



CERAMIC
PHOTO
SCHOOL

FREE GUIDE

10 checks

before photographing your ceramics with your smartphone

A simple method to prepare your shoot
and obtain cleaner, more consistent images
that are faithful to your pieces.

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PREPARE BEFORE PHOTOGRAPHING

1 Clean the piece, the background and the lens

Before you start, take a minute to clean everything that will appear in the image: your piece, the background, and the smartphone lens. Dust, fingerprints or small spots can become much more visible in a photo than to the naked eye.

Today's editing tools can remove some dust, marks or small flaws after the shot. But fixing one image is one thing; repeating these corrections on ten, twenty or even fifty photos is another. It takes time to open the images, spot the defects, remove them, check the result and keep a consistent look across your photos.

A few seconds of preparation can save you a lot of time in front of the screen.

Editing is still useful to fine-tune brightness, color, crop or remove an accidental flaw. The goal is simply not to rely on editing for things you could easily take care of before pressing the shutter.



Clean piece



Clean background



Clean lens



Clean hands



BETTER TO PREVENT THAN EDIT 20 TIMES



10 seconds
now

Wipe off a mark
or some dust



Several minutes
every time

Remove the same thing
from each photo

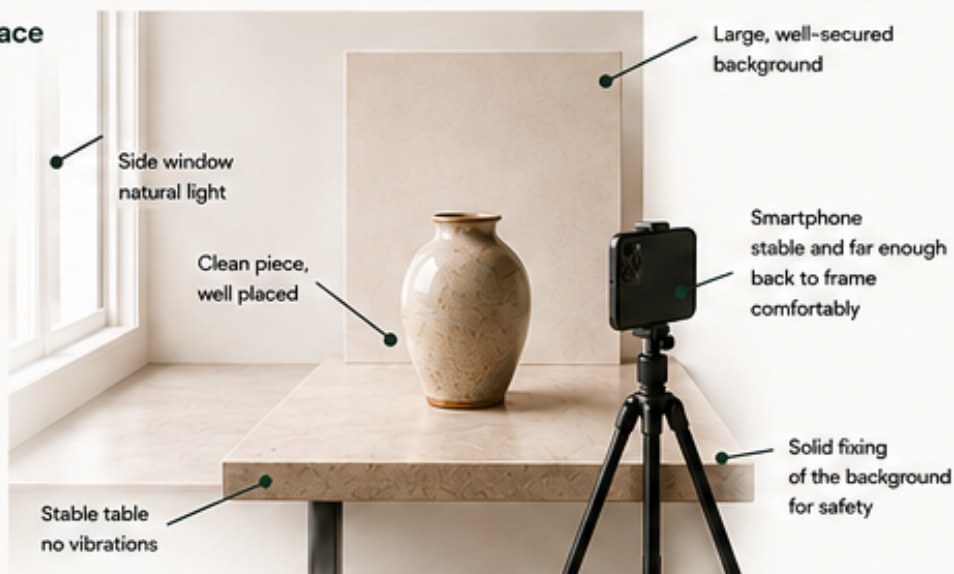
A small effort before the shot saves you a precious amount of time afterwards.

2 Set up a simple and stable space

You don't need a photo studio.

To start, look for a simple setup you can easily recreate: a stable table, enough room to frame your shot, and a background that is large enough and securely fixed.

If you use natural light, place your setup near a window. The goal is not to build a complicated set, but to have a small, practical space where you can place your piece, move your phone and work safely without the risk of knocking anything over.



KEY TAKEAWAY

Your photo space doesn't need to be professional. It should be clean, stable, safe and easy to reproduce.

SIMPLIFY THE LIGHTING

3 Use a single light source

In a studio, several lights are often on at the same time: daylight from a window, a ceiling light, fluorescent lights or an additional lamp.

They do not all illuminate the piece from the same direction or with the same color. This can create multiple shadows, reflections that are difficult to control, and a ceramic piece that looks too yellow, too blue, or different from what you see with the naked eye.

Start by simplifying: use one main light source.

It can be a window or a lamp. Turn off the other lights and observe your piece. The shadows become easier to read, the form easier to understand, and the colors easier to control.

✗ MULTIPLE LIGHT SOURCES



Window + ceiling light + additional lamp

- Shadows in several directions
- Colors are harder to control

✓ ONE LIGHT SOURCE



Window: the only light source

- One direction of light; clearer form
- More consistent colors

ONE LIGHT SOURCE = FEWER VARIABLES TO CONTROL



Shadow

Easier to read



Color

More consistent



Reflections

Easier to control

4 Place the light to one side

Once you are working with a single light source, you need to decide where it comes from.

