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Photography: choosing the right lens



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In the hands of a creative photographer, the right lens is what makes the perfect picture. Your task is to choose yours with care!

1. Tips

- Avoid choosing solely on the basis of affordability. You are likely to be sorely disappointed.
- Professional quality lenses are reliable, high-performance devices that will stay with you for virtually your entire life.
- Aperture is a key factor when it comes to lens quality. A lens that goes as wide as f/2.8 will always be better than one that only goes up to f/4 or f/5.6.
- The focal length must match the chosen subject.

2. Choosing the right lens to match the subject

Subject conditions	Recommended lens	Second best option	
Insects, flora, small objects, coins..	Macro lenses: 50, 85 or 105mm depending on the required magnification	7-200 or 70-300 zoom lens with "macro" function	Macro bellows

Sports figures at a range of distances	100-300mm telephoto lens or greater	70-200 or 70-300 zoom	1.4x or greater
Building or large tree	17-35mm perspective correction lens	12-28mm wide angle lens	24-70mm zoom
Bird or small animal in the distance	500mm telephoto lens	Téléobjectif de 400 mm	500mm or greater
Animals and wildlife more generally	300mm telephoto lens or 300mm zoom	400mm telephoto lens or 400mm zoom	70-200mm zoom
Small indoor spaces	12-28mm wide angle lens	Fish-eye if distortion is acceptable	Fisheye lens
Urban or rural landscapes	12-35mm wide angle lens	24-70mm zoom, or 70-200mm, giving a distorted perspective	
Portraits (head and shoulders)	70-135mm lenses	70-200 or 70-300mm zoom	50mm or greater
Group photos	28mm-35mm lenses	24-70 or 24-105mm zoom	18mm or greater

Tip: Break the rules!

Using a lens in a non-standard way will let you to shoot a given subject from a new perspective.

E.g. using a wide angle for taking a portrait shot. The subject's outline appears distorted, emphasising the sense of angst portrayed by the background closing in on them, or playfully exaggerating the size of their nose to comic effect.



3. Choosing lenses according to focal length

Wide angle lenses

Any lens with a focal length of less than 35mm is deemed to be a wide angle lens. They are useful when you are unable to stand further back to take in wide scenes such as landscapes and trees. However, they distort the perspective.

- Ensure you shoot straight to prevent vertical lines from converging at the top or bottom.
- Because of the distortion, avoid placing horizontal or vertical lines near to the edges of the picture.

Standard lenses

35-80mm, offering a viewing angle similar to that of the human eye. 70/80mm, useful for separating the subject from the background. At these focal lengths, fixed focal lengths often offer wide apertures (f/1.0-f/2.8), which is particularly useful in low light, and higher quality compared to zoom lenses. However, you will need to step towards or away from the subject to ensure they are properly framed.

Telephoto lenses

These lenses, with focal lengths above 60 mm, allow you to bring distant subjects closer to the camera without the need to actually move closer. They have a shallow depth of field. Above 300 mm, they require a tripod, as they are heavy and bulky.

Zoom lenses

A zoom lens is one with a variable focal length. Those with a fixed aperture (e.g. f/2.8 or f/4) will be better than those with sliding aperture range (e.g. f/3,5-5,6). There come in 4 types.

- Wide-angle zooms: 8-16, 12-24, 17-35 or 17-40mm
- "Standard" zooms provide multiples of particular focal lengths such as 24-70 or 24-105, (17-55 or 17-70mm in APS-C format). They are fairly multi-purpose and can be used to capture a broad scene such as a landscape or take a close-up portrait of a single figure.
- Telephoto zooms: 70-200, 70-300, 100-300, 200-500mm
- "Ultra zoom" lenses rated 28-200mm (18-135mm APS-C) or 50-500mm are extremely flexible and can take the place of several lenses, from a wide angle to a telephoto.
Warning: the wide range of focal lengths and sliding apertures often have an adverse effect on image quality at either end of the focal range!



LENSES LIST

Types of lens

Wide angle

