1

Getting the Lay of the Land

In This Chapter

- Attaching and using an SLR lens
- Adjusting the viewfinder to your eyesight
- Working with camera memory cards
- Getting acquainted with external camera controls
- Using the camera menus and Shooting Info display
- Deciphering the viewfinder data
- Displaying onscreen help

I still remember the day that I bought my first SLR film camera. I was excited to finally move up from my one-button point-and-shoot camera, but I was a little anxious, too. My new pride and joy sported several unfamiliar buttons and dials, and the explanations in the camera manual clearly were written for someone with an engineering degree. And then there was the whole business of attaching the lens to the camera, an entirely new task for me. I saved up my pennies a long time for that camera — what if my inexperience caused me to damage the thing before I even shot my first pictures?

You may be feeling similarly insecure if your Nikon is your first SLR, although some of the buttons on the camera back may look familiar if you've previously used a digital point-and-shoot camera. If your Nikon is both your first SLR and first digital camera, you may be doubly intimidated.

Trust me, though, that your camera isn't nearly as complicated as its exterior makes it appear. With a little practice and the help of this chapter, which introduces you to each external control, you'll quickly become as comfortable with your camera's buttons and dials as you are with the ones on your car's dashboard.

This chapter also guides you through the process of mounting and using an SLR lens, working with digital memory cards, and navigating your camera's internal menus. And for times when you don't have this book handy, I show you how to access the Help system that's built into your camera.

Getting Comfortable with Your Lens

One of the biggest differences between a point-and-shoot camera and an SLR *(single-lens reflex)* camera is the lens. With an SLR, you can swap out lenses to suit different photographic needs, going from an extreme close-up lens to a super-long telephoto, for example. In addition, an SLR lens has a movable focusing ring that gives you the option of focusing manually instead of relying on the camera's autofocus mechanism.

Of course, those added capabilities mean that you need a little background information to take full advantage of your lens. To that end, the next three sections explain the process of attaching, removing, and using this critical part of your camera.

Attaching a lens

Whatever lens you choose, follow these steps to attach it to the camera body:

1. **Remove the cap that covers the lens mount on the front of the camera.**
2. **Remove the cap that covers the back of the lens.**

   The cap is the one that doesn't say *Nikon* on it, in case you aren't sure.
3. **Hold the lens in front of the camera so that the little white dot on the lens aligns with the matching dot on the camera body.**

   Official photography lingo uses the term *mounting index* instead of *little white dot.* Either way, I highlight the markings in question with a red circle in Figure 1-1.

   Note that the figure (and others in this chapter) show you the D40 with its so-called "kit lens" — the 18–55mm zoom lens that Nikon sells as a unit with the body. If you buy a lens from a manufacturer other than Nikon, your dot may be red or some other color, so check the lens instruction manual.
4. **Keeping the dots aligned, position the lens on the camera's lens mount as shown in Figure 1-1.**

   When you do so, grip the lens by its back collar as shown in the figure — that is, not the movable, forward end of the lens barrel.

Figure 1-1: When attaching the lens, align the index markers as shown here.

5. **Turn the lens in a counter-clockwise direction until the lens clicks into place.**

   In other words, turn the lens toward the side of the camera that sports the shutter button, as indicated by the red arrow in the figure.

6. **On a lens that has an aperture ring, set and lock the ring so the aperture is set at the highest f-stop number.**

   Check your lens manual to find out whether your lens sports an aperture ring and how to adjust it. (The D40 kit lens doesn't.) To find out more about apertures and f-stops, see Chapter 5.

Always attach (or switch) lenses in a clean environment to reduce the risk of getting dust, dirt, and other contaminants inside the camera or lens. Changing lenses on a sandy beach, for example, isn't a good idea. For added safety, point the camera body slightly down when performing this maneuver; doing so helps prevent any flotsam in the air from being drawn into the camera by gravity. See Chapter 3 for tips on cleaning your lens.

Removing a lens

To detach a lens from the camera body, take these steps:

1. **Locate the lens-release button, circled in Figure 1-2.**
2. **Grip the rear collar of the lens.**

   In other words, hold onto the stationary part of the lens that's closest to the camera body and not the movable focusing ring or zoom ring, if your lens has one.
3. **Press the lens-release button while turning the lens clockwise until the mounting index on the lens is aligned with the index on the camera body.**

   The mounting indexes are the little guide dots circled in Figure 1-1. When the dots line up, the lens should detach from the mount.

Figure 1-2: Press the lens-release button to disengage the lens from the mount.

4. **Place the rear protective cap onto the back of the lens.**

   If you aren't putting another lens on the camera, cover the lens mount with the protective cap that came with your camera, too.

Focusing and zooming the lens

When paired with a compatible lens, your camera offers autofocusing capabilities, which you can explore in detail in Chapter 6. But with some subjects, autofocusing can be slow or impossible, which is why your camera also offers manual focusing. The process is quick and easy: You just turn the focusing ring on the lens until your subject comes into focus. To try it out, take these steps:

1. **Locate the A-M focusing switch on the side of the lens.**

   In Figure 1-3, I circled the switch as it appears on the D40's kit lens. The switch should be in a similar location on other Nikon lenses; if you use a lens from another manufacturer, check the lens instruction manual.
2. **Set the switch to the M position, as shown in the figure.**

   Don't try to move the focusing ring with the switch set to the A (autofocus) position; doing so can damage the lens.

