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## For New Students: Is the Photo 143 Introduction to Digital Photography Course Right for Me?

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**S**o you are looking for a photo course, have become interested in digital photography, and somehow came across City College's Photo 143 offering. The Catalog description seemed interesting enough but you are wondering if it is really the class you should take and if so, what will be required in terms of equipment, time, effort, etc.

Specifics on how the class is run, the grading and attendance issues, data on some of the topics, etc. are all contained in the Course Outline/Syllabus which is available for you to download and read as well. That alone may answer your questions but there are always others that crop up depending on specific students' needs.

### *Prerequisites*

If you want to simply learn how to use your new camera, whether film or digital, and have no interest in getting deeper into photography courses, then you may only need to take the **Photo 105 Introduction to Photography**. It was originally designed as a course for non-majors but has become quite popular with students simply seeking a good grounding to go and take good travel or fun shots.

But that class does not meet the requirements of a prerequisite for further courses in photography. If you want to progress into more advanced levels you will have to take either the **Photo 100 Beginning Black and White Photography** course (which is the entry level into a film-based track but also highly

recommended for ANY student serious about learning photography) or the **Photo 143 Introduction to Digital Photography**.

### ***Prior Experience and Photo knowledge***

We frequently get students who have had entry level photography at some other college or institution. The easiest solution for them is, during registration when your previous transcripts are analyzed, if there was what is called “articulation” between their previous school and City College, the system will indicate that you have had the equivalent of, say, the Photo 100 class, and you can move right along in the progression. If that situation does not exist then our system will require you to take our prerequisites. There are no prerequisites for Photo 100 and Photo 143, but if you felt you wanted to bypass those and take an intermediate or advanced class the system will not automatically allow it.

There is a way around it but it is a double edged sword and in my experience it almost always comes around to negatively impact the student as well as the instructor and class. We try to sequence our classes so that each builds on the last and preps for the next. When you get out of sequence even if you have SOME of the needed skills it is unlikely you will have them all and that forces you into some serious extra work to catch up on very short notice. The instructor has a right to assume you have full command of the material contained in the prerequisite course and will operate accordingly. If you do not, it will be your problem to resolve.

Additionally, once you have received a waiver for a prerequisite, the system will now see you as having actually taken that course and you will not be allowed to take it since it looks like a repeat which is not allowed. So think very hard about trying to get around a prerequisite since in the end the only one hurt will be you. Nevertheless if you feel you can meet ALL of the demands of the prerequisite course, the instructor of the course you want has the authority on their discretion to grant you a waiver. Different instructors ask for different “proofs” of your ability ranging from seeing a portfolio to giving you the equivalent of the final exam for the class you claim to have had. The instructor is the one who will have to deal with it if your actual skill and knowledge level falls short so it is totally within their discretion as to whether to allow it or not for their section.

Even if you have had what appears to you to be the prerequisite class some time in the past, still don’t automatically assume it ought to be OK. Technology and

times have changed, tools have changed, there is much that is different just in the last few years. If you seriously want to be the best you can be, you will be far better off actually taking the prerequisite course. Some of it will possibly be review for you. Great, it ought to be easy but still afford you a chance to hone some skills. Other parts will be new or presented in a new fashion.

This is not a time to let ego or image get in the way of education. If you are taking this with a thought toward generating a revenue stream from your photography, then be cautioned that it is a highly competitive discipline with work procurement sometimes hinging on small differences in skill and style so there is no such thing as wasted education. But there is such a thing as missed opportunity...

And as regards the 143 class *per se*, a previous beginning Black and White or other film based class is not a substitute for 143 if 143 is a prerequisite such as for the **Photo 243 Advanced Digital Class**.

### ***Picking an Instructor***

Within limitations of meeting official curricula mandates, the various instructors are free to conduct the class, structure and sequence assignments and topics, as seems to them the best way to present the material. Instructors, just like the photographic artists they are, have their own "style" which, alas, may work better for some students than for others.

That is a fact of life in any of the creative disciplines. But issues of style and approach and personalities aside there is one thing none of them can do, and that is to feed you some golden pill to success. They can all present the material as well as they know how, use their individual and unique knowledge, skills, and experiences to make it interesting and understandable, but like leading a horse to water, they cannot make you drink.

None of them can give you a shot that injects you with talent and skill because that particular serum does not exist. They can, at best, show you how to develop it on your own. What you do with what they present is what will make all the difference.

Many instructors, because they are also current or former working photographers, have their own web sites. (Mine is [www.ndavidking.com](http://www.ndavidking.com) but

then you already know that in order to download this...) Check those out to see if you like their work or their style and to get a preliminary feel for what they do. Come down to the photo lab and talk to other students to get a feel for what the various instructors are like from their standpoint. Try to find out what that particular student's perspective is so you can relate it to your own to see if their feelings may be appropriate for your own needs.

Then sign up and give it a shot.

### ***Which Entry Level Course Should I take First?***

You can enter our program by starting with either the Photo 100 or photo 143 courses. They in fact contain some of the same beginning photo-related topics such as camera control, exposure, using light, composition, etc. We allow students to start into our program taking the 143 as their entry level course and for those who are totally into digital and are just interested in becoming very good advanced level amateur photographers that works out just fine..

However, if you want to think about being a professional grade shooter, then you need to understand that the photographic underpinnings that came from and are still active in film have not gone away. The foundational knowledge that comes from working with an emulsion and in a darkroom translates easily into digital and indeed helps lay the foundation for and makes sense of much of digital's amazing functionality. If you really want the best in photo education then take the Photo 100 first and then take the Photo 143. You can take them in reverse order just to pick up on some wet darkroom/emulsion skills but it makes far more sense to do it the other way.

### ***What Equipment Will I need?***

Yes, you will need a camera of your own. Photo 143 is a digital photography course so you will need a *digital* camera. In order to really profit from the class you need a camera that at a minimum allows you to manually control focus, aperture settings, and shutter speeds. Additionally you will gain from the ability to control ISO settings.

We will explain the details in class but the bottom line is that the smaller point and shoot cameras' small sensors and their lenses do not allow you the same

range of exposure control settings available in larger DSLR type cameras so their may be some projects that will not be as well controlled as you would like. We do have some DSLR cameras for check out for brief periods that may allow you to experience what they can do and deal with those issues but it will likely get very frustrating to then go back to the Point and Shoot.

If you are really serious about your photography, get an entry to mid level DSLR and get on with it. If it is for fun then the point and shoot will work fine for the moment.

You may also need a tripod for assignments using long exposures but those too can be checked out with instructor approval.

You will need a memory card and card reader. Though it is possible, and your camera came with a cable for it, interfacing directly from your camera to a computer creates the opportunity for disaster for you and is not recommended by most professionals. There are some other supplies mentioned in the course outline as optional.

In class we will be using Photoshop CS4 (Photoshop ver 11). As a student you will have access to the computers and can do your work there. Photoshop is the industry standard and therefore what we use. If you have your own computer (and if you are serious about digital photography you will sooner or later need one) you can accomplish anything we will be doing in Photo 143 with versions of Photoshop going back to Photoshop 5 but to proceed further you need a newer version. In class we will discuss where to get educational discounts.

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Hopefully this, along with the syllabus/course outline will give you some insight into the Photo 143 class. We'll look forward to having you in one of the sections this coming semester.