**HARMAN** technology Ltd

# HOLGA CAMERA GUIDE

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## BACKGROUND

Holga cameras have an amazing following around the globe thanks to the unique images they produce using film.

The cameras have unique qualities thanks to the basic camera body and plastic lens, and the images created continue to attract a fanatical following particularly amongst younger users.

This guide will help you understand the history and give some guidance on how best to use them.

## WHY HOLGA

It's about the experience, uncertainty and unique images. The nature of the camera gives rise to slight vignetting and it's easy to create lovely soft images thanks to the lens design. The cameras can leak light and this creates flawed yet beautiful images. If you like breaking the rules then Holga is for you. The way in which the camera can be so unpredictable adds an extra dimension to your photography.

Users wax lyrical about the whole experience, there are many forums where you can find out more, hear about new techniques, and see great images, just search for Holga.

## HOLGA HISTORY

The camera first appeared in 1982 and quickly proved to be popular in the domestic Chinese market. A few years later the cameras started to appear in other countries, new owners were delighted with the lack of precision that lead to new creative effects. The first camera was the Holga 120S which has since been discontinued, with a fixed shutter speed, dual aperture lens and basic focus method it provided users with a functional camera at a modest price. Although the camera developed over the years with the introduction of built in flash and latterly the pinhole and stereo cameras they have remained true to their roots based on simple designs.

## FEATURES

The cameras on offer here all take 120 roll film which can be bought from any good photo retailer in both colour and B&W. The all plastic body and lens features no metal apart from the shutter. The basic models can shoot both 6x6cm or 6x4.5cm negative sizes by changing the insert.



It's also possible to load 35mm film and expose not only the image area but the sprockets as well. The 60mm lens has two aperture settings of f/11 and f/8, the different settings will vary the depth of field that remains in focus. The camera can be focused from infinity to 3 feet with the shutter speed fixed at around 1/100 of a second, and is sprung driven.

## CHOICE OF FILM

120 roll film is available in colour negative (for prints), colour transparency (for projection or scanning) and black & white which can easily be processed in a darkroom by the user or sent to a processing lab. Colour negative and black & white have great tolerance during exposure and good results can be printed even when mistakes are made. Colour transparency requires accuracy at all times with little tolerance possible. Most minilabs will process a colour film or ILFORD XP2 black & white film making prints available within the hour, colour transparency will need to be sent away to a specialist lab. Although films of different speeds are available ISO 400 is a good all round option. Higher speed films are available up to ISO 3200 which is perfect for low light, and down to ISO 50 where a steady hand or tripod will be needed. Many users deliberately cross process films to create special effects using the wrong processing chemicals for the type of film. Black & white can be processed at home or at a college where darkrooms are available to those attending evening classes or full time courses. It's not difficult to make great black and white images and more guidance can be found at www.ilfordphoto.com

Photo © Julija Svetlova.

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## THE HOLGA PINHOLE CAMERAS

An easy way for pinhole photography, the Holga pinholes are a Holga 120 or 135 body with the lens removed and replaced with a pinhole. The lensless body produces infinite depth of field, meaning that under most conditions, everything is reasonably sharp and detailed. A tripod and cable release are recommended when using the Holga Pinhole, as exposure times will be much longer.

## FOCUSING HOLGA CAMERAS

Four different settings are marked around the barrel of the lens. Use the setting most appropriate to your subject distance.

### FORMAT

A standard medium format Holga has the 6x6cm (12 frames) mask in place. This mask will produce square images with sharply defined borders. The camera also comes with a 6x4.5cm (16 frames) mask, which will produce a vertical rectangular image with the same sharp border. To get the most out of the Holga's vignetting, light leaks and edge distortion features, remove the mask entirely, so that the image goes out to nearly the edge of the film. Check the area that the mask covered for any small protruding edges of plastic that may scratch or damage the film. Although rare, remove any rough parts with a small file or cover with tape. Move the format arrow on the camera back from 16 to 12 so that the frame count on the film will be accurate. In earlier models, this can require some coaxing and a screwdriver or other tool may help. Take care not to damage the red window, and remember to move the arrow back to the 16 position if you wish to use the vertical 6x4.5cm mask.

## TIPS FOR GOOD EXPOSURE

The plastic lens 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 colour negative film can benefit from the habit of over exposing slightly. With slide film it is best to be as accurate as possible, so use a light meter.

## LOADING A FILM

Load and unload 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 from the back of the camera, new film is loaded on the left side. Make sure that 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.
3. Break and remove the seal securing the film.
4. With your left thumb resting lightly on the film, pull out the paper film leader until you can insert the tapered edge into the take-up spool.

