

What equipment is needed.

A tripod – this is a critical piece of equipment for shooting long exposures. Make sure your camera is properly mounted onto the tripod before you start shooting. You could get away with resting your camera on a solid surface – the key thing is it must not move while the shutter is open.

A camera – obviously you will need a camera, but many people assume you can only do this type of photography with an DSLR. Some advanced point-and-shoot cameras can also do long exposures if they have a Shutter Priority function. Take a look in your camera's manual to see if it has this function, you may be surprised.

Cable or wireless release – your camera will be on a tripod, so it should be very still, however, sometimes the action of pressing the shutter release button can cause the camera to move slightly and this movement can cause your image to blur very slightly. You may not notice this on the LCD screen, but when you open the image on your computer, it will be evident. Using a cable release means you can set up your camera, step away from the tripod and press the button without touching the camera. Cable releases can be wireless too. Don't worry if you don't have a cable release and just starting out, you could use your camera's self-timer function to trigger the shutter.

Warm clothes and comfortable shoes –you may need to dress warmly. Long exposure shots after dark can mean working in the cold, so be sure to wear warm clothes. Be sure that you have comfortable footwear too as you may be standing for quite a while.

A small torch – If the place you stood is also dark then setting up your camera can be difficult if you can't see what you're doing. A small torch will be a big help here, but once your setup is turned off as you don't want the light affecting your image.

The location

For light trails to work, you need to have something with lights moving through your scene. A car, a bus, a train can work. Be sure to be out of the direction of the vehicle you are photographing. SAFETY - Please do not stand in the middle of the road. Position yourself in a safe place to make this work. Always be aware of your surroundings. It is easy to become immersed in what you are shooting and lose sight of where you are standing. Be safe, first and foremost!

Camera Settings

Manual Mode, but if your camera does not have this then shutter priority and dial in the long shutter time.

Manual focus works really well if you get it right. Depending on your camera using autofocus may or may not work depending on your subject.

Shutter speed – depending on the light in your scene, your shutter time will need to be at least 10 to 15 seconds, or longer if necessary. Make sure that your shutter speed is long enough to capture longish light trails.

Aperture – you will want to have your aperture set at anywhere between f/8 and f/16. This again, will be determined by how much light is in the scene, how much of the scene you want in focus, and how long you want the exposure.

ISO – keep your ISO settings as low as possible, ISO 100 or 200 is what I use for light trails. If your ISO is set too high, your exposure will be shorter, and you run the risk of overexposing the highlights.

There is no perfect setting for every light trail picture, it depends on your location and the amount of light on the scene, (use the above a guide) you will also find you need to increase exposure times as you work as the scene may be getting darker as time passes, each scene will be different. Sometimes it is too light to get effective light trails just after sunset. You may need to wait until 30 minutes after the sun has set to get longer light trails. The important part is to be willing to experiment. Try shorting the exposure times if your close to the traffic and you can capture a ghostly car figure in your light trails.

Group Meetup - Shooting Traffic Light Trails