

Chapter 1

Ladies and Gentlemen: Start Your Point-and-Shoots!

In This Chapter

- ▶ Installing batteries
- ▶ Batteries and digital point-and-shoot cameras
- ▶ Loading film
- ▶ Turning on the camera
- ▶ How to hold your camera
- ▶ How to press the shutter button
- ▶ What to do if you accidentally open the camera back
- ▶ Rewinding do's and don'ts
- ▶ Getting the most from a one-time-use camera

Your point-and-shoot camera is practically an invitation to just start taking pictures. A wonder of automation, it uses advanced electronics and tiny motors to quickly execute the many separate steps that photographers used to have to do manually each time they wanted to take a picture. Point-and-shoots automatically advance the film from shot to shot, or, if they're digital, automatically store your pictures in their onboard "memory." And film or digital, they automatically compute the correct exposure — the exact amount of light that your film or digital camera needs to properly record the subject — and adjust their settings accordingly. They automatically turn on the flash in dim light. And they automatically focus the lens. Digital cameras take things a step further, using a built-in computer to convert each scene you shoot into a "file" of tiny dots of varying color and tone.

Actually, your particular point-and-shoot may not perform every one of these functions. And which ones it does perform depends partly (though not entirely) on what type of point-and-shoot you have. So I begin this chapter — a chapter otherwise devoted to getting you started taking pictures as quickly as possible — by describing the four different types of point-and-shoot cameras. The good news: You really don't need to know what kind of point-and-shoot camera you have to make it point and shoot. But knowing what kind of

10

Part I: What You Need to Take Pictures

point-and-shoot you have can actually help you make better pictures. That is, after all, why you're reading this book — right?

The Four Types of Point-and-Shoot Cameras

Like people, point-and-shoots have more in common than they do differences. This is especially true of the way you operate the cameras — what you push, slide, or twist to make them do specific things. But while they're operated in pretty much the same way, point-and-shoots differ both in the way the image is captured and in the mechanical and electronic complexity they bring to the job. Those differences make it possible to divide these cameras into four main types.

The 35mm point-and-shoot

Granddaddy of the point-and-shoot movement, the 35mm point-and-shoot uses 35mm film — the film that comes in the funny-looking little cassette with the perforated tongue sticking out at you. You grab that tongue of film to start the roll through the camera, as this chapter explains in detail. 35mm point-and-shoots come in every form from cheapo, check-out counter specials to expensive, full-featured models that rival 35mm single-lens reflexes (those professional-style system cameras) in their sophistication.

The Advanced Photo System point-and-shoot

A younger generation of point-and-shoot cameras, Advanced Photo System (APS) models look pretty much like their 35mm counterparts. But they take a different, smaller-than-35mm film cassette that has allowed manufacturers to create smaller cameras. The system also simplifies film loading, makes storage and reprinting easier, and gives you a shot-by-shot choice of three different print sizes, which you pick with a switch on the camera. See Chapter 8 for details on the Advanced Photo System.

The one-time-use point-and-shoot

They're everywhere. From drugstore counters to Disney World, one-time-use cameras are by far the most popular type of point-and-shoot, outselling reloadable models many times over. These inexpensive (usually \$5 to \$15, depending on the type) models are in some respects the ultimate point-and-shoot. You don't have to figure out how to insert film, for example, because they come preloaded with a roll. (In fact, you can get them in both 35mm and Advanced Photo System versions.) The same goes for batteries, also preinstalled. You needn't master any pushbuttons except for the shutter button and the flash

Chapter 1: Ladies and Gentlemen: Start Your Point-and-Shoots!

11

button, if your model has a flash at all. You don't even have to remember to bring your camera along, because you can buy a one-time-use camera on the way or on the spot. After you finish shooting a roll, you just give the camera to the photofinisher — no rewinding necessary. And last, but not least, one-time-use cameras are the only cameras with complete instructions printed on them! (See the sidebar “When to use a one-time-use camera” in this chapter for details.)



Don't buy and shoot with a one-time-use camera simply because you're intimidated by your regular, reloadable point-and-shoot. Read this chapter, and your regular point-and-shoot won't scare you anymore!

The digital point-and-shoot

Unlike the other types of point-and-shoot cameras, a digital point-and-shoot neither contains nor accepts film. How can it make photographs without film? The same way video camcorders do: With a permanently installed electronic light sensor, sometimes called a “chip.” For clarity's sake, I refer to it as an *image sensor* in this book.

Unlike many camcorders, a digital camera stores photographs as digital files that can be downloaded directly and immediately to a computer for various purposes, including retouching, e-mailing, and printing. And most digital point-and-shoots store these files on *memory cards*, small plastic-and-silicon wafers that are (in some respects) the digital equivalent of film. Yet in terms of operation, digital point-and-shoots are essentially like film-using cameras — and again, most of the shooting advice in this and other chapters applies to them as well. Perhaps the main difference is that some camera settings (mostly less important ones) are adjusted on the same tiny, computer-like screen with which you view your subjects and review your pictures. These days, many people have both film and digital point-and-shoots in their homes. For specifics on working with digital models, see Chapter 15.

The Parts of Your Camera

Here are a couple of things to remember whenever you feel you're not quite getting the hang of operating your camera. First, for all its pushbuttons, dials, windows, and flashing lights, your camera is basically a lightproof box. It's lightproof to protect the film or image sensor inside it from any light other than what the lens gathers from the subject and uses to form a picture on the surface of the film or sensor. And second, the camera is basically an extension of your eye — a window on your subject. In fact, to view your subject you look through a little window on the camera back called the *viewfinder*. Most digital cameras have viewfinders, but also let you see the subject you're photographing on what I prefer to call a *viewing screen* — essentially, a little

12 Part I: What You Need to Take Pictures

computer monitor that's connected to the camera's image sensor. (There are other terms in circulation for this screen, but I think they're confusing.) For more about what you see when you look through the camera's viewfinder, read Chapter 5. And for specifics about a digital point-and-shoot's viewing screen, see Chapters 4 and 15.

Now for those pushbuttons. When it comes to the design and location of your point-and-shoot's controls, little standardization exists. In pictorial terms, two very different-looking controls in two very different places may do pretty much the same thing. But whatever the control configuration, most 35mm and APS models, and many though not all digital models, have an *LCD panel*. The LCD panel is a digital display on the top or side of the camera that indicates what settings you're making. Figures 1-1 and 1-2 show the location of camera controls and other basic camera features for a typical 35mm point-and-shoot. Figures 1-3 and 1-4 show the same for a typical digital point-and-shoot. The purposes of these controls and features are spelled out in Part II, and you can refer back to these figures for help in locating specific parts and buttons. But your camera may be different from the models shown — and the only way to know is to check your camera manual.

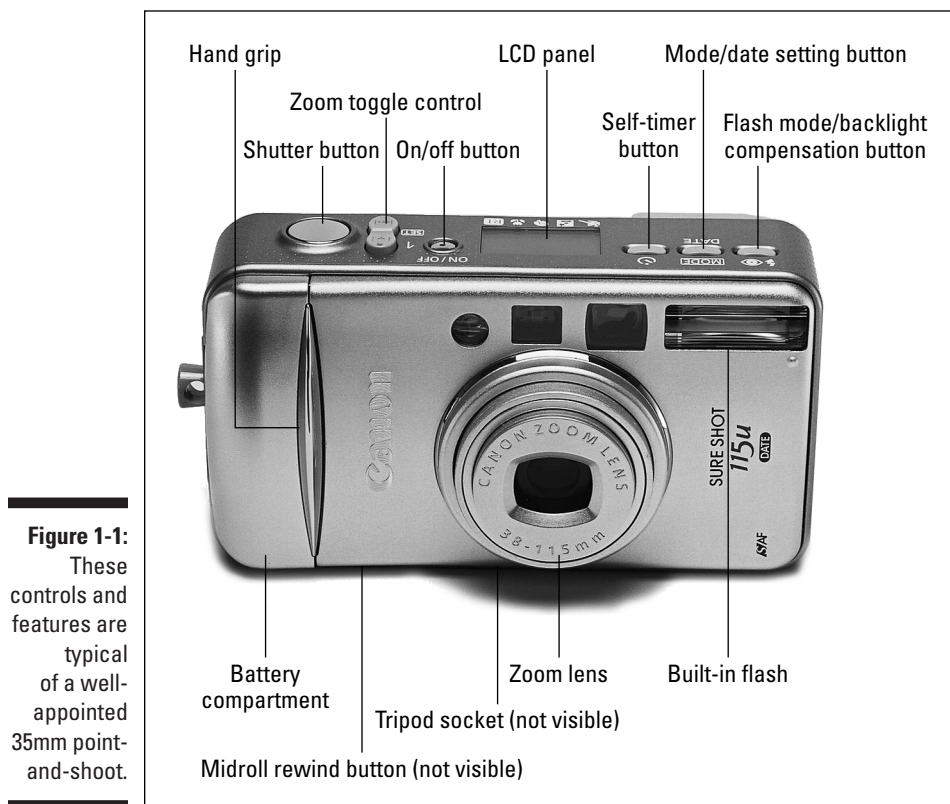


Figure 1-1:
These controls and features are typical of a well-appointed 35mm point-and-shoot.