When photographing ceramics, a very good starting point is to place the light to one side, or slightly off to the side.

Side lighting creates a visible shadow and helps reveal the form, curves, material and surface relief of the piece.

If the light comes directly from the smartphone's axis, the shadow falls mostly behind the object. The form then appears flatter, and the textures can be harder to read.

There is no single perfect position for every ceramic piece: a plate, a bowl and a vase do not respond to light in exactly the same way.

But when you are starting out, begin with the light to one side, observe the result, then adjust.



SIDE-LIGHT SETUP



Window

Main light source, to one side.



Ceramic piece

Lit from one side to reveal its form.



Visible shadow

Helps describe the volume.



Smartphone

Positioned in front of the piece.

✗ FRONT LIGHTING



Light aligned with the smartphone. Shadow less visible; form appears flatter.

✓ SIDE LIGHTING



Light from one side. Visible shadow; form and surface are easier to read.



KEY TAKEAWAY

Start with one light source, placed to one side. Then observe the shadow, form and surface before changing your setup.

CHOOSE YOUR BACKGROUND AND KEEP STEADY

5 Choose a suitable background

A background is not just there to look nice. Above all, it should help show your piece clearly and suit your camera angle.

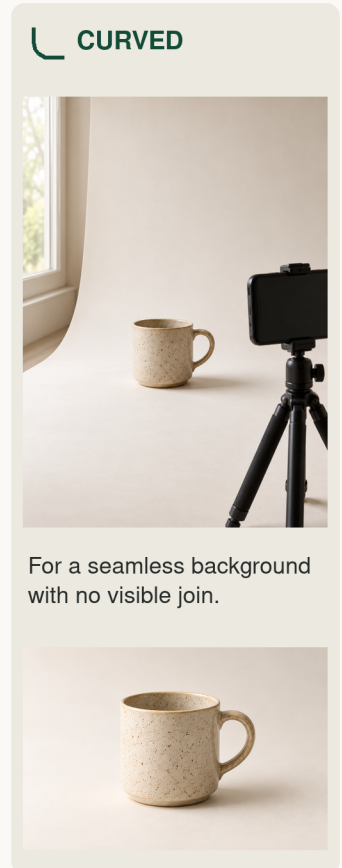
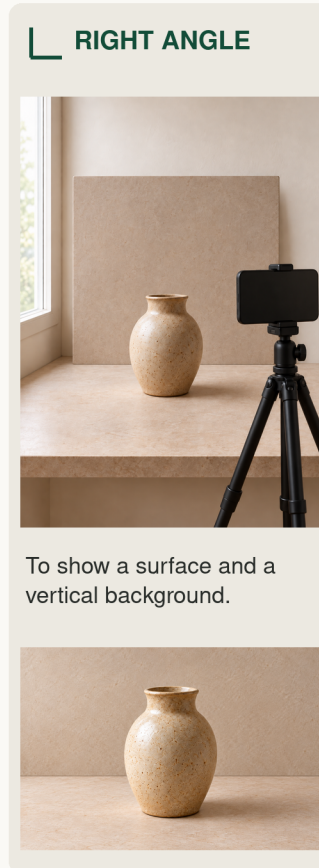
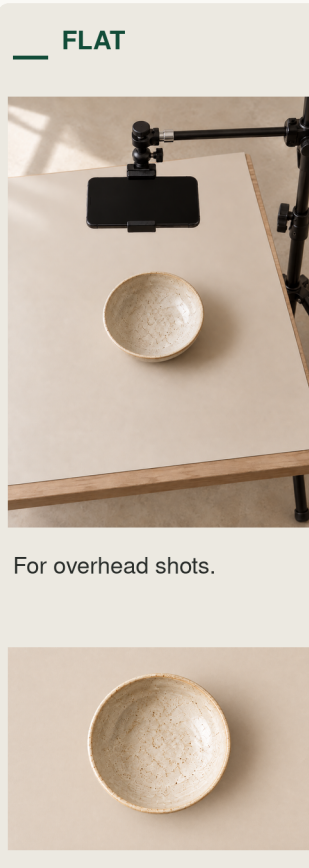
To start with, three simple setups are enough:

Flat: ideal for overhead shots. A large sheet of paper, vinyl or a tabletop can work very well.

Right angle: a surface beneath the piece and a vertical background behind it. This is useful for front or three-quarter views, while keeping the impression of a table and a wall.

Curved: the background drops down behind the piece, then curves gently onto the table. The line between the surface and the background disappears, creating a seamless, very clean image.