Figure 1-3: Set the focusing mode switch to M before turning the manual focus ring.

3. **While looking through the viewfinder, twist the focusing ring to adjust focus.**

   If you have trouble focusing, you may be too close to your subject; every lens has a minimum focusing distance. (See Chapter 6 for more tips on focus issues.) You may also need to adjust the viewfinder to accommodate your eyesight; see the next section for details.

If you bought a zoom lens, a movable zoom ring lies behind the focusing ring, as shown in Figure 1-3. To zoom in or out, just move that zoom ring forward and backward.

The numbers on the zoom ring, by the way, represent *focal lengths.* I explain focal lengths in Chapter 6. In the meantime, just note that when the lens is mounted on the camera, the number that's aligned with the lens mounting index (the white dot) represents the current focal length. In Figure 1-3, for example, the focal length is 55mm.

Adjusting the Viewfinder Focus

On the right side of the camera viewfinder is a tiny vertical switch, called a *diopter adjustment control.* I circled the switch in Figure 1-4. With this control, you can adjust the focus of your viewfinder to accommodate your eyesight. If you don't take this step, scenes that appear out-of-focus through the viewfinder may actually be sharply focused through the lens, and vice versa.

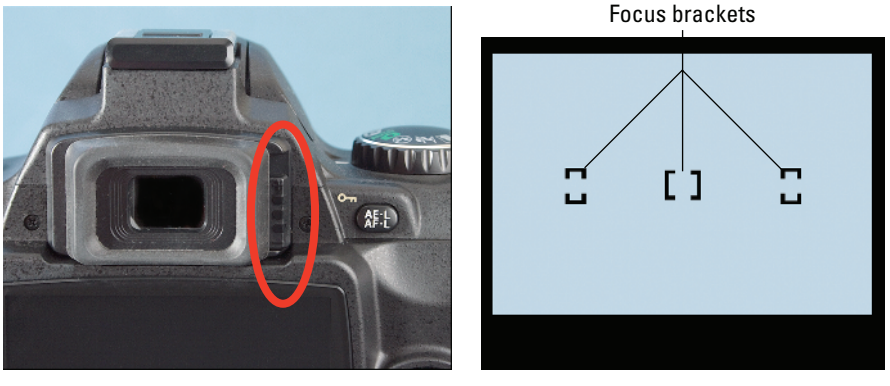

Figure 1-4: Use the diopter adjustment control to set the viewfinder focus for your eyesight.

Here's how to make the necessary adjustment:

1. **Remove the lens cap from the front of the lens.**
2. **Look through the viewfinder and concentrate on the three pairs of brackets shown on the right side of Figure 1-4.**

   The brackets are officially called *focusing brackets,* but don't worry about focusing the actual picture now; just pay attention to the brackets.
3. **Slide the diopter adjustment control up or down until the brackets appear to be in focus.**

The Nikon manual warns you not to poke yourself in the eye as you perform this maneuver. This warning seems so obvious that I laugh every time I read it — which makes me feel doubly stupid the next time I poke myself in the eye as I perform this maneuver.

Working with Memory Cards

Instead of recording images on film, digital cameras store pictures on *memory cards.* Some people, in fact, refer to memory cards as *digital film,* but I hate

that term because film and memory cards actually have little in common. Film must be developed before you can view your pictures, a process that involves time and some not-so-nice chemicals. Film can be damaged when exposed to some airport security scanners; memory cards are immune to those devices. The cost per picture is also much higher for film: You have to develop and print each negative, whether the shot is a keeper or a clunker. With digital, you print only the pictures you like — and you can reuse your memory cards over and over and over, saving even more money.

Whatever term you prefer, your Nikon uses a specific type of memory card called an *SD card* (for *Secure Digital*), shown in Figure 1-5. Other card types — CompactFlash, Memory Stick, or any others — aren't compatible with your camera. However, if you use SD cards in your cell phone, portable music player, or other device, you can use the same cards in your camera.

Figure 1-5: Insert the card with the label facing the camera back.

Safeguarding your memory cards — and the images you store on them — requires just a few precautions:

- **Inserting a card:** First, be sure that the camera is turned off. Then put the card in the card slot with the label facing the back of the camera, as shown in Figure 1-5. Push the card into the slot until it clicks into place; the memory card access light (circled in Figure 1-5) blinks for a second to let you know the card is inserted properly.

- **Formatting a card:** The first time you use a new memory card, take a few seconds to *format* it by choosing the Format Memory Card option on the Setup menu. This step simply ensures that the card is properly prepared to record your pictures. See the upcoming section "Cruising the Setup menu" for details.
- **Removing a card:** After making sure that the memory card access light is off, indicating that the camera has finished recording your most recent photo, turn the camera off. Open the memory card door, as shown in Figure 1-5. Depress the memory card slightly until you hear a little click and then let go. The card should pop halfway out of the slot, enabling you to grab it by the tail and remove it.
- **Handling cards:** Don't touch the gold contacts on the back of the card (see the left card in Figure 1-6). When cards aren't in use, store them in

the protective cases they came in or in a memory card wallet. Keep cards away from extreme heat and cold as well.

