

Nikon D750

From Snapshots to Great Shots



Learn the best ways
to compose your
pictures!



Get great detail
in your subjects!

Rob Sylvan

Nikon D750:
From
Snapshots to
Great Shots

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Peachpit
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Dedication

For my dear friends Brian Matiash and Nicole S. Young, thank you for being a constant source of inspiration to me, and for all that you have given to the community of photographers around the world.

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My deepest thanks go to Jeff Revell, the founding author of the From Snapshots to Great Shots series. Jeff is a tremendous photographer and gifted teacher. Thank you for providing such a sound foundation upon which to build.

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Contents

INTRODUCTION **IX**

CHAPTER 1: THE D750 TOP TEN LIST **1**

Ten Tips to Make Your Shooting More Productive Right Out of the Box

Poring Over the Camera	2
Poring Over the Camera	4
1. Charge Your Battery	5
2. Set Your JPEG Image Quality	6
3. Set the Correct White Balance	7
4. Set Your Color Space	10
5. Choose Your ISO Setting	12
6. Set Your Focus Point and Mode	13
7. Know How to Override Auto Focus	15
8. Disable the Slot Empty Release Lock	15
9. Turn On Image Review	17
10. Review Your Shots	19
Chapter 1 Assignments	25

CHAPTER 2: FIRST THINGS FIRST **27**

A Few Things to Know and Do Before You Begin Taking Pictures

Poring Over the Picture	28
Choosing the Right Memory Card	30
Formatting Your Memory Card	31
Updating the D750's Firmware	32
Cleaning the Sensor	34
Using the Right Format: Raw vs. JPEG	35
Lenses and Focal Lengths	39
What Is Exposure?	44
Motion and Depth of Field	46
Chapter 2 Assignments	51

CHAPTER 3: THE AUTO MODES **53**

Get Shooting with the Automatic Camera Modes

Poring Over the Picture	54
Auto Mode	56
Flash Off Mode	57
Scene Modes	59
Portrait Mode	59

Landscape Mode	61
Child Mode	62
Sports Mode	62
Close Up Mode	65
Night Portrait Mode	66
Other Scene Modes to Explore	67
Effects Modes	70
When You May Never Want to Use the Auto Modes Again	75
Chapter 3 Assignments	77
CHAPTER 4: THE PROFESSIONAL MODES	79
Taking Your Photography to the Next Level	
Poring Over the Picture	80
P: Program Mode	82
S: Shutter Priority Mode	85
A: Aperture Priority Mode	89
M: Manual Mode	95
User Settings Mode—Saving Your Favorite Settings to the Mode Dial	99
Customizing My Menu	100
How I Shoot: A Closer Look at the Camera Settings I Use	102
Chapter 4 Assignments	106
CHAPTER 5: MOVING TARGET	109
The Tricks to Shooting Sports and More	
Poring Over the Picture	110
Stop Right There!	112
Using Shutter Priority (S) Mode to Stop Motion	115
Using Aperture Priority (A) Mode to Isolate Your Subject	118
The ISO Sensitivity Auto Control Trick	120
Keep Them in Focus with Continuous-servo Focus and AF Focus Point Selection	122
Stop and Go with 3D-tracking AF	124
Manual Focus for Anticipated Action	124
Keeping Up with the Continuous Shooting Mode	126
A Sense of Motion	127
Tips for Shooting Action	128
Chapter 5 Assignments	132
CHAPTER 6: PERFECT PORTRAITS	135
Settings and Features to Make Great Portraits	
Poring Over the Picture	136
Automatic Portrait Mode	138
Using Aperture Priority Mode	138
Metering Modes for Portraits	142
Using the AE-L (Auto Exposure Lock) Feature	142
Focusing: The Eyes Have It	144

Classic Black and White Portraits	147
The Portrait Picture Control for Better Skin Tones	149
Detect Faces with Live View	150
Use Fill Flash for Reducing Shadows	151
Portraits on the Move	153
Tips for Shooting Better Portraits	153
Chapter 6 Assignments	163

CHAPTER 7: LANDSCAPE PHOTOGRAPHY 165

Tips, Tools, and Techniques to Get the Most Out of Your Landscape Photography

Poring Over the Picture	166
Sharp and In Focus: Using Tripods	168
Selecting the Proper ISO	170
Selecting a White Balance	172
Using the Landscape Picture Control	174
Turn On Exposure Preview	176
Taming Bright Skies with Exposure Compensation	177
Shooting Beautiful Black and White Landscapes	179
The Golden Light	181
Where to Focus	182
Easier Focusing	184
Making Water Fluid	185
Directing the Viewer: A Word About Composition	188
Chapter 7 Assignments	193

CHAPTER 8: MOOD LIGHTING 195

Shooting When the Lights Get Low

Poring Over the Picture	196
Raising the ISO: The Simple Solution	198
Using Very High ISOs	201
Stabilizing the Situation	204
Focusing in Low Light	207
Shooting Long Exposures	210
Using the Built-in Flash	211
Compensating for the Flash Exposure	214
Reducing Red-Eye	216
Rear Curtain Sync	218
Flash and Glass	220
A Few Words About External Flash	221
Chapter 8 Assignments	224

CHAPTER 9: ADVANCED TECHNIQUES 227

Impress Your Family and Friends

Poring Over the Picture	228
Spot Meter for More Exposure Control	230

Manual Mode	232
Avoiding Lens Flare	235
Using the Sun Creatively	236
Bracketing Exposures	237
High Dynamic Range (HDR) Photography	239
Active D-Lighting	243
Shooting Panoramas	245
Shooting with the Interval Timer	247
Macro Photography	250
Chapter 9 Assignments	251

CHAPTER 10: THE MOVING PICTURE **253**

Getting the Most Out of the D750's Video Capabilities

It's All About the Lenses	254
Recording with Live View	254
Video Quality	255
Sound	257
Dedicating a Second Card to Video	259
Focusing	260
View Modes	261
Accessories for Video	263
Getting a Shallow Depth of Field	265
Giving a Different Look to Your Videos	266
Creating a Time-Lapse Movie	267
Tips for Better Video	269
Watching and Editing Your Video	271
Chapter 10 Assignments	273

CHAPTER 11: ACCESSORIZE **275**

Upgrades and Accessories to Expand Your Camera's Creative Potential

Filters	276
Tripods	282
Remote or Cable Release	283
Macro Photography Accessories	284
Hot-Shoe Flashes	287
Diffusers	289
Camera Bags	289
Bits and Pieces	290
A Word About Lenses	292
Conclusion	293

CHAPTER 12: CREATIVE COMPOSITIONS	295
Improve Your Pictures with Sound Compositional Elements	295
Poring Over the Picture	296
Depth of Field	298
Angles	300
Point of View	300
Patterns	300
Color	302
Contrast	303
Leading Lines	305
Splitting the Frame	305
Frames Within Frames	307
Chapter 12 Assignments	309
INDEX	310

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Introduction

The D750 is a wonderful bit of camera technology and a very capable tool for creating photographs and video that you will be proud to show others. The intention of this book is not to be a rehash of the owner's manual that came with the camera, but rather to be a resource for learning how to improve your photography while specifically using your D750. I am very excited and honored to help you in that process, and to that end I have put together a short Q&A to help you get a better understanding of just what you can expect from this book.

Q: Is every camera feature going to be covered?

