

HOLGA HELP (FAQ)

Q: Can I use slide film in my Holga?

A: Yes. You need to be more careful with your exposure estimates as slide film is less forgiving than print film. Feel adventurous? Cross process your slide film.

Q: What is the easiest film to use as a beginner Holga owner?

A: C-41 B&W films are great for beginners. They are more forgiving, come in ISO 400 & you can take them to a 1 hour lab so you see your results right away.

Q: Can I choose a focusing range other than what is shown?

A: Yes. Placing your focus point somewhere between the distance icons. But the options available cover most of the bases. The minimum focus range will always be about 3 feet.

Q: My pictures are dark on the corners. What am I doing wrong?

A: This is vignetting and is a natural part of a Holga's optics. If you prefer to minimize this effect, make sure you use the 645 mask.

Q: My pictures have become more than fuzzy, they are blurry. What happened?

A: Your film may be loose and so it is not flush with the film plane. Check to make sure that your cardboard wedge is in place and working properly.

Q: Can I use my Holga 120SF with studio strobes?

A: Yes. Set up your pack with a photo slave. These will trigger your strobes when the 120SF's built-in flash goes off.

Q: Can I use infrared film in my Holga?

A: Yes. But be the impact of light leaks are much worse on infrared films. You should tape up your Holga to make sure it doesn't leak light.

Q: I've had my Holga for a long time but now my pictures are way over exposed. What's wrong?

A: Your Holga's shutter spring may have finally worn out. Time for a new one. But don't throw it away. Convert your old Holga to a Holga Obscura.

Q: Can I use electrical tape to cover up light leaks?

A: Yes. But a little warmth can turn it into a sticky mess. Use photography black masking tape or black gaffer's tape. These will pull more cleanly from the camera and the glue won't melt.

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Freestyle Advisor #1

INTRODUCTION

Holga medium format cameras have a near fanatical following of photographers, teachers, and enthusiasts. But for those not familiar with the camera and its unique abilities, a Holga is largely an enigma. This does not dissuade people from buying the camera. In fact, the Holga mystique draws people to it.

In the following pages we will lift the veil that shrouds the camera and give you special insight into the Holga. We will explore the camera's inner workings, show you how to use it, and discuss that special photographic "sensibility" the Holga offers to its user.



"Lemonade" by Kristina Loughery

HOLGA SENSIBILITY

A Holga is a study in imperfection, and to use it is an exercise in breaking free from dependence on technology, precision, and "uber-sharpness." The slight softness of images, uncontrollable vignetting and peculiar light leaks create a partnership between you and the Holga. These "flaws" accompanied by your creative choices result in a quasi-serendipitous art.

A Holga stretches our visual perception. Using a Holga adds a facet to the way we see the world. We notice more things and thus we evaluate their status.

A Holga is a rule breaker. To use a Holga is to utterly change the terms of reference most people use to interpret photography.

SUMMARY OF FEATURES

HOLGA 120S

Format: Medium (120 film)
Film Format: 6x4.5cm & 6x6cm
Construction: all plastic
Lens: Plastic 60mm f/8
Shutter: 1/100 sec.
(metal spring activated mechanism)
Aperture Range: 2 settings, f/8 & f/11
Frame: 6x4.5cm or 6x6cm
Depth of field: 3 feet to infinity
Weight: 4 ounces
Flash: hot shoe

HOLGA 120SF

Format: Medium (120 film)
Film Format: 6x4.5cm & 6x6cm
Construction: all plastic
Lens: Plastic 60mm f/8
Shutter: 1/100 sec.
(metal spring activated mechanism)
Aperture Range: 2 settings, f/8 & f/11
Frame: 6x4.5cm or 6x6cm
Depth of field: 3 feet to infinity
Weight: 5 ounces
Flash: built-in flash

HOLGA HISTORY

Holga's history is the thing of myth and legend. Some say that the camera is made by the same people who brought us the Diana (*a popular all-plastic camera manufactured in the early 1960's.*) Others say the Holga was designed specifically to fill the gap left by the Diana's departure.

The truth is something very different. Holga is not related to Diana, and the Holga was not designed with the Diana in mind. In fact, the people who manufacture the Holga were not even familiar with the Diana or its substantial following.

Designed and engineered in a factory in China, the Holga was initially introduced to China in 1982 as an inexpensive camera using the most popular film format in the country at that time, 120 size film. China was just beginning to open its doors to the world and photography was skyrocketing in popularity. Unfortunately for the Holga, no one could have predicted the quick and overwhelming dominance that 35mm film would have on the Chinese market and after only a few short years the Holga was overrun by its 35mm competitors.

But by then, word of a special, all-plastic camera called the Holga had spread to the West and its popularity was growing. Since then, over a quarter of a million cameras have been sold in 20 different countries with almost no change in it's original design. Then in 2000, the original Holga 120S was joined by the 120SF version which featured a built-in flash.

What's in a name? Quite a lot it seems, because everyone is wondering where the name "Holga" came from. The answer is related to the Holga's oriental heritage. The name is derived from the Cantonese term *ho gwong*, which means "very bright." A nip and a tuck and a western twist and you get the European name: "Holga."



Holga 120S



Holga 120SF

CHOOSING FILM

Much of your flexibility is in your film because a Holga has only 2 aperture settings: sunny (f/11) and not so sunny (f/8). You can shoot under almost any lighting condition by choosing the right film and pushing/pulling it as necessary. Black and white C-41 films like Ilford XP2 are a good choice because they have excellent latitude.

On a sunny day, use an ISO 400 speed b&w or color negative film. A popular choice is our Arista® Professional B&W 400. On overcast days go for even more speed. Try Fuji NHGII 800. Ilford Delta 3200 works well late in the day or indoors.