- **Locking cards:** The tiny switch on the left side of the card, labeled *lock switch* in Figure 1-6, enables you to lock your card, which prevents any data from being erased or recorded to the card. Press the switch toward the bottom of the card to lock the card contents; press it toward the top of the card to unlock the data.

You can protect individual images by using the camera's Protect feature, covered in Chapter 4.

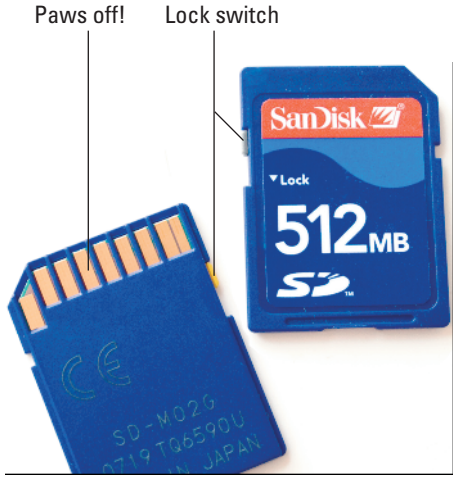

Figure 1-6: Avoid touching the gold contacts on the card.

Do you need high-speed memory cards?

Memory cards are categorized not just by their storage capacity, but also by their data-transfer speed. The speed specs you see on memory cards — 10x, 40x, 80x, 133x, and the like — reflect the transfer rate compared to a single-speed CD-ROM, which can move about 156K (kilobytes) of data per second. So a 10x card, for example, is 10 times faster than that, offering a transfer speed of 1.5MB (megabytes) per second.

Faster data-transfer speeds reduce the time your camera needs to write a picture file onto the card and the time required to download files from the card to your computer. Of course, card prices rise along with card speed. And whether you will really notice much difference depends on a couple of factors.

On the picture-taking end, users who want to capture fast-paced action benefit the most from high-speed cards. Bumping up your card speed can enable you to fire off a continuous series of shots at a slightly faster pace than with a slower card. Users who shoot at the highest resolution or prefer the NEF (Raw) file format also gain the most from high-speed cards; both options increase file size and, thus, the time needed to store the picture on the card. (See Chapter 3 for details.)

When it comes to picture downloading, you may or may not enjoy much of a speed increase because transfer time isn't just dependent on the card. How long it takes for files to shuffle from card to computer also depends on the capabilities of your computer and, if you use a memory-card reader to download files, on the speed of that device. (Chapter 8 covers the file-downloading process.)

To sum up, if you want to push your camera to its speed limit — and money is no object — go for a high-speed card. Otherwise, you probably don't need to make the extra investment; even a "slow" card is usually more than fast enough to satisfy all but the most demanding users.

Exploring External Camera Controls

Scattered across your camera's exterior are a number of buttons, dials, and switches that you use to change picture-taking settings, review and edit your photos, and perform various other operations. Sometimes a single twist of a dial gets the job done; other times, you press several buttons in sequence.

In later chapters, I discuss all your camera's functions in detail and provide the exact steps to follow to access those functions. This section provides just a basic road map to the external controls plus a quick introduction to each. You may want to put a sticky note or other bookmark on this page so that you can find it for easier reference later. (The cheat sheet at the front of the book offers a similar guide, albeit with less detail.)

With that preamble out of the way, the next three sections break down the external controls found on the top, back, and front-left side of the camera.

Topside controls

Your virtual tour begins at the top of the camera, shown in Figure 1-7. There are four controls of note here, as follows:

Figure 1-7: The tiny pictures on the Mode dial represent special automatic shooting modes.

- **On/Off switch and shutter button:** Okay, I'm pretty sure you already figured this combo button out. But check out Chapter 2 to discover the proper shutter-button-pressing technique — you'd be surprised how many people mess up their pictures because they press that button incorrectly.

- **Info button:** Press this button to display the Shooting Info screen on the monitor. Via this screen, you can review and adjust critical camera settings. See the upcoming section "Using the Shooting Info Display" for details.

- **Exposure compensation button:** This button activates a feature that enables you to tweak exposure when working in any autoexposure mode. Chapter 5 explains.

- **Mode dial:** With this dial, you set the camera to fully automatic, semiautomatic, or manual photography mode. The little pictographs, or icons, represent the Nikon Digital Vari-Program modes, which are automatic settings geared to specific types of photos: action shots, portraits, landscapes, and so on. Chapter 2 details the Digital Vari-Program and Auto modes; Chapter 5 explains the four others (P, S, A, and M).

Back-of-the-body controls

Traveling over the top of the camera to its back side, shown in Figure 1-8, you encounter the following controls:

- **Command dial:** After you activate certain camera features, you rotate this dial, labeled in Figure 1-8, to select a specific setting. For example, when you shoot in the A exposure mode (aperture-priority autoexposure, detailed in Chapter 5), rotating the Command dial changes the aperture (f-stop).

- **AE-L/AF-L and Protect button:** Like several buttons, this one serves multiple purposes. When you're taking pictures in automatic mode, you can lock in your focus and exposure settings by pressing and holding this button. Chapter 5 explains why you may want to do so. In picture playback mode, pressing the button locks the picture file — hence the little key symbol next to the button — so that you can't accidentally delete or alter it. See Chapter 4 for details on that option.

