

Chapter 1

Getting Chummy with Your Camera

In This Chapter

- ▶ Choosing image size and quality
 - ▶ Shooting RAW images
 - ▶ Setting the lens focal length
 - ▶ Focusing the camera
-

In some respects, digital cameras are like cars. You can put them on automatic so that all you have to do is guide them down the road. On the other hand, if you own a modern car you can take advantage of the car's advanced features by controlling when the engine upshifts, changing the settings for the suspension when driving on winding mountain roads, and so on. Most digital cameras come with a plethora of menu options, and they have dials and buttons as well. You take control of your photography and the quality of your pictures when you master menu controls and know when to switch settings for a specific subject. In this chapter, I present exercises that familiarize you with some basic settings on your camera. I have to include a caveat: No two digital cameras have the same settings, even when made by the same manufacturer. Throughout this chapter, I direct you to your camera manual to find out exactly what part of the menu or on which camera dial the settings to which I refer can be found. I show you which menu option to use to achieve an end result. Your job is to find out where it is on your camera.

Setting Image Size and Quality

Image size and quality determine many things about the picture you download from camera to computer. For example, size and quality determine how much room the images take up on your memory card and computer. They also determine what you can do with the images. If you're shooting a picture to send via e-mail, you choose one set of options. If you're printing the images, you choose different options. Before you decide which image size and format to specify, you must first ask yourself a few questions. The answer to these questions will determine what settings you choose. The following exercise helps you examine what you must consider before choosing the settings that best suit your needs.

Exercise 1-1: Setting Image Size and Quality

1. Power on your camera.

You turn your camera on by either pressing a button or flipping a switch. Your camera may also be equipped with a feature that powers down the camera when you haven't taken a picture or used the menu in a while. If this is the case, you generally push the shutter button halfway to "wake up" the camera.

2. Format your memory card.

It's always a good idea to format your memory cards after you download images to your computer and back up the images to an external source such as a DVD disc or a USB hard drive. Formatting cards is especially important if you use a card that has already has some images on it, but is not full. Your camera lets you shoot until you fill up the card. If you've already downloaded the previous shots, you end up downloading them again and wasting valuable space on your hard drive. When you start with a formatted card, you're starting with a clean slate and don't download the same image twice. Formatting a memory card is similar to formatting a hard drive on a computer: When you format a memory card, you erase all data (photos), and you can start filling up the card again. To format the memory card, you use a camera menu setting. The exact location of the Format command varies depending on the camera and manufacturer. Most cameras warn you that you're erasing all data from the card when formatting. If you're sure that you downloaded the images to your computer, click Yes to format the card.

Even though you can format a card with your computer after downloading images, you should always use the camera menu command to format a memory card.



3. Determine how many pictures you can fit on your memory card.

The number of images you can fit on a memory card is directly proportional to the image size and quality currently specified. When you specify a large image size, with the highest quality, you won't be able to fit as many pictures on your memory card.

4. Consider the following questions before choosing a setting:

- *Will you be printing the images (or ordering prints)?*

If so, you must specify an image quality that is high enough to support the size media on which the image will be printed. For example, if the native resolution of your camera is 180 PPI (pixels per inch), and you want an 8 x 10 print of the picture you are shooting, the image size must be larger than 1440 x 1800 pixels. If you want a really sharp image with a resolution of 300 PPI, your image must have dimensions of 2400 (8 inches x 300) x 3000 (10 inches x 300) pixels. You'll find more information on image dimensions and the relationship of resolution to image size in Chapter 10.

- *Will you display the images on a Web site rather than print them?*

If so, you can specify your smallest image size and quality, which on most cameras is still more than you need to display the image on a Web page or send it via e-mail. For more information on optimizing images for the Web, see Chapter 10.

- *Are you running out of room on your memory card?*

Every time you take a picture, you decrease the number of images you can add to the memory card. Your camera lists the remaining number of images in the LCD viewfinder, or in a window on the camera body. If you're running out of room on your memory card and don't have a spare memory card or a device to which you can download the pictures before taking more pictures, you can switch to a smaller image size and quality, which increases the number of images you can fit on the card. Another alternative is to delete some of the images that are obviously of poor quality or poorly composed.