A: Nope, just the ones I felt you need to know about in order to start taking great photos. Believe it or not, you already own a great resource that covers every feature of your camera: the owner's manual. Writing a book that just repeats this information would have been a waste of my time and your money. What I did want to write about was how to harness certain camera features to the benefit of your photography. As you read through the book, you will also see callouts that point you to specific pages in your owner's manual that are related to the topic being discussed. For example, I discuss the use of Live View, but there is more information available on this feature in the manual. I cover the function that applies to our specific needs but also give you the page numbers in the manual to explore this function even further.

Q: So if I already own the manual, why do I need this book?

A: The manual does a pretty good job of telling you how to use a feature or turn it on in the menus, but it doesn't necessarily tell you why and when you should use it. If you really want to improve your photography, you need to know the whys and the whens to put all of those great camera features to use at the right time. To that extent, the manual just isn't going to cut it. It is, however, a great resource on the camera's features, and for that reason I treat it like a companion to this book. You already own it, so why not get something of value from it?

Q: What can I expect to learn from this book?

A: Hopefully, you will learn how to take great photographs. My goal, and the reason the book is laid out the way it is, is to guide you through the basics of photography as they relate to different situations and scenarios. By using the features of your D750 and this book, you will learn about aperture, shutter speed, ISO, lens selection, depth of field, and many other photographic concepts. You will also find plenty of large full-page photos that include captions, shooting data, and callouts so you can see how all of the photography fundamentals come together to make great images. All the while, you will be learning how your camera works and how to apply its functions and features to your photography.

Q: What about video?

A: The video recording functionality of DSLR cameras continues to improve with each new model, and the D750 is right up there near the top of its class. While the title of this book, *From Snapshots to Great Shots*, gives a nod to the fact that its main focus is on creating fantastic still photographs, I devote an entire chapter (Chapter 10) to help you get started capturing video with your D750.

Q: What are the assignments all about?

A: At the end of most of the chapters, you will find shooting assignments, where I give you some suggestions as to how you can apply the lessons of the chapter to help reinforce everything you just learned. Let's face it—using the camera is much more fun than reading about it, so the assignments are a way of taking a little break after each chapter and having some fun.

Q: Should I read the book straight through or can I skip around from chapter to chapter?

A: Here's the easy answer: yes and no. No, because the first four chapters give you the basic information that you need to know about your camera. These are the building blocks of using the D750. After that, yes, you can move around the book as you see fit, because the following chapters are written to stand on their own as guides to specific types of photography or shooting situations. So you can bounce from portraits to landscapes and then maybe to a little action photography. It's all about your needs and how you want to address them. Or, you can read the book straight through. The choice is up to you.

Q: Is there anything else I should know before getting started?

A: In order to keep the book short and focused, I had to be pretty selective about what I included in each chapter. The problem is that there is a little more information that might come in handy after you've gone through all the chapters. So as an added value for you, I have written a bonus chapter: Chapter 12, "Creative Compositions." Chapter 12 will lead you through some photography tips and techniques to make your photographs even better. To access the bonus chapter, just log in or join peachpit.com (it's free), then enter the book's ISBN on this page: www.peachpit.com/store/register.aspx. After you register the book, a link to the bonus chapter will be listed on your Account page under Registered Products. Note: If you purchased an electronic version of this book, you're set—Chapter 12 is already included in it.

Q: Is that it?

A: One last thought before you dive into the first chapter. My goal in writing this book has been to give you a resource that you can turn to for creating great photographs with your Nikon D750. Take some time to learn the basics and then put them to use. Photography, like most things, takes time to master and requires practice. I have been a photographer for many years and I'm still learning. Always remember that it's not the camera that makes beautiful photographs—it's the person using it. Have fun, make mistakes, and then learn from them. In no time, I'm sure you will transition from a person who takes snapshots to a photographer who makes great shots.

ISO 100 • 1/2 sec. •
f/22 • 29mm lens



4

The Professional Modes

Taking Your Photography to the Next Level

Most professional photographers use a few select modes that offer the greatest amount of control over their photography. To anyone who has been involved with photography for any period of time, these modes are known as the backbones of photography. They allow you to influence two of the most important factors in taking great photographs—namely, *aperture and shutter speed*. To access these modes, you simply hold the Mode dial lock release and turn the Mode dial to one of the letter-designated modes and begin shooting. But wouldn't it be nice to know exactly what those modes control and how to make them do our bidding? Well, if you really want to take that next step in controlling your photography, it is essential that you understand not only how to control these modes, but why you are controlling them. So let's switch over to the first of our professional modes: Program.

Poring Over the Picture

I used Shutter Priority mode to ensure that the speed was slow enough to blur the water.

I paid a visit to Franconia Notch State Park, in my home state of New Hampshire, the other day. The predominant feature of Franconia Notch is the Flume Gorge, an amazing cascade of water over granite. I brought my tripod, but I absentmindedly forgot to bring the bracket that attaches the D750 to it. That tilting screen on the D750 was about to make itself really useful. I still intended to get that silky water look by using a slow shutter speed, so I made a tripod out of every rock, root, and branch I could find to frame up my shots. Tilting the screen out allowed me to compose when it wasn't possible to get my eye to the viewfinder.

ISO 100 • 1/2 sec. •
f/13 • 80mm lens

I used the camera's self-timer feature to trigger the shutter to avoid shaking the camera during the exposure.

Despite the small aperture, the depth of field was relatively shallow because I zoomed the lens to 80mm and focused on the nearby leaf.

The camera was perched on a mossy root for a firm foundation.



P: Program Mode



I think of Program mode as a good place to begin for those graduating from the automatic or scene modes. There is a reason that Program mode is only one click away from the automatic modes: With respect to apertures and shutter speeds, the camera is doing most of the thinking for you. So if that is the case, why even bother with Program mode?

First, let me say that I rarely use Program mode because it just doesn't give as much control over the image-making process as the other professional modes. There are occasions, however, when it comes in handy, like when I am shooting in widely changing lighting conditions and I don't have the time to think through all my options, or when I'm not very concerned with having ultimate control of the scene. Think of a picnic outdoors in a partial shade/sun environment. I want great-looking pictures, but I'm not looking for anything to hang in a museum. If that's the scenario, why choose Program over one of the scene modes? Because it gives me choices and control that none of the scene modes can deliver.

Manual Callout

To see available settings for each mode, check out the table on pages 460 and 461 of the electronic user's manual.

When to use Program (P) mode instead of the automatic scene modes

It's graduation time and you're ready to move on to a more advanced mode but not quite ready to jump in with both feet. When does Program mode come in handy?

- When shooting in a casual environment where quick adjustments are needed
- When you want more control over the ISO
- If you want to make corrections to the white balance
- When you want to change shutter speeds or the aperture to achieve a specific result

Let's go back to our picnic scenario. As I said, the light is moving from deep shadow to bright sunlight, which means that the camera is trying to balance our three photo factors (ISO, aperture, and shutter speed) to make a good exposure. From Chapter 1, we know that Auto ISO is generally not what we want except when shooting in Auto mode, so we have already turned that feature off (you did turn it off, didn't you?). Well, in Program mode, you can choose which ISO you would like the camera to base its exposure on. The lower the ISO number, the better the quality of photographs, but the less light sensitive

the camera becomes. It's a balancing act, with the main goal always being to keep the ISO as low as possible—too low an ISO, and we will get camera shake in our images from a long shutter speed; too high an ISO, and we will have an unacceptable amount of digital noise. For now, let's go ahead and select ISO 400 so that we provide enough sensitivity for those shadows while allowing the camera to use shutter speeds that are fast enough to stop motion.