  You can adjust the performance of the button as it relates to locking focus and exposure, too. Instructions in this book assume that you stick with the default setting, but if you want to explore your options, see Chapter 11.

Figure 1-8: You rotate the Command dial to adjust some camera settings.

- **Multi Selector:** This dual-natured control plays a role in many camera functions. You press the outer edges of the Multi Selector left, right, up, or down to navigate camera menus and access certain other options. At the center of the control is the OK button, which you press to finalize a menu selection or other camera adjustment. See the next section for help with using the camera menus.

- **Delete button:** Sporting a trash can icon, the universal symbol for Delete, this button enables you to erase pictures from your memory card. Chapter 4 has specifics.

- **Playback:** Press this button to switch the camera into picture review mode. Chapter 4 details the features available to you in this mode.

- **Menu:** Press this button to access five menus of camera options. See the next section for details on navigating menus; see the appendix at the back of the book for a complete listing of all menus and menu options.

- **Thumbnail/Help button:** In playback mode, pressing this button changes the number of picture thumbnails displayed on the monitor. You also can reduce the magnification of a thumbnail — zoom out, in other words. (The minus sign in the magnifying glass is the universal symbol for zoom out.) In other modes, the button accesses the camera's built-in help system, hence the question mark symbol underneath the button. See "Asking Your Camera for Help," later in this chapter, for details.

- **Zoom/Setting/Reset button:** Even more multifunctioned, this button has three main roles:
  - In playback mode, pressing this button magnifies the currently displayed image and also reduces the number of thumbnails displayed at a time. Note the plus sign in the middle of the magnifying glass — plus for zoom in.
  - The *I* marking below the button stands for *information,* sort of. You can use this button in conjunction with the Info button on top of the camera to select and adjust certain settings via the Shooting Info display, discussed in more detail later in this chapter.
  - The little green dot indicates the button's Reset function. Pressing this button and the Info button — which also sports a green dot — simultaneously for more than two seconds restores the most critical picture-taking options, such as Image Quality and Image Size, to their default settings. See "Browsing the Custom Setting menu," later in this chapter, for more on this topic.

In illustrations and figures that reference these last two buttons, you see the button and its surrounding labels. But in text, I refer to them as the Thumbnail button and the Zoom button, respectively. This is not the approach that Nikon takes in its manuals — instructions therein call the button by the name that's relevant for the current function. I think that's a little confusing, so I always refer to each button by one name only.

Front-left buttons

On the front-left side of the camera body, you find two final external controls, circled in Figure 1-9. These work as follows:

- **Fn/Self-timer button:** The *Fn* is short for *function,* in case you were wondering. By default, pressing this button puts the camera into self-timer mode, in which the camera snaps the picture automatically a few seconds after you press and release the shutter button. This feature allows for hands-free picture taking — useful for times when you want to include yourself in the shot, for example.

If you don't use the self-timer mode often, you can set the button to control one of four other functions instead. Chapter 11 shows you how.

- **Flash/Flash compensation:** Pressing this button pops up the camera's built-in flash (except in automatic shooting modes, in which the camera decides whether the flash is needed). By holding the button down and rotating the Command dial, you also can adjust the flash mode (normal, red-eye reduction, and so on). In advanced exposure modes (P, S, A, and M), you also can press this button, along with the Exposure Compensation button, and then rotate the Command dial to adjust the flash power. See Chapter 5 for all things flash related.

Figure 1-9: You can set the Function button to quickly access a frequently used camera setting.

Ordering from Camera Menus

You access many of your camera's features via internal menus, which, conveniently enough, appear when you press the Menu button. Features are grouped into five main menus, described briefly in Table 1-1.

Table 1-1 Nikon D40 and D40x Menus

Symbol	*Open This Menu . . .*	*to Access These Functions*
	Playback	Viewing, deleting, and protecting pictures
	Shooting	Basic photography settings
	Custom Setting	Advanced photography options and some basic camera operations
	Setup	Additional basic camera operations
	Retouch	Built-in photo retouching options

After you press the Menu button, you see on the camera monitor a screen similar to the one shown in Figure 1-10. Along the left side of the screen, you see the icons shown in Table 1-1, each representing one of the five available menus. The icon that is highlighted or appears in color is the active menu; options on that menu automatically appear to the right of the column of icons. In the figure, the Shooting menu is active, for example.

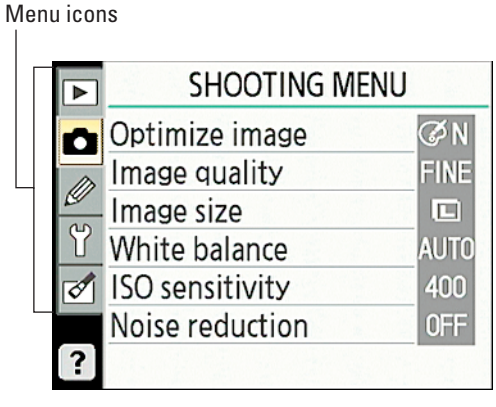

Figure 1-10: Highlight a menu in the left column to display its contents.

I explain all the important menu options elsewhere in the book; for now, just familiarize yourself with the process of navigating menus and selecting options therein. The Multi Selector, shown in the margin here, is the key to the game. You press the edges of the Multi Selector to navigate up, down, left, and right through the menus.

