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1

Making your camera a friend

Digital cameras are fantastically powerful and versatile and the temptation is to start snapping away as soon as you get your hands on one. Although this can result in excellent photos, it can pay great dividends to spend a little time to become familiar with the full range of controls on your camera. This chapter looks at these controls and shows how you can gain confidence with your camera before you even start taking your first photo.

What are the options?

In the early days of digital cameras, the available options were limited to very expensive professional-level cameras, and consumer cameras that had very low specifications compared to those available today. However, things have now changed so that there is a wide range of excellent cameras in a number of different categories:

- Compact cameras
- Mid-range cameras
- Digital SLR cameras
- Phone cameras

Compact range

This is the most common range of digital cameras. They are small, powerful and can take great photos in a variety of situations. Most of the functions are undertaken automatically but the menus offer certain levels of control for taking photos. Look for cameras with approximately 10 megapixels (capable of capturing up to 10 million pixels in an individual photo) and a high optical zoom (rather than a digital zoom). Some cameras in this range are:

- Nikon Coolpix
- Panasonic Lumix
- Sony Cyber-shot
- Canon Powershot



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Mid-range

This is a range of cameras in between compacts and digital SLRs (Single Lens Reflex). They usually have fixed lenses but have controls on the camera body that can be used for a variety of settings such as specifying the aperture and shutter speed of the camera. Some cameras in this range are:

- Fujifilm FinePix
- Nikon 1 J1 Compact System
- Olympus Pen Compact System

Digital SLR

This range includes professional-level cameras but there is also a variety of excellent cameras for people who want to have as much control as possible over their photos. SLR cameras have detachable lenses so you can change the lens according to the type of shot you want to take. Some cameras in this range are:

- Canon EOS 600D
- Nikon D90
- Pentax K-5

Phone

Smartphones now have powerful digital cameras that can capture approximately 5 megapixel images (or greater in some cases). They do not have quite the same functionality as dedicated digital cameras but they do have a range of menu options, flash and zoom facilities.

Ready for action: know your buttons

Before you even take your first photo it is a good idea to get to know all of the buttons and functions on your camera. Not only will this help you get the best out of your camera, it will also give you more confidence about being able to apply the right settings at the right time. This could mean the difference between capturing an ideal photo, or missing it. The buttons are usually on the back of a digital camera and they include:



1

Menu button. This can be used to access menus for whichever mode you are in, i.e. in shooting mode it will be the Shooting menus and in review mode it will be the Review ones



2

Photo button. This is used to put the camera into shooting mode, i.e. when you want to take photos



3

Review button. This is used to view the photos on your camera that you have taken



4

Delete button. This is used to delete photos. This can be done in Review mode and also in Shooting mode if you want to delete a photo that you have just taken. If you want to delete other photos, this has to be done in Review mode



...cont'd

- 5 Control buttons. These are a collection of buttons that perform specific tasks. Press on the top, bottom, left and right of this button to move in these directions for selecting items
- 6 Macro button. This is used to take very close-up photos
- 7 Self-timer button. This sets the self-timer option, where there is a delay between the shutter button being pressed and the photo being taken
- 8 Flash button. This has options for how the flash operates. This can be Auto, On or Off
- 9 Exposure compensation button. This is used to increase or decrease the amount of light that is included when a photo is taken
- 10 OK/Select button. This is used to activate options that have been selected, e.g. if a menu option is selected in Step 1, press the OK button to apply it
- 11 Video button. This is used to switch between photo and video mode (most digital cameras now have a video function too)



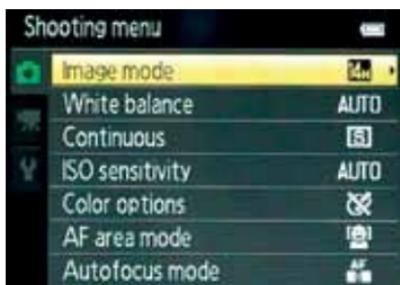
Something from the menu?

Much of the functionality of a digital camera is accessed from the menus via the screen at the back of the camera. There are different menus available for whichever mode you are in (Shooting or Review) and the range of menus include:

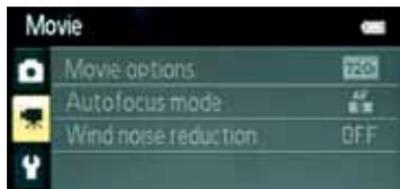
Shooting menu

In Shooting mode the menu will offer similar items to these:

- 1 Use the Up and Down options on the Button controls to move between the menu items. Press the OK button to select an item and see its options



- 2 Press on the Left button on the button controls and the Down button to access the Movie options



- 3 Use the Down button to access the Set up options (these are the same for the Shooting menu and the Review menu)



...cont'd

Review/Playback menu

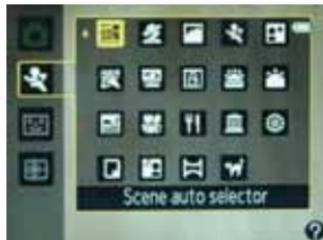
Select the Review option and press the Menu button to access these menus and options. Navigate through these in the same way as for the Shooting menus.