Starting points for ISO selection

Many years ago camera manufacturers were racing to create cameras with more megapixels. Today the digital race is more about higher ISO. Photographers want to be able to shoot in lower light conditions without the risk of digital noise. There is a lot of discussion concerning ISO in this and other chapters, but it might be helpful if you know where your starting points should be for your ISO settings. The first thing you should always try to do is use the lowest possible ISO setting. Your D750 has a good working range of 100–6400. That being said, here are good starting points for your ISO settings:

- 100: Bright, sunny day
- 200: Hazy or outdoor shade on a sunny day
- 400: Indoor lighting at night or cloudy conditions outside
- 800: Late night, low-light conditions or sports arenas at night
- 1600: Very low light; possibly candlelight or events where no flash is allowed
- 3200–6400: Extreme low light (some digital noise will be present; however, less than ever before)

These are just suggestions; you'll have to adjust as necessary. Your ISO selection will depend on a number of factors that will be discussed later in the book.

With the ISO selected, we can now make use of the other controls built into Program mode. By rotating the Main Command dial, we now have the ability to shift the program settings. Remember, your camera is using the internal meter to pick what it deems suitable exposure values, but sometimes it doesn't know what it's looking at and how you want those values applied (**Figures 4.1** and **4.2**).

With the program shift, you can influence what the shot will look like. Do you need faster shutter speeds in order to stop the action? Just turn the Main Command dial to the right. Do you want a smaller aperture so that you get a greater depth of field? Turn the dial to the left until you get the desired aperture. The camera shifts the shutter speed and aperture accordingly to get a proper exposure, and you will get the benefit of your choice as a result.



Figure 4.1
(left) This is my first shot, using Program mode.

ISO 100 • 1/50 sec. •
f/4.5 • 85mm len



Figure 4.2
(right) I decreased the size of the aperture by rotating the Main Command dial to the left to get a greater depth of field, and the shutter speed slowed down to maintain the same exposure value.

ISO 100 • 1/4 sec. •
f/20 • 85mm lens

You will also notice that a small star will appear above the letter P in the viewfinder and the rear display if you rotate the Main Command dial. This star is an indication that you modified the exposure from the one the camera chose. To go back to the default Program exposure, simply turn the dial until the star goes away or switch to a different mode and then back to Program mode again.

Let's set up the camera for Program mode and see how we can make all of this come together.

Setting up and shooting in Program mode

1. Turn your camera on, and then press the Mode dial release lock and turn the Mode dial to align the P with the indicator line.
2. Select your ISO by pressing and holding the ISO button on the back left of the camera while rotating the Main Command dial with your thumb.
3. The ISO will appear on the top display. Choose your desired ISO, and release the ISO button on the left to lock in the change.
4. Point the camera at your subject, and then activate the camera meter by depressing the shutter button halfway.
5. View the exposure information in the bottom of the viewfinder or by looking at the display panel on the back of the camera.
6. While the meter is activated, use your thumb to roll the Main Command dial left and right to see the changed exposure values.
7. Select the exposure that is right for you and start clicking. (Don't worry if you aren't sure what the right exposure is yet. We will work on making the right choices for those great shots beginning with the next chapter.)



S: Shutter Priority Mode



S mode is what photographers commonly refer to as Shutter Priority. Just as the name implies, it is the mode that prioritizes or places major emphasis on the shutter speed above all other camera settings.

Just as with Program mode, Shutter Priority gives us more freedom to control certain aspects of our photography. In this case, we are talking about shutter speed. The selected shutter speed determines just how long you expose your camera's sensor to light. The longer it remains open, the more time your sensor has to gather light. The shutter speed also, to a large degree, determines how sharp your photographs are. This is different from the image being sharply in focus. One of the major influences on the sharpness of an image is just how much blurring is occurring based on camera shake and the subject's movement. Because a slower shutter speed means that light from your subject is hitting the sensor for a longer period of time, any movement by you or your subject will show up in your photos as blur.

Shutter speeds

A *slow* shutter speed refers to leaving the shutter open for a long period of time—like 1/30 of a second or slower. A *fast* shutter speed means that the shutter is open for a very short period of time—like 1/250 of a second or faster.

When to use Shutter Priority mode

- When working with fast-moving subjects where you want to freeze the action (Figure 4.3); much more on this in Chapter 5.

Figure 4.3

Even the fastest of subjects can be frozen with the right shutter speed.

ISO 25600 • 1/1000 sec. • f/5.6 • 400mm lens



- When you want to emphasize movement in your subject with motion blur (**Figure 4.4**).
- When you want to use a long exposure to gather light over a long period of time (**Figure 4.5**); more on this in Chapter 8.
- When you want to create that silky-looking water in a waterfall (**Figure 4.6**).

As you can see, the subject of your photo usually determines whether or not you will use Shutter Priority mode. It is important that you can visualize the result of using a particular shutter speed. The great thing about shooting with digital cameras is that you get instant feedback by viewing your shot on the rear LCD monitor. But what if your subject won't give you a do-over? Such is often the case when shooting sporting events. It's not like you can ask the quarterback to throw that touchdown pass again because your last shot was blurry from a slow shutter speed. This is why it's important to know what those speeds represent in terms of their capability to stop the action and deliver a blur-free shot.

First, let's examine just how much control you actually have over the shutter speeds. The D750 has a shutter speed range from 1/4000 of a second all the way down to 30 seconds. With that much latitude, you should have enough control to capture almost any subject. The other thing to think about is that Shutter Priority is considered a "semi-automatic" mode. This means that you are taking control over one aspect of the total exposure while the camera handles the other. In this instance, you are controlling the shutter speed and the camera is controlling the aperture. This is important, because there will be times that you want to use a particular shutter speed but your lens won't be able to accommodate your request.

