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Knowing and Choosing Your Camera

Now that you've been introduced to some of the basic terms and technology of the digital world of photography, it's time to turn to the more practical matter of choosing the right camera for your photographic needs. If you already have a digital camera, you can quickly skim the list that follows looking for new information you weren't aware of when you bought your camera. If you are new to photography, and digital photography in particular, this list will familiarize you with a camera's features and offer advice on how to choose the right one for you.

Categories might include cost, physical size, memory size, features, quality, or level of optical zoom.

Prosumer is a term coined in the video production industry to denote equipment that can be classified as both "professional" and "consumer."

- Digital cameras don't fall naturally into a few neat categories. Each camera model has its own mix of features, so cameras that fall into the same category when you classify them one way fall into different categories when you classify them another way.
- The best way to pick a camera is to start with the type of category that matters most to you, and narrow down your choices based on that type. Then look at the second most important type of category to winnow your choices down further, and so on.
- The first step in understanding your needs is to know what kind of photographer you are (or want to be): point-and-shoot, mildly creative, or prosumer.
- Also consider what kinds of photographs you want to take, and what features you need in the camera in order to take them.
- If you never crop your photos and never print them at sizes larger than 5 × 7 inches, a 1-megapixel camera should serve your needs. If you print as large as 8 × 10 inches, you'll need a 2-megapixel camera instead.
- If you sometimes crop your photos or print them at sizes larger than 8 × 10 inches, you want the highest resolution you can afford.
- If you have more pixels than you need in a photo, you can reduce the number without hurting the image quality. If you have fewer than you need, you can increase the number, but the quality will not match a photo that was taken at the right pixel resolution to begin with.
- Normal lenses see scenes much as the human eye sees them. Wide angle lenses see a wider angle of view. Telephoto lenses see a narrow angle of view, but the image is magnified.

Digital movie cameras (also called DV cameras) almost always include a digital still camera. However, dedicated digital cameras usually produce better-quality pictures than DV cameras.

- A camera that lets you change lenses, or add adapters that serve the same purpose, will let you take a wider variety of pictures, from wide angle shots that will let you see more in the image without having to step back so far, to telephoto images that can give you a close-up view from far away.
- Filters come in all sorts of varieties, including some that improve your photos (polarizing filters minimize glare, for example), some that add special effects to your photos (like adding a starburst effect to the sun), and some that simply protect an expensive lens from damage.
- Zoom lenses aren't necessarily telephoto lenses.
- Digital zoom is essentially worthless. Ignore it.
- You can use control over shutter speed to stop action, or choose to indicate movement with a blur courtesy of a slow speed.
- You can use aperture to control depth of field (how much of the image, as measured from distance to the camera, is in focus), which lets you focus attention on the subject of the photo.
- Shutter speed and aperture interact with each other, since both affect the amount of light that gets into the camera.

Now that you've decided what kind of photographer you are, how much resolution is appropriate for you needs, the camera features you would like your camera to have, and the types of lenses you're likely to use, let the shooting begin.