How to Prevent Reflections When Photographing Through Windows

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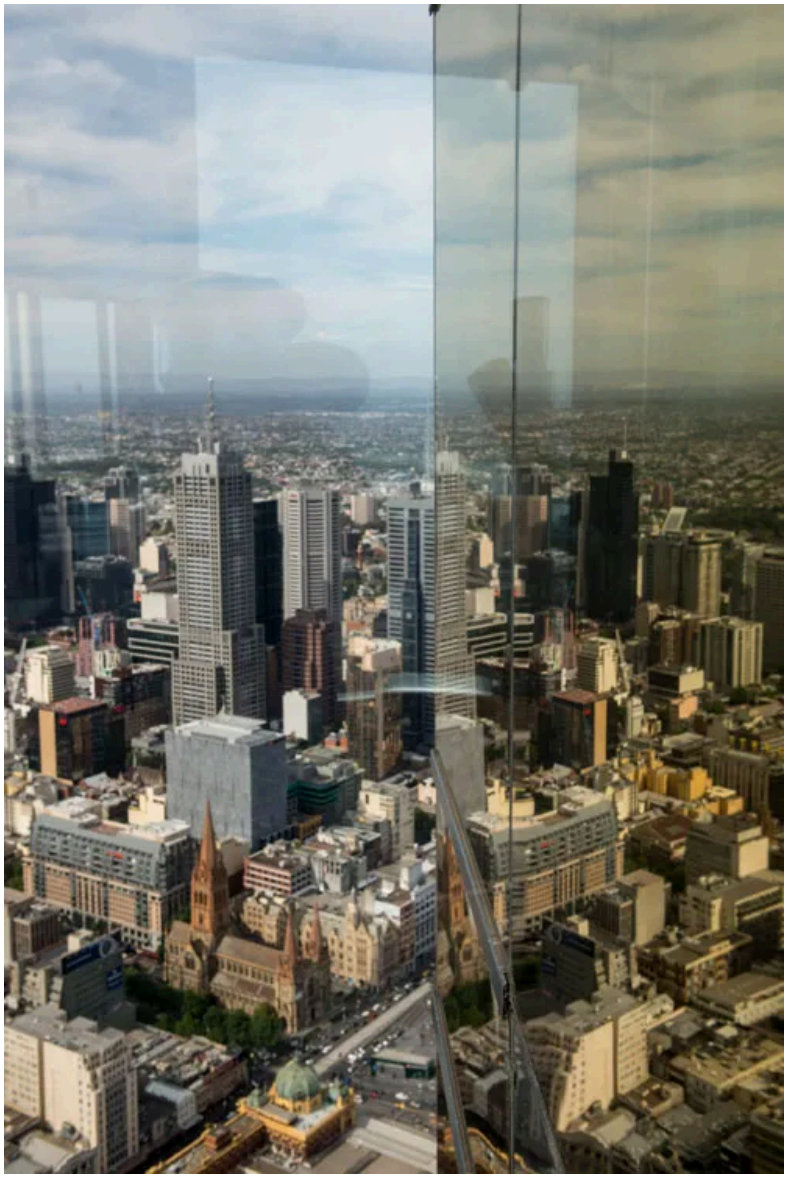
Have you ever wanted to take a photo through a shop window but couldn't work out how to cut down the reflections? Or been up on an observation deck, struggling to photograph the gorgeous view because the window glass had all sorts of reflections from stray lights?

Photographing through glass can be deeply frustrating, whether you're a beginner or a seasoned professional. You can try to adjust your angle, but no matter where you move, you'll run into more reflections. Then, just when you think you've found the perfect shot, you pull the file up on the computer only to find that the reflections are still there!



As you can probably tell, I photographed this image while standing on an observation deck. Notice the reflections in the glass? It's hard to avoid, but it's not impossible!