In this book, the instruction "Press the Multi Selector left" simply means to press the left edge of the control. "Press the Multi Selector right" means to press the right edge, and so on.

Here's a bit more detail about the process of navigating menus:

- **To select a different menu:** Press the Multi Selector left to jump to the column containing the five menu icons. Then press up or down to highlight the menu you want to display. Finally, press right to jump over to the option on the menu.
- **To select and adjust a function on the current menu:** Again, scroll up or down the list of options to highlight the feature you want to adjust and then press OK. Settings available for the selected item then appear. For example, if you select the Image Quality item from the Shooting menu, as shown on the left in Figure 1-11, and press OK, the available Image Quality options appear, as shown on the right in the figure. Repeat the old up-and-down scroll routine until the choice you prefer is highlighted. Then press OK to return to the previous screen.

  In some cases, you may see a right-pointing arrowhead instead of the OK symbol next to an option. That's your cue to press the Multi Selector right to display a submenu or other list of options.

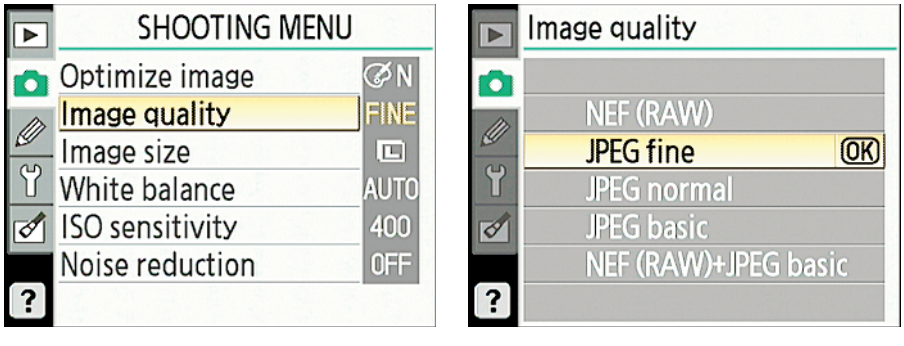

Figure 1-11: Select the option you prefer and press OK again to return to the active menu.

Again, I present this information just as a general introduction, so don't worry about memorizing it. I tell you exactly which Multi Selector actions to take whenever I explain a function that requires its use.

Using the Shooting Info Display

As you advance in your photography and begin to move beyond the automatic settings, you need a way to keep track of what camera settings are currently active. That's the purpose of the Shooting Info display, which appears

when you press the Info button on the top of the camera. Figure 1-12 offers a look at this display.

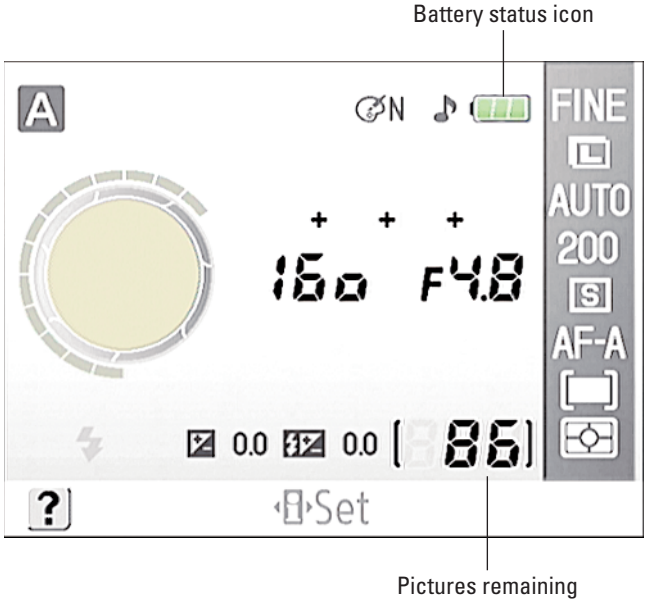

Figure 1-12: View picture-taking settings in the Shooting Info display.

If what you see in the figure looks like a big confusing mess, don't worry. Most of it won't mean anything to you until you make your way through later chapters. The figure does label two key points of data that are helpful even in fully automatic mode, though: how many more pictures can fit on your memory card at the current settings and the status of the battery. A "full" battery icon like the one in the figure shows that the battery is fully charged; if the icon appears empty, go look for your battery charger.

What's especially neat about the Shooting Info display, though, is that you can not only view, but also adjust, the most critical picture-taking settings via the screen. This option is usually faster and easier than using camera menus.

Here's how it works:

- **To view the Shooting Info display:** Press the Info button on the top of your camera. The display automatically turns off after a few seconds or when you press the shutter button.

To adjust camera settings using the display: After pressing the Info button, press the Zoom button on the back of the camera. The display then appears similar to what you see in the first screen in Figure 1-13, and the menu cursor jumps to highlight a camera setting. In the figure, the ISO Sensitivity option, discussed in Chapter 5, is highlighted. Use the Multi Selector to scroll to a different setting if needed. When the setting you want to change is highlighted, press OK to display the related options. For example, the options available for the ISO Sensitivity setting appear on the right in Figure 1-13. Scroll to highlight your choice and press OK again to return to the Shooting Info display.

