

Getting Started

HOLDING YOUR CAMERA

Holding your camera properly will improve your photos. A steady camera reduces the chances of blurry pictures.

- You should always use two hands. Two hands are better than one.
- Always find a stable position to stand, sit, etc.
- Hold the camera by the grip, comfortably in your right hand with your index finger positioned above the shutter release button.
- For SLR users: Support the bottom of the lens with your left hand. This helps keep the camera from shaking.
- For compact camera users: Hold the left side of the camera with your left hand.
- If you are using the viewfinder, hold the camera so that your elbows are close to your body.
- If you are using the LCD, hold the camera as close to your head as is comfortable. Avoid holding the camera at arms length. The further your arms are extended the more they shake.
- For vertical photos, it is best to rotate the camera counter clockwise so that your right hand is now above your left hand. Support the camera by placing your left hand under the left side of the camera.
- Breath slow and deep. Press the shutter at the end of an exhaled breath. This is when your body is most stable.



MOUNTING AND CHANGING LENSES

SLR cameras allow you to use a variety of different lenses. Changing lenses on your SLR isn't difficult, but improper lens mounting cause wear and possibly damage as well.

Read your camera's instruction manual. Turn off your camera. Prepare a clean flat surface to place your lenses on before and after changing. Remove your rear lens cap and find the index mark which allows you to perfectly align your lens for mounting on the camera. Set your lens into the camera's mount and twist to lock it into place. Do not change lenses in a windy, dusty environment. When changing lenses always have the next lens ready. Limit the time that the camera body internals are exposed to dust and dirt. This is extremely important with Digital SLRs. Sensors do not like dust. Replace your lens caps immediately.



FOCUSING WITH YOUR SLR CAMERA

Autofocus Cameras

Autofocus cameras are handy but not full proof. Here are some tips to help you get sharper pics.

- I suggest always using the center point when using AF. Why? The center point is simply the most reliable.
- Set your camera for single-shot AF. This is the most accurate choice for general photography.
- Autofocus is not reliable in the following situations:
 - Low light (Your camera needs light to focus. (Use AF Assist if your camera offers it)
 - Backlit subjects (Use your flash and AF Assist if available)
 - Low contrast subjects, (i.e. blank walls)
 - Fast moving subjects
 - Small subjects in a large frame
 - A twig, wire or other object in the line of sight
 - Parallel lines
- Hold your camera steady. To focus on an object the focus point needs to be fixed on that object. Press the shutter button slowly. Allow the camera to focus.
- Breath slow and deep. Press the shutter at the end of an exhaled breath. This is when your body is most stable.
- Be ready for your subject to move. Anticipate where you will need to point the camera.



Manual Focus Cameras

(Read your instruction manual)

- Look at the center of your viewfinder. All manual focus cameras have a mechanism in the center of the frame to help you achieve proper focus.
- Know which direction you must turn the lens focusing ring in order to reach infinity focus. You will use this as a reference. Start at infinity and turn the focusing ring until you achieve proper focus. Why? Using the same starting point for each time you focus saves time because you only turn the ring in one direction instead of hunting back and forth.
- Focus on the closest part of your subject. Landscapes and portraits are different, see [Landscape Tips](#) and [Portrait Tips](#).



FILM AND MEDIA CARDS

Film

For loading instructions, see [wikihow](#). They offer a simple step by step video guide. Note: Never put pressure on the shutter curtain while loading film.

- Film is a strip or sheet of transparent plastic coated on one side with a gelatin emulsion containing microscopically small, light-sensitive, silver halide crystals. The size and other characteristics of the crystals determine the sensitivity, contrast, sharpness and resolution of the film.
- Never let your exposed color films be X-ray'd. It will alter the characteristics and shift the colors. Always ask for hand inspection.
- Never touch the film surface with your bare hands. Your fingerprint will become permanently infused into the film's surface.
- Keep your negatives or slides in archival sleeving.

Never cut your negatives into strips shorter than three frames.

Media Cards

Memory cards transfer data to and from your camera. They are sensitive to heat, cold and moisture. They also have a limited life span just like any flash memory device.

- Avoid strong magnetic fields, such as industrial electromagnets. There's a chance that a strong magnetic field will damage the card. Weak magnetic fields will not damage your card, though.
- Memory cards should only be loaded with the camera's power off.
- Memory should always be formatted before use. Check your camera menu for that option.
- Do not touch the contacts. The oil from your fingers will damage the contacts.
- Do not force the memory card into your camera. They are designed to fit 'one way'.
- Always carry a backup card in your bag in case one fails or you leave it in your computer. It's better to have two 64gb cards than one 128gb card.
- Use a class 10 or higher rated card.

CARE AND MAINTENANCE

- Use a camera bag or camera backpack. All cameras and lenses are fragile. Camera bags are designed to protect your equipment from the elements and from breakage.
- Protect your lens with a UV filter and cap. It's better to break a \$20 filter instead of your \$200 lens if you whack it against something. Also, filters and caps help keep dirt and water off your lens. It's better to clean a filter twenty times than to clean your lens twice. Every time you wipe your lens you degrade the surface.
- Clean your lens and filters with care. For dust, use a blower brush. For streaks or light smears, use a pre-moistened lens wipe. Don't over wipe. I suggest Zeiss. For an oily smudge you may need a product like ROR to gently degrease the glass. I do not suggest detergents of any kind for lens or filter cleaning. Detergents leave a residue which builds up and damages the lens coating.
- Protect your camera from sand and water. Both will work their way into the camera's crevices and damage electronics and moving parts.
- Use an LCD protector. They are cheap and they work.
- Use a camera strap at all times. Don't trust your hand to hold your camera.
- Extreme heat, cold and humidity will damage your camera. Long term exposure to humidity will result in un-cleanable mold growth inside your lens. Store your equipment at room temperature in a low humidity environment. If you come in from the cold do not remove your lens filter. If you do, condensation will immediately form on the lens glass. If your lens fogs up, do not wipe it. Set in on a table and let it defog naturally.
- Wipe your camera with a lint free cloth moistened with soapy water. Avoid using alcohol on plastics.
- Always have a lens or body cap on your camera body to reduce the chance of dust entering the camera and landing on the sensor. If you are changing lenses, do it quickly on a clean surface. Mirrorless cameras are notorious for dust problems.
- Sticky lens? Never use oil to lubricate it. The oil will find it's way into your lens and ruin it. Never lubricate anything unless you are trained to do so.
- Never use canned air to clean the mirror on your digital camera. Canned air contains chemicals which will damage the sensor.
- Never touch the slr mirror or focus screen. Never touch the screen with alcohol. It will permanently damage the screen.
- Never touch the shutter curtain on a film camera. It will break.
- Never leave batteries in your camera when it is not in use. Battery leakage is still a major cause of electronic failure.
- Never touch your memory card's contacts. The oil from your fingers will damage the contact. Protect the memory card from extreme heat, cold and humidity. It can melt or suffer permanent damage from condensation.