You do not need lots of backgrounds to get started. A few carefully chosen surfaces are enough: a simple background to present your work clearly, a surface better suited to showing pieces in use and, perhaps, a more personal background to create a mood.



Use a large enough sheet: a tight curve soon becomes visible.

? Ask yourself: overhead view, visible background or seamless backdrop?

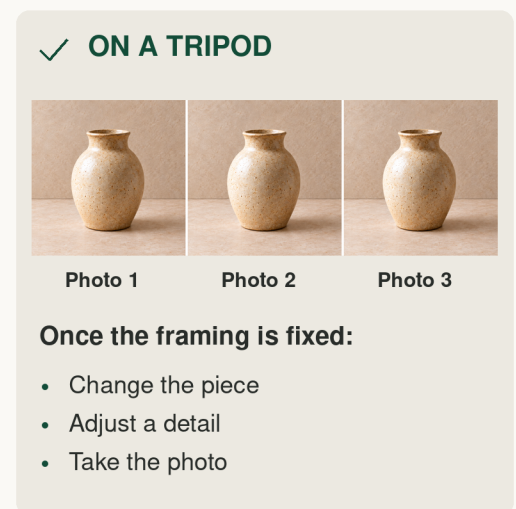
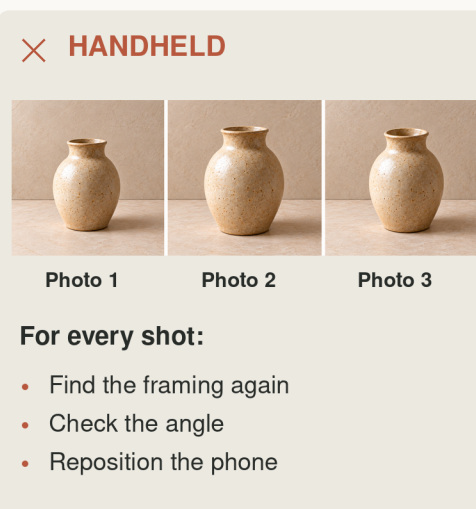
6 Keep your phone steady

Shooting handheld seems quicker: pick up your phone, frame the shot and take the photo. But in object photography, the framing always shifts a little from one image to the next.

With a tripod, once you have found your composition, the framing stays fixed. You can swap one piece for another, check focus, adjust the light or move an element without having to find your framing again for every shot.

A tripod also helps reduce small movements when taking the shot and leaves your hands free to turn the piece, move a reflector or prepare a scene.

It may feel slower at first. In practice, the opposite is often true: once the framing is fixed, you have fewer things to manage.



**FIXED FRAMING = MORE CONSISTENT SERIES
+ LESS TIME WASTED**

Fixed frame

✓ Hands free

Consistent series



KEY TAKEAWAY

Choose your background to suit the camera angle and the result you want. Then secure your smartphone: steady framing saves time and makes your series more consistent.

LOOK AT THE PIECE BEFORE THE SCREEN

7 Ask what the photo needs to show

Before taking out your smartphone, really look at your piece.

One photograph cannot show everything at once. Depending on the angle you choose, you will highlight its overall form, interior, rim, depth, material or decoration.

Start with a very simple question: what should this image help the viewer understand?

To present a piece clearly, first choose a main view that shows its form unambiguously. Then, if needed, add one or two complementary views to reveal what the first image cannot show.

The aim is not to take more and more photos, but to make sure each image has a purpose.

ONE PIECE, DIFFERENT INFORMATION

BOWL



FORM

Shows the silhouette and exterior shape.



INTERIOR

Shows the opening and the inside.



RIM

Shows the thickness and profile of the rim.

PLATE



SURFACE

Shows the decoration and surface.



RIM

Shows the thickness and shape of the rim.



DEPTH

Shows the hollow and the actual volume.

? Decide what to show before choosing the angle.
One angle cannot show everything.

8 Check framing, grid, level and margins

Once you have chosen your viewpoint, take a few seconds to check the framing before taking the shot.

Turn on the grid and, if your smartphone offers it, the level. These guides immediately show whether the phone is tilted or the piece is off-centre unintentionally.

Also check the space around the piece. Avoid placing it right against the edge of the image or accidentally cutting off a handle, a foot or part of the decoration.

For a series, try to keep a similar approach from one image to the next: the height of the piece in the frame, the space around it and its overall position.

Clean framing looks simple. That is precisely because it does not distract from the ceramics.

GRID

Helps organise the frame.

LEVEL

Check that the phone is not tilted.

