

Another Art Tool—Your Camera

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As with anything that has many options, choosing the right camera to buy can be daunting. This article will not tell you to get a Nikon or Canon or even how to use your iPhone—there are thousands of books and websites to entice you to their particular brand and model. My hope is to help you make a decision that will augment your art toolbox for years.

Questions to ask yourself before buying a camera:

1. What do I plan to photograph?

- Landscapes/Cityscapes
- Animals—domestic or wildlife
- Portraits
- Sports
- Still-life
- Close-ups

2. Will I be shooting indoors, outdoors or both?

3. What size will I be printing my photographs?

4. How will I carry my camera? (pocket/purse/camera bag)

5. What can I afford?

Each answer should help you narrow your choice of camera, lenses, and other accessories. Point-and-shoot type cameras and even camera phones are great, but trying to produce an image beyond a camera's capability can be frustrating. Here are some things to consider:

Landscapes and cityscapes—Very basic cameras can handle scenic subjects; but some cameras are capable of handling low light better than others. Some cameras also have a panorama mode so you won't have to stitch together photographs using additional software. Yet others have sunrise/sunset modes that enhance the colors at those times of day.

Animals—The best lens depends on how close and how fast the animals you plan to photograph may be. The farther away the subject is, the "longer" the lens needs to be. (The focal length of the lens, despite numbers such as 55mm and 300mm, relates to how much magnification you

get and the angle of the view you can capture with that lens.) Longer lenses are more likely to be heavy and require a tripod to keep the camera stable for clear photographs. Flash should be avoided for wildlife shots, so a camera that is good in low light is a must.

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Portraits—Shorter (85mm or 105mm) lenses can be used with or without a tripod for portraits. When photographing children, however, you may want a camera that is fast enough to capture playtime action. Flash options aren't just for filling in dark areas anymore and should be considered to prevent harsh-looking skin. Some cameras allow you to adjust the flash intensity, and many have a mount called an accessory or "hot" shoe atop the camera for attaching a separate flash (apart from the built-in flash). This unit has the ability to point away from the subject to get a different effect and softer light.

Sports—A digital single-lens reflex (DSLR) camera allows you to change lenses to get those up-close shots. For indoor sports, you need a camera that is good in low light—meaning higher ISO capabilities. (ISO, previously known in film photography as ASA, denotes how sensitive the image sensor is to the presence of light.) As with ASA, the higher the number, the lower the light can be. Keep in mind that you trade photo quality for sensitivity and may get

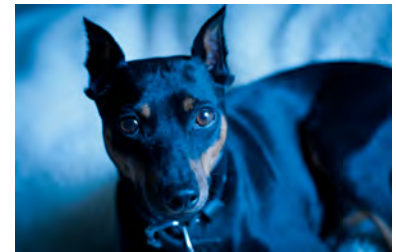
a grainier, poorer quality image. Most point-and-shoot and DSLR cameras offer continuous-shooting rates of 3 frames/sec or higher to capture action.

Still-life—If you don't make your own still-life box, a soft box or shoot-through umbrellas that are made of reflective material can give you other lighting options.

Close-ups—Some point and shoot cameras have great close-up capability. If you plan to use a DSLR, check the range capability of the lens attached to your camera. And remember that there is a minimum distance too.

Indoors—For photographing indoors, most cameras allow you to change the white balance or color correct for temperature depending on the type of light in the room. Others might have a macro feature or manual focus to allow for better close-up shots.

White Balance/Color Correct



Top: Elvis, using auto white balance
Middle: Elvis in fluorescent light
Bottom: Elvis in incandescent light

References and places to get answers

After thinking about what you want to shoot, consider visiting your local camera store and letting them help you narrow down your choices. A locally owned, independent seller will usually be better equipped to answer any questions that you may have. Also, some camera stores will rent equipment so you can try out camera models before committing to one. This goes for different lenses too.

Some helpful tips:

- The higher the ISO number is, the easier it will be to photograph in low light. The drawback can be “grainy” looking pictures.
- A shutter speed of 1/60 second or faster helps lessen camera shake.
- Learn how to breathe as you snap that pic. Slowly exhale and then hold your breath momentarily as you snap that image.
- Depth of field increases with F-stop (see images below).
- Shutter speed is important if you want to stop action (see images above right)

Depth of Field



Top: F5.6 decreases the depth of field
Bottom: F36 increases the depth of field

Shutter Speed



Top: 1/13 of a second
Bottom: 1/50 of a second



Top: 1/500 of a second
Bottom: 1/8000 of a second

How to get the most out of your camera

Once you have that camera in hand, the only way to get to know it is to use it. There are so many ways to get inspired nowadays. Break out that manual, look for third party books on how to use your particular model, log onto online forums, enroll in adult school classes, or join community center groups that allow you to explore your camera and learn. See a person using a camera? Ask them what they like and dislike about their camera.

My personal favorite links to look at before buying a camera are:

www.KenRockwell.com
www.dpreview.com

Other helpful sites I found that may help you decide are:

<http://staff.washington.edu/corey/digicam.html>
<http://photo.net/equipment/digital/basics/>

The Ken Rockwell and DP Review sites are great for learning. In fact, if you already have a camera, look to see what feature you don't use and read up on how it might help get you that reference shot you want.

More useful links:

<http://www.dummies.com/how-to/photography-video/digital-photography/using-the-camera.html>

<http://www.dsrlrbodies.com/>
(contains reviews on Nikon equipment and instruction)

<http://www.fredmiranda.com/>
(for photography tutorials)

<http://www.strobist.blogspot.com/>
(how to use flash)

<http://www.cambridgeincolour.com/tutorials/white-balance.htm>

<http://www.digitalcameraworld.com/2012/09/07/what-is-focal-length-definition-comparison-every-question-answered/>

<http://www.photomatters.org/softbox-vs-umbrella>

Gayle is the newsletter editor of DC 214 and volunteers for a wildlife organization. Her photographs have been published in CPSA “To The Point,” local newspapers, television news reports, and a national art magazine.