Fortunately, while photographing through windows is no walk in the park, there *are* ways to minimize and even eliminate

the reflections you encounter. Below, I share my essential tips for handling these reflections – so you can successfully capture storefronts, city skylines, and more.

Photographing through shop windows

Shop windows offer plenty of great opportunities for photography. But reflections always seem to get in the way!

One of the most common ways to take photos is through shop windows. You can capture interesting street photos of interior activity – or you can simply document the beautiful displays behind the glass.

The problem is that shop windows tend to be in well-lit places, which is tough because you'll get reflections from all directions. However, there are ways of minimizing the reflections, and there are even steps you can take to prevent them entirely.

1. Use a polarizing filter

A circular polarizer is generally used by landscape photographers to reduce reflections in water and waxy leaves, but it can help reduce reflections in shop windows, too!

No, it may not remove them all, but it will help you to eliminate many of them. Take a look at the images below. First, we have an image captured without a polarizing filter, where you can see all sorts of reflections from exterior lighting:

The reflections of the lights from outside the shop can be seen on the glass.

To my eye, those reflections are frustratingly noticeable and distracting. But here's what happened when I added my circular polarizer and set it for maximum polarization:

The reflections have been removed with the help of the polarizing filter!

Note that using a polarizer isn't especially difficult. Just screw it onto your lens, then turn the front filter element while looking through your viewfinder. The reflections should start to disappear, and when they're at their weakest, go ahead and take your photo!

In my experience, polarizers can be a little finicky – the effect depends on the angle of the light and the type of glass – but they definitely *can* help reduce reflections. And even if the reflections are reduced but not eliminated, it's often better than having them completely ruin your images.

2. Use a lens hood

Another effective method to eliminate reflections when shooting through shop windows is to mount your lens hood to the end of your lens, then position your setup carefully. If you can get your lens right up to the glass of the window so that it sits on it squarely, it'll stop any unwanted reflections from getting in front of the lens.

Of course, this comes with a major problem: you can only take photos of what is directly in front of the camera! Once you adjust your lens's position, even slightly, you'll start to see those pesky reflections. So what do you do if you want to take photos at an angle?

One option is to use a rubber lens hood, which will create a seal around the end of the lens while *also* allowing you to reposition your lens. In this next image, you can see a rubber hood on the lens; notice how the photographer has pushed

the hood up against the glass while still angling the lens for a better shot of the chocolates in the window display.

A rubber lens hood is on the lens and pushed against the window. If the photographer were to pull the lens away from the window, reflections would start to creep back in – but thanks to the rubber hood, it's possible to angle the camera without losing the seal.

The big advantage of these rubber lens hoods is flexibility – you can move it around and change the angle of your lens while avoiding reflections. (Rubber lens hoods are also easier to store since you can compress and compact them down without issue.)

The following two images demonstrate the effectiveness of a rubber lens hood. I captured this image without my rubber lens hood:

Image *without* a rubber lens hood. Reflections on the glass are apparent.

At first, the image – a close-up shot of a cake behind glass – looks okay. But when you look more carefully, you start to see unwanted reflections on the glass (especially that circular reflection in the center of the shot!).

When I added my rubber lens hood and formed a seal against the glass, I was able to completely eliminate all the reflections, as you can see here:

The rubber lens hood has eliminated the reflections! (I've also adjusted the composition and exposure slightly.)

Rubber lens hoods used to be very common and a lot of people used them on their lenses, but slowly the hard plastic ones took over. If you hunt around the internet, you can find rubber lens hoods; the one I used for the images above comes from eBay.

There is also a third-party company, KUVRD, that's gained some attention in recent years for creating universal rubber lens hoods. The hoods are primarily marketed for their flexibility, but they can also be used to eliminate reflections! You can check out KUVRD's hoods right here.

Photographing through tram, train, and car windows

Until now, I've been focusing on eliminating reflections when photographing through shop windows. However, you can often capture beautiful images when shooting through tram, train, and car windows, so it pays to know how to handle these reflections, too!