Slide films are much less forgiving when push or pulled, but you can get great results in the right situation. The multi speed Fujichrome RMS 100/1000 film is a great choice. Short of that, Fuji Sensia or Provia, Kodak 100V, VS, or SW are all options. Tungsten slide film, like Kodak EPT, has more latitude and suffers less from reciprocity failure than daylight balanced film. Whether or not you decide to filter-correct for daylight is up to you.

FORMAT

Out of the box, a Holga is set up for 6x4.5cm (15 frames) format. But to get the most out of Holga's (in)famous vignetting and edge distortion features, switch it to 6x6cm (12 frames) format:

1. Remove the 6x4.5 mask
2. With firm downward pressure, move the format arrow on the back from sixteen to twelve. This could take some coaxing and a screwdriver or other tool may help the transition. Be careful not to damage the red window.



FOCUSING A HOLGA

A Holga has four focus marks on the lens barrel. Simply rotate the barrel to the setting that most closely corresponds to your situation. Feel free to use your own setting that might fall between these icons.

Symbol



Approximate Distance

- 3 feet (1m)
- 9 feet (2m)
- 18 feet (6m)
- 30 feet (10m) to infinity

EXPOSURE TIPS

The lens on a Holga is fairly low contrast and tends to lose detail in the shadow areas. For B&W negative film, the rule of thumb is to expose for the shadows and develop for the highlights. Even color negative film can benefit from the habit of over exposing slightly. With slide film it is best to meter as accurately as possible.

LOADING

For best results, have ready a folded-up piece of thin cardboard (maybe an inch (25mm) square). Part of a film box works well.

As with all film, it is best to load and unload it out of direct sunlight, preferably in subdued light.

1. Remove the back by sliding down the metal clamps on either side of the camera. Looking in the back side of the camera, new film is loaded on the left side. Make sure the take up spool is on the right side.
2. Place the spool of film into the left side of the camera with the leading edge pointing to the right. Break the seal securing the film.
3. With your left thumb resting lightly on the film, pull out the film leader until you can insert the tapered edge into the take-up spool.
4. Spool the film with a couple of turns of the take-up knob. Keep your thumb lightly on the film to prevent slack.
5. With your thumb still on the film, insert the piece of cardboard between the bottom of the film spool and the camera.
6. Replace the camera back and slide the clips back into place.
7. Advance the film by turning the take-up knob until you see the number 1 appear in the red film counter window.



UNLOADING

1. After shooting the last frame (15 frames in 6x4.5 format, 12 frames in 6x6 format), turn the take-up knob until the film and paper have completely wound onto the spool.
2. Open the back in subdued light and remove the film. Moisten the tape and wrap it around the film.
3. Switch the empty spool to the right side of the camera.

TAPING UP A HOLGA

Many Holga owners look forward to the light leak feature of the camera. The streaks of light or color can change, even reinterpret the photograph. The most notorious light leak on the camera comes from the film counter window. The ortho-safe red color is not suited to today's modern panchromatic films. Some people don't mind, but for the rest of us, a piece of opaque tape used as a flap solves this problem easily.

There are those of us who prefer to expel the light leaks altogether by taping up the entire camera. However, the judicious application of tape at key positions can nearly eliminate unwanted exposure and make film loading much easier. (Note: there is no guarantee that even the total mummification of a Holga will eliminate every light leak. There are reports of leaking Holgas that were taped everywhere but on the lens.)

LEAK REMEDIATION

Camera Back

Run pieces of tape along the seam where the back fits onto the body.

Metal Clips

Cover the metal clips that secure the camera back. This will prevent them from falling off the camera – especially when you use the strap.

645 Mask Removal

Removing the mask reveals two holes above the lens. A single piece of tape will cover them.

Film Counter Window

Cover the window with piece of tape. Fold the tape a little to create a pull flap.

Bag the Camera

In order to take advantage of the unique light leak properties of your Holga, you should use a camera bag to transport your Holga if you will be out in bright sunlight for an extended period of time.

FLASHES AND STUDIO STROBES

A Holga has a hot shoe. So any modern camera flash will work, but an adjustable automatic flash is best. Simply set your flash to f/8 and shoot.

To shoot studio strobes, use a hot shoe to pc adapter. This handy device fits onto the hot shoe. Alternatively, use an on-camera flash and equip your strobes with photo slaves.

A Holga always triggers a flash twice. Once when you depress the shutter and once when you release the shutter. It is important to pause before releasing the shutter. This prevents damage to the flash or strobe pack.

MULTIPLE EXPOSURES

The shutter works independently from the film advance. This lets you press the shutter as many times as you like on the same frame.



“Street Scene” by Jose Rivera

Besides the creative door this opens, a key technical benefit is that you can build up exposures in low light situations.

MODIFYING & PERSONALIZING YOUR HOLGA

There are many things you can do to modify a Holga. I've seen a “Holgaroid” (Holga attached to a Polaroid two-and-a-quarter back) and have heard rumor of a “Holgablad” (a Holga with a Hasselblad Planar lens affixed to the front) that exists somewhere in Los Angeles. Here are a few, more practical changes you can make:

Tripod-Compatible Holga

Some super glue and a “1/4-20” (pronounced “quarter-twenty”) threaded nut found in any hardware store will instantly convert your Holga so that it will accept a standard tripod screw mount.

Holga Obscura (Time/Bulb Exposures)

This is a permanent change to your Holga. But that's why many people own two! By removing the shutter spring, clearly visible when the back is off, and securing the shutter open with glue or tape, your Holga can mimic a camera obscura. This is great for long exposures at night. Use the Holga's lens cap as a shutter. This change benefits from the tripod-compatible modification.