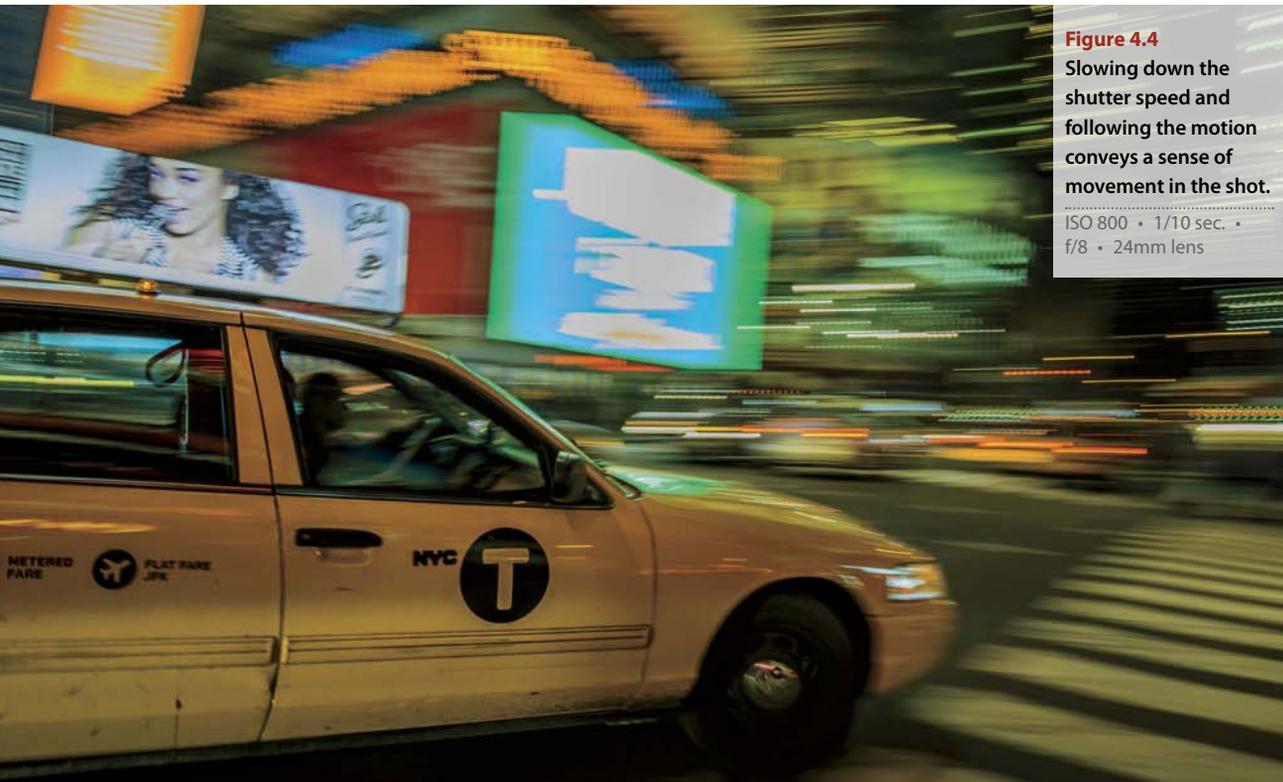


Figure 4.4
Slowing down the shutter speed and following the motion conveys a sense of movement in the shot.
ISO 800 • 1/10 sec. • f/8 • 24mm lens

Figure 4.5

With a long enough exposure, moonlight can look like daylight.

ISO 400 • 120 sec. •
f/8 • 24mm lens



For example, you might encounter this problem when shooting in low-light situations. If you are shooting a fast-moving subject that will blur at a shutter speed slower than 1/125 of a second and your lens's largest aperture is $f/3.5$, you might find that your aperture display in the viewfinder and the control panel will blink. This is your warning that there won't be enough light available for the shot—due to the limitations of the lens—so your picture will be underexposed. It does not, however, prevent you from taking the shot, so you need to be aware of the warning and the results.

Another case where you might run into this situation is when you are shooting moving water. To get that look of silky, flowing water, it's usually necessary to use a shutter speed of at least 1/15 of a second. If your waterfall is in full sunlight, you may see the aperture readout blink because the lens you are using only stops down to $f/22$ at its smallest opening. In this instance, your camera is warning you that you will be overexposing your image. There are workarounds for these problems, which we will discuss later (see Chapter 7 for all the details), but it is important to know that there can be limitations when using the Shutter Priority mode.

Figure 4.6
Increasing the
length of the
exposure time gives
moving water a
misty look.

ISO 100 • 1/2 sec. •
f/13 • 24mm lens



Setting up and shooting in Shutter Priority mode

1. Turn your camera on. Press the Mode dial release lock and turn the Mode dial to align the **S** with the indicator line.
2. Set your ISO by pressing the ISO button; select the appropriate setting by looking at the ISO readout on the control panel or by looking at the info display on the rear LCD monitor.
3. Once your ISO is set, point the camera at your subject and then activate the camera meter by depressing the shutter button halfway.
4. View the exposure information in the bottom area of the viewfinder or in the control panel.
5. While the meter is activated, use your thumb to roll the Main Command dial left and right to see the changed exposure values. Roll the dial to the right for faster shutter speeds and to the left for slower speeds.



A: Aperture Priority Mode



You wouldn't know it from its name, but Aperture Priority mode is one of the most useful and popular modes in DSLR photography. Aperture Priority is one of my personal favorite modes, and I believe that it will quickly become one of yours as well. Aperture Priority is also deemed a semi-automatic mode because it allows you to once again control one factor of exposure while the camera adjusts for another.

Why, you may ask, is this one of my favorite modes? It's because the aperture of your lens dictates depth of field. Depth of field, along with composition, is a major element in how you direct attention to what is important in your image. It is the controlling factor when determining how much of your image is sharp. If you want to isolate a subject from the background, such as when shooting a portrait, you can use a large aperture to keep the focus on your subject and make both the foreground and background blurry. If your emphasis is on keeping the entire scene sharply focused, such as with a landscape scene, then using a small aperture will render the greatest depth of field possible.

When to use Aperture Priority mode

- When shooting portraits or wildlife (**Figure 4.7**)
- When shooting most landscape photography (**Figure 4.8**)
- When shooting macro, or close-up, photography (**Figure 4.9**)
- When shooting architectural photography, which often benefits from a large depth of field (**Figure 4.10**)

Figure 4.7

A large aperture created a blurry background, so all the emphasis was left on the subjects.

ISO 3200 • 1/125 sec. •
f/1.4 • 50mm lens



Figure 4.8

The smaller aperture setting brings sharpness to near and far objects.

ISO 100 • 1/15 sec. •
f/11 • 45mm lens





Figure 4.9
A small aperture was used to capture the smiling faces of my bees as they emerged from the hive.

