

Picture Perfect *National Geographic* photographer Joel Sartore sharpens the focus on picture-taking.

TOP FIVE



Joel Sartore is an award-winning photographer, author, speaker, and an instructor for the online Great Courses.

1 Watch Your Back(ground)

"I start by carefully looking at a scene," Sartore says. "If the background is terrible, I move. I don't want it to be so distracting that my subject doesn't come across well. Great photographers are visual problem-solvers, and a lot of problems can be solved by looking at everything in the frame."

2 Work in the Right Light

"Shoot at the beginning or end of the day. At those times, the light comes through the atmosphere down low and illuminates all the pollution and dirt, creating golds and reds and oranges—and even pink after the sun has set."

3 Find the Heart

"Leading lines, like a road or a railing, draw the viewer in because they point to the emotional center of a photograph. But one of the most important elements, whether you're shooting people or animals, is the eyes, which need to be in sharp focus for the image to be effective."

4 Look All Around

"By changing your perspective a little, you can really make pictures sing. To find the best direction to shoot, in terms of both light and background, think about it from a bird's-eye view, a worm's-eye view, and from 360 degrees."

5 Be Prepared

"If you've considered everything else and you know the settings on your camera, when something great happens—those dramatic moments that take place in an instant—you'll be able to get it. They don't happen very often, but luck favors the prepared."