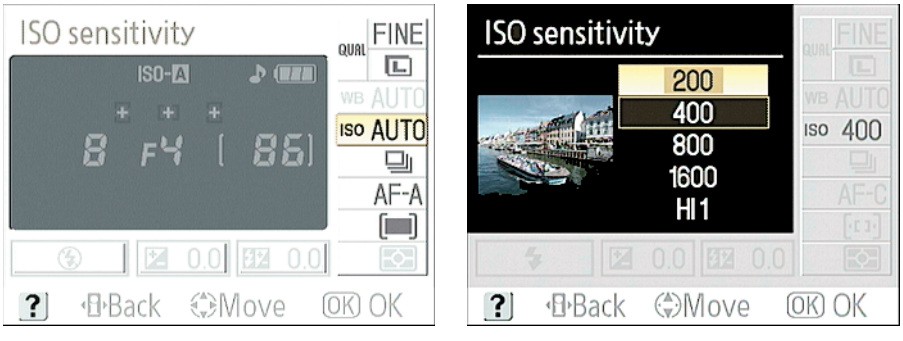

Figure 1-13: You can adjust some camera settings more quickly by using the Shooting Info display than by using the regular menus.

Through the Auto Shooting Info option on the Setup menu, you can tell the camera to automatically display the Shooting Info screen any time you press the shutter button halfway. I find this method easier than pressing the Info button every time I want to check the camera settings. For details, see the upcoming section "Cruising the Setup menu."

Decoding Viewfinder Data

When the camera is turned on, you can view some camera settings and other critical information in the viewfinder as well as on the Shooting Info display. The viewfinder data changes depending on what action you're currently undertaking. For example, if you simply turn on the camera and look through the viewfinder without pressing the shutter button, you see the data labeled

in Figure 1-14. When you depress the shutter button halfway to initiate autofocusing and exposure metering — a topic that I discuss in Chapter 2 — you see a slightly different set of information.

Rather than give you a full guide to all the possible viewfinder readouts here, which would only boggle your mind and cause lots of unnecessary page-flipping, I show you the relevant viewfinder displays as I cover the various photographic topics later in the book.

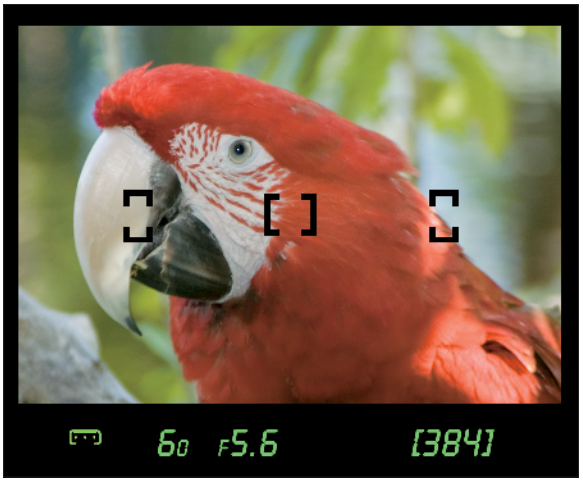

Figure 1-14: You also can view some camera information at the bottom of the viewfinder.

Asking Your Camera for Help

Programmed into your camera's internal software is a handy information help line — a great tool for times when you forget the purpose of a particular feature or would like a little picture-taking guidance. This digital 411 offers assistance in two ways:

- Press and hold the Thumbnail button to display information about the current shooting mode or selected menu option. For example, Figure 1-15 shows the Help screen associated with the Image Quality setting. If you need to scroll the screen to view all the Help text, keep the Thumbnail button depressed and scroll by using the Multi Selector. Release the Thumbnail button to close the information screen.

Figure 1-15: Press and hold the Thumbnail button to display onscreen help.

- If the camera thinks you're headed for a picture problem, it may display a blinking question mark on the monitor or in the viewfinder. Again, press and hold the Thumbnail button to see what's up.

Reviewing Basic Setup Options

You know how sometimes you visit someone's house, and their kitchen cabinets are arranged in a way that doesn't make sense to you? Why are the mugs above the microwave instead of above the coffeepot? And wouldn't it be better if the serving spoons were next to the stove instead of by the dishwasher? Well, that's how I feel about the two menus discussed in this section, the Setup menu and the Custom Setting menu.

Both menus contain options that control basic camera functions, such as how long the monitor displays a recorded image after you press the shutter button and how certain information appears on the monitor. But mixed in with those options are totally unrelated controls, such as those that adjust the exposure metering mode, covered in Chapter 5.

Well, I can't rearrange the menus for you any more than I can put those mugs near the coffeemaker, so instead, the following sections describe in detail only the basic setup options found on each menu. For options related to other aspects of camera operation, I list the chapter were you can find more information.

The figures in this section show only the first handful of options on each menu, again in the interest of saving page space for more critical information. Note, too, that I cover the Setup menu first, even though it's listed after the Custom Setting menu on the camera; the Setup menu contains the bulk of the basic settings and also contains one setting that affects the appearance of the Custom Setting menu. (See the earlier note about kitchen reorganization.)

If you don't yet know how to select options from the menus, see the earlier section "Ordering from Camera Menus" for help.