You can purchase battery-powered portable hard drives that are specifically made for downloading images from digital camera memory cards. The units accept most popular memory cards. Power on the unit, insert your memory card, and then press a button to download the contents of the card to the hard drive. After successfully downloading the images, you can reformat the card and continue taking pictures. Many of the portable hard drives also come with a monitor you can use to preview your images. You can also purchase portable CD/DVD burners, which enable you to copy images from your memory cards to a CD or DVD. Either device is a great alternative if you shoot lots of pictures while you travel. They're lighter and smaller than a laptop computer and alleviate the need for purchasing more memory cards than you would ordinarily need.



When you purchase additional memory cards, refrain from purchasing memory cards larger than 2 GB. A memory card is an electrical device. The most common cause for memory card failure is loss of power when the card is being read or written to. In accordance with Murphy's law, a memory card will fail at the least opportune time. When a memory card fails, I'd rather lose 1 or 2 gigabytes of images instead of 4 or 8 gigabytes of images.

5. Open your camera menu and navigate to the image size and quality settings.

Your camera's menu may be subdivided into sections. Some camera manufacturers divide settings into tabs of related commands. For example, my Canon ProShot 1 has one tab for camera settings such as shutter sounds, startup sounds, and so on; a second tab for other camera settings such as LCD brightness, power saving, and so on; plus a third tab for settings related to picture taking. However, on my camera, a different button (Func) is used to change the image size and quality settings. The choices on my ProShot 1 (8.0 megapixels) range from S (an image with dimensions of 640 x 480 pixels) to L (an image with dimensions of 3264 x 2448 pixels). The quality settings are Normal, Fine, and Superfine. My Canon EOS 5D (12.8 megapixels) has the image size and resolution settings on the menu. The options for this camera range from S (2496 x 1664 pixels) to L (4368 x 2912 pixels) with quality settings of Normal and Fine. You get the most detail when you choose the highest image quality, which also creates the largest file size and uses more space on your memory card. To give you an idea of the impact file size and quality have on space, consider the following fact: When I use a 256 MB card in my PowerShot Pro 1, it holds 2720 images when I choose S for the image size and Normal for the quality. It holds 72 images when I choose L (largest image dimension in pixels) for the image size and Superfine (least compression, best image quality, and largest file size) for the quality. Quality determines how much the image is compressed. If you're shooting images that you plan to print, you should always choose your camera's highest quality setting, as shown in Figure 1-1, which shows the image size menu for a digital SLR (single-lens reflex) camera.

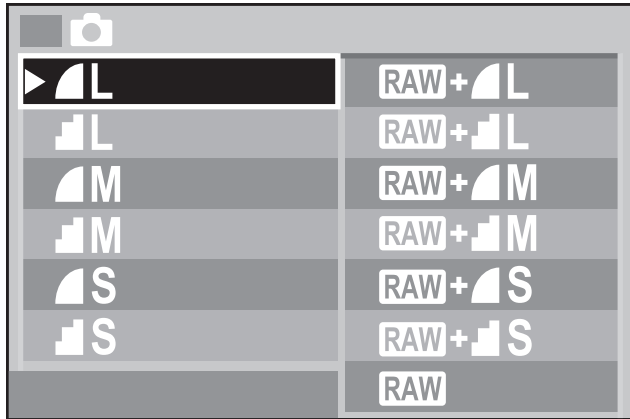


Figure 1-1: A digital SLR image size menu.

6. Choose the setting that best suits your immediate picture-taking needs.

Exactly how you select image size and quality varies from camera to camera. Refer to your camera manual for the button or dial used to toggle through menu options. On many cameras, it's self-explanatory.

7. Press the shutter button halfway to achieve focus.

Most cameras give you visual representation on the LCD monitor or in the viewfinder that the camera has focused the scene. You may also hear a beep. Some cameras also lock focus when you press the shutter button halfway. Other cameras have a button to lock focus. Refer to your camera manual for additional information.

8. Take the picture.

You can continue shooting with the current settings until your needs change. That's the beauty of digital cameras. You can change image size and quality settings on the fly. However, unless memory card capacity is an issue, your best bet is to shoot at the largest image size and the best image-quality setting. You can always optimize the image for an intended destination such as the Web or e-mail later in an application like Photoshop Elements. Remember, if you take pictures with smaller image dimensions at lower-quality settings, there's really no way to increase the image size and quality after you download the images to your computer. The only exception to that rule is when you shoot using your camera's RAW format. The Camera Raw dialog box in Photoshop CS2 and CS3, and in recent versions of Photoshop Elements, gives you the option of increasing the image size of a RAW file when processing it.

