

Photography

...“the art and science of utilizing radiant energies to form latent images on sensitized emulsions”.



An Illustrated lectures series of lessons and articles of interest for the modern photographer.

Presented by

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PHOTOGRAPHY

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Illustrated Lecture Series;
Understanding Photography

Photo Basics: Purchasing a New Camera

The idea of spending hundreds of dollars on a new camera and later finding out it does not meet your expectations is enough reason for us to completely shy away from the investment. To make matters worse, we no longer have the option of going into the nearby camera store and holding the various models. And for good reason, we do not trust the sales person at the big box store. The best thing we can do is make a very well informed decision. Here is how to wade through the sales hype.

1. Make a list of everything you want or may eventually want to take pictures of. Be as specific as possible.
2. Establish some meaningful price range.
3. Decide on a size.
4. Eliminate un-needed features and options.
5. Touch a few cameras.
6. Now you can price shop.

Sounds easy, but lets look at the specifics of each step.

Make a list

Decide on all the different types of things and subject you may want to take pictures of. Also think about the circumstance under which you would take those pictures. For instance, taking pictures of people and the family is different than shooting the kids sports and action shots. Taking pictures of dance recitals, concerts and theatre is not the same as candid shots of the family at home or vacation. Shooting an occasional flower shot is not the same as macro photography.

Generally speaking, the more specific the activity, and the more challenging the lighting is under those conditions of that activity, the more technically advanced, larger and more expensive the camera would have to be.

Smallish Point & Shoot cameras will do wonders for general family, vacation, holiday and event shots, but will fall short if you expect Sport Illustrated type action shots, or National Geographic landscapes, fantastic family portraits, or if you expect to make large prints of your shots. Their advantage is go anywhere size, relative ease of use and low cost. Forget megapixels here, a 10MP Point & Shoot will simply NOT deliver the same degree of control or image quality as a 10 MP Digital SLR.

I have an 8 MP Point & Shoot that does a wonderful job of candid family shots, landscapes, vacation, birthdays and events and even good close up shots just do not try to make 8 x 10" prints because they look terrible. It also produces VERY bad shots under low light conditions... like the kids' recitals, graduations, and forget action and sports. But it fits in my shirt pocket and costs well under \$200.00.

Also consider just how picky you are going to be about your shots. These smallish Point & Shoot cameras are not a good choice if you want the best image quality on the market, anticipate making big prints or are determined to see extreme details in a shot.

Last you should consider future growth. Most Point & Shoot cameras do not enable us to purchase additional lenses or add a more powerful flash later.

ahhh, the Budget

Here are some broad price ranges for the camera and one lens.

Under \$200 - 300 = Most Point & Shoot Cameras

\$300 - \$600 = Intermediate sized, self contained large Point & Shoot Cameras

\$600 - \$900 = Low to mid priced Digital Single lens Reflex cameras (DSLR)

\$800- \$1200 = High end consumer or semi pro Digital Single Lens Reflex cameras (DSLR)

\$1200 - \$5000+ = High end and Pro Digital Single lens Reflex cameras (DSLR)

The higher the price cameras give you:

- ~ Much better image quality. Not only in raw resolution, but more detail, and better color.
- ~ More interchangeable lenses choices plus more 3rd party accessory options.
- ~ Add on flashes are available.
- ~ Better lenses, and overall the camera functions are MUCH better, more sophisticated and more accurate.
- ~ More controllable functions, more options, and more dials and buttons.
- ~ More weight... they are larger and heavier.

Today the camera models are changing every few years. The technology of 5 year old cameras is not obsolete but it is being incorporated into lower priced cameras. You are getting more for less (comparatively speaking) than you did a few years ago. Whether you bust the bank and go for a higher priced camera now or wait to grow into a “better” camera in a few years is your choice and it really does involve setting limits on the costs. Stay with the big players in the industry if you plan to expand your shooting capability... those would be Nikon and Canon. Both offer a full line of products ranging from low priced consumer models up to the high end Pro versions.

Camera Size

As you increase the cost you will be getting more camera. This usually translates into a larger camera body and more weight. Jumping from the smaller or mid sized Point & Shoot cameras into the DSLR models significantly increases the footprint of the camera. We move from being able to put the camera into a pocket or purse into needing a dedicated camera bag. This size jump alone keeps some photographers at the smaller camera body level. Try dealing with a camera bag, more lenses and accessories all day while on vacation, or a visit to the Zoo. Sometimes it may seem as though it is not worth the effort or added weight.

I had an older student who really wanted to shoot birds and landscapes; both locally and at her beach property in New Jersey. She was retired and was able to spend a few extra dollars on good equipment. She bought a very good semi pro type Canon camera, a few lenses, tripod and a flash. After a few “local” walks in the dunes and wildlife sanctuaries at the shore, she realized the ordeal of carrying all the extra weight. A camera backpack was the next purchase, but as we all would do, it became overloaded with “stuff” and she could not manage it. Within one year she traded in the heavier semi pro camera for a lighter consumer type camera body, and when she took walks she left some gear at home.

This is an important lesson. You must pick up the camera and feel comfortable with the size and weight. Sometimes this mean making a day trip into a larger city and visiting a big Photographic retailer. When I hand my Nikon to my students they are shocked how heavy it seems. Many people cannot even hold it comfortably.

Features & Options; there is no Easy Button

The more control you want to exercise over the image, the better the camera you should have. Typically better cameras offer more or better features and shooting options. This does not mean a better camera would have a “Easy Button” that the Point & Shoot camera did not have. You need to decide that YOU will control the camera and the resultant image. Regardless of cost, no camera is capable of giving us perfect images all the time under all types of conditions.

However, the major differences in offered options & features fall along the size/price guidelines we already mentioned. For instance, smaller Point & Shoot cameras have far less options, features and generally are less sophisticated than their larger, more expensive DSLR brothers. Within the DSLR range we seem many similar features, and almost identical looking cameras until we get to the high price range. Then again the camera manufactures load up these premium cameras with all the bells and whistles.

Define what you want to shoot, how much control you wish to exercise over the image, and then look for those features in a camera.

Regardless of cost, no camera is capable of giving us perfect images all the time under all types of conditions.

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