## HOLGA RANGE

| CAMERA NAME | FLASH | HOT SHOE | BULB EXPOSURE | TRIPOD MOUNT | | MASKS (cms) | BATTERIES |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Holga 120N | Hot Shoe | Yes | Yes | Brass | | 6x4.5, 6x6 | None |
| Holga 120FN | Built-In | No | Yes | Brass | | 6x4.5, 6x6 | Two AA |
| Holga 120CFN | Built-In* | No | Yes | Brass | | 6x4.5, 6x6 | Two AA |
| Holga 120PC Pinhole | None | No | Yes | Brass | | None | None |
| Holga 120WPC Pinhole | None | No | Yes | Brass | | 6x7, 6x9 | None |
| Holga 120-3D Stereo | Built-In | No | Yes | Brass | | Dual 6x6 | Four AA |
| Holga 120PC-3D Stereo Pinhole | None | No | Yes | Brass | | Dual 6x6 | None |

* Holga 120 CFN has a colour wheel allowing the flash to be red, yellow, blue or white.

5. Spool the film with a couple of turns of the take-up knob. Keep your thumb lightly on the film to prevent slack.
6. Replace the camera back and slide the clips back into place. You may want to use some tape to keep the back in place. See the section on Taping Up A Holga, below for tips.

## UNLOADING THE CAMERA

1. After shooting the last frame (16 frames in 6x4.5 format, 12 frames in 6x6 format), turn the take-up knob until the film and paper have completely rolled onto the spool.
2. Open the camera back in subdued light and remove the film. Be sure that the film is wound tightly around the take-up spool, then moisten the tape and wrap it around the film.
3. Switch the empty spool to the right side of the camera for the next roll you shoot.

Photo © Julija Svetlova.

## TAPING UP A HOLGA

Many Holga owners appreciate the light leak feature as the streaks of light can change—or even reinterpret—a photograph. The worst light leak comes from the film counter window, and the red colour is not suited to today's panchromatic films. Some people don't mind, but a piece of opaque tape used as a flap solves this problem. To stop the light leaks tape up the entire camera. Application of tape at key positions can nearly eliminate unwanted exposure and make film loading much easier. There is no guarantee that even then it will eliminate every light leak.

## CURING LEAKS

**Camera Back**
Run pieces of black tape along the seam where the back fits onto the body.

**Metal Clips**
Cover the metal clips that secure the camera back to help prevent them from falling off the camera especially when using the camera strap. Velcro strips can be used instead of tape making easier access while changing film and less tape residue left on fingers.

**Behind the 6x4.5 Mask**
With a standard 120 Holga camera, removing the 6x4.5 mask reveals two holes above the lens that can cause light leaks. A piece of tape can cover them both.

**Film Counter Window**
Cover the window with a piece of tape.

**Camera Bag**
Keep the camera in your camera bag to minimize the impact of unwanted light.

Photo © Julija Svetlova.

**Painting the Inside of the Camera**
Painting the inside of the camera matt black can cut down unwanted reflected light that gets in.

**Loose Film**
120 films have no light-tight cassette to protect them from exposure; the only guard against the sun is the thin paper backing. If film is not rolled tightly light can get in under the loose paper. If the camera does not roll the film tightly, refer to the section Loading A Film.

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## FLASH & STUDIO FLASH

Holga 120S and 120N have standard hot shoes, so any simple non-dedicated standard mount camera flash will work. Because of the Holga's limited exposure adjustment, it is best to use an adjustable automatic flash. Set the flash to match your film's ISO at f/8. To shoot with studio flash use an on-camera flash and equip the flash with photo slaves. A hot shoe-to-PC adapter can be used allowing a hook up directly to an off-camera flash or flash pack with a sync cord. Every version of the Holga camera triggers the flash twice — once at shutter depression and once at shutter release! Be sure to pause in between or you risk damaging the flash.

## MULTIPLE EXPOSURES

The Holga shutter works independently from the film advance, allowing the shutter to be pressed many times on the same frame. This allows creative opportunities with multiple exposures in low light situations. Use a tripod to minimize camera shake.

Long exposures are achieved when using the bulb setting built into the Holga 120N, FN, CFN, 120-3D, and WPC. Mount the camera on a tripod and set the exposure switch to the "B" position. Push down the shutter release button and keep it down as long as desired. Release the button to close the shutter to complete the picture taking cycle. Use of a tripod and the Holga Cable Release is recommended to reduce camera shake and blur. When finished, set the "B" exposure switch back to the "N" position.

Camera accessories are available

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