Shooting with Your Camera's RAW Format

If your camera has an option for capturing images using a RAW format, you capture exactly what the camera sensor captures. Think of this as working with the equivalent of a digital negative. When you shoot in any mode other than RAW, the camera processes the image. Most modern cameras process images into the JPEG format. The disadvantage to shooting images in the JPEG format is that you're limited to how much you can

manipulate the photo in an image-editing program like Photoshop Elements. If the image is slightly underexposed or overexposed, there's not a whole lot you can do with it, unless the image was captured using the RAW format. When you shoot RAW, however, you can correct exposure problems, and even enhance the image while you process it. (And just think of how much fun you can have telling your friends you shoot in the RAW.) There's a downside to shooting RAW images, however: You must process them. All camera manufacturers provide a software application that enables you to process the images after you download them to your computer. These applications work with the images from your camera. As you may have guessed, each camera manufacturer has a proprietary RAW format. In fact, some have multiple RAW formats, such as Canon, which has .CRW and .CR2 RAW formats. However, the Adobe engineers have been working with all camera manufacturers and have created a nifty application called Camera Raw, which ships with Photoshop CS3 and Photoshop Elements 6.0. Camera Raw recognizes all the popular RAW formats and has features not found with the application shipped with your camera. In Chapter 10, I show you how to process images with the version of Camera Raw for Photoshop Elements. In the following exercise, I show you how to take pictures using your camera's RAW format.

Exercise 1-2: Shooting Photos in RAW Format

1. Power on your camera.

2. Format your memory card.

Refer to Exercise 1-1 for details.

3. Open your camera menu and navigate to the image size and quality settings.

Your camera should show several settings that relate to image size. The option you need should be called something like RAW, R, or RAWCCD, depending on your camera manufacturer. The option to shoot RAW should be readily identifiable. When you shoot in the RAW format, you capture all the data your camera sensor records.

4. Choose your camera's option for shooting in the RAW format.

Most cameras use a wheel or dial to navigate from menu item to menu item. Figure 1-2 shows the RAW format menu from my Canon EOS 5D. The Canon EOS 5D and many other cameras on the market give you the option of saving a RAW file and a JPEG image each time you take a picture.

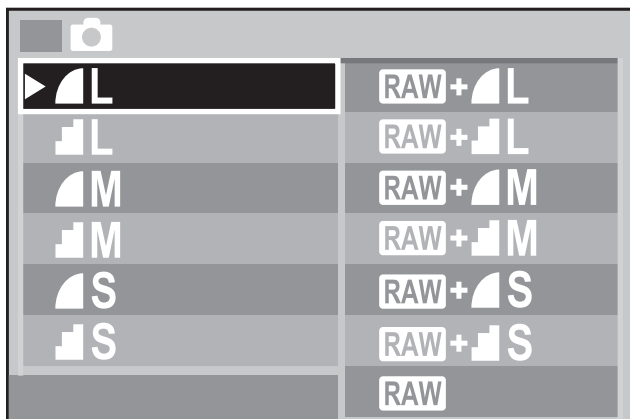


Figure 1-2: A digital SLR offers several RAW formats and options.

5. Press the shutter button halfway to achieve focus.

Inside your viewfinder or on your LCD monitor, a focus point changes color, which signifies that the camera has focused on an object that intersects that focus point. Your camera may also beep when it has focused on an object.

6. Compose the scene and take the picture.

The camera transfers the information from its sensor to your memory card with no processing. Figure 1-3 shows a photograph captured using Canon's .CR2 RAW format as processed using the Adobe Photoshop CS3 Camera Raw application.



Figure 1-3: You have more latitude when you shoot photos using your camera's RAW format.

Setting the Focal Length

Point-and-shoot digital cameras are marvels of engineering. Realize that the pint-sized camera you can fit in a purse or your pocket captures the photograph and processes it as well. In addition, it's equipped with a motorized lens that enables you to zoom in or zoom out. Talk about having everything in a teeny-weeny little package! Typical point-and-shoot cameras have a lens that can zoom to four times (4X) the minimal focal length of the lens. An example of this type of camera is the minuscule Canon PowerShot SD850 IS, which is just a little larger than the classic iPod, and has an optical zoom of 4X, which is the 35mm equivalent of a focal range from 35mm to 140mm. If your camera isn't quite pint size, it may have a more powerful zoom. Some cameras on the market can zoom up to 12X. An example of a camera with this zoom range is the Canon S5 IS, which has a 12X optical zoom, which is the 35mm equivalent of 36mm to 432mm.