MARGINS

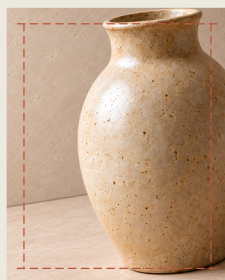
Leave space around the piece.

FRAMING

Check that nothing is accidentally cropped.



✗ ADJUST THE FRAMING



- Too close to the edge
- Phone tilted
- Uneven margins
- Part of the piece cropped

✓ CLEAN FRAMING



- Piece well positioned
- Comfortable margins
- Level horizontals
- Nothing cropped



KEY TAKEAWAY

Before shooting, ask what the image needs to show. Then check four things: framing, grid, level and margins.

Decide what to show before choosing the angle.

THE FINAL TECHNICAL CHECKS

9 Check focus and exposure

Before taking the shot, check that your smartphone is focusing on the piece, not on the background or on something in front of it.

Tap the important part of the ceramic piece on screen to set the focus. Then look at the details: the rim, material, decoration or texture should remain sharp enough to read clearly.

Also check the brightness. An image that is too dark can hide the material and nuances of the glaze. An image that is too bright can lose detail in the highlights, especially on pale or glossy ceramics.

The aim is not the brightest possible image, but one in which the piece remains easy to read.

FOCUS

Tap the important area of the piece.



EXPOSURE

Adjust if the image looks too bright or too dark.



✗ TOO DARK

Details and colours are hard to see; shadow detail is lost.



✓ BALANCED

Visible detail and texture, natural colours, a clear and pleasing image.



✗ TOO BRIGHT

White areas lose detail; colours wash out and texture disappears.

10 Compare the image with the real piece

A photograph can be pleasing to look at yet not very faithful to the real piece.

Before finishing your shoot, look at the ceramic piece in front of you, then look at your screen. Compare the two.

Ask yourself four questions:

1 Is the colour believable?

A white glaze should not turn yellow, blue or grey without a reason.

2 Does the brightness match what you see?

Check that the piece is neither too dark nor too bright.

3 Does a reflection hide an important area?

On a glossy glaze, a reflection can hide texture, decoration or form.

4 Are the important details sharp?

Look especially at rims, patterns and areas of texture.

If something bothers you, try correcting it during the shoot first: slightly moving the light, the piece or the smartphone is often quicker than fixing several images afterwards.

YOUR SCREEN IS NOT THE REFERENCE. THE REAL PIECE IS.

1 COLOUR



✗ Too warm



✓ Faithful colour

2 BRIGHTNESS



✗ Too bright



✓ Visible detail

3 REFLECTION



✗ Distracting reflection



✓ Better controlled

4 SHARPNESS



✗ Slightly out of focus



✓ Sharp

✓ MORE FAITHFUL TO THE PIECE

Natural colours • Balanced brightness • Better-placed reflections • Sharp, visible details



KEY TAKEAWAY

Check sharpness, brightness, colour and reflections. Then look at the real piece: it remains your reference.

A good ceramic photograph does not transform the piece: it helps us understand it.

THE FINAL CHECKLIST

10 CHECKS BEFORE TAKING THE SHOT

Better photographs of your pieces, step by step.



1. PREPARE YOUR SPACE

A simple, effective working environment.

**1**

Set up a suitable shooting space

A stable surface, enough room and controlled lighting.

**2**

Choose and position the light

Opt for soft, even light, whether natural or artificial.



2. BACKGROUND AND STABILITY

Steady framing for more consistent images.

**3**

Choose a suitable background

Flat, right-angled or curved, depending on your viewpoint and the result you want.

**4**

Keep your phone steady

Use a tripod or stable support to save time and keep the same framing.



3. LOOK AT THE PIECE

Decide what you want to show.

**5**

Ask what the photo needs to show

Form, interior, rim, surface, depth, material, decoration... Every image has a purpose.

**6**

Check framing, grid, level and margins

Turn on the grid, keep lines straight and leave space around the piece.



4. THE FINAL CHECKS

Make sure the image is accurate and faithful.

**7**

Check the focus

Tap the important area to focus on the piece.

**8**

Check the exposure

Neither too dark nor too bright, with details clearly visible.



5. COMPARE AND ADJUST

Your screen is not the reference: the real piece is.

**10**

Compare the image with the real piece

Look at the piece, then your screen. Do the colours, material and details match what you see?



WHAT NEXT?

This checklist gives you a starting point. At Ceramic Photo School, you will learn to adapt the method to your bowls, vases, mugs, plates, series and other pieces.

Explore Ceramic Photo School



Beautiful photographs that bring your ceramics to life.

