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## **Digital Photography for the New DSLR Owner: What to do with all those buttons!**

Have you just purchased a digital camera and want to know what to do with it? Digital camera purchases have grown dramatically in recent years, and digital SLR sales have skyrocketed as well. The trouble is—most everyone is simply using that expensive \$400 to \$1000 camera as a “Point-and-Shoot” camera. So, isn’t it time to open yourself up to some new adventures in picture taking, and start getting creative?

By creative, I mean that you learn your camera’s settings and introduce yourself to some camera and technological jargon. Once you have become familiar with these new terms, you will find yourself wanting to “Go Manual” and “Shoot from the Hip”, so to speak. You will want to trust your own instincts instead of letting the camera choose its settings for you all the time.

Sure, you can still use automatic settings now and then, especially in unfamiliar settings to get an idea of what the camera is going to use to expose the picture. Then you can compare the image with what you expected the picture to look like and make adjustments from there to get the optimal image that you desire. But you have to know some basics, like what all those buttons do!

This is a great way to ease yourself into the creative side. You simply set the camera to fully automatic and note the settings on the exposed picture that appear on your LCD screen. Then you try to duplicate that by going manual. Then from there, adjust one setting at a time to see the difference one setting makes. Be sure to change that setting to both allow more light in and to allow less light in so you create a “bracketed” set of pictures with which to compare.

I once had a student of mine ask me, “Why don’t we just simply leave it on the green (fully automatic) setting?” By the time I was finished with my rather lengthy reply, he might have been sorry he asked, but he certainly had a new appreciation for why cameras come with all those manual settings.

Some examples of when the fully automatic settings on the camera simply will not be able to take a good picture include:

- Subjects against a bright backlit background, such as a sky, beach, water, or snow. In this case, you’ll find that your subject shows up in silhouette against a bright background. If this is not the effect you desire, then you can try using fill-in flash to light up your subject, while still obtaining a bright background. But if your subject is too far away (more than 15 feet away for most flashes) then this simply will not work. So you will have to get to know your camera’s manual settings to know how to get through this one.
- Subjects that are fast-moving such as action, sports, children, pets, or other fast-moving objects—especially indoors. Your camera chooses the settings automatically and more often than not, it will choose a slower shutter speed causing image blur. There is no way out of this except to shoot manually or semi-automatically.
- Macro photography or extreme close-ups. This may fool your camera into overexposing or underexposing the image and may also cause problems with your autofocus. So not

only will you need to adjust the settings, but you may also need to manually adjust the focus on these objects to focus on exactly what you want, instead of what the camera deems important.

- High-contrast photos, such as bright outdoors in woods or combo sun/shade. The camera will expose to its best ability, but may under or overexpose the image depending on which part of the composition it selects to base its exposure settings on. Again, you may be left with a less-than-desireable image.
- Indoor pictures without flash. Your camera will likely add a yellowish, orangeish, or greenish glow to your indoor pictures unless you learn how to adjust for this problem.
- Pictures in dimly lit or darkened places. You may need to manually focus and make other manual adjustments to get that picture just right, yet still get a clear, sharp picture without blur or odd coloring.

These are but a few examples of when you will want to take manual control of your camera to get that perfect image.

Don't worry: learning the basics of what those buttons is fairly easy as they all simply change the amount and kind of light entering the camera. You simply can make an adjustment (one at a time), take the picture, and view the results. So if you are finally ready to learn the easy, hands-on way what all those buttons mean and how to use them, then head on over to the ACA for some nicely-paced, small class size, photography course offerings.