Hop, *skip* and **click**

Do you fancy being a dab hand at downloading from your digital? Then strike a pose, please, for **Julie Ferry**.

Picture the scene. It's five years ago and you've just returned from a fabulous once-in-a-lifetime trip to South America. You've arrived at the chemist first thing in the morning, eager to get your mitts on the bundle of holiday snaps you took whilst you were away. But there's one problem when you get them back — they are full of distorted prints with a worrying amount of 'quality control' stickers pressed onto them.

Okay, your experience of photography might not be quite as bad as this and nowadays most of us have digital cameras to delete any of our more embarrassing attempts to be David Bailey, but what if with just a few lessons you could banish those failed attempts to a mere memory for good? Would you grab the opportunity with both hands or chalk it up as one more thing that you will get round to when you have some more spare time?

Taking up photography as a hobby is growing in popularity and there are many reasons why it is back in vogue. Whether you want to indulge your inner creativity or just get better family snaps, there are hundreds of courses that can fulfil your requirements. With the advent of the digital camera and mobile phones that can also take photos, instant pictures have become a part of everyday life. Instead of taking lots of photos of Great Aunt Eve's 80th birthday celebration and having to wait a couple of days before you can see the results, they are now available instantly at the touch of a button, so you can reject or accept them at will. The digital age has also brought a myriad of choices to alter your pictures. Want to remove red-eye? No problem. Add a speech bubble to one of your unsuspecting victims? You can do that as well. The sky really is the limit and there are plenty of easy-to-use computer programs that will help you get the most out of your new found hobby.

But what if you want to do something a little more arty? Many people get a lot of pleasure out of photographing landscapes or capturing people at their natural best. It may seem like an easy task in theory but how many times have you tried to create those 'natural' shots and been disappointed with the results? Well, that is where the professionals come in. Most towns and cities in the UK have adult education courses in photography. They range from taking a beginner's course to actually studying for a GCSE or 'A' Level in photography and coming out with a qualification at the end of it. A friend of mine has recently completed an 'A' Level in photography and describes it as 'one of the best things I've ever done'. It has also helped her in her new career as a garden designer so she has been able to use it professionally, as well as personally, where she is now the official photographer for any gathering.

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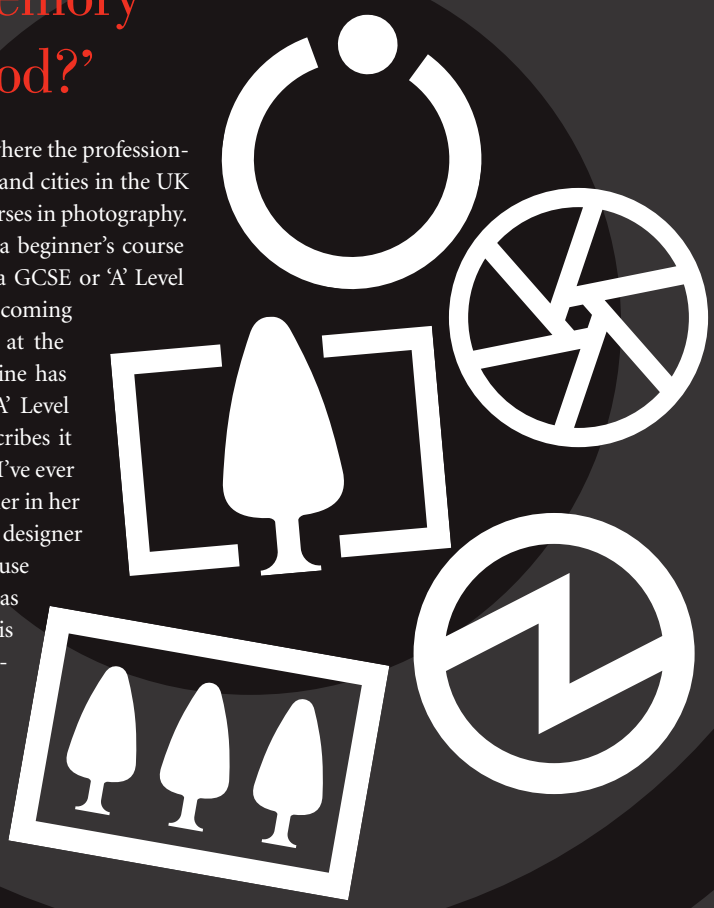
There are also a number of private companies that run photography courses. These range from residential trips where you can enjoy an intensive round of tutoring in a particularly beautiful area to give you plenty of inspiration, or can be a short or long course completed with a class once a week.

One of the best things about photography is that for most courses you don't need a lot of equipment. A simple point and shoot camera is often enough and any other equipment that you want to try can usually be borrowed or hired from your course provider.

So what are you waiting for? You are just a hop, skip and several hundred clicks away from perfect pictures. Don't forget to say cheese.

For further information contact your local adult education centre.