ISO 4000 • 1/320 sec. •
f/8 • 400mm lens

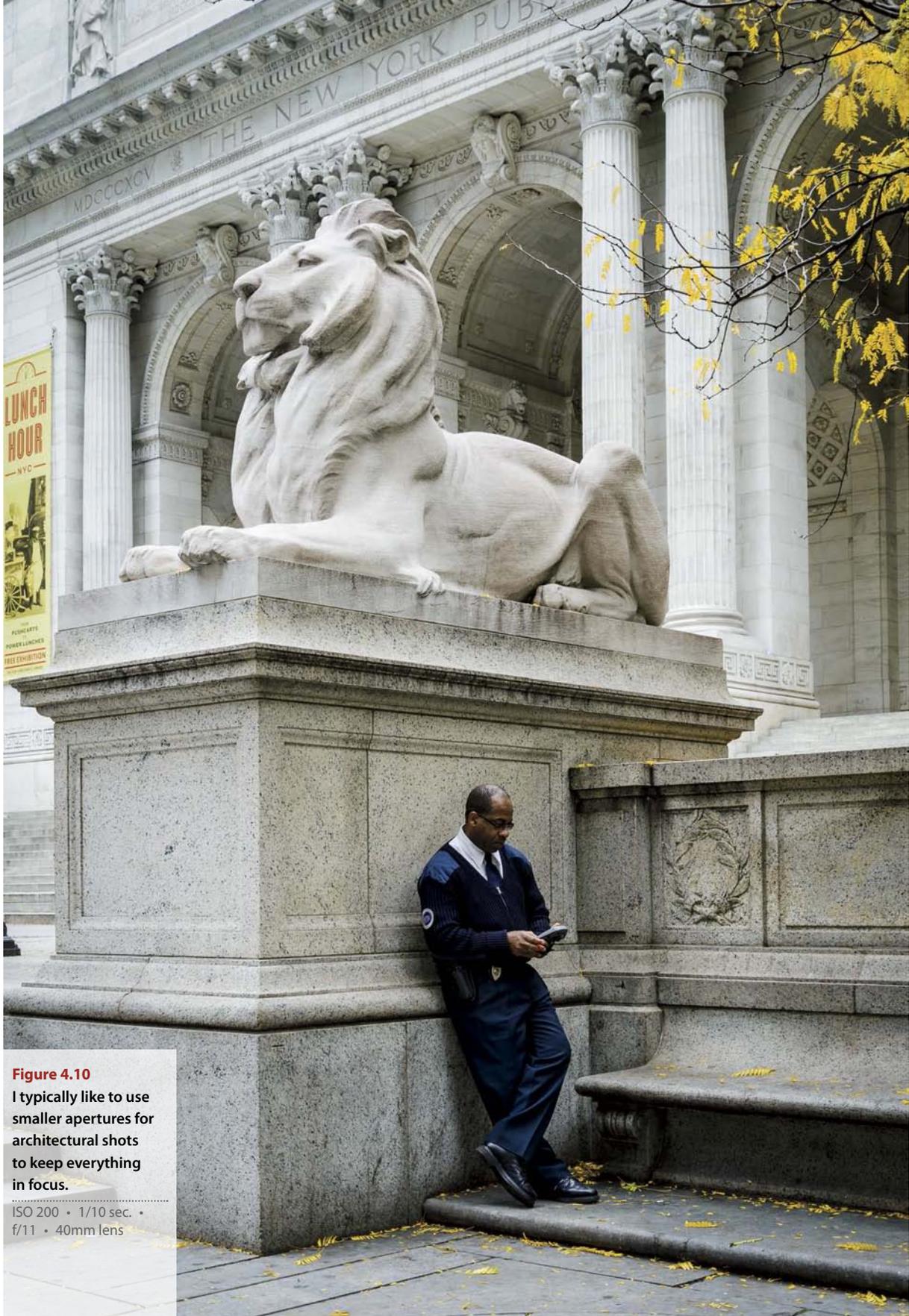


Figure 4.10

I typically like to use smaller apertures for architectural shots to keep everything in focus.

ISO 200 • 1/10 sec. •
f/11 • 40mm lens

So we have established that Aperture Priority (A) mode is highly useful in controlling the depth of field in your image. But it's also pivotal in determining the limits of available light that you can shoot in. Different lenses have different maximum apertures. The larger the maximum aperture, or f-stop, the less light you need to achieve an acceptably sharp image. You will recall that, when in Shutter Priority mode, there is a limit at which you can handhold your camera without introducing movement or hand shake, which causes blurriness in the final picture. If your lens has a larger aperture, then you can let in more light all at once, which means that you can use faster shutter speeds. This is why lenses with large maximum apertures, such as f/1.4, are called "fast" lenses.

On the other hand, bright scenes require the use of a small aperture (such as f/16 or f/22), especially if you want to use a slower shutter speed (**Figure 4.11**). That small opening reduces the amount of incoming light, and this reduction of light requires that the shutter stay open longer.



Figure 4.11
A wide-angle lens combined with a small aperture added to the depth of field. It also created the need for a long shutter speed, which helped add fluidity to the falling water.

.....
ISO 100 • 1/20 sec. •
f/22 • 24mm lens

F-stops and aperture

When referring to the numeric value of your lens aperture, you will find it described as an *f-stop*. The *f-stop* is one of those old photography terms that, technically speaking, relates to the focal length of the lens (e.g., 200mm) divided by the effective aperture diameter. These measurements are defined as “stops” and work incrementally with your shutter speed to determine proper exposure. Older camera lenses used one-stop increments to assist in exposure adjustments, such as 1.4, 2, 2.8, 4, 5.6, 8, 11, 16, and 22. Each stop represents about half the amount of light entering the lens iris as the larger stop before it. Today, most lenses don’t have *f-stop* markings, since all adjustments to this setting are performed via the camera’s electronics. The stops are also now typically divided into 1/3-stop increments to allow much finer adjustments to exposures, as well as to match the incremental values of your camera’s ISO settings, which are adjusted in 1/3-stop increments as well.

Setting up and shooting in Aperture Priority mode

1. Turn your camera on. Press the Mode dial release lock, and turn the Mode dial to align the **A** with the indicator line.
2. Set your ISO by pressing the ISO button; select the appropriate setting by looking at the ISO readout on the control panel or by looking at the info display on the rear LCD monitor.
3. Once your ISO is set, point the camera at your subject and then activate the camera meter by depressing the shutter button halfway.
4. View the exposure information in the bottom area of the viewfinder or in the control panel.
5. While the meter is activated, use your index finger to roll the Sub-command dial left and right to see the changed exposure values. Roll the dial to the right for a smaller aperture (higher *f-stop* number) and to the left for a larger aperture (smaller *f-stop* number).



Zoom lenses and maximum apertures

Some zoom lenses (like the 24–85mm lens) have a variable maximum aperture. This means that the largest opening will change depending on the zoom setting. In the example of the 24–85mm zoom, the lens has a maximum aperture of $f/3.5$ at 25mm and only $f/4.5$ when the lens is zoomed out to 85mm.

M: Manual Mode



Once upon a time, long before digital cameras and program modes, there was manual mode. Only in those days it wasn't called "manual mode," because there were no other modes. It was just photography. In fact, many photographers cut their teeth on completely manual cameras. Let's face it—if you want to learn the effects of aperture and shutter speed on your photography, there is no better way to learn than by setting these adjustments yourself. However, today, with the advancement of camera technology, many new photographers never give this mode a second thought. That's truly a shame, as it is not only an excellent way to learn your photography basics, it's also an essential tool to have in your photographic bag of tricks.

When you have your camera set to Manual (M) mode, the camera meter will give you a reading of the scene you are photographing, but it's your job to actually set both the f-stop (aperture) and the shutter speed to achieve a correct exposure. If you need a faster shutter speed, you will have to make the reciprocal change to your f-stop. Using any other mode, such as Shutter or Aperture Priority, would mean that you just have to worry about one of these changes, but Manual mode requires you to do it all yourself. This can be a little challenging at first, but after a while you will have a complete understanding of how each change affects your exposure, which will in turn improve the way that you use the other modes.

When to use Manual mode

- When learning how each exposure element interacts with the others (**Figure 4.12**)
- When shooting silhouetted subjects, which requires overriding the camera's meter readings (**Figure 4.13**)
- When your environment is fooling your light meter and you need to maintain a certain exposure setting (**Figure 4.14**)

Figure 4.12

The camera was set to Manual so I could expose properly for the bright lights while still using a slow enough shutter to enhance the feeling of motion that exists in Times Square.

ISO 100 • 0.6 sec. •
f/22 • 80mm lens



Figure 4.13

I used the spot meter on the bright background and adjusted exposure manually to put the subject into silhouette.

ISO 200 • 1/80 sec. •
f/8 • 200mm lens





Figure 4.14
Beaches and snow are always a challenge for light meters. Add to that the desire to have exact control of depth of field and shutter speed, and you have a perfect scenario for **Manual mode.**

ISO 100 • 2 sec. •
f/8 • 40mm lens

Setting up and shooting in Manual mode

1. Turn your camera on. Press the Mode dial release lock, and turn the Mode dial to align the **M** with the indicator line.
2. Set your ISO by pressing the ISO button; select the appropriate setting by looking at the ISO readout on the control panel or by looking at the info display on the rear LCD monitor.
3. Point the camera at your subject, and then activate the camera meter by depressing the shutter button halfway.
4. View the exposure information in the bottom area of the viewfinder or by pressing the info button on the back of the camera and looking at the info display on the rear LCD monitor.
5. While the meter is activated, use your index finger to roll the Main Command dial left and right to change your shutter speed value until the exposure mark is lined up with the zero mark. The exposure information is displayed in the viewfinder, and on the rear LCD after pressing the info button (**Figure 4.15**), by a scale with marks that run from -3 to +3 stops. A proper exposure will line up with the taller mark in the middle. As the indicator moves to the left, it is a sign that you will be underexposing (not enough light on the sensor to provide adequate exposure). Move the indicator to the right and you will be providing more exposure than the camera meter calls for; this is overexposure.
6. To set your exposure using the aperture, depress the shutter release button until the meter is activated. Then rotate the Sub-command dial to change the aperture. Rotate right for a smaller aperture (large f-stop number) and left for a larger aperture (small f-stop number).