Fortunately, the two approaches I've shared above – working with a circular polarizer and using a rubber lens hood – can both help when shooting through vehicle windows. My recommendation is to use the rubber lens hood approach because it's not especially difficult to get close to the window, and your movement in vehicles and on public transportation is pretty limited anyway. But be sure to take good care of your lens and camera; a sudden jostle might result in your setup smashing into the glass, which is never a good thing.

Photographing through observation deck windows

The rubber lens hood method of eliminating reflections is great for a variety of scenarios, as discussed above. But there was one scenario where it just didn't work for me, and I'd like to share with you the details in case you find yourself in a similar situation.

In Melbourne, there is an observation deck that is 88 floors up, Melbourne Skydeck, that provides some stunning views of Melbourne. It is a great place to see the city, but it's a terrible place to take photos.

There is glass all around, and it reflects everything else in it. The one place where you can go outside has mesh across it, and for most cameras, the holes in it are not big enough to take photos. At night, there are lights on the floor that create their own reflections on the windows.

If you go up to the glass to take photos, you will find that the rubber lens hood method won't work as there are *two* panes of glass. A tight seal will eliminate reflections on the first pane, but it doesn't do a whole lot to reduce reflections on the second pane of glass.

Here are two images I captured from the Skydeck. The first was taken during the day and you can see the reflections, especially on the left-hand side:

I photographed the city from the Skydeck during the day, and you can see the reflections.

The second image was taken at night, and as you can see, the reflections were even worse:

At night, the lights inside reflect *everywhere*. You can also get reflection portrait shots – whether you want them or not.

But like everything in photography, there are always ways to get around problems. Let me explain how I managed to get a reflection-free shot from the Melbourne Skydeck. This method should work for most observation decks with double-paned glass, so it's definitely worth learning!

First, I placed my camera on a tripod. (Some observation decks don't allow these, but I was able to photograph using a small GorillaPod without issue. If you can't use a tripod, try putting your camera on something relatively stable, like a backpack.)

I placed my camera close to the ground, as you can see in the image below:

My camera on a GorillaPod, positioned just in front of the observation deck window.

At Melbourne Skydeck, there are lights on the floor, so I had to make sure that light wasn't coming from under the camera.

Next, I set up my image and created a seal around the camera with fabric. For this, you can use a piece of black cloth – just make sure that the fabric is dark as a lighter color will create its own reflections. For the images displayed below, I actually held a lightweight black jacket against the window:

The jacket is placed around the camera to stop reflections.

Basically, you want to be able to use the fabric to create a closed-in area around the camera so you don't get lights from the observation deck interior reflecting off the glass.

Of course, no system is going to be foolproof. But if you compare the following two images, you can see that it *does* make a big difference. This first shot was captured *without* the dark jacket around my camera:

I didn't take steps to reduce reflections, and it shows!

Those reflections made the image practically unusable. But then, when I added the dark jacket, the result was crystal clear:

This was taken using the above method with a jacket to block the reflections!

The image is so much better, don't you think? Adding a piece of dark fabric is easy to do, and the results speak for themselves.

Go capture amazing photos through windows!

Well, there you have it: Several simple but effective techniques to eliminate – or at least reduce – reflections when photographing through windows.

As I emphasized above, handling reflections isn't impossible. It just takes a bit of creativity!

One final piece of advice: judge each situation as you get to it. While one technique might work in one place, it may not work elsewhere. There is no doubt that glass and windows are one of the hardest objects to photograph through, a bit like photographing a mirror – but as I emphasized above,

handling reflections isn't impossible. It just takes a bit of creativity! I hope the next time you are taking photos through glass, you're happy with the results.

Now over to you:

Do you have any tips or tricks for eliminating reflections that I missed? Have you experienced similar frustrations when shooting through windows? Share your thoughts in the comments below!

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