

Night Photography

These suggestions, given in no particular order, are things to consider when doing night photography. Some are 'quality things', others may make it a bit easier to control the picture-taking process.

use a low ISO (100 or 200)	large dark areas are prone to noise, which is less with a low ISO
use a tripod	exposures can be very long!
check the histogram for shadow detail	some shadow detail can help composition and give the photo more tonal depth
watch out for blown-out highlights	not always avoidable if a light source is actually in the photo
use a lens hood if possible	this helps reduce flare from a light source in-shot
use a small aperture if possible (f/ 11, 16 or 22)	as well as giving depth of field, this also helps reduce flare from in-shot light sources
use the self timer or 'live view'	this reduces the camera shake you can get from the act of pressing the shutter button, even on a tripod
you may need to use manual focus	AF systems can struggle to find focus in low light
be prepared to use manual exposure mode and spot metering	bright highlights and large areas of dark can fool the light meter - try using the 'B' setting if you have a remote shutter release
OR... use exposure compensation	use + or - to move the histogram away from the extremes
try different white balance settings	street lights and building lights in particular can be strongly coloured
consider using a torch or flashgun to paint with light	either to give some fun shapes, or to illuminate parts of the photo and make them stand out

Or try the table below:

ISO	Suggested exposure at f/16		
	100	200	400
Subject			
Cityscape just after sunset	4secs	2secs	1sec
Cityscape at night	20secs	10secs	5secs
Docks and bridges with reflections	30secs	15sec	8secs
Floodlit statues and fountains	8secs	4secs	2secs
Neon sign	2secs	1sec	1/2sec
Christmas lights outdoors	20secs	10secs	5secs
Ordinary night street scene	20secs	10secs	5secs
Floodlit exteriors	4secs	2secs	1sec
Floodlit castles and churches at dusk	15secs	8secs	4secs
Floodlit castles and churches at night	30secs	15secs	8secs
Landscapes by moonlight	30mins	15mins	8mins
Landscapes at twilight	1min	30secs	15secs
Interior lit by tungsten	12secs	6secs	3secs
Interior by candlelight	60secs	30secs	15secs
Traffic trails	30secs	Not recommended	Not recommended
Fairground rides	15secs	8secs	4secs
Bonfire flames	2secs	1sec	1/2sec
Fireworks	Bulb for 2-60secs	Bulb for 2-60secs	Bulb for 2-60secs

table from digitalcameraworld.com

(Bulb exposure, or 'B', in M or S/Tv mode, keeps the shutter open for as long as the release is held down.

In practice, holding it down manually will cause camera shake, so you would need a remote shutter release.)