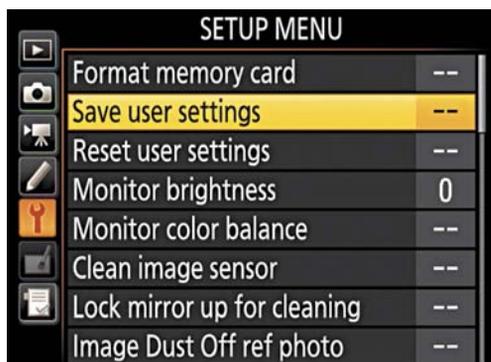
Figure 4.15
Use the over/under scale to find your exposure settings.

User Settings Mode—Saving Your Favorite Settings to the Mode Dial

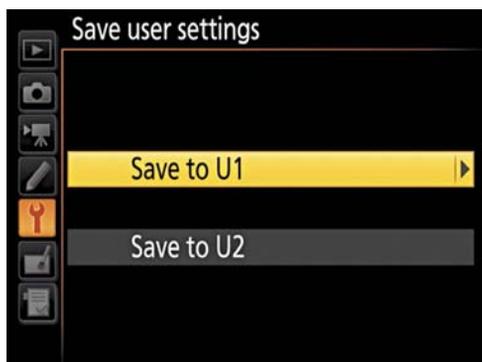


The User Settings mode is a great feature if you're looking to have your favorite settings at the touch of a dial. These are located on the dial as U1 and U2. If you have a favorite group of settings that you find you are using often and want to have them close at hand, then these modes are for you.

A

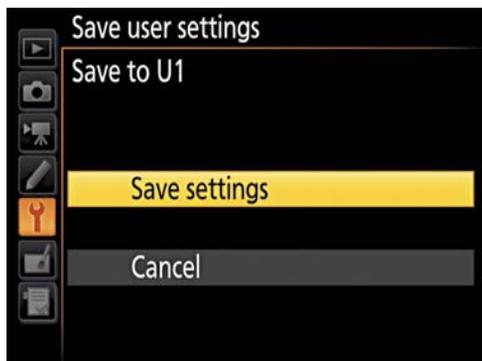


B



1. Set the camera to your favorite settings (under any of the semi-automatic modes or Manual mode), adjusting aperture, shutter speed, ISO, flash, focus point, metering, and/or bracketing.
2. Go to the setup menu, and highlight Save user settings (A).
3. Highlight Save to U1 or Save to U2 (B), then press OK to save your settings (C).
4. When you want to use those settings again, just rotate the top dial to U1 or U2, and the camera will choose your saved settings so that you're ready to go.

C



I find it useful to set up one user setting for Aperture Priority mode with bracketing turned on and ISO set to 100 (I find it too easy to forget that I have bracketing enabled), and to configure the other user setting for Shutter Priority mode with Auto ISO sensitivity enabled for times when freezing fast action is more important than ISO setting (and I also find it easy to forget I have Auto ISO sensitivity enabled). This makes it simple for me to jump right to those settings, but also to jump out again.

Customizing My Menu

An awesome characteristic of the D750 is how many aspects can be customized to suit your shooting needs. One of those is the My Menu screen. This is for menu items that you want to make available with fewer clicks. You can add up to 20 items from the Playback, Photo Shooting, Movie Shooting, Custom Settings, Setup, and Retouch menus. In Chapter 2, I mentioned that I add the Clean image sensor function to mine for easy sensor cleaning, but a few others I like to add are Self-timer, Remote Control mode, Set Picture Control, Image Review, and Battery Info. What works for me may not work for you, but that is the beauty of customization.

1. Press the Menu button, scroll down to the My Menu screen, and highlight Add items (A).
2. Press OK to go to the Add items screen, and highlight the menu section containing the item you want to add to My Menu (B).
3. Press OK to see the available menu choices from that section, and then highlight the one you want to add to My Menu (C).
4. Press OK to add the item, and use the Multi-selector to choose the position for that item in the list (D). Press OK to commit the change.



A



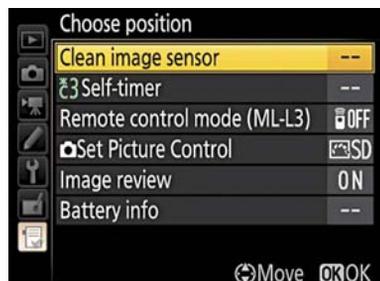
B



C



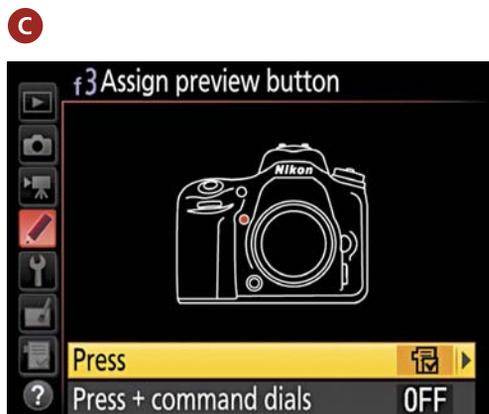
D



You can remove and reorder items over time, which is bound to happen as you get more familiar with the camera and your needs change. To make that menu even handier, I assigned the Preview button to display My Menu when pressed.



1. Press the Menu button, scroll down to the Custom Settings menu, and highlight f Controls (A).
2. Press OK, then highlight f3 Assign preview button (B).



3. Press OK, then with Press highlighted (C), press the Multi-selector to the right to access its options.
4. With My Menu selected, press OK to commit the change (D).



How I Shoot: A Closer Look at the Camera Settings I Use

The great thing about working with a DSLR camera is that I can always feel confident that some things will remain unchanged from camera to camera. For me, these are the Aperture Priority (A), Manual (M), and Shutter Priority (S) shooting modes. Regardless of the subject I am shooting—from landscape to portrait to macro—I am almost always going to be concerned with my depth of field. Whether it's isolating my subject with a large aperture or trying to maximize the overall sharpness of a sweeping landscape, I always keep an eye on my aperture setting, which makes Aperture Priority my default mode. If I do need to control the action, I use Shutter Priority. If I am trying to create a silky waterfall effect, I can depend on Shutter Priority mode to provide the long shutter speed to get the desired result. Or, perhaps I am shooting a sporting event; I definitely need fast shutter speeds that will freeze the fast-moving action. For times when I need to control all settings, such as when the situation is more complicated than my camera can handle automatically, I put it in Manual (**Figure 4.16**).

While the other camera modes have their place, I think you will find that, like myself and most other working pros, you will use the Aperture Priority and Shutter Priority modes for 90 percent of your shooting.

The other concern that I have when I am setting up my camera is just how low I can keep my ISO. This is always a priority for me, because a low ISO will always give the cleanest image. I only raise the ISO as a last resort, because each increase in sensitivity is an opportunity for more digital noise to enter my image. To that end, I always have the High ISO Noise Reduction feature turned on when shooting in JPEG mode (I use Lightroom to deal with high ISO noise in raw format).