Your camera manual shows you which controls do what, and where they are. Sometimes it loses a little in translation, but your manual is an important photographic tool. It doesn't tell you how to take better point-and-shoot pictures; that's the job of this book. What it does tell you is where to find and how to operate the camera controls that can help you take better pictures.

Getting a Charge: The Pluses and Minuses of Batteries

Point-and-shoot cameras are chock full of little motors that do everything from advancing and rewinding your film to zooming your lens. These motors, along with other electrical demands — with digital point-and-shoots, the viewing screen is the biggest hog — consume quite a bit of electricity. Makers of kids' toys have a simple solution: Use more batteries. But because a point-and-shoot camera must remain compact, manufacturers have devised a different strategy: Use smaller, more powerful, longer-life batteries.

Lithium batteries

Most film-using point-and-shoots are powered by special *lithium batteries*. Made specifically for cameras, these cells are shorter than the familiar AA battery, but a lot more expensive.

There are two common types of lithium batteries. One is a three-volt cell that goes by proprietary designations such as KL123A, CR123A, or DL123A (a 123A is always in there) and costs as much as \$7, sometimes more. The other is the shorter, thinner three-volt CR2 lithium battery, which costs about the same. Some cameras need two three-volt lithium batteries. And some take double-barreled six-volt batteries, either the 223A or, infrequently, the bigger 2CR5. These batteries can cost up to \$13. And their prices may go even higher, depending on what the market will bear — and in tony or touristy areas, it will bear a lot.



More and more digital cameras use proprietary rechargeable batteries, but a number of these models take the CRV3 lithium battery. It looks like two familiar AA cells just stuck together, but don't be fooled: It costs up to \$25, though you can sometimes find it for less than \$20. See the sidebar, "Batteries and digital point-and-shoots."

Fortunately, you get what you pay for: Lithium batteries last much longer than alkaline AA cells. But the number of pictures you actually get from a lithium battery depends on the power needs of your camera; the more motorized it is, the fewer the rolls. Most 35mm and APS models give you within the range of 10 to 25 24-exposure rolls per battery, assuming that you use flash about half the time. (Lithiums also don't conk out in freezing weather as fast as AA cells, a good thing if you like taking pictures in the snow.)

14

Part I: What You Need to Take Pictures

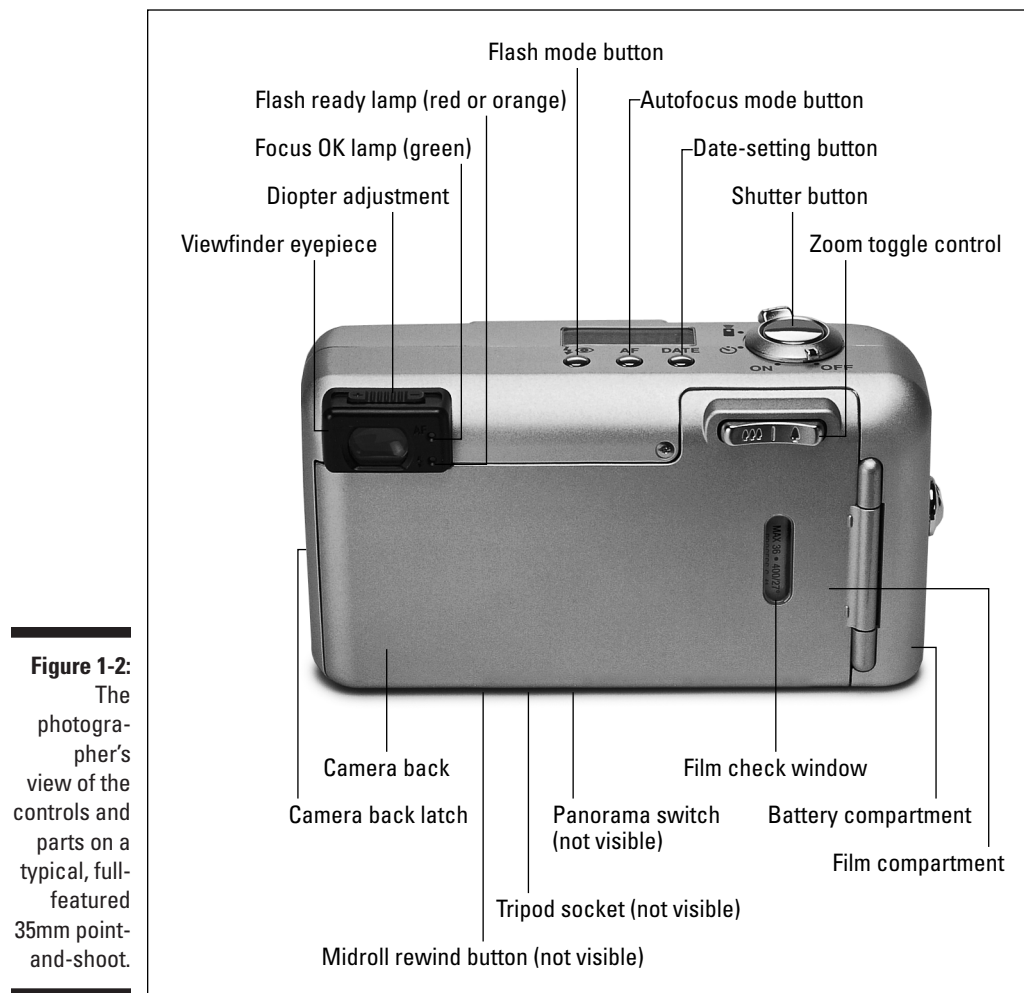


Figure 1-2:
The
photogra-
pher's
view of the
controls and
parts on a
typical, full-
featured
35mm point-
and-shoot.



TIP

When you need to buy a new battery, always bring the old one — or better yet, your camera — to the store. Given all the different types of batteries, not knowing which type you need can drive clerks crazy. And by bringing your camera to the store and putting in the new battery there, you're immediately reassured that the new battery brings your camera up to snuff.

Lithium batteries are sometimes hard to find in out-of-the-way places. Suburban camera shops are a dependable source, but if your camera loses power in Timbuktu, you're in trouble. Even if you can find the right lithium battery, you may have to pay a black-market price for it.

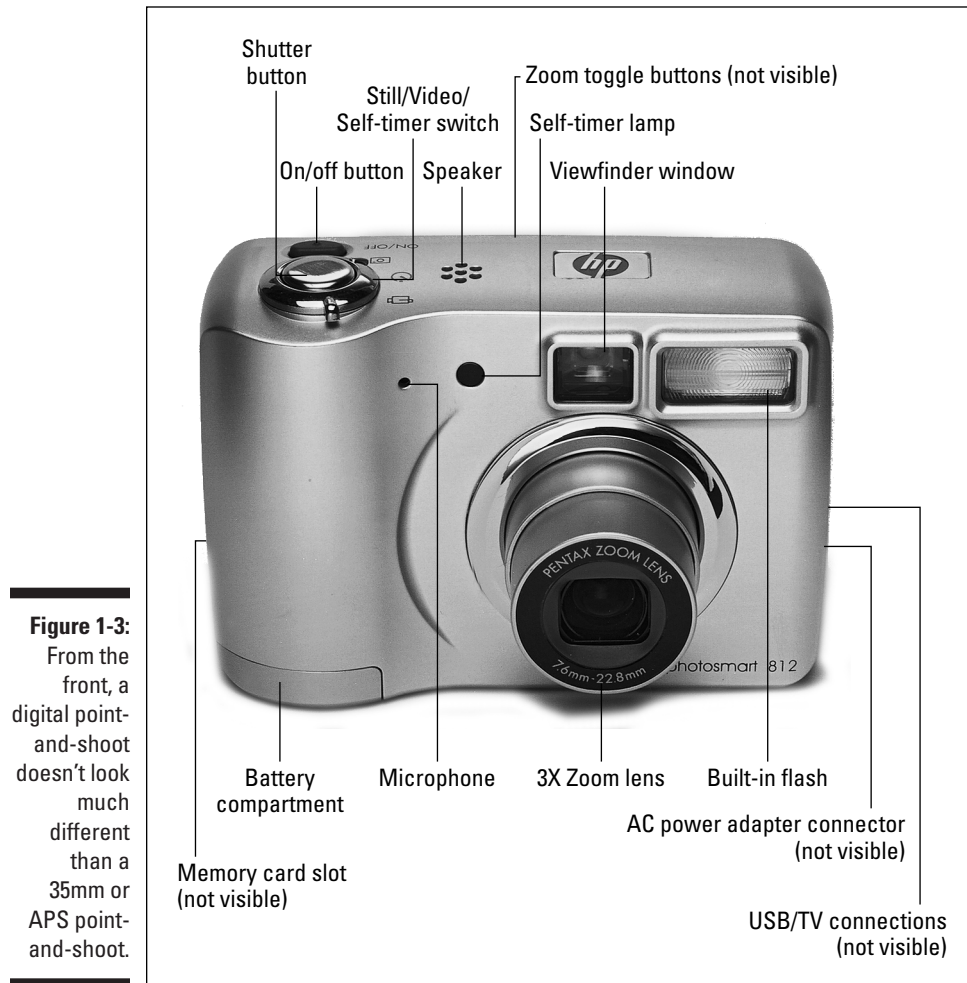


Figure 1-3: From the front, a digital point-and-shoot doesn't look much different than a 35mm or APS point-and-shoot.

