

What Is Photography

Introduction

Photography is one of the most influential visual media of the modern world. It plays a vital role in art, communication, documentation, science, journalism, and everyday social life. Photography as a **combination of technique and visual observation**. So, photography is not merely as the use of a camera, but as a systematic process involving light, technology, and human creativity.

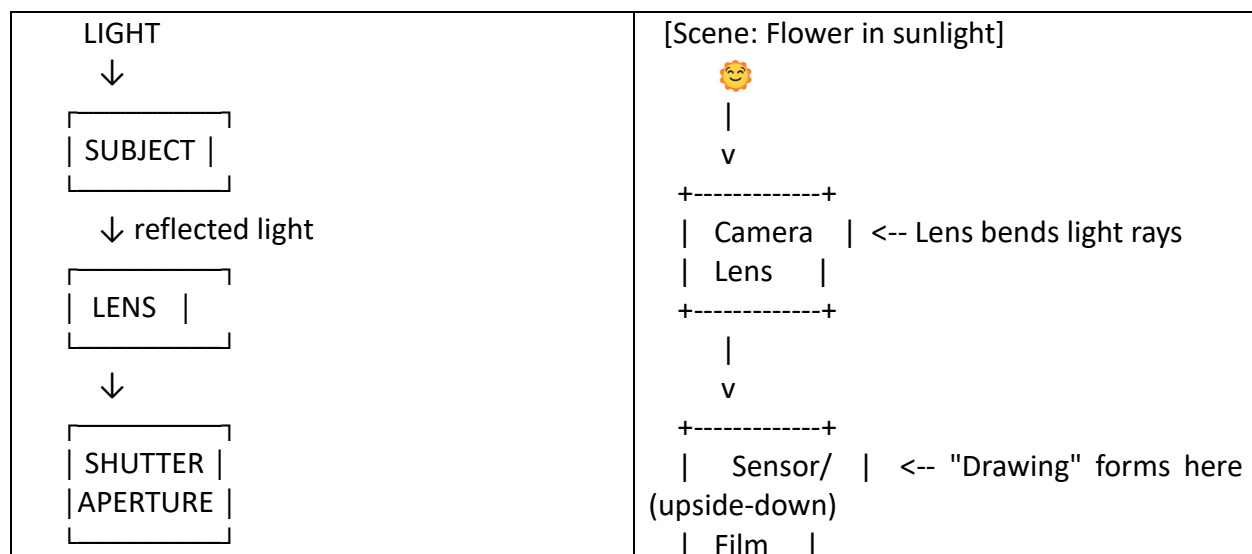
Meaning and Definition of Photography

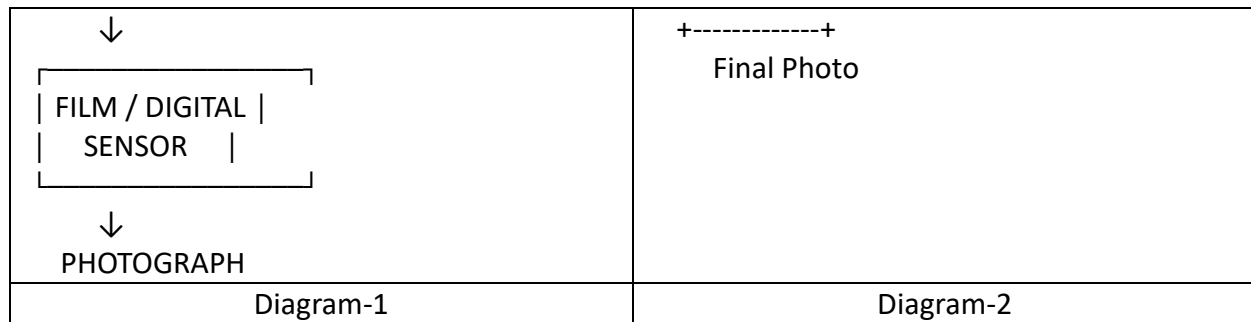
The term *photography* is derived from the Greek words *photos*, meaning light, and *graphé*, meaning drawing or writing. Thus, photography literally means “drawing with light.” This definition highlights the fundamental principle of photography: the creation of images through the controlled use of light.

According to Langford, photography is the process of recording light reflected from a subject onto a light-sensitive surface, such as photographic film or a digital sensor, using a camera. The resulting image is a visual representation of reality as shaped by technical conditions and the photographer’s choices.

Photography as a Technical Process

Photography is a structured technical process rather than a single mechanical action. Langford emphasizes that several elements must work together to produce a photograph. These include light, subject, camera, lens, exposure controls, and an image-recording medium.





Light enters the camera through the lens and passes through an adjustable opening known as the aperture. The shutter controls the duration for which light reaches the film or sensor. The combined control of aperture and shutter speed determines exposure, which directly affects the brightness and clarity of the image. Therefore, photography requires an understanding of basic optical and mechanical principles.

The Central Role of Light

Light is the most essential component of photography. Without light, no image can be formed. Langford explains that light influences not only visibility but also the mood, texture, depth, and overall aesthetic quality of a photograph.



Different qualities of light—such as intensity, direction, color, and softness—produce different visual effects. For example, soft light creates gentle shadows and is often used in portrait photography, while hard light produces strong contrast and dramatic effects. A photographer must observe and control light carefully in order to achieve the desired result.

Photography as Art and Science

Langford characterizes photography as both a scientific and artistic practice. From a scientific perspective, photography relies on physics, optics, chemistry, and digital technology. Concepts such as exposure, focus, sensitivity, and color balance are governed by technical laws.

At the same time, photography is an art form. Artistic elements such as composition, framing, perspective, timing, and emotional impact depend on the photographer's creativity and visual awareness. A successful photograph therefore emerges from the balance between technical accuracy and artistic expression.



Photography as a Medium of Communication

Photography functions as a powerful medium of visual communication. Images can convey information, emotions, and ideas quickly and effectively, often without the need for written or spoken language. Langford notes that photographs can cross cultural and linguistic boundaries, making them universally understandable.

In fields such as journalism, advertising, education, and social documentation, photography plays a crucial role in shaping public perception and preserving historical moments. Through selection, framing, and context, photographs communicate particular meanings and viewpoints.



Photography and Reality

One of the defining characteristics of photography is its close relationship with reality. A photograph records light from real objects at a specific moment in time, giving it a strong sense of authenticity. For this reason, photographs are often regarded as evidence or factual records.

However, Langford also acknowledges that photography is not purely objective. The photographer's choices—such as angle, lens, timing, and editing—can influence how reality is represented. Thus, photography can both document reality and interpret it.

Functions and Applications of Photography

Photography serves multiple purposes in contemporary society. It is used for personal memory and family documentation, artistic expression, scientific research, medical imaging, advertising, fashion, and mass media. In each of these contexts, photography fulfills different aesthetic, informational, or practical functions.

Langford highlights that the versatility of photography has contributed to its widespread adoption and continued relevance in the digital age.

Conclusion

In *Langford's Basic Photography*, photography is presented as a complex yet accessible medium that combines light, technology, and human vision. It is a technical process grounded in scientific principles, an art form shaped by creativity, and a powerful means of communication and documentation.

Understanding what photography is provides the conceptual foundation necessary for studying photographic techniques and appreciating photographs as meaningful visual texts.

Reference

Langford's Basic Photography, (9th Edition), Focal Press, London