Scene menu

Another menu option is the Scene menu. This provides pre-defined settings for specific photographic conditions, such as portraits, sports and fireworks. To access these:

- 1 Press the Scene button
- 2 Navigate through the available scene modes with the button controls at the back of the camera. Press the OK button to select a scene option

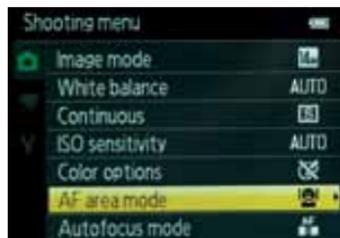


Staying focused

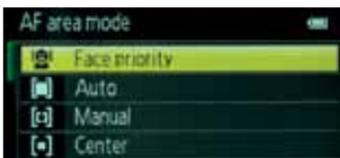
There is nothing worse in the world of photography than taking what you think is a perfect photo, only to discover that it is slightly out of focus. The best way to avoid this is to take your time when focusing a shot: half depress the shutter button until you hear a beep and a green light, or green outlined boxes, appear on the screen.

There are also options for how you select the method of focus, so you can take more control over how your camera's focus operates.

- 1 Access the Shooting menu and select the AF area mode by pressing the OK button



- 2 Select one of the autofocus options, as above



- 3 If the manual option is selected, you can specify the area of focus. Use the control buttons to move the area of focus icon. This is useful if you want to focus on something which is outside the center of the frame



Look, no hands

The self-timer option on a digital camera is a great way to take group shots of people so that everyone is included and one person does not have to miss out because they are taking the photo. To set this up:

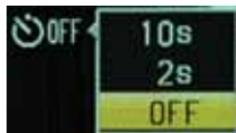
1

Press the self-timer button



2

By default the self-timer is Off. Select a duration for the self-timer (this has to be selected each time you want to take a photo this way)



3

Once the self-timer has been activated, this is displayed on the screen at the back



4

When the shutter button has been pressed, the timer counts down



5

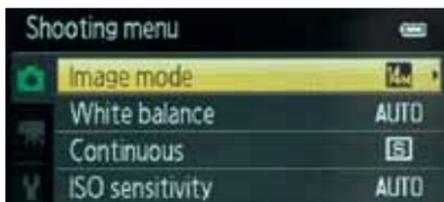
During the countdown a light flashes on the front of the camera until the photo is taken



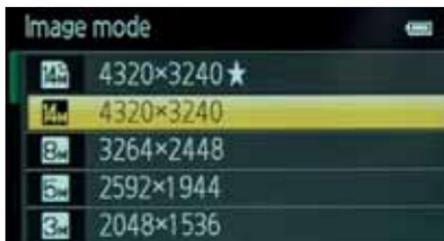
Size matters

Digital photos are frequently talked about in terms of resolution. This refers to the number of pixels (colored dots) that are in the photo: the more pixels, the larger the photo can be displayed or printed at a high quality. A large size also makes a larger file size. There is a range of sizes that can be selected within the camera:

1 Access the Shooting menu and select the Image mode (or Image size) option



2 Select a resolution size. The figure at the left-hand side refers to the total number of pixels for each option



3 Press the OK button to apply the resolution setting



Don't forget

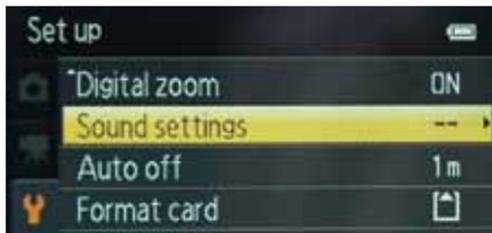


For printed photos the higher the resolution the better, since the pixels can be more closely arranged for printing. For use on the web or email, it is better to use smaller resolutions to create smaller file sizes.

Setting the sound

Due to their design, digital cameras do not make the same noises as traditional film cameras, i.e. there is no shutter sound when you take a photo. However, sounds can be selected for both the shutter and also the camera buttons. To do this:

- 1 Select the Set up menu and select the Sound settings option



- 2 Select either the Button or the Shutter sound option



- 3 For both options select On or Off to activate sound for that item



Hot tip



Having the Shutter sound On is a good way of determining when a photo has been taken. If the Sound is Off you may not be sure until you review the photo.

Reviewing your handiwork

It is hard to believe that only a few years ago people had to wait days, or weeks, to get their photos developed to see them. But with digital cameras this is a thing of the past and you can review your photos as soon as you have taken them.

1

Once you have taken a photo, press the Review/Playback button



2

Details of the photo are displayed, such as the date and time when it was taken, the image name, the image size and the number of images that have been taken so far



3

Use the zoom buttons on the camera to zoom in on the photo to see it in greater detail



Beware



Make sure that you set the date and time before you start taking photos. This can usually be done in the Set up menu.