Shooting insurance: Pack an extra battery

If your point-and-shoot takes lithium batteries, you should always keep an extra one (or two, if that's what the model requires) on hand. To prolong the battery's shelf life, keep it in the refrigerator, in its original packaging inside a baggie. (Never freeze it.) Just avoid putting the battery straight into your camera from the refrigerator; give it a half hour to warm up.



Take an extra battery with you to weddings, graduations, bar mitzvahs, or any other occasions that you want to photograph. These events are flash-intensive, and using flash a lot reduces the number of pictures you get from a battery. If you take an extra battery along, you don't have to stop shooting if the one in your camera peters out. Just be sure to refresh your memory about

16 Part I: What You Need to Take Pictures

how to install it, in case you need to do it fast. (See “Loading batteries — the right way,” later in this chapter, for the details.)

A different kind of recycling

As a battery weakens, your camera’s flash takes longer to *recycle* — to recharge itself for the next flash picture. (See Chapter 7 for more on flash recycling.) This sluggishness becomes a practical problem if, as with most point-and-shoots, your camera won’t let you shoot until the flash has mostly recycled. Have you ever tried to take a picture right after turning on the camera or to take flash pictures in quick succession, only to find that when you press the shutter button it just doesn’t respond — and you have to keep pressing and pressing to get it to fire the camera? Sometimes the problem is due to the camera’s inability to focus, but more often than not, it’s caused by an overly long recycling time — the direct result of a low battery.

You can turn off the flash (which otherwise powers up automatically every time you turn on the camera) to sidestep this problem. But I think flash is one of the most valuable photographic tools on your point-and-shoot, and I encourage you to use it generously — even outdoors! So please read Chapter 7 for ways to deal with flash recycling woes and to find out about the flash-ready lamp, which alerts you when the flash is ready to fire again.



If your camera’s shutter button won’t let you take a picture, don’t keep bearing down on it. The camera may still be recycling the flash, preventing you from shooting to reduce the chance of a bad picture. Release the pressure, wait a few seconds, and then press again.

The good old AAs

Some point-and-shoots get their power from AA (or AAA) batteries, the same size that goes into most battery-powered gizmos. With 35mm and APS cameras, it is often the less expensive models that use AA and AAA cells. If you have such a camera, be sure to use alkaline AA (or AAA) batteries rather than the standard cheapo AA (or AAA) batteries. Alkalines last way longer than regular batteries, and most battery makers offer alkalines that are specially formulated for use in digital cameras and other power-hungry electronic devices. Some cameras actually accept both AA batteries *or* the smaller three-volt lithiums. Now *there’s* a great idea, especially if you’re going to Timbuktu. (Pack extra AAs anyway.)

And if you really *are* going to Timbuktu, or even somewhere less exotic, consider buying *lithium* AA batteries, not to be confused with the small lithium cells made specifically for cameras. Lithium AAs look the same as regular AA batteries but last up to three times as long as alkaline AAs. They’re also three times as expensive as alkaline AAs. But you don’t have to change them half as

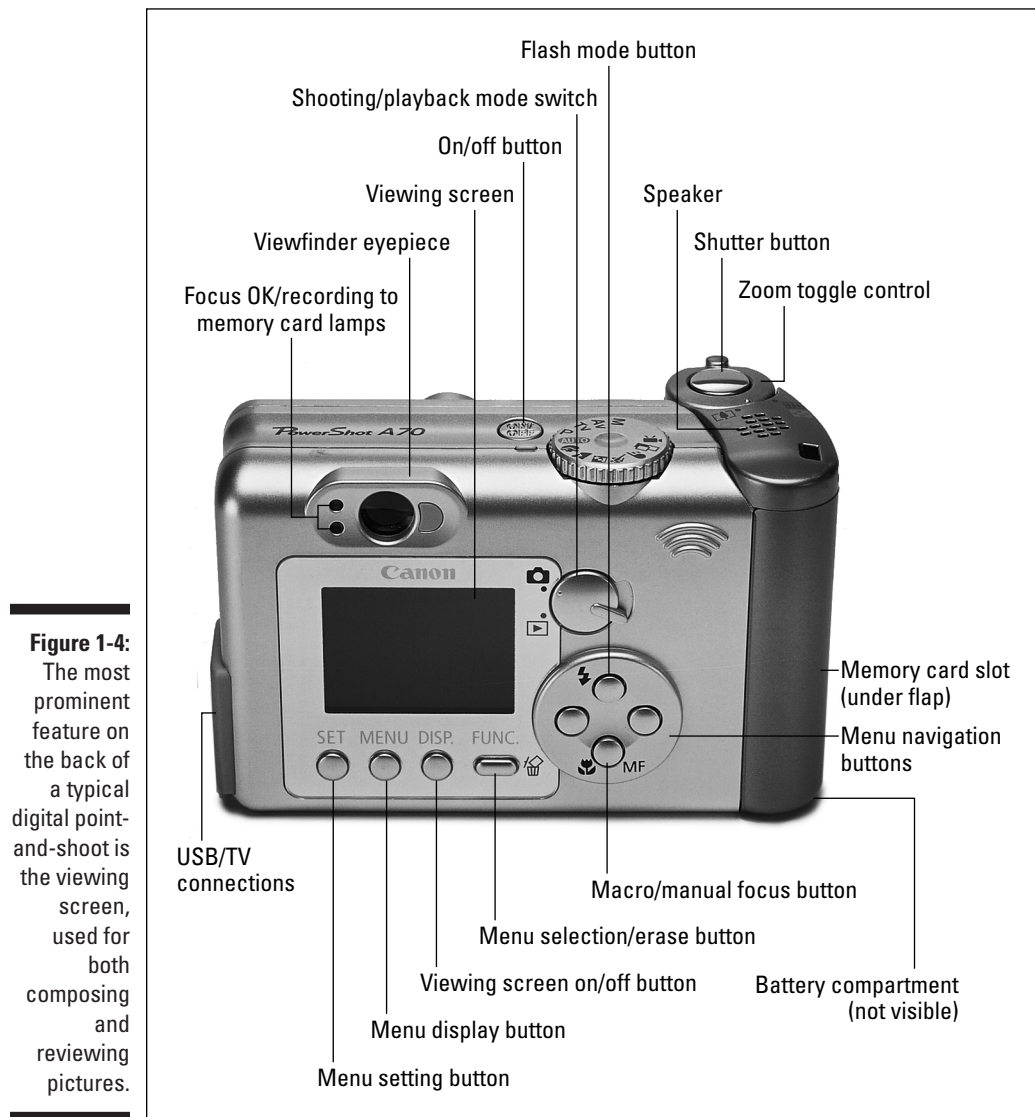
Chapter 1: Ladies and Gentlemen: Start Your Point-and-Shoots!

17

often, which means you're less likely to see a great photo opportunity disappear before your eyes as you struggle with batteries.



Lithium AAs are especially valuable with digital cameras because of their energy-sapping viewing screens. But you certainly can use them in your regular film point-and-shoot if it accepts AAs. Another option is to use dual-celled CR3V batteries, which fit in cameras that take AA cells. (You'll need one for models that take two AAs, and two for models that take four AAs.) An expensive solution, but you won't be changing batteries for a long time.



18

Part I: What You Need to Take Pictures



Batteries and digital point-and-shoots

Digital point-and-shoots don't accept the scaled-down lithium batteries used by better film models. The reason for this, as far as I can tell, is that these newfangled cameras have enormous power needs — so special lithium batteries would make them prohibitively expensive to operate. Most early digital point-and-shoots used four AA batteries, and some still do, eating them like they're going out of style. Many models use just two AAs to stay small, if they don't come with a proprietary rechargeable cell.

The big power drain in these cameras is their little viewing screens. These mini-monitors are intended not just for playback of pictures that you've already shot, but also for viewing and composing your subject while you're shooting. Though many models have a window-type viewfinder in addition to the viewing screen, others have no such viewfinder and force you to use the viewing screen for shooting. Every minute the screen is on, even if you're not taking pictures, it's sucking your batteries dry.

If your digital point-and-shoot makes you shoot with the viewing screen, turn the camera on *only when you're ready to take pictures*. Turn it off as soon as you're done shooting. This habit extends the life of the batteries.

