sure to follow through! Keep pressing the shutter button until after the motion sequence has completed. Doing this will invariably leave you with quite a few shots of missed focus, weird blurring, etc. but, with practice, it is a skill that can be developed into consistent results.



4. Freezing Motion



This might actually be one of the simplest pieces of the puzzle! Freezing motion is all about getting your shutter speed high enough that the camera doesn't show the movement. Depending on what you are shooting, you might have to get shutter speeds up into the thousandths of a second! Of course, when doing this, you have to be in an area that has excellent, bright lighting. Obviously, the shutter isn't open very long in these cases so, the more available light in this case, the better.

5. Lighting

If having your shutter speed very high isn't an option, but you still want to freeze movement, flash is your best (perhaps your only) option. Utilizing flash enables you to capture an image of your subject completely frozen in motion because the sensor in your camera only "sees" the momentary flash and captures it.

This is where you are able to start getting a bit more creative and stepping outside the box. Moving to an off-camera flash setup with wired or wireless triggers will give you options for controlling the placement of the flash and how the

image turns out. Granted, depending on the event you are shooting this might not be an option, but when you have the opportunity, give it a go!