Cruising the Setup menu

Start your camera customization by opening the Setup menu. It's the menu marked with the little wrench icon, as shown in Figure 1-16.

Here's a quick rundown of each menu item:

- **CSM/Setup Menu:** Guess what? You can even customize the Setup menu and its neighbor, the Custom Setting menu! At the default setting, Simple, some options are hidden on both menus. Choose Full to access

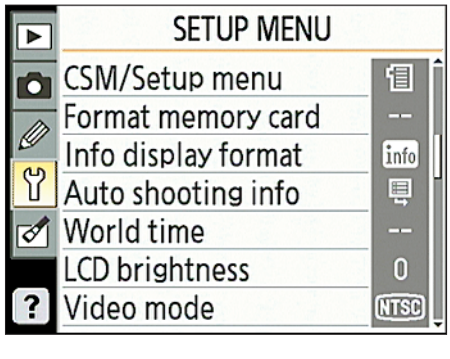

Figure 1-16: Set the CSM/Setup menu option to Full to access hidden functions.

the hidden settings. You can also choose My Menus and select exactly which options appear and which are hidden.

While working with this book, choose Full so that what you see in your menus matches my figures. When you're ready to head off on your own, though, see Chapter 11 for details on how to establish your own, custom menus.

- **Format Memory Card:** The first time you insert a new memory card, you should use this option to *format* the card, a maintenance function that wipes out any existing data on the card and prepares it for use by the camera. If you previously used your card in another device, such as a digital music player, be sure to copy those files to your computer before you format the card.
- **Info Display Format:** With this setting, you can alter the visual design of the Shooting Info display, covered earlier in this chapter. You can establish this setting independently for the Digital Vari-Program modes and the other shooting modes (manual, aperture-priority autoexposure, and so on). Use the default setting, Graphic, for both categories so that your display matches what you see in this book. Chapter 11 gives you a look at the other modes.
- **Auto Shooting Info:** When you turn this option on, the Shooting Info display automatically appears when you depress the shutter button halfway. The camera is smart enough, however, not to activate the display when your eye is close to the viewfinder. You can also view the display by pressing the Info button, but the shutter button technique is easier because you don't have to hunt for the Info button. As with the preceding option, you can establish different settings for the two categories of shooting modes; I set both categories to On.
- **World Time:** When you turn on your camera for the very first time, it automatically displays this option and asks you to set the current date and time.

Keeping the date/time accurate is important because that information is recorded as part of the image file. In your photo browser, you can then see when you shot an image and, equally handy, search for images by the date they were taken.

Note that if you see the message "Clock Not Set" on the camera monitor, the internal battery that keeps the clock running is depleted. Simply charging the main camera battery and then putting that battery back in the camera sets the clock ticking again, but you need to reset the camera time and date.

- **LCD Brightness:** This option enables you to make the camera monitor brighter or darker, as shown in Figure 1-17.

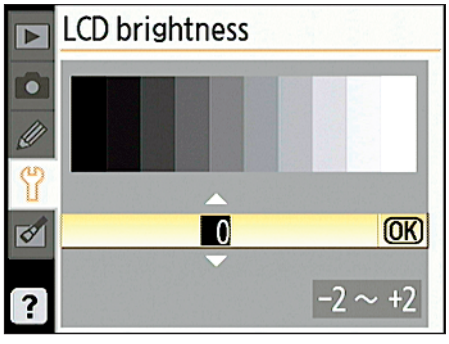

Figure 1-17: You can adjust the brightness of the camera monitor.

If you take this step, keep in mind that what you see on the display may not be an accurate rendition of the actual exposure of your image. Crank up the monitor brightness, for example, and an underexposed photo may look just fine. So I recommend that you keep the brightness at the default setting (0). As an alternative, you can display the *histogram,* an exposure guide that I explain in Chapter 4, when reviewing your images.

- **Video Mode:** This option is related to viewing your images on a television, a topic I cover in Chapter 9. Select NTSC if you live in North America or other countries that adhere to the NTSC video standard; select PAL for playback in areas that follow that code of video conduct.
- **Language:** You're asked to specify a language along with the date and time when you fire up your camera for the first time. Your choice determines the language of text on the camera monitor. Screens in this book display the English language, but I find it entertaining on occasion to hand my camera to a friend after changing the language to, say, Swedish. I'm a real yokester, yah?

- **File No. Sequence:** This option controls how the camera names your picture files. When the option is set to Off, as it is by default, the camera restarts file numbering at 0001 every time you format your memory card or insert a new memory card. Numbering is also restarted if you create custom folders (an advanced option covered in Chapter 11).

  Needless to say, this setup can cause problems over time, creating a scenario where you wind up with multiple images that have the same file name — not on the current memory card, but when you download images to your computer. So I strongly encourage you to set the option to On. Note that when you get to picture number 9999, file numbering is still reset to 0001, however. The camera automatically creates a new folder to hold for your next 9999 images.

  As for the Reset option, it enables you to assign the first file number (which ends in 0001) to the next picture you shoot. Then the camera behaves as if you selected the On setting.