If your camera has both a window-type viewfinder and a viewing screen, you can get much more life out of your batteries by shooting with the regular viewfinder and saving the viewing screen for playback only. Oh, and if you're taking your digital point-and-shoot to an occasion — or on a trip — pack at least two changes of batteries.

When you use flash *and* a digital point-and-shoot's viewing screen for your pictures, you consume batteries even more quickly. But the several seconds digital point-and-shoots often make you wait before taking the next shot aren't always battery-related: During this interval, the camera is processing the information from the image sensor.



If your camera takes AA batteries and you feel guilty about throwing them away, you can get rechargeable AA cells. Some digital point-and-shoots — the ones that don't use specially-shaped, proprietary rechargeables — actually come with AA rechargeables and a charger. Or purchase an inexpensive plug-in AA recharger and at least two sets of cells — four cells if your camera takes two batteries, eight cells if it takes four. That way, you can alternate charging them and always have a freshly charged set.

Loading batteries — the right way

If you've ever had to figure out where to stick batteries in your child's latest electronic acquisition, then loading batteries in your point-and-shoot shouldn't be a challenge. Turn off your camera when you install the batteries; otherwise, it may go crazy opening and closing its lens. (Some cameras turn themselves off after you install new batteries, so you have to turn them back on to shoot.)

Chapter 1: Ladies and Gentlemen: Start Your Point-and-Shoots!

19

With big point-and-shoot models, you typically have to open a latched cover on the camera bottom to install batteries. On more compact models, the battery compartment is often under a door or flap incorporated into the side or grip of the camera (see Figure 1-5). Sometimes you have to pry open such doors with a coin or key. This design is annoying when you don't have any change and break a fingernail trying to do it.

Figure 1-5: This point-and-shoot's battery compartment is on the side; others are in the bottom.



More annoying are camera-bottom battery covers that you open by loosening a screw. (You need a coin for this type, too.) And most annoying are battery covers that aren't hinged. They come off completely when you unscrew them. If you have one of these covers, don't change batteries when you're standing over a sewer grate, in a field of tall grass, or on a pier!



With digital point-and-shoots having proprietary rechargeable batteries, the battery slot and the memory card slot are often under the same door on the side of the camera. This is especially true of compact models.

Whether you're loading four AA cells or just a single lithium, make sure that the batteries are correctly oriented as you insert them. You'll find a diagram and/or plus and minus markings, usually within the compartment or on the inside of the door. The bump end of the battery is its positive (+) terminal; the flat end is its negative (–) terminal. The batteries also have plus and minus symbols on their sides. AA (and AAA cells) usually don't go in all facing the same way; you may have to reverse every other cell. Always follow your camera's diagram.



If you don't install batteries in their correct orientation, your camera won't start up when you try to turn it on. If this happens, remove the batteries, reinsert them correctly, and then try to turn the camera on again.

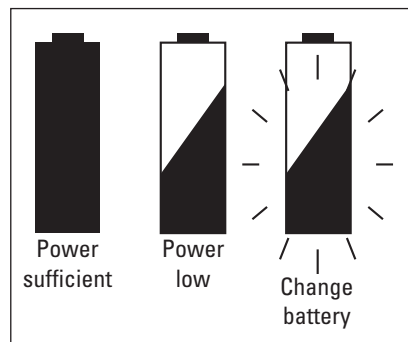
If your camera doesn't turn on and you're sure the batteries are correctly installed, then the problem may be that the batteries have lost their punch from sitting on a shelf too long. Which brings me to the battery icon. If your camera has an LCD panel or viewing screen, the icon tells you when battery power is low.

20

Part I: What You Need to Take Pictures

After you turn on your camera or load film, your camera may display a battery-shaped icon, usually in a corner of the LCD panel or viewing screen. (See Chapter 4 for more on the LCD panel and viewing screen.) If the icon's shape is fully darkened, the battery has sufficient power. If it's half darkened, you've already used a good portion of its juice — and may have noticed already that the flash recycling time is increasing. If the icon is barely filled in and/or blinking, you need a new battery. (See Figure 1-6.) Many models won't display the icon at all until the battery is on its way out.

Figure 1-6:
Typical
battery
power
icons.



Some models may display battery status all the time. And other models may have a pushbutton battery check. Pushing the button makes a light glow. But however your camera displays battery status, if it does, check the status regularly. If you're planning to shoot a special event or going on a trip, check it before you go. If the battery needs replacing, do it now.

By the way, changing batteries when film is in the camera is perfectly okay. The LCD panel goes blank during the change. Even though the LCD is battery-dependent, the camera “remembers” how many pictures you’ve taken — or how many are left, depending on your model — and restores the display after you power up again. Models with mechanical counters remain unaffected. The camera ordinarily *doesn't* remember specific settings that you previously made, however. (See Chapter 4 for more on setting camera modes.)



If you have a roll of film in the camera, be sure to leave the old battery in it until you're ready to put in a new one. Left too long without a battery, the camera may forget how many pictures have been taken.

Models with *quartz date* capability, which allows them to imprint the time and/or date on your prints, generally do not use the camera's main battery to keep time. They use a tiny *button cell* — a watch battery — that either comes with the camera or is factory-installed. This battery usually lasts many years. You can replace it after it dies, though some models may need to be returned to the manufacturer for this service. Check your manual! (And see Chapter 3 for the pros and cons of putting the time or date on the front of your pictures.)



If you don't use your camera for long periods of time — a couple of months or more — remove the batteries to prevent the possibility that they will start to leak corrosive fluids. (Just remember that you lose the frame count — but then you shouldn't be leaving film that long in the camera anyway!) Leakage, most likely with AA batteries, can seriously damage your camera's innards. The solution: Take pictures more often!

Loading Film — the Painless Way!

Probably the single greatest source of photographic anxiety, loading film is much easier than it used to be — and, thanks to point-and-shoot innovation, easier than most people think. Nearly all reloadable point-and-shoots (one-time-use cameras not included) have automatic film loading, and the Advanced Photo System's film cassette and drop-in loading makes something easy even easier. (See Chapter 8 for details.)

But first, here's all that you ever need to know about loading film into a 35mm point-and-shoot. Nothing gives away an amateur like tentative or prolonged film loading. Master this stuff, and you'll look like a pro.

After you close the back of a 35mm point-and-shoot, the camera automatically advances the film to the first frame. (With some low-budget models you may have to advance the film manually with a little fold-out crank; see “Counting up — and down,” later in this chapter, for details.) But what cows people is the film *leader* — the little strip of film that protrudes from the cassette's lightproof lip (see Figure 1-7). The leader starts out perforated on both sides (as is the film inside the cassette), but tapers to a short half-width strip with perforations only on one side. After the cassette is in position inside the camera, you pull the leader across to the film *take-up spool*, which automatically engages it after you close the camera back.

Figure 1-7:
An
Advanced
Photo
System film
cassette
(left) and a
35mm film
cassette
(right).



22

Part I: What You Need to Take Pictures

Here's how 35mm loading works:

1. Open the camera back.

You do this with a latchlike sliding switch (usually marked with an arrow or the word *open*) on the side or back of the camera. Sometimes you have to hold down a locking button as you move the switch; this double catch lessens the chance that the back would accidentally pop open and ruin your film when you're shooting. The back clicks open on the latch side; lift it up so that you can put in the film. (The camera can be off or on when you load the film.) (See Figure 1-8.)

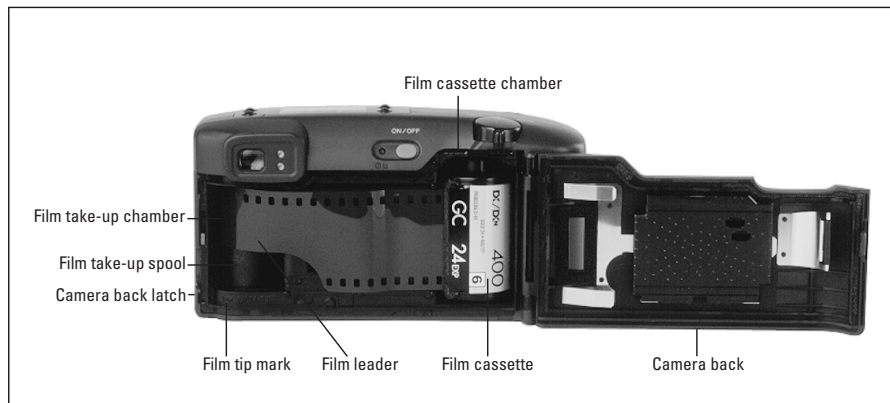
In the middle of the inside of the camera is a rectangular opening through which you can see the back of the lens. This rectangular opening is where each frame of film rests as you shoot it. On either side of this rectangle are two chambers. The large, empty one is where the film cassette goes. With some models, it's on the left; with others, it's on the right.

