

How to read a Histogram

For digital photographers it is important to understand the histogram displayed on your camera's monitor, even more so if you capture your images in JPEG as opposed to RAW as your PC software permits less manipulation of exposure on JPEG images. A histogram is a graph of the exposure for each image with lighter areas being displayed upon the right side of the graph and dark areas displayed upon the left side of the graph. Even though you have a digital camera and software on your PC, it is still important to control your exposures correctly and checking your histogram at the time of each image capture is the easiest way. Taking another image at a correct exposure is far easier than playing around for an hour on the PC trying to correct a badly exposed image.

If your histogram has "peaks" touching the right hand side of the graph then your image is over-exposed. Do not delete your image; just take the shot again with a faster speed. Alternatively, if your histogram has "peaks" touching the left hand side of the graph it is under-exposed so retake the scene again giving it a longer exposure. Continue reshooting your image with either shorter or longer exposures until you have a graph that you are content with that preferably does not touch either the right side or the left side of the histogram. Ideally, if the histogram is right side weighted that is more acceptable and easier to manipulate on your PC than a histogram that is left side weighted.

If your over-exposed / under-exposed image was captured by you using either aperture or shutter priority modes on the capture, then you will need to change your camera mode to **Manual** in order to change the exposures when retaking the image. Firstly read from the camera's display monitor the settings used for the image that you first captured and then set your camera controls to a faster or slower shutter speed. **Once you are content, remember to change your modes back to either shutter or aperture priority.** (Read your camera manual if you are unsure how to change modes)

Only practice will make perfect, and as you get used to both your camera and your PC software you will get to understand the preferential histogram for your images. This is only a brief and non-technical description. Speak to one of the Society's more experienced members should you require further advice.