- **And the rest:** The remaining functions on this menu, listed below, relate to image playback, organization, and camera maintenance:
  - **Image Comment:** See Chapter 11 to find out how to use this feature, which enables you to add text comments into a picture file. You then can read that information in Nikon PictureProject, the software that shipped with your camera. (The text doesn't actually appear on the image itself.)
  - **USB:** This one comes into play when connecting your camera to a computer or printer; see Chapter 8 for information.
  - **Folders:** This feature is an advanced file-organization option; leave the option set at the default until you read about it in Chapter 11.
  - **Mirror Lock-Up:** This feature is necessary when cleaning the camera interior — an operation that I don't recommend that you tackle yourself. See Chapter 3 for more information on camera cleaning.
  - **Firmware Version:** This screen is informational in nature only; it tells you the current version of the camera *firmware* (internal operating software). The appendix at the back of the book explains how to check which version is installed in your camera and how to update it via Nikon's Web site if needed.
  - **Dust Off Ref Photo:** This specialty feature enables you to record an image that serves as a point of reference for automatic dust-removal filters available in Nikon Capture NX. I don't cover this accessory software, which must be purchased separately, in this book.
  - **Auto Image Rotation:** Keep this option set at the default setting (On) so that the image is automatically rotated to the correct orientation (horizontal or vertical) in playback mode. The orientation is recorded as part of the image file, too, so the auto-rotating also occurs when you browse your image thumbnails in PictureProject. Note, though, the rotation data may not be accurate for pictures that you take with the camera pointing directly up or down.

Browsing the Custom Setting menu

Figure 1-18 shows the Custom Setting menu, whose icon, for reasons I can't figure out, is a little pencil. At any rate, many options here involve photographic functions, such as using the flash, selecting an exposure metering mode, and so on.

As with the Setup menu, some options are hidden unless you set the CSM/Setup Menu option to Full, as requested in the preceding section. Go ahead and take that step now if you haven't already.

With that task out of the way, the following list describes just the Custom Setting menu items related to basic camera operations:

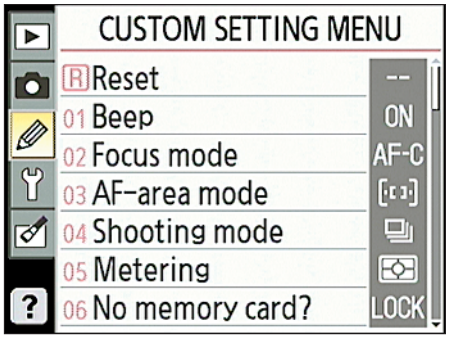

Figure 1-18: The Custom Setting menu contains additional basic options.

- **Reset:** Select this option to restore all features on the Custom Setting menu to their default settings. Note that the two-button reset technique I describe earlier in the chapter, in the section "Back-of-the-body controls," affects only a few options on this menu, all of which fall in the category of critical image-capture settings (such as focus mode and shooting mode). If you're interested, you can find a complete list of all the camera's default settings in the back of the camera manual.
- **Beep:** By default, your camera beeps at you after certain operations, such as after it sets focus when you shoot in autofocus mode. If you're doing top-secret surveillance work and need the camera to hush up, set this option to Off.
- **No Memory Card?:** I have to admit that I don't quite get the point of this option. If you set it to Enable Release, you can take a temporary picture, which appears in the monitor with the word "Demo" but isn't recorded anywhere. So keep this one set at the default (Release Locked), which disables the shutter button when the camera is minus a memory card.
- **Image Review:** Leave this option set to On if you want the camera to automatically display each picture briefly in the monitor after you press the shutter button.

  

  If you're shooting fast-paced action and you want to speed up *shot-to-shot time* — how long the camera makes you wait after taking one picture before you can take another — try turning this feature off. You can then review your pictures by pressing the Playback button.
- **AF-Assist:** On the front of your camera, there's a little light tucked right below the Mode dial. This light is the *autofocus-assist illuminator.* In dim lighting, it shoots out a beam of light to help the camera's autofocus

system find its target. In general, leaving the AF-Assist option enabled is a good idea, but if you're doing a lot of shooting at a party, wedding, or some event where the light from the lamp may be distracting, you may want to disable it.

Regardless of the setting you choose here, however, the illuminator doesn't light in manual focus mode or in the Sports or Landscape Digital Vari-Program modes. In addition, the feature doesn't operate in continuous-servo autofocus mode or when the center autofocus area mode is not selected. You can explore those two focus options in Chapter 6.

- **Self-Timer/Fn Button:** Here's where you establish the operation you want to assign to this button, explained in the earlier section "Front-left buttons."
- **Auto-Off Timers:** When your camera is turned on but idle for a period of time, it conserves battery power by automatically turning off the monitor and exposure meter. Options on this menu determine how much time must pass before this occurs: Short (4 seconds); Normal (8 seconds); Long (20 seconds for the monitor, 1 minute for the exposure meter); Custom (enables you to set the monitor auto-off from 4 seconds to 10 minutes and to set the meter auto-off from 4 seconds to 30 minutes).

  A couple of side notes: When the exposure meter turns off, so does the Shooting Info display (explained earlier in the chapter). And the setting you choose for the monitor auto-off also affects how long your image appears on the monitor after shooting (assuming that you enable the automatic Image Review function, described earlier in this list).

  If you know you're perilously close to complete battery drainage, select the Short auto-off settings and turn off Image Review altogether.

That wraps up all the basic customization settings. For details about other