Digital cameras also have what is known as digital zoom. In essence, *digital zoom* crops to a portion of the image that can be captured at the largest optical zoom, and then resizes to fill the frame. This means that the camera is redrawing pixels, which inevitably leads to image distortion. I strongly advise against using digital zoom. If you need to zoom in really close, your best bet is always a camera with a high rate of optical zoom.

Many beginning photographers don't understand *focal length*, the distance in millimeters from the optical center of the lens to the camera sensor or film. A long focal length gives you a narrow field of view, which in effect zooms in or magnifies the subject. A short focal length gives a wide field of view; hence the name, wide angle. Beginning photographers tend to just stand wherever they happen to be, and then zoom in or out to compose the photo. This can lead to some undesirable results. For example, if you're capturing a head and shoulders portrait of a person with a wide-angle lens, the features closest to the camera appear distorted. (Can you say "large nose?" I thought you could.) The following exercise is designed to help you understand the difference between wide-angle focal lengths and telephoto focal lengths. If you're doing this exercise with a digital SLR, use a wide angle to telephoto zoom lens with a range of about 28mm to 105mm, if you have one.

Exercise 1-3: Setting the Focal Length

1. Find a building you'd like to photograph.

You can take a snapshot of your own house or a photogenic building in your neighborhood.

2. Zoom out to the widest focal length.

The actual device used to zoom in and out varies. Some cameras have a circle with a detent outside of the shutter button. Move the detent left to zoom out, right to zoom in. Other cameras have a collar on the lens barrel that you twist to change focal length. This is similar to zooming in and out with a 35mm telephoto lens. Move the collar left to zoom out; right to zoom in.

3. Walk toward the building until it almost fills the viewfinder.

4. Press the shutter button halfway to focus, and then fully to snap the picture.

The image appears in your camera LCD monitor shortly after you take the photo. Figure 1-4 is a photograph of a Frank Lloyd Wright building a few miles from my home. It was shot with the 7.2 mm focal length on my Canon PowerShot 1, which is the 35mm equivalent of a 28mm focal length.



When you shoot a building with a wide-angle lens, do not tilt the lens up to fill the lens with your subject. Doing so results in the distortion of vertical lines. The lines appear as though they are converging together. This is known as *keystoning*. Of course, all rules are meant to be broken. If you *want* to exaggerate the height of a tall building, get up close and personal, choose the widest focal length on your camera, and then tilt the camera to fill the viewfinder with the skyscraper.



Figure 1-4: Photographing a building with a wide-angle lens.

5. Zoom in the middle focal length of your lens.

Some camera lenses are marked with the 35mm equivalent and the actual focal length of the lens. If your camera has this feature, you can accurately zoom to the middle focal length of the lens. If your camera is not marked, experiment with the zoom control until you get a good feel for it, and then approximate the middle focal length. If your camera has a 3X optical zoom, your middle focal length will be the 35mm equivalent of a 50mm lens, which is close to the range of the human eye. If your camera has a 4X or higher optical zoom, you're in the telephoto category.

6. Walk away from the building until it almost fills the viewfinder.

7. Press the shutter button halfway to focus, and then fully to take the picture.

You'll see the image in your LCD monitor in a few seconds. Figure 1-5 is the same building in Figure 1-4 at the middle focal length of my Canon PowerShot Pro 1, which is the 35mm equivalent of a 100mm lens. Notice the difference between this image and the photo in Figure 1-4.



Figure 1-5: Photographing a building with the equivalent of a medium telephoto lens.

8. Zoom in to the longest focal length of your lens.

The focal length depends on the amount of optical zoom your camera has. If you have a camera with 6X optical zoom or higher, you're shooting with a relatively long telephoto lens. A lens with the 35mm equivalent of 180mm and greater lets you zoom in on your subject from afar, an excellent and very safe alternative when you're trying to photograph a grizzly bear catching a salmon.

