

Choosing a Digital Camera

Don't get confused! If you have made your mind up to start using a digital camera, or perhaps upgrading from an existing one, then you can be forgiven for being confused. There are thousands of digital cameras available and they all display a confusing array of specifications. And digital photography was supposed to make photography easy, wasn't it? Luckily, many of the functions that digital cameras have are common to all so it is often down to personal choice as to which one is for you. How do you plan to use your camera? When? How much can you afford to spend? Don't worry about terminology! The easiest mistake to make is to go for the greatest megapixels when choosing a camera. But this won't get you the best camera or the best shots. Then there is the zoom of the lens to think about - optical or digital? And what type of memory cards are used? SLR, prosumer or compact? It can be very confusing. Decide what you want from a camera! Think what you are expecting from a digital camera? Will you be using it for family and travel type shots or will you be delving into more complex areas such as nature. Sports, portrait or landscape photography? Buying a digital camera won't make you a superstar photographer or get you noticed by the rich and famous but it can simplify your photography and make you think about what you are doing a bit more. To be a top class photographer takes years of experience. But, there have been remarkable advances in digital photography in recent years and the very least you can expect is an affordable camera that will produce images as good as you were used to on 35mm film. You will get a state of the art camera that will fulfil most of your expected requirements. What is different about digital? The big difference between digital and film cameras is the ability to see your shot on the inbuilt LCD screen either before you shoot or after (sometimes both). This can allow you to see any glaring mistakes, improve composition and retake shots that weren't up to scratch. Cost is a big factor. Don't be put off by the cost of digital cameras in the stores. They may look expensive (although prices are coming down all the time) but you will save a fortune on processing. All images you make with your digital can be downloaded from your camera onto your computer and the memory card in the camera wiped clean ready to start again. No more buying film, no more developing and printing costs - unless you want to! And a digital camera will allow you to view your images on your computer, on your TV or send them to friends and family around the world or even upload them to free websites and galleries. The limits are endless! Types of digital cameras Cameras come in various types. Single Lens Reflex (SLR) cameras come with the ability to change lenses depending on the conditions. They can be complex for the casual user and the results are not necessarily better than those of good compact cameras. They are for the avid enthusiast who knows what spending lots of cash on a new lens really means. Another type of camera is the "prosumer" model. These look and feel like SLRs but they don't have interchangeable lenses. They are, however, of a high specification and produce results that can be indistinguishable from more expensive models. Compact cameras do not have interchangeable lenses - but often have additional components that can be attached to make them function in this way. They are usually smaller and easier to carry and handle. They have powerful functions and most have both programme mode (fully automatic) and the ability to override to a more creative mode when required. They often have between 3 and 6x optical zoom - more than enough for the avid snapper. Enjoy digital! Digital cameras are fun! You can see what photograph you have taken without having to wait days or weeks to finish a film or await processing. The images you take can be shared and enjoyed by everyone around you either instantly at the time of taking the picture or very quickly afterwards by email or other medium. You get instant results and if you don't like what you see then you can discard it and take it again. There are no costs involved in this. Don't worry about "megapixels".... There is a lot of fuss made about megapixels. This can be confusing for the majority of us. Rest assured that most cameras have at least 3 megapixels these days and will produce more than excellent results at normal sizes. Only when you enlarge to 10x8 ins or more will you find the need to invest in greater megapixels. But think back - when was the last time you EVER did that?.... or lenses In respect of lenses, you should consider buying a camera with a lens that will "zoom" - that is get closer to the action, or further away. If you never felt the need before, than trust me, go for a zoom lens now. You won't regret it. Luckily almost all compact cameras and all prosumer models have a zoom lens built in and of course you can buy your own zoom lenses if you have a digital SLR. Shutter delay is normal on compact cameras One of the annoyances you might find with compact digital cameras is that of shutter lag. This is the delay between pressing the shutter button and the picture actually being taken. It is normal. When you press the shutter button the camera goes through a sequence of checks and adjustments to calculate the best circumstances for correct exposure. This can create a delay before the shutter actually triggers and the picture is taken. You won't miss many shots but you might miss a few especially where fast action is concerned. You can minimise this problem by pressing the shutter button halfway and allowing the camera to pre-calculate conditions for exposure. In any event, the problem is a minor annoyance and is overshadowed by the tremendous benefits digital photography has to offer. Flash is easy Most compact cameras, prosumers and many SLRs have built in flash. This is handy if you want to get that otherwise elusive shot indoors or in the dark. But don't expect quality - external flashguns will give the best results but the sheer convenience of a built in flash makes it worth the effort. What are "memory cards"? People often get confused by memory cards. There is no need. Simply put, a memory card is the equivalent to film in the older film cameras. The images you take are stored on these. The main differences are that you can store many more than you would have been able to on film and that you can download them to a computer or print images out at the local store or at home and then delete all the images on the card ready to start all over again! The camera you buy will usually take only one type of memory card. Other types won't fit. They are easily and cheaply available both in the shops and online. They come in different capacities (just like film) but typically a 256Mb sized card will be able to store around about 150 images taken on a 3 megapixel camera. Batteries are required Your camera will need power and these days it comes from batteries. Not so long ago, battery life was very short and consequently, costs were relatively high. Now things are better and most cameras give longer battery life. Of course you can use rechargeable batteries and these will last you for years if looked after. Many cameras allow you to recharge batteries either with a specific charger (often included in the package) or via an optional "dock" in which the camera is placed when not being used - this gives a continuous charge and means your camera is ready for action at all times. Viewing your pictures When you have finished taking your pictures you can usually review them on your camera's built-in

screen. Or, better still, you can download them easily to your computer for ease of viewing and can even watch slide shows on your TV or send them via email to your friends. Many people are setting up free galleries online to store their images or developing user-friendly "blogs". With digital, the possibilities are endless! And, all the software and cables you need are usually supplied with the camera when you buy it. Now get your camera! Digital cameras are the way to go. They are relatively cheap to run, produce fantastic results and will give years of pleasure.

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