2. Nestle the film cassette into the empty chamber.

You can't just drop the film cassette in. Notice that the cassette has a small cylindrical protrusion at one end, called the spool hub. This protrusion must fit into a small recess in the film chamber. Notice, too, that there's a little spindle extending into the film chamber, from the top or bottom. You have to slip the flat end of the cassette — the end opposite the spool hub — over this spindle as you fit the cassette into the chamber. The process sometimes takes a little nudging and wiggling.

Figure 1-8:

The view inside an open 35mm point-and-shoot. The loaded cassette's film leader has been extended to the film tip mark.



3. Grasp the leader and pull enough film from the cassette so that the leader's front edge lines up with the *film tip mark* in the opposite chamber.

Chapter 1: Ladies and Gentlemen: Start Your Point-and-Shoots!

23

The film tip mark is often, though not always, colored orange or red. Pull gently on the leader, keeping a finger on the cassette itself so that it doesn't lift out of the chamber. Lie the film flat across the rectangular opening to see if it reaches the mark. If it doesn't, pull it out a little more.



After you get more comfortable pulling film out of the cassette, use your thumb to press against the top edge of the film and push it along its path, as shown in Figure 1-9. This technique helps you gauge how much film to pull out. Just be sure not to press against the rectangular opening.

Figure 1-9:
One way
to extend
35mm's film
leader is to
slide it
across with
your thumb.



With compact cameras, you don't need to pull the film out more than a few perforations' worth; with bigger models, rarely more than $\frac{1}{2}$ or $\frac{1}{4}$ of an inch. But you don't have to be especially precise about the amount of film you pull out. Some models seem more able than others to handle excess film. None, however, can grab the leader if it's physically too far away. So err on the side of more film rather than less.

- 4. Now press the whole film strip flat against the rectangular opening, double-check that the cassette is snugly seated, and then close the camera back with firm pressure until it clicks.**

The camera's take-up mechanism and winding motor should engage the film and advance it to the first frame. The camera's frame counter or LCD panel then displays the number *1*.

If nothing happens after you close the camera back, your camera may be the type that must be turned on to advance the film. Turn it on. If it still doesn't advance the film, try pressing the shutter button once. (A few inexpensive models may require that you push the shutter button repeatedly until the number *1* appears in the frame counter.)



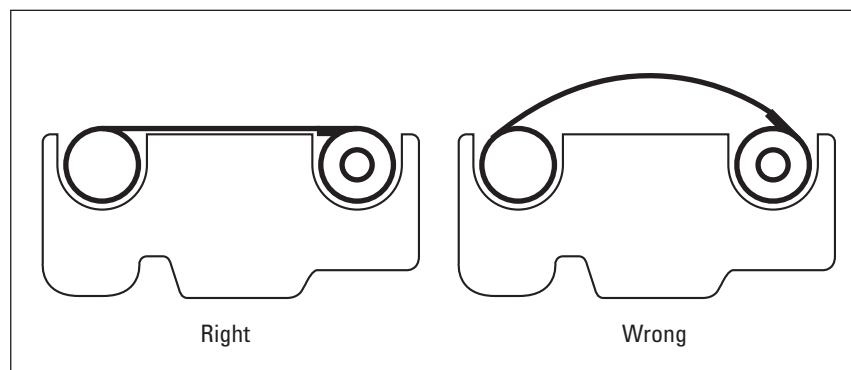
If you pull too much film out of the cassette when loading it — or not enough — the camera may not advance the roll to the first frame (see Figure 1-10). If this happens, you must open the back and reload the film.

24

Part I: What You Need to Take Pictures

Figure 1-10:

Don't pull too much film out of a 35mm cassette when you're loading it — or too little.



Fortunately, most 35mm point-and-shoots tell you (after you close the back and they attempt to engage the leader) if you pulled out too much film — or if you didn't pull out enough. They give you this warning, if they have an LCD panel, by blinking an icon of the film cartridge and/or the number *1* or an *E* (for empty). Models without LCD panels simply fail to move their mechanical frame counters to 1.

To fix the problem, open the camera back. Pressing the film flat against the camera, check again to see whether the leader lines up with the film tip mark. If it's short, just pull out a little more film and close the camera back again.



If you pulled out too much film, take out the cassette. Hold the cassette between the thumb and fingers of one hand and point the spool hub toward you. Grasp the spool hub with the thumb and forefinger of your other hand and rotate it counterclockwise to *draw the leader back into the cassette* (see Figure 1-11). This rotation may not appear to have an effect until the coil of film inside the cassette begins to tighten up. Continue to turn the spool hub until the half-width portion of the film is a few perforations away from the cassette's lip. Rotate it *slowly*, so that you don't accidentally pull the whole leader back into the cassette.

Now load the film as I describe earlier in this section. If you pull out too much film again, just repeat the process.

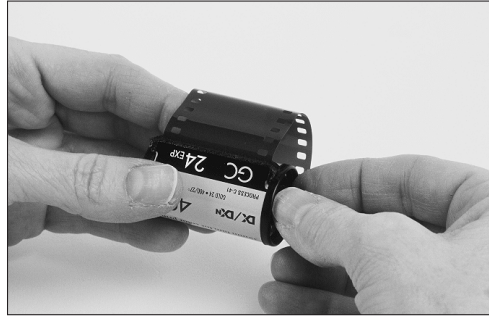


Do not rotate the film cassette's spool hub in a clockwise direction. It puts up a lot of resistance if you try, and doing so may cause damage to the film.

Some 35mm point-and-shoot brands use a drop-in loading system that is fairly foolproof, as such things go. The cassette slips into a shaped compartment on the *bottom* of the camera. You do have to pull out the film leader a bit so that the camera can engage it after you close the door, but the compartment is shaped so that you can clearly see how to insert the cassette.

Figure 1-11:

To draw excess film back into a 35mm cassette, rotate the spool hub slowly counter clockwise.



Counting up — and down

After you load the film, the camera automatically advances it from one shot to the next. If your camera is a one-time-use model or an older, inexpensive reloadable, you may have to advance the film by rotating a thumbwheel after every shot. You can't overwind: The wheel, which is located in the upper right of the camera back, stops when the next frame is lined up.

Most 35mm models count exposures upwards — 1, 2, 3, and so on, all the way to the last frame on the roll. (Rolls of 35mm film come in 12-, 24-, and 36-exposure lengths.) Displayed either by a mechanical counter under a small window (usually on the camera top) or by the camera's LCD panel (if it has one), the frame number is actually the number of the frame that you're *about* to shoot (see Figure 1-12). If it says 18, you've taken 17 pictures and are about to take number 18. To know how many pictures are left on the roll, you have to know the length of the roll, and deduct this number from it. If you've forgotten the length of the roll that you loaded, don't worry: With almost all 35mm point-and-shoots, a narrow vertical window on the camera back lets you read vital statistics off the side of the loaded film cassette, including the length of the roll. (See Figure 1-13.)

By contrast, some 35mm models count down — 24, 23, 22, and so on, all the way to 0. The number that they display actually tells you how many frames you have left on the roll.



If you mistakenly open your camera in the middle of a roll (thinking it's empty or that the film has been rewound), *close it immediately*. Your cue to close the camera is if you see *any* actual film at all; if the film has been rewound, it should *all* be back inside the cassette. (See the following section.)

26

Part I: What You Need to Take Pictures

Figure 1-12:

To display the frame count, your point-and-shoot uses either its LCD panel (left) or a separate window (right).



Fogging film (say it ain't so!)

When you open the camera back before the film has been fully rewound, the resulting exposure to incoming stray light is said to fog the film. *Fogging* basically clouds up, discolors, mars with streaks, or completely obliterates the pictures that you've shot — assuming that you go on to get them developed.

Figure 1-13:

You can tell whether 35mm film is loaded by looking at a window on the camera back.



Fogging almost certainly ruins your most recent shots. But if you close the camera back quickly, some of the earlier pictures on the roll may be salvageable. They may be okay because the film is opaque before development and forms a tight coil on the take-up spool as you shoot — the top loop or loops protecting the film beneath. But the longer you leave the back open, the more damage is done. And the brighter the surrounding light, the more immediate the damage. You don't know how bad the damage is until you have the film processed, which is worth doing. The photofinisher does not print badly fogged frames, so you don't have to pay for them.

If you open the camera in the middle of the roll, the film you *haven't* used yet is still safe in the cassette and, with the exception of a frame or two, should be unfogged. In fact, after you reclose the back, the camera might behave as if you've loaded a new roll and advance the film to what it thinks is the first frame — in the process pulling out enough film to reach the unfogged portion. But just to be safe, fire off a few blank frames (shots of nothing in particular) to advance the roll farther, and you're ready to continue shooting. (That is, if you're not so anxious to assess the damage that you choose to rewind the film and have it processed immediately!) Keep in mind that because the frame counter is reset to 0 after you open and close the back, unless you can remember how many frames were left on the roll, you don't know exactly when it will end.