9. Walk away from the building until it almost fills the viewfinder.**10. Press the shutter button halfway to achieve focus, and then fully to take the picture.**

You see the image in your LCD monitor shortly after you snap the picture. Figure 1-6 is the same building in Figure 1-4 at the maximum focal length of my Canon PowerShot Pro 1, which is the 35mm equivalent of a 200mm lens. Notice the difference between this image and the photos in Figures 1-4 and 1-5, especially the building in the background. When you use a telephoto lens, it brings everything closer to you, including the distant buildings. When you photograph a busy city street with lots of buildings, the buildings seem like they are closer together in the photo than they are when you see them in real life. It's a pretty cool effect. Try it: You'll like it.

11. Download the images to your computer and compare them on-screen.

When you compare the images on-screen, you'll see the difference between the different focal lengths you have available. This gives you a better idea of which focal length to use when photographing a particular subject. I expand on the topic of focal lengths during exercises on how to shoot different subjects.



Figure 1-6: Photographing a building with the equivalent of a long telephoto lens.



On a Saturday afternoon when you have an hour or so to spare, take a walk around your neighborhood and photograph objects with several focal lengths. Practice quickly zooming from one focal length to another and pay attention to the different types of pictures you can take just by changing the focal length with the same subject. For example, if you get close to an SUV and photograph it with a wide-angle focal length, the grille will look huge, almost comical.

Changing Lenses on a Digital SLR

If you own a digital SLR (single-lens reflex) camera, you change your focal length by switching to a different lens. Each camera manufacturer has a wide variety of lenses from which to choose. You can purchase wide-angle lenses that enable you to capture the broad expanse of a majestic vista like Yosemite Valley, or telephoto lenses that you use to zoom in on distant subjects such as wildlife without getting dangerously close to them. You can purchase a prime lens, which has a single focal length, or a zoom lens, which gives you a wide variety of focal lengths from which to choose. The beauty of a zoom lens is that you can compose a picture by zooming in or out. If you've used 35mm SLRs in the past, you may think you can change lenses whenever you want. However, if you switch one lens with another and don't take some precautions, you end up with dust on your sensor. The following exercise shows you techniques for changing lenses on your digital SLR that minimize the chance of dust fouling the camera sensor.

Exercise 1-4: Swapping Lenses on a Digital SLR

1. Replace the front lens cap of the lens currently mounted on the camera.

This protects the lens from damage. You can also set the lens on a solid surface, lens cap side down after removing it from the camera.



Consider purchasing a skylight filter for each lens you own. A skylight filter “warms” the picture by removing the bluish cast of daylight. Leave the filter on the lens at all times. It's also cheap insurance against dust, moisture, or scratches on your expensive lens. Remember that you get what you pay for. If you buy a cheap skylight filter, it may degrade the quality of your image.

2. Decide which lens is best suited for the picture you want to take.

Wide-angle lenses are great for shooting wide-open landscapes; lenses with a 35mm equivalent of 50mm are great for photographing groups of people and trees; and telephoto lenses are great when you need to zoom in on a subject.

3. Turn the camera off.

The camera sensor uses camera power to capture images. When you turn the camera off, you minimize the risk of dust particles being attracted to the sensor's electrical charge.

4. Point the camera down and away from any prevailing wind.

This prevents dust from blowing into the camera during the brief amount of time when the lens is off the camera. If you're taking photographs in a dusty or windy environment, it's advisable to change lenses in a building or your car.

5. Remove the current lens and gently set it down on a solid surface.

If the only solid surface is dirt or wet grass, place the lens between your thighs and clamp them around the lens. Practice this a few times before actually doing it outdoors.

6. Remove the rear lens cap from the lens you're going to mount on the camera.

When you remove the lens, note where the lens mounting dot is. There is also a dot on the body of your camera.

7. Align the lens mounting dot with the mounting dot on the camera body.

You'll have to turn the camera body up slightly to see the mounting dot on the camera.

8. Mount the lens to the camera body and turn it clockwise or counterclockwise (depending on the manufacturer of your camera) until you feel it lock into place.

With practice, you'll be able to dismount and mount a lens quickly, minimizing the chance of dust fouling your camera sensor. When I purchased my first digital SLR, I knew nothing about dust spots on the sensor and learned the hard way when reviewing some pictures I had taken during a San Francisco vacation. The cerulean blue sky in the photo was speckled with dots. Figure 1-7 shows a close-up of a photo that was marred due to dust on the sensor. If you notice black specks on areas of solid color, such as a clear blue sky, your camera sensor has dust specks. The dust spots can be removed in an image-editing program. However, if you follow the steps in this exercise, you'll minimize the chances of dust adhering to your sensor, which will save you a ton of time when editing your photos.