To make quick changes while I shoot, I often use exposure compensation so that I can make small over- and underexposure changes. This is different than changing the aperture or shutter because it is more like fooling the camera meter into thinking the scene is brighter or darker than it actually is. To get to this function quickly, I simply press the Exposure Compensation button and then dial in the desired amount of compensation.

One of the reasons I change my exposure is to make corrections when I see the blinkies in my rear LCD monitor. (“Blinkies” is not the real name for the highlight clipping warning, just the one most photographers use.) Blinkies are the warning signal that part of my image has been overexposed to the point that I no longer have any detail in the highlights. When the Highlights feature is turned on, the display will flash between black and white whenever there is a potential of overexposing in the image. The black and white flashing will only appear in areas of the picture that are in danger of overexposure. To turn on this feature, go to the Playback menu and enable the feature as follows.

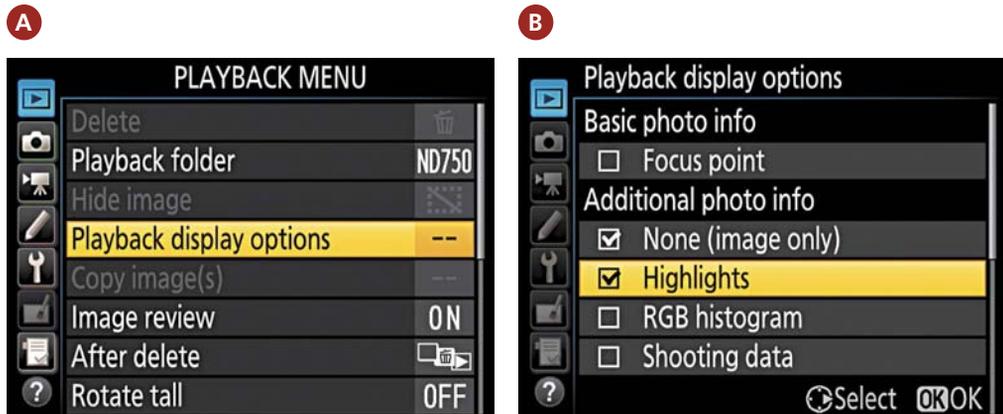


Figure 4.16

At the landscape photography workshops I teach, we end most days with light painting after the sun goes down. My co-leader Randy was shining a powerful light on Balanced Rock in Arches National Park, while I used a small pocket flashlight on the foreground stones. Manual mode was required.

ISO 800 • 30 sec. •
f/9 • 14mm lens

1. To set up the highlight warning for your camera, press the Menu button and then use the Multi-selector to access the Playback menu.



2. Once in the Playback menu, use the Multi-selector to choose Playback display options, and press OK (A).
3. Move the Multi-selector down to the Highlights option, and then press the OK button to add a checkmark (B).
4. Now move back up to the Done heading, and press the OK button again to lock in your change.

Once the highlight warning is turned on, I use it to check my images on the back of the LCD after taking a shot. If I see an area that is blinking (Figure 4.17), I will usually set the exposure compensation feature to an underexposed setting like $-1/3$ or $-2/3$ stops and take another photo, checking the result on the screen. I repeat this process until the warning is gone.



Figure 4.17
The blinking black and white areas (shown in this image as black) are a warning that part of the image is overexposed at the current camera settings.

Sometimes, such as when shooting into the sun, the warning will blink no matter how much you adjust the exposure because there is just no detail in the highlights. Use your best judgment to determine if the warning is alerting you to an area where you want to retain highlight detail.

To see the highlight, or “blinkie,” warning, you will need to change your display mode. To do this, press the Playback button on the back of the camera and then press up or down on the Multi-selector button until you see “RGB Highlights” at the bottom of the display screen. This will now be your default display mode unless you change it or turn off the highlight warning. If you really want to nerd out, while in the RGB Highlights view, hold the Zoom Out button and press the Multi-selector to the right to view the clipping on a per-channel basis. With each press, you’ll see the letter representing the channel being viewed blink. Keep pressing to the right to return to the full RGB view.

As you work your way through the coming chapters, you will see other tips and tricks I use in my daily photography, but the most important tip I can give is to understand the features of your camera so that you can leverage the technology in a knowledgeable way. This will result in better photographs.

Chapter 4 Assignments

This will be more of a mental challenge than anything else, but you should put a lot of work into these lesson assignments because the information covered in this chapter will define how you work with your camera from this point on. Granted, there may be times that you just want to grab some quick pictures and will resort to the Program mode, but to get serious with your photography, you will want to learn the professional modes inside and out.

Learning to control time with Shutter Priority mode

Find some moving subjects and then set your camera to S mode. Have someone ride a bike back and forth, or even just photograph cars as they go by. Start with a slow shutter speed of around $1/30$ of a second, and then start shooting with faster and faster shutter speeds. Keep shooting until you can freeze the action. Now find something that isn't moving, like a flower, and work your way down from a fast shutter speed like $1/500$ of a second. Don't brace the camera on a steady surface. Just try and shoot as slowly as possible, down to about $1/4$ of a second. The point is to see how well you can hand-hold your camera before you start introducing hand-shake into the image, making it appear soft and somewhat unfocused.

Controlling depth of field with Aperture Priority mode

The name of the game with A mode is depth of field. Set up three items at varying distances from you; I would use chess pieces or something similar. Now focus on the middle item and set your camera to the largest aperture that your lens allows (remember, large aperture means a small number, like $f/3.5$). Now, while still focusing on the middle subject, start shooting with ever-smaller apertures until you are at the smallest f-stop for your lens. If you have a zoom lens, try doing this exercise with the lens at the widest and then the most telephoto settings. Now move up to subjects that are farther away, like telephone poles, and shoot them in the same way. The idea is to get a feel for how each aperture setting affects your depth of field.

Giving and taking with Manual mode

Manual mode is not going to require a lot of work, but you should pay close attention to your results. Go outside on a sunny day and, using the camera in Manual mode, set your ISO to 100, your shutter speed to 1/125 of a second, and your aperture to f/16. Now press your shutter release button to get a meter reading. You should be pretty close to that zero mark. If not, make small adjustments to one of your settings until it hits that mark. Now is where the fun begins. Start moving your shutter speed slower, to 1/60, and then set your aperture to f/22. Now go the other way. Set your aperture on f/8 and your shutter speed to 1/500. Now review your images. If all went well, all the exposures should look the same. This is because you balanced the light with reciprocal changes to the aperture and shutter speed. Now go back to our original setting of 1/125 at f/16 and try just moving the shutter speed without changing the aperture. Just make 1/3-stop changes (1/125 to 1/100 to 1/80 to 1/60), and then review your images to see what a 1/3 stop of overexposure looks like. Then do the same thing going in the opposite way. It's hard to know if you want to over- or underexpose a scene until you have actually done it and seen the results.

With each of the assignments, make sure that you keep track of your modes and exposures so that you can compare them with the image. If you are using software to review your images, you should also be able to check the camera settings that are embedded within the image's metadata.

Share your results with the book's Flickr group!