35mm models that count frames *down* rather than up may actually prewind the film. *Prewinding* means that right after you load the cassette and close the camera back, these models advance the film all the way to the *last* frame. You hear their motors whirring for quite some time, and you may see their counters counting up along the way. Then, as you take each picture, they draw the film, a frame at a time, back into the cassette. (Rewinding is short, because at the end of the roll only a few inches of film are left!)

The thought behind prewinding is sensible: Should you open the camera back accidentally in the middle of the roll or should you drop the camera and the back pops open, the frames that you've already shot are safe inside the cassette. With a prewinding camera, the only film that would be fogged by the light you let in is the film that's still *outside* the cassette — which has no pictures on it.

So if you have a prewinding camera and accidentally open the back in the middle of a roll, close it and rewind the film. (Check out “Rewinding Film (Congratulations!)”, later in this chapter, for instructions on midroll rewinding.) Do *not* shoot any more pictures; you'd be taking them with fogged film, and they probably wouldn't come out. If you shut your camera really fast, you may have a few good frames toward the end of the roll, but why take the chance? The photofinisher doesn't print what you don't shoot and certainly doesn't print fogged negatives. Film is cheap.

Loading film into an Advanced Photo System camera



Being well thought-out machines, APS cameras make loading film effortless. Photographers who've moved from a 35mm point-and-shoot to an APS model have probably noticed that the APS model doesn't have a camera back to

28

Part I: What You Need to Take Pictures

open up for film insertion, only a small door. This door — call it the *film-compartment door* — is usually on the bottom of the camera. On a few models you may find it finagled into the side or even the top. You usually open it with a latchlike sliding switch or a flat lever.

With some models, you have to press a button to unlock the switch; with others, you must push the switch up or sideways before it fully slides to open the film-compartment door. Such designs are meant to protect against accidental opening of the door, which would fog your film. In fact, if you open and close the door without rewinding the film (or with some models, even if you move the switch), the camera may go ahead and rewind the film for you as insurance against any possibility of shooting on fogged film. (See “Fogging film (say it ain’t so!)” for more details.)



By the way, I’ve found that the film-compartment switch or lever on APS cameras often takes more pressure to move than the camera-back switch on 35mm models.

As for the APS cassette, you’ll notice not only that it’s smaller and differently shaped than a 35mm cassette, but that it lacks 35mm’s leader — the annoying little strip of protruding film. (Are you happy?) The film is entirely within the cassette and is actually *pushed* out of the cassette to the take-up spool (which you can’t even see) after you close the film-compartment door. Loading an APS cassette is about as simple as sliding a VHS cassette into your TV’s VCR.

As you throw the switch, the door pops open. Lift the door up if it doesn’t open all the way on its own. Then just push the film cassette into the camera, end first. If one end doesn’t fit, put in the other end first.



You can’t accidentally load an Advanced Photo System film cassette backwards. The cassette is specially shaped so it fits only one way.

With some APS models, you may encounter a slight, springy resistance as you slide in the cassette. If you do, push the cassette all the way down; it may click into position. But if the cassette rides up a little in the compartment, just push it down with the film-compartment door when you close it.

After you close the film-compartment door, which takes firm pressure, the camera automatically advances the film to the first frame. Most APS models automatically advance the film whether they’re on or off. They take more time than 35mm cameras to accomplish this task — quite a long time, which can be frustrating if you’re in a hurry to get more pictures. But don’t let all this motorized whirring and whining lead you to think that the film is being prewound. You may get that idea because most APS cameras (though not all) count frames *down*, starting at 15, 25, or 40 frames — the standard APS roll lengths.



The Advanced Photo System cassette

Part of the Advanced Photo System's appeal is that its film cassette has no visible leader — so you don't have to worry, as you do with 35mm, about engaging a leader to load the film. But this lack of a visible leader also means that you can't tell with a quick look whether you've shot a roll of film. Instead, you have to look at icons on the end of the cassette. These icons are especially useful because with the Advanced Photo System, your processed film is returned in the original cassette, where it remains for long-term storage and future reprinting.

The icons — a circle, a half circle, an X, and a rectangle — surround the opening in the middle of one end of the cassette (see figure). To keep their proper sequence perfectly clear, they are numbered 1, 2, 3, and 4 (respectively), and arrows point from one icon to the next. The icons are actually small, shaped cutouts in the cassette surface, and a white indicator appears beneath the appropriate cutout to tell you the roll's status. With a new, unexposed cassette, the circle appears white (left cassette in figure). With a cassette in which only a portion of the

roll has been shot, the half circle appears white. (This status is only possible with the few APS models having mid-roll film change capability, which I explain in the section "Rewinding Film (Congratulations!).") With a cassette that is fully exposed (that is, all the frames have been shot) but unprocessed, the X appears white (center cassette). And with a processed cassette, the rectangle appears white (right cassette).

If you inadvertently load either an exposed but unprocessed APS cassette or a processed APS cassette, your APS camera does not advance the film. This protection prevents double-exposure and shooting pictures that would not come out.



Loading digital cameras

Digital cameras don't need film, silly. That's why you can't hear the familiar whir of the film-winding motor after you take a picture. The silence of digital point-and-shoots is disquieting to some film-oriented photographers. When digital cameras first came out I facetiously suggested to manufacturers that they put a little computer chip into them to fake this noise, just to make it seem as if something is really happening. Something is happening, of course — quietly and electronically. And now most models provide such sound effects.



Actually, you do "load" digital cameras in one sense: With most models, to get photographs you have to place a *memory card* into a slot on the camera body. The memory card is where your pictures reside until you put them somewhere else, and depending on its storage capacity, you may need more than one. When a card fills up with pictures, you either have to remove it and replace it with another or transfer its pictures to your computer and erase it so you can start putting new pictures on it. (For more about this, see Chapter 15.)

Turning the Camera On — and Off Again

Most point-and-shoots, whether 35mm, Advanced Photo System, or digital models, are turned on with a single pushbutton on the top or back of the camera, marked on/off. You push it once to turn the camera on and again to turn the camera off. Other models may turn on and off with sliding switches, also placed on the top or back. Some switches have two positions; others have a spring mechanism that returns them to a single position. (You slide them once to turn the camera on and again to turn the camera off.) Some cameras have sliding on/off switches on the front, usually below the lens. These switches also open the camera's built-in protective lens cover, so you must slide them back to close the cover and turn off the camera.

Still other models, both digital and film-using, are turned on and off with a large, sliding front panel that doubles as a lens protector. It's sometimes called a *clamshell* cover, a term inherited from older cameras that actually had swing-out front covers. This design is very sensible. To open up and turn on the camera, you simply use the flats of your fingers to slide the cover to the side. (The cover usually has a ridge to help you grasp it.) To turn off the camera, you slide the cover back over the lens. With some designs, you have to wait a moment for the lens to retract into the camera before you can slide the cover all the way over.

One other style of on/off switch is fairly common. It is built into a thumb-controlled dial on the back or top of the camera. The dial has various settings on it, but rotating it one click away from its off position, to a setting marked *A* or *Auto*, or sometimes just plain *On*, turns on the camera. (This setting may be color-coded green, for go.) Rotating the dial back to *Off* turns the camera off.



How to press the shutter button

Don't treat your shutter button like a hot potato! Many point-and-shooters wait for pictures with their finger hovering above the shutter button, "stabbing" it to take the shot. This bad habit causes you to jerk the camera — and that unintended movement is one of the main causes of unsharp pictures.

Instead, keep your finger resting lightly on the shutter button. When you want to take a picture, slowly, smoothly bear down on the button until you hear the shutter click. Then release the button without completely removing your finger

from it. Get yourself to do this by pretending that your shutter-button finger is glued on: Keep it there before, during, and after snapping a picture. Practice with an unloaded camera to get a feel for it. Watch yourself in a mirror: You should see no movement of the camera at all.

This technique is also crucial to mastering the shutter button's two-step operation — pressing it halfway to lock the autofocus and then all the way down to take the picture. See Chapter 6 for more on the shutter button two-step.

As you turn the camera on, the first thing that happens is that the lens is uncovered. This function may be strictly mechanical, as it is with sliding front panels or below-the-lens sliding switches. In other cases, it's accomplished with motor-driven spring action.

Some lens covers are just large, flat doors that are flush with the front of the camera; after you turn off the camera, they hide the entire lens, cylindrical barrel and all, within the camera body. (You find them mainly on nonzooming models.) Other lens covers are made of delicate blades that are built into the lens barrel and spring open to uncover just the glass portion of the lens. Whatever the design, the lens cover protects the front glass surface of the lens from smudges or scratches. But if your camera has a bladed cover, be advised that if you leave it in a purse or carryall, the cover blades can catch on something and be pulled open, subjecting the lens to scratching from keys and so on. If you stash your camera in a bag, keep it in a fitted pouch.



Point-and-shoot cameras with sliding front covers are a smart idea. The lens is more protected than with other designs, making the camera ideal for slipping into a pocket or purse.