Figure 1-7: Change lenses with the camera power off to avoid the risk of dust fouling your camera sensor.



If you do notice dust specks on your pictures, you can clean your sensor by following the instructions in your camera manual. Digital SLRs have a menu command for sensor cleaning, which, when invoked, flips up the camera mirror. You then use a blower to dislodge the dust from the camera sensor. Do not use a blower with a CO2 cartridge as the cartridge contains oil, which fouls the sensor. You can purchase a powerful hand-held blower (there are many available with the generic name of “hurricane blower”) from your local camera store. Do not touch the sensor with the blower. Turn the camera off to complete the task. After cleaning the sensor, immediately replace the body cap or put a lens on the camera. Some newer digital SLRs have built-in dust removal, which shakes the sensor when the camera is turned on or off and thus dislodging any dirt.

Understanding the 35mm Equivalent

If you used a film SLR camera prior to converting to digital, you're probably familiar with the different focal lengths typically used to shoot landscapes, portraits, or close-ups, for example. The focal lengths on a point-and-shoot lens are different than those commonly associated with 35mm film cameras. The reason is that your digital camera's sensor is smaller than the frame size of a 35mm negative or slide. If you study the specifications of a digital point-and-shoot camera, you'll see that the lens has a focal length with a range of something like 5.8mm to 17.4mm. The camera manufacturer lists the 35mm equivalent in the specs, which is great information for photographers who previously used 35mm film cameras. For example, the 35mm equivalent of the lens previously mentioned is 35mm to 105mm, which, by the way, is 3X zoom.

If you purchased a digital SLR, your sensor is probably also smaller than the frame size of 35mm film. There are only a few cameras on the market that have what is known as a *full frame sensor*: a sensor that is the same size as a frame of 35mm film (24 x 36mm). If you own a camera with a sensor that is not full frame, you're dealing with a focal length multiplication factor. The focal multiplier determines the 35mm equivalent of a lens you mount on a digital SLR that does not have a full frame sensor. In essence, the smaller sensor has a smaller field of view. For example, if your camera has a lens multiplication factor of 1.5, and you mount a 50mm lens on the camera, it's the equivalent of mounting a 75mm (50 x 1.5) lens on a 35mm film camera. This information is useful if you're a 35mm film convert and want to purchase additional lenses for your camera.

Focusing on Your Subject

Digital cameras relieve you from needing razor-sharp eyesight when composing your photo. Gone are the old days when you had to manually focus on your subject and then shoot the picture. But auto-focus is not infallible, so that's why you have options. On the other hand, options without knowledge can be confusing. The following exercise familiarizes you with how your digital camera thinks when it focuses on a subject, and how you can stay one step ahead of your camera.

Exercise 1-5: Focusing on Your Subject

1. **Compose the photograph.**
2. **Choose the proper AF point.**

The AF (auto-focus) point is the spot in the frame from which your camera focuses the scene. Your camera may have multiple AF points. To determine how many AF points your camera has, point it at an object, press the shutter button halfway, and look in the viewfinder. If you see a single square as shown in Figure 1-8, your camera uses a center AF point to focus the scene. When the AF point changes color, and the camera beeps, the scene is in focus.

