

# How to photograph Fireworks

## or photographing fireworks like a pro

This topic assumes that you already have an SLR or mirrorless camera and you are comfortable with your camera's settings and its features. Please [click here](#) to review my "[Photography 101](#)" for tips on how to use your SLR camera prior to this lesson.

Fireworks are always an interesting subject for photographers. Nowadays with DSLR or mirrorless cameras taking pictures of fireworks is much easier than before. Here are a few keynotes to capture your favorite photos on dark nights:

### Position

Arrive early to find a good spot. You can capture the fireworks alone or include some foreground elements like landscapes or buildings, depending on your location and creativity

### Tripod

A steady tripod is essential for sharp photos since you're using long exposure

### Shutter release cord

This helps keep the shutter open without shaking the camera

### Your camera setup

Here is the tricky part. This depends on your camera, the amount of available light and your distance from fireworks. You may need to modify these settings, but a general rule about fireworks photography:

- Use Manual mode on your camera.
- Make sure your camera flash is off (if you have a pop up flash on your camera).
- Choose a low ISO like 100 or even 50 if possible.
- Choose a wide aperture like 2.8 or 4 (choose the lowest aperture available on your lens).
- Use manual focus as much as you can, otherwise use your auto focus for the first time you see a firework and then put it on manual. Make sure you do not touch the focus ring on your lens.
- Use bulb (B) for your shutter speed\* you should keep the shutter open between 3 to 10 seconds, depending on the fireworks.
- If your lens has zoom capability then try to zoom enough to get either all the fireworks in frame or to include other subjects, then make sure you do not change your focal length (zoom setting).





Vafa2016



Vafa2016



## And now: ACTION

Wait for the first fire blast after setting up the tripod, mounting the camera, attaching the shutter release cord and making sure that it is stable and steady. Try using manual focus if you can. You only need to do it once. Otherwise, use the auto focus for the first shot, take the camera off the auto focus and leave it for the night. Then wait for the first blast of the series. (During most of the professional firework events you will see a series of blasts for each scene, e.g. three blasts for flowers; the petals, the seeds, and stem). Trigger the shutter as soon

as you see the first blast, and hold it until the last blast is faded (typically 3 to 10 seconds.) Understanding the elements of the fireworks is the tough part, not the photography itself. This part needs good observation and lots of practice. For the first couple of tries you may end up missing some parts of the scene, but it's still a beautiful firework shot being created in your camera.

In most cases there is not much time between each series of bursts, so get ready for the following series of blasts and keep repeating the same steps.

Try not to get frustrated or overwhelmed, like any other type of photography you need to keep practicing and adjust the camera setting to eventually get the best out of the subject.

## Post processing

You can use post processing to make your photos look even better. One of the best editing applications is Adobe Lightroom, even though most of the other applications also provide similar tools and adjustments.

Editing photos is an endless job. You can always keep playing with your photos and change countless settings to make them look better, but the main key factors for firework post processing are:

- Lower the “black point” or “shadows”
- Increase the “highlights”
- Sharpen the photo



- **Crop it if necessary**
- **Dehaze to remove smoke caused by the guns that shot the fireworks**





## Advance points:

- Turn your noise reduction off if you know where it is on your camera
- Shoot toward east and not west (avoiding any remaining glare from the sun)
- Try zooming in and out during exposure to get some abstract photos
- Turn off any vibration reduction features on your camera since you are using a tripod
- Lock your camera mirror to eliminate even small vibrations it may cause
- Use RAW to capture the most details

## Bonus points:

- Take extra batteries for your camera
- Take a reliable flashlight with you, forehead lights are even better
- Have a blanket with you, nights might be cold







Text and Photos:

Vafa Adib  
vafa@vafa.ca

## 8 Tips to Remember:

- - Use your tripod
- - Find a good position
- - Use Low ISO
- - Use RAW
- - Use low Aperture to start with
- - Use bulb mode and 3-second Shutter speed to start with
- - Notice the fireworks and find out the series of blasts
- - Do some post-processing to edit your photos and make them stunning

[www.vafa.ca](http://www.vafa.ca)