After you turn your camera on, it may extend the lens, especially if it's an autofocus model. (Many cameras extend the lens as the cover is opening.) The lens is extended with a small motor. Extending the lens readies the camera for shooting, and with 35mm zoom models, sets the lens to its shortest (most wide-angle) focal length — which is generally 35mm or 38mm, though sometimes 28mm. (Note that these settings are different for APS cameras; for more on focal lengths, check out Chapter 5.) You can then zoom to the setting of your choice. If your camera does not have autofocus capability, the lens may not need to move at all.

Get a Grip: Holding Your Camera

Point-and-shoot cameras are often so small — and therefore so crowded with buttons, dials, windows, and other doodads — that you usually don't have much leeway in terms of how to hold them when you're taking pictures. You basically have to pinch each end of the camera between your thumb and fingers, except that with the right hand, your index finger must rest on the shutter button, on top of the camera. Your remaining three right-hand fingers form a sort of wedge against the front of the camera. Many models incorporate a curved or ridged grip on the right side, which makes for a more secure grasp and, coincidentally, a nice little space for the battery compartment.

Your right thumb should rest vertically against the back of your camera. With most zooming models, you find the zoom control at the tip of your thumb, in the upper right of the camera back. But some models have their zoom controls on the top of the camera, where they must be operated by the right index

32

Part I: What You Need to Take Pictures

finger. You have to get used to moving your finger back and forth between these zoom controls and the shutter button. You will.

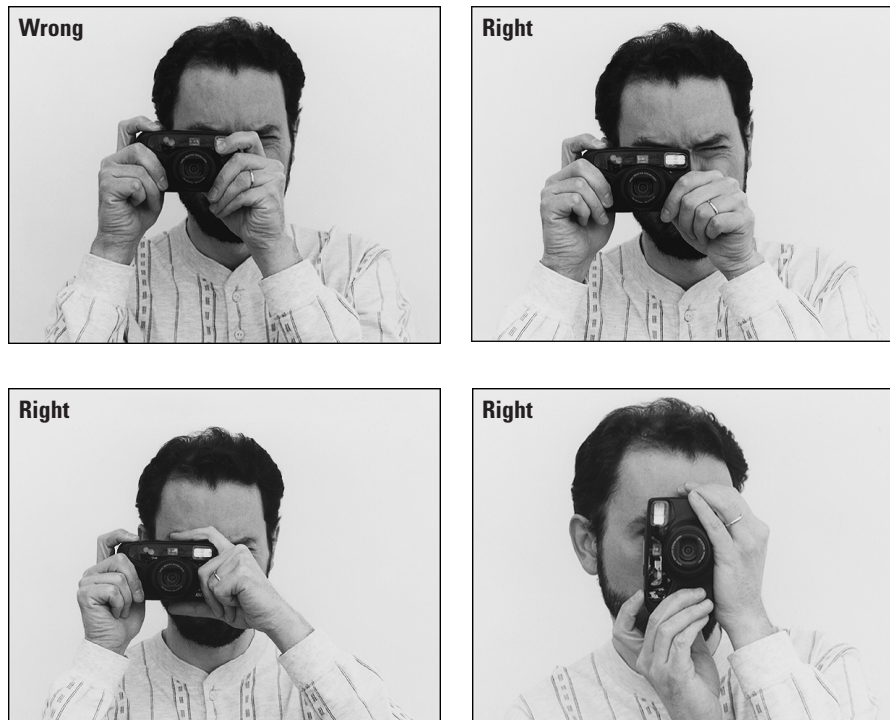
You have a little more flexibility in how you use your left hand, though the best way depends partly on the specific design of your camera. The worst thing that you can do is to stick a finger over the flash, which definitely ruins indoor pictures (see Figure 1-14, top left). Find a comfortable way of grasping the camera that avoids this problem and use it consistently.



An easy way to determine whether you're covering the flash when you hold the camera — a real no-no — is simply to look at yourself in a mirror while sighting through the camera's viewfinder.

As far as your left thumb goes, one thing that you can do with it is pretty much to match the position of your right thumb: point it up and slightly inwards. The front of the camera then rests against the side of your index finger (see Figure 1-14, top right). But my preferred left-hand grip places the thumb against the bottom of the camera, and, preferably, the index finger across the top (see Figure 1-14, bottom left). You just have to hold your other fingers away from the camera (again, to avoid blocking the flash) either by folding them in tightly or splaying them out, which looks a little ornate.

Figure 1-14:
The
steadiest
grip on the
camera
is often
the most
comfortable
one, but
there are
right ways
and wrong
ways —
and you
should
never cover
the flash
(top left).
See text for
details.



I think this technique is more secure, lessening the chance that hand tremors will make your pictures unsharp. However, if your camera has a flash that pops up from the top of the camera or it has pushbuttons there that you may accidentally press, you can't use this technique, so go back to Plan A. For vertical shots with flash, try to place the camera's built-in flash at the top rather than the bottom; this creates a more flattering effect with people pictures (see Figure 1-14, bottom right).

Rewinding Film (Congratulations!)

When a 35mm or APS point-and-shoot camera reaches the end of a roll of film, it automatically *rewinds* it — that is, the camera draws the entire roll of exposed but undeveloped pictures back into the cassette. (Less expensive models may require manual rewinding with a crank; read on.) Sometimes the camera squeezes in an extra shot or two at the end of a roll, depending on the brand of film and the winding system; you may get 37 exposures instead of 36. The standard roll lengths in 35mm are 12, 24, and 36 exposures; in the Advanced Photo System, 15, 25, and 40.

If you have a 35mm camera, it has a little window on the back through which you can see a small portion of the outside of the loaded film cassette. This window allows you to read the number of frames off the cassette, should you forget the length of the roll that you loaded. If the camera counts exposures upwards (1, 2, 3, and so on), as most do, this information lets you determine when you're nearing the end of the roll. If you have an Advanced Photo System camera, you probably don't have to figure out how many frames you have left, because most APS models count frames *down* — in other words, they tell you how many exposures are *left* on the roll. (Digital point-and-shoots count down too, and you can go straight to Chapter 15 for more on that.)

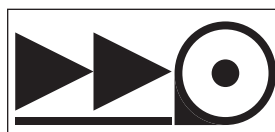


Knowing how many frames are left on a roll is useful, not because of anything to do with rewinding — the camera rewinds the film only after it senses the tug at roll's end — but because it lets you plan your shooting. If you're about to leave for a wedding with a 24-exposure roll in your 35mm point-and-shoot and the frame counter says 23, you know you're not going to have enough film to get the pictures you want. At the very least, you should bring an extra roll.

I say at the very least because I have a better idea: Put a new roll of film in your camera *before you go*. That way, you won't have to stop and reload after shooting two frames — possibly just when you have a perfect picture in sight. It's not worth losing a great picture to save a frame or two of film. Film is the cheapest part of photography, and photofinishers don't print frames that you don't shoot — nor can they charge you for prints that they don't make.

To put in a new roll of film before the last one is finished, you have to push the rewind button. With most point-and-shoot cameras, it is a tiny pushbutton (usually the smallest of any button on the camera) that is recessed to prevent accidental rewinding. Its location varies totally from camera model to camera model; yours may be on the bottom, sides, back, or top. (The only place that you won't ordinarily find it is the front.) The button is almost always marked with a symbol that combines double arrows and a stylized film cassette (see Figure 1-15). The capability is often called *midroll rewind*.

Figure 1-15:
The film
rewind icon.



There are other reasons to rewind film before roll's end. For one, you can get pictures back sooner — for example, to be able to send out promised prints of a special event. Even if you waste five or ten frames (a buck or two's worth of film), it's worth the satisfaction of sharing those important images when the event is still fresh in peoples' minds.

Another good reason to rewind film before the end of a roll is to switch to a different type of film for a different purpose, occasion, or lighting condition. The switch can be aesthetically motivated — a change from color to black and white, for example. Or it can be practical — switching to a faster film (one with a higher ISO number) when you want to take pictures by low existing light. (Read Chapter 2 for more on different types of film.)

To rewind your film:

- 1. Turn the camera on, if it's not on already.**

Some models may be able to rewind when they're off, but turn them on anyway.

- 2. Push the rewind button.**

To push the rewind button, you probably need a pencil or pen or bobby pin — a straightened paper clip also does the job — though some cameras may incorporate a little groove that allows you to use your fingernail. After you push the button, the camera starts rewinding the film with its motor, just as if it had reached the end of the film on its own. Most but not all models count down the exposures. If you have a mechanical frame counter, you see it slowly move backwards from the last exposure (say, 24) to 0; if your camera displays frame numbers on its LCD panel, it counts backwards frame by frame.

After the camera rewinds the film all the way back into the cassette — and with some models, this process can take as long as 45 seconds with a 36-exposure roll — the motor stops. (Cameras with an LCD panel usually blink the icon of the cassette with the number 0 or the letter E — for empty, not error.)