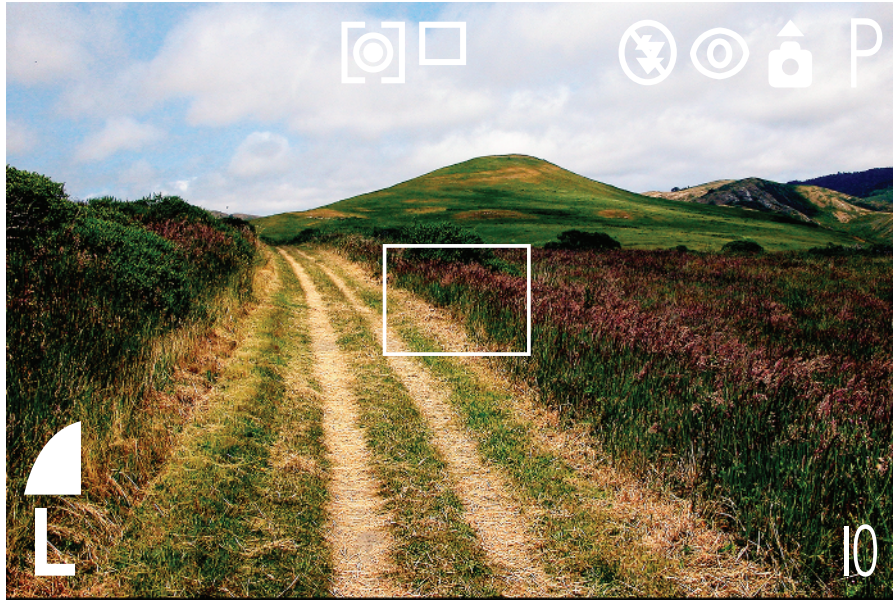


Figure 1-8: A camera with a single AF point.

If you see multiple points, such as shown in Figure 1-9, the camera focuses on an object that intersects with one of these focus points. In fact, your camera may detect many points on which it can focus. This is a good thing when you're photographing landscapes; however, when you're photographing people, the camera can be fooled, especially if one of the auto-focus points intersects with something that has a lot of contrast, such as window blinds. If your subject is the bride walking down the aisle, and your camera focuses on the blinds, the end result is an out-of-focus bride. In this case, choose the camera option to switch to a single focus point. Refer to your camera manual to discover which menu command or dial you need to use to switch to a different AF point if indeed your camera has multiple focus points.

Your camera may also have an option known as Face Detect. Use this option if you're photographing a scene with people in it. In addition to focusing on the right subject, this mode may also choose the proper exposure and flash setting for photographing people. If your camera is equipped with this feature, refer to your camera manual to determine the proper menu command or dial that you use to switch to this option.

3. Press the shutter button halfway to achieve focus.

The AF point changes color and your camera may beep.

4. Press the shutter button fully to take the picture.

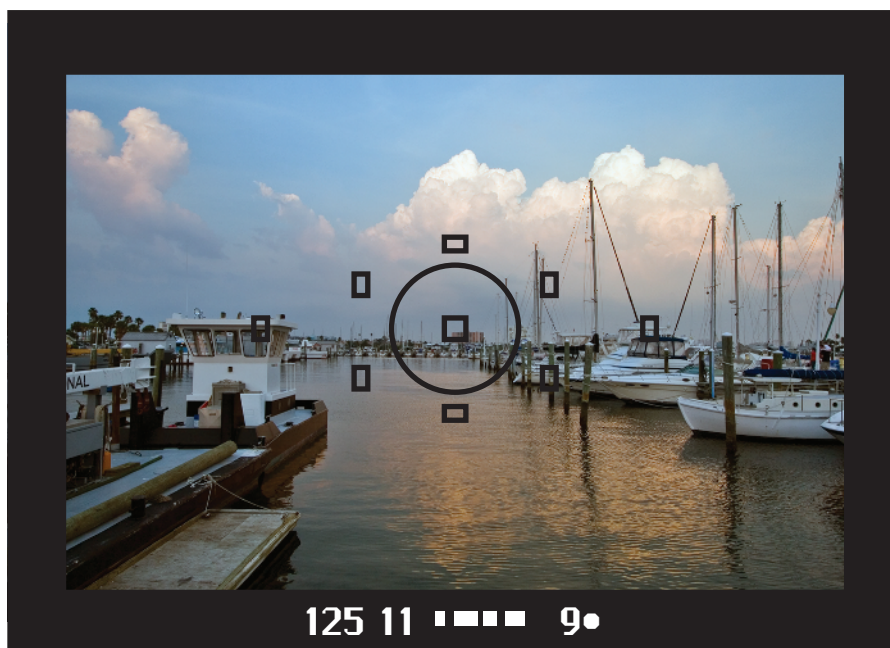


Figure 1-9: A camera with multiple AF points.

Focusing On Off-Center Subjects

Many photographers prefer to compose their photographs in such a way that the main subject (also known as center of interest) is not smack-dab in the middle of the photo. In fact, this often makes for a more interesting photograph. (For more information on composing a photo, see Chapter 3.) When your subject is not in the center of the scene, you can ensure that it's in focus by following the steps in this exercise.

