

Glossary of Photography Terms

The discovery of the photographic process is generally credited to Jacques Louis Mande Daguerre, but the first photographic image was made in 1826 by fellow Frenchman Nicéphore Niépce. Together these two men, along with French scientist François Arago, developed the process that came to be known as daguerreotype. The details of the process were announced to the world in 1839, the same year that Englishman William Henry Fox Talbot unveiled his own camera obscura images. Many different methods of creating photographs have been developed since, but it is to these *four* men that we should credit the birth of photography as we know it.

camera obscura Origin of the present day camera. In its simplest form it consisted of a darkened room with a small hole in one wall. Light rays could pass through the hole to transmit on to a screen, and inverted image of the scene outside. It was first mentioned by Aristotle in the 4th Century B.C. and developed through the centuries as an aid to drawing.

chromogenic color print Also known as C-print. The most common type of color photograph, printed from a chromogenic color negative; consists of dyes within gelatin layers on a plastic-coated paper base. Subject to fading and color shifts in dark storage and on exhibition. Developed in the 1940s as an outgrowth of chromogenic color transparencies (Kodachrome, invented in 1935). Used by amateurs and artists alike.

daguerreotype One-of-a-kind photograph on a highly polished, silver-plated sheet of copper, developed over mercury fumes characterized by a mirror-like surface and astonishing detail. A positive image was produced by camera exposure and mercury “development,” which turned light-struck halides gray-white. The image was made permanent by immersing the plate in a solution of sodium chloride.

documentary photography A type of photography that records a phase of regional, social or cultural life; subjects are typically presented in a very straightforward manner without sentimentality or artifice.

dye transfer print Color photograph made by transferring to paper yellow, cyan, and magenta dyes from color separations of an image. Process permits precise control of image color. Used for fine art or advertising prints from the late 1940s to the early 1990s.

f-stop In a camera lens the aperture’s relative diameter (or opening) is measured in f-stops, such as $f/8$, $f/5.6$, etc. The aperture size controls how much light passes through the lens to the film plane (often expressed as a fraction or ratio 1:1.8). As the number increases, the size of the aperture decreases, thereby reducing the amount of light passing through the lens and striking the film.

film A light-sensitive material that receives an image that has been directed through the camera; in older cameras specially coated glass plates served as film; today flexible acetate in rolls is the support for the coating; digital cameras don’t use film to capture images at all.

flash An artificial light source that has a brief, intense burst of light; usually used where the lighting on the scene or subject is inadequate for photograph-taking.

gelatin silver print. Photograph on paper or plasticized paper coated with an emulsion of light-sensitive silver salts suspended in gelatin, printed out or developed out, and fixed. Came into general use in the 1880s; the developed variety remains the standard black-and-white photographic process.

lens The part of a camera that directs light reflected from the subject to the film plane and focuses the image.

negative A reversed light/dark image formed on film that may be used to make prints; the tones are the reverse of the original subject, but during the printing process they are reversed back to normal appearance.

photograph The art or process of producing an image by the chemical action of light on a sensitized surface.

photogravure Photographic image printed in ink from an etched copper plate. Characterized by rich inky blacks; the "whites" are the bare paper. One of the finest means for reproducing a photograph in large numbers. Popular with artists at the turn of the twentieth century.

point of view The angle from which a photograph is taken.

pose The physical position taken by the subject for the photograph; may be casual or more formal – suggested by a photographer or just spontaneously acted on by the subject (person in the picture).

positive The print in which the tones of the image echo those of the original subject.

print A photographic image usually printed on paper, generally a positive image made from a film negative.

sepia 1. Refers to a rich, reddish-brown pigment produced from the ink sac of an octopus or cuttlefish ink, used in watercolor, drawing ink and oil paint. 2. In photography, a gold toning bath can produce a color in the print referred to as sepia. 3. Referring to the dark brown-grey color called sepia.

shutter A curtain inside the camera that opens to expose film to light coming through the lens when a picture is taken.

slide Color reversal film that produces a positive image as opposed to a negative; used in slide lectures and publishing; not subject to color shifts that can occur in printing of color negatives; slide film is usually cut and mounted into small 2x2" frames for use in a projector.

tripod A three-legged supporting stand used to hold the camera steady.