If pressing the rewind button doesn't start the rewind motor or if the winding stops in the middle, *do not open the camera*. First, if the camera is off, turn it on and push the button again. If that procedure doesn't work, replace the battery. You don't have to hurry to replace it; the film is safe. If replacing the battery doesn't get the rewind going (push the button again, if need be, after it's installed), bring the camera to your local photo dealer or photofinisher to have the film rewound. (See Chapter 3 for more on choosing a photofinisher.)

3. After the motor stops, open the camera back or film compartment and take out the film.

With 35mm, rewinding draws the film entirely inside the cassette, leaving no film leader outside. In fact, that's how you can tell if a 35mm roll has been shot: If the perforated film leader is visible, the roll is ready to shoot; if the film leader is not visible, the roll is exposed and ready for processing. (See Figure 1-16.)

Some rewind variations (What else is new?)

A few point-and-shoots replace the single rewind button with a sliding switch that clicks back into position when you open the camera back to remove the rewound film. And a few use a two-button combination for rewinding. With one of my favorite models, actually, you have to hold down what is normally the self-timer button for a couple of seconds to make the LCD panel's rewind symbol flash, and then you push the *shutter button* to start the rewind. I definitely needed my manual to figure this one out. So if you can't find a rewind button anywhere on your camera, check your manual!

If you have a bare-bones 35mm point-and-shoot, it may not have a rewind motor at all — just a manual crank on the camera. You flip out the crank and rotate it to rewind the film into the

cassette. In order to start rewinding, you usually first have to push a small (and sometimes recessed) button, normally on the camera bottom. Pushing this button unlocks the film-advance mechanism. Be sure to turn the crank in the direction of its indicating arrows (usually, but not always, counterclockwise). Hold the camera body firmly (keep those fingers off the lens!) and rewind smoothly and slowly until you feel a little tug or click, which is the film leader disengaging from the take-up spool. Then you feel a reduction in the pressure needed to turn the crank. Turn the crank a few more times to draw the film completely into the cassette. (Don't worry — you can't overdo it.) Finally, open the camera back to remove the film.

36

Part I: What You Need to Take Pictures

Figure 1-16:

If a 35mm cassette's film leader is visible (left), the roll is ready to shoot; if the leader's inside the cassette (right), the roll has been shot.



If you've read this chapter and still face the ultimate frustration — your camera just won't shoot — go directly to Chapter 20. There you find ten succinct suggestions for getting your point-and-shoot shooting again.

When to use a one-time-use camera

Some people call them disposable cameras. That isn't entirely fair, because about 85 percent of their content (by weight) is reused or recycled by manufacturers, including the battery, flash, and lens. Some people call them single-use cameras, but the companies that make them don't like that term either because its acronym is SUC. (They don't think these cameras suck, and neither do I.) So as the popularity of these one-roll wonders has burgeoned, the photo industry has settled for OTUC — an acronym for one-time-use camera.

OTUCs are bare-bones cameras that come already loaded with a roll of film. You don't even have to *unload* them, because when you've finished the roll you just turn in the *camera* to a photofinisher. It's ironic that the world's best-selling camera uses the same consumer paradigm as the original 1887 Kodak — the camera invented and introduced by company founder George Eastman, AKA the Great Yellow Father.

Purchased with a roll of black-and-white film preloaded, the Kodak was advertised with the slogan "You Press the Button, We Do the Rest." Sounds like an OTUC, the difference being that you had to send the Kodak camera itself back to the factory for processing, and it was mailed back to you with the prints — reloaded with a fresh roll of film.

Unlike the Kodak, you can buy a one-time-use camera nearly anywhere, so it's a fallback if you've left your reloadable point-and-shoot at home. In my book there's little excuse for that. (See Chapter 10 for a list of ten really lame reasons for not taking your camera with you.) If, on the other hand, you're going to the beach and don't want to expose your good camera to sand and salt spray, an OTUC is just the ticket. Or if you're worried that flashing your good camera in a questionable neighborhood might invite theft, an OTUC can allay your fears. (Why are you taking pictures in a questionable neighborhood?)

Sometimes an OTUC can mean the difference between getting and not getting photographs. Lose or damage your reloadable camera on a trip? Buy an OTUC and you can still bring pictures home. Spouse or kid run off with the reloadable camera when kitty is doing something adorable? Keep an OTUC in the house and you can grab it.

When you buy an OTUC, you have to choose between a model with a built-in flash and one without. Flashless OTUCs are a bit cheaper, ostensibly designed for outdoor photography only.

Even if you're planning to shoot outdoors with an OTUC, I suggest getting a model with a built-in flash. Firing the flash when you're shooting in bright light helps lighten dark shadows, for more flattering pictures of people. And having flash available lets you keep shooting when outdoor light gets low or you move into deep shade. Besides, you never know when you'll be heading indoors, and that way you won't have to stop shooting.

Don't take indoor pictures with an OTUC that has no flash! If they come out at all, the quality is usually terrible.

For more about OTUCs and flash, plus how (and why) to make the flash fire even when you're in bright light, see Chapter 7. And keep in mind that unlike other types of point-and-shoots, an OTUC can't figure out when flash is called for. *You* have to decide if flash is needed or useful, and if it is, push a flash-activation button that is usually located on the front of the camera.

Even if there's a regular point-and-shoot in your pocket, an OTUC can be valuable. That's because one-time-use cameras now come in many varieties for specific purposes. These include:

- ✔ **Sports OTUCs.** Chunky, "ruggedized" models with extra weatherproofing, these often have rubbery body panels that make

them easier to grip in wet conditions. They aren't, however, waterproof!

- ✔ **Underwater OTUCs.** A thick, sealed plastic housing lets you take these models to depths of 10 or 15 feet, sometimes even deeper. But because they lack a flash, I recommend staying close to the water's surface, where the light is stronger. (The lower you go, the bluer your pictures will usually be.) Great for snorkeling. Also fun at the pool!

- ✔ **Panoramic OTUCs.** Shoot with one, and you'll get back wide-screen prints measuring the usual four inches high but 10 or 11 ½ inches wide, depending on the processing. They're terrific for shots of scenery and landscapes, and it's fun to use them vertically for pictures of trees, big-city buildings, and other tall subjects (your gangly teenager?). Just keep in mind that even though the camera itself doesn't cost more, panoramic-format prints will add considerably to your photofinishing bill. A panoramic print often costs two or three times as much as a standard 4 x 6.

- ✔ **Advanced Photo System OTUCs.** A mouthful of an acronym, the APS OTUC benefits from the system's smaller-than-35mm film size, which allows the camera to be more compact than its 35mm cousins. Some models even give you a choice between two of the three different print formats that APS provides, selected with a switch on the camera. In either case, your film comes back respooled in the APS cassette rather than in loose strips like 35mm. (See Chapter 8 for details.)

- ✔ **Black-and-white OTUCs.** These models come loaded with a special film that produces black-and-white images yet can be processed in the same chemicals as your usual color film. Drop it off at your usual photofinisher and you'll get back black-and-white prints, a nice photographic change of

(continued)

(continued)

pace. (See Chapter 2 for more about “thinking” in black and white.)

- ✓ **Ultrawide-angle OTUCs.** The sweeping view you get with this unusual model fits twice as much of a scene into your picture as you’d get with a regular OTUC from the same vantage point. That ability makes it well-suited to common travel subjects such as landscapes and city scenes, but you can also use it to create interesting, wacky perspectives with everyday subjects.

Because these special-purpose one-time-use cameras have particular talents lacking in your regular, reloadable point-and-shoot, you might want to take one or two along even when you’re carrying your regular camera. Yet for all their variations, OTUCs are primitive cameras by today’s technological standards. They don’t have autofocus. They can’t zoom to make a subject bigger. Their viewfinders are less accurate than regular point-and-shoots, giving you only a close approximation of what will end up on film. And they don’t advance the film automatically, as do nearly all reloadable models.

There’s nothing you can do about the latter; you just have to remember to spin the little grooved film-advance wheel between each shot. But there are remedies to the other three problems.

- ✓ **Stay at least four feet from your main subject.** Since an OTUC can’t autofocus, the

lens is prefocused by design to make everything sharp at that distance and beyond. If your main subject is closer than three or four feet, it will look unsharp in the print.

- ✓ **If you want to make your subject bigger in the picture, just get closer.** Since an OTUC can’t zoom, your legs have to do the zooming for you. And for reasons I explain in Chapter 5, moving closer is usually a better way to make the subject bigger than zooming in.
- ✓ **To keep the subject from ending up too small in the picture, move closer to it.** Sounds sort of like the same tip as the one before, but it isn’t. Since an OTUC’s primitive viewfinder shows you more than what you actually get in the final picture, move in a little closer than where your feet first land. This may feel a bit uncomfortable at first, but it will make the subject fill the “frame” more effectively.

All that said, the point-and-shoot simplicity of an OTUC makes it the ultimate test of your photographic eye. Because you have little or none of the control possible with reloadable point-and-shoots, the success of a picture depends almost entirely on nontechnical things: the moment that you capture; the colors, tones, shapes, and textures that describe it; and the effectiveness of your composition.