Exercise 1-6: Focusing on an Off-Center Subject

- 1. Switch to Single AF (auto-focus) mode. Your camera may also refer to this mode as One-Shot.**

If your camera is in Continuous AF mode, it continually focuses on whatever intersects the AF point.

- 2. If your camera is equipped with multiple AF points, switch to the AF point in the center of the viewfinder.**
- 3. Aim the camera so that the AF point is over your subject.**
- 4. Press the shutter button halfway to achieve focus.**

When focus is achieved, the AF point changes color, and your camera may beep.

5. With the shutter button depressed halfway, compose the scene.

Move the camera until you see the photo you envisioned in the viewfinder or on your LCD monitor. As long as you're in Single AF mode, and the shutter button is depressed halfway, the camera is focused on the subject you aimed at in Step 4.

6. Press the shutter button fully to take the picture.

Figure 1-10 shows an example of a scene where a single AF point was aimed at an off-center subject, the man painting the Golden Gate Bridge.



Figure 1-10: Focusing on an off-center subject.

Zen and the Art of Photography

If you're going to become a good photographer, you must learn to see photo opportunities. And when you see them, you need to make the best of the "Kodak Moment" and capture some keeper photos on your memory card. To recognize a scene that will make a good or perhaps great photograph, you must be observant, or as they say, "in the moment." Just taking a quick glance into the viewfinder or LCD monitor and then pressing the shutter is not being observant. Many people go through life with blinders on. They drive to and from work without observing the beauty around them and the changes in their own neighborhood or hometown, and they always take the same route whenever they go somewhere. Armed with a digital camera, a creative spirit, and the ability to see a photo opportunity, you can capture some wonderful photographs of the town in which you live. Here are some suggestions for capturing interesting photos:



- ✓ **Always carry your digital camera with you.** You never know when you'll see an interesting scene, or when a glorious rainbow (with or without the obligatory pot of gold at its end) will appear after a storm.

If you own an expensive digital SLR, you may be hesitant to carry it with you wherever you go. I'm hesitant to carry *my* digital SLR with me wherever I go. I purchased a relatively inexpensive 8.1 megapixel point-and-shoot digital for my everyday camera. I carry it in the glove box and am ready whenever I see something that would make an interesting photo.

- ✓ **Leave a half-hour early for work and take a route you've never traveled.** Morning light is wonderful for photographs. If you take a route to work that's off the beaten path, you're bound to find interesting subjects to photograph. Taking a different route also makes you more aware of your surroundings.
- ✓ **Take a different route home from work.** If you leave work in the late afternoon, you'll have golden light for your photographs.
- ✓ **See the big picture.** Many beginning photographers snap the picture and move on. But if the scene or person is worthy of a photograph, you should take the best picture you can. If you're photographing a landscape or building, take a few moments to slow down and analyze the scene. This helps you figure out the best vantage point from which to photograph the scene. It will also make you aware of items that will distract from the picture such as telephone poles, garbage cans, street signs, and so on. If you're photographing a person, make sure you don't have a telephone pole growing out of her head. If you really see the big picture, you'll find the vantage point that will give you a great shot, without background clutter or other distracting elements.
- ✓ **Think outside of the box.** Photograph the scene the same way you've photographed similar scenes, and then put your creative muse to work and think of ways you could take a better picture. Try turning the camera diagonally, or using a different zoom setting. If you're photographing a person, give him a prop and ask him to ham it up a bit.
- ✓ **Walk around the scene.** When you see something worth photographing, take the picture you imagined, but don't put the camera away. Not yet, anyway. Walk around the scene and envision shots from different angles. Crouch down on your belly for a snail's-eye view, or climb up some steps to get a higher vantage point, or, if you're agile, climb a tree. When you see something that looks good, analyze the scene through your viewfinder or LCD. If it still looks good, take the picture.
- ✓ **Take photographs of everyday objects, like pots and pans, road signs, and billboards, but photograph them in unusual ways.** Look for the patterns in common objects. A close-up of a stucco wall with peeling paint can be the basis for a wonderful abstract photograph. Figure 1-11 is a photograph of painted plywood that serves as a gate for an alley in Ybor City, Florida. The painted lock draws your eye into the photograph.



Figure 1-11: Explore your world through the camera lens.

Face it: We live in a world that's moving at a breakneck pace. By creatively exploring the world around you through your camera lens, you get a chance to really see the beauty in your world. It's also a wonderful way to slow down and relieve stress.