Join the group here: www.flickr.com/groups/nikond750_fromsnapshotstogreatshots

Index

3D-tracking AF mode, 124
12- or 14-bit raw images, 36

A

about this book, ix–xi
accessories, 275–293
 camera bags, 289–290
 cleaning tools, 290–291
 diffusers, 289
 filters, 276–282, 285–287
 hot-shoe flashes, 287–288
 LCD viewing, 264
 macro photography, 284–287
 remote or cable release, 283–284
 tripods, 282–283
 video-specific, 263–265
action photography, 109–133
 3D-tracking mode for, 124
 annotated example of, 110–111
 assignments on shooting,
 132–133
 automatic mode for, 62, 64
 composing shots in, 128–131
 continuous shooting mode for,
 126–127
 conveying motion in, 127–128
 depth of field in, 118–119
 factors to consider for, 112–115
 focus modes for, 122–125
 freezing motion in, 85, 112
 ISO settings and, 115, 117,
 120–122
 isolating subjects in, 118–119
 manual focus for, 124–125
 portraits as, 153, 154
 shutter speed and, 85, 102,
 112–115
 techniques for shooting, 127–131
 See also motion
Active D-Lighting feature, 75,
 243–244, 251
Adams, Ansel, 179

additive color, 11
Adobe RGB color space, 10–11
AE Lock feature, 142, 144, 232
AF-A focus mode, 76
AF-area modes, 14, 123, 260
AF-assist Illuminator, 209
AF-C focus mode, 76, 122–123
AF-F focus mode, 261
AF-mode button, 14
AF-S focus mode, 13, 14, 76, 144, 146
air blowers, 291
Aperture Priority (A) mode, 89–94
 assignment on using, 106
 close-up photography and, 89,
 91, 250
 flash sync speeds in, 212
 HDR photography and, 239
 isolating subjects using, 118–119
 landscape photography and, 89,
 90, 182, 185
 photo examples using, 90, 91,
 92, 93
 portrait photography and, 89,
 90, 138
 setting up and shooting in, 94
 situations for using, 89–93, 102
aperture settings
 depth of field and, 48, 49, 89,
 93, 102
 exposure and, 44, 45–46
 f-stops and, 94
 landscape photography and,
 90, 185
 light levels and, 93
 Live View feature and, 265–266
 portrait photography and,
 138–139
 prioritizing, 89–94
 zoom lenses and, 42, 94
architectural photography, 89, 92
audio recording, 257–259, 270
Auto Cleaning feature, 34, 35
auto exposure bracketing function,
 238, 240
Auto Exposure Lock (AE-L) feature,
 142, 144, 232
Auto ISO sensitivity control,
 120–122
Auto ISO setting, 12, 13

Auto mode, 56–57, 77
Auto white balance setting, 8
autofocus modes. *See* focus modes
automatic modes, 53–77
 assignments on using, 77
 Auto mode, 56–57
 Child mode, 62, 63
 Close Up mode, 65
 effects modes, 70–74
 Flash Off mode, 57–58
 Landscape mode, 61
 limitations of, 75–76
 Night Portrait mode, 66
 Portrait mode, 59–60, 138
 Program mode vs., 82
 scene modes, 59–70
 Sports mode, 62, 64
 See also professional modes
auto-off timers, 17, 18
Autumn Colors scene mode, 70

B

backgrounds
 blurring, 118–119, 138, 139
 isolating subjects from, 118–119
 portrait, 138, 139, 158, 159
back-of-camera features, 3
backup battery, 5
ball heads for tripods, 282
battery, charging, 5
Beach/Snow scene mode, 67
black and white images
 landscapes as, 179–180
 portraits as, 147–149
blinkies, 102, 104–105, 177, 187
Blossom scene mode, 69
blur
 background, 118–119, 138, 139
 motion, 46, 48, 86, 128, 129, 133
bonus chapter on composition, xi
bracketing exposures, 75, 237–238,
 240, 244
brightness, 22, 188
buffer, camera, 127
built-in flash. *See* pop-up flash
Bulb setting, 232–234, 251
bull's-eye composition, 188
burst shooting mode, 126–127

C

camera bags, 289–290
camera shake, 58, 168, 204, 224
camera stabilizers, 264
Candlelight mode, 69
catchlight, 151
Center-weighted metering mode, 141, 142, 143
charging the battery, 5
Child mode, 62, 63
child photography, 62, 63, 161
Clean Now feature, 34, 35
cleaning the sensor, 34–35, 51
clipping, 22
Close Up mode, 65, 77
close-up filters, 285–287
close-up photography, 250
 accessories for, 284–287
 annotated example of, 54–55
 Aperture Priority mode for, 89, 91, 250
 assignment on shooting, 251
 automatic mode for, 65
clouds in photos, 29, 181
Cloudy setting, 8
CMYK colors, 10
color
 additive vs. subtractive, 11
 viewing in photographs, 188
 warm vs. cool, 10, 181
Color Sketch effect, 72
color space settings, 10–11
color temperature, 10, 181
color theory, 11
Command dial, 59, 71, 83, 84
commander function, 222–223
composition
 action photo, 128–131
 bonus chapter on, xi
 creating depth through, 191–192
 elements related to, 188, 189
 grid overlay for, 191
 landscape, 188–192
 portrait, 153, 155–162
 rule of thirds, 188–190, 193
continuous shooting mode, 126–127, 240
Continuous-servo (AF-C) mode, 122–123

cool colors, 10, 181
Creating DSLR Video: From Snapshots to Great Shots (Harrington), 272
Creative Lighting System (CLS), 222, 223
crop-sensor lenses, 292
Custom Setting menu, 142, 191
customizing menus, 100–101

D

Daylight setting, 172
deleting images, 21
depth, creating, 191–192
depth of field
 action photography and, 118–119
 aperture settings and, 48, 49, 89, 93, 102
 close-up photography and, 250
 landscape photography and, 182–183, 193
 lens focal length and, 193
 portrait photography and, 138–139, 163
 telephoto lenses and, 42
 video recording and, 254, 265–266, 273
 wide-angle lenses and, 40
diffusers, 289
diopter adjustment, 14
Direct Sunlight setting, 8
direction of travel, 112, 113
display modes, 19–21
display screen. *See* LCD display
distance
 flash range and, 212
 hyper focal, 182–183, 193
 subject-to-camera, 114–115
distortion, 139
drive modes, 125
dual image formats, 37–38
Dusk/Dawn scene mode, 68
DX (crop-sensor) lenses, 292
Dynamic-area AF mode, 123, 124
dynamic range, 36, 239

E

editing video, 271
effects modes, 70–74
 Color Sketch effect, 72
 High Key effect, 74
 Low Key effect, 74
 Miniature effect, 72
 Night Vision effect, 71, 202–203
 Selective Color effect, 73
 Silhouette effect, 73
 See also scene modes
environmental portraits, 138–140
exposure, 44–46
 calculating, 45–46
 factors of, 44–45
 histograms and, 22–23
 long, 86, 87, 171, 210–211, 232–234
 previewing, 176–177
 reciprocal settings for, 45–46
exposure bracketing, 75, 237–238, 240, 244
exposure compensation feature, 102
 automatic modes and, 75
 flash adjustments and, 288
 highlight warning and, 104, 177
 landscape photography and, 177–179, 187
 portrait photography and, 142
 steps for using, 179
Exposure Delay mode, 206–207
Exposure Preview feature, 176–177
exposure triangle, 44–45
exposure value (EV), 44
extension tubes, 284–285
external flash, 221–223
eyes
 catchlight in, 151
 focusing on, 144, 145, 146
 red-eye reduction, 216–217

F

Face Priority mode, 150
faces
 action conveyed in, 131
 detecting with Live View, 150
fast lenses, 93
fill flash, 151–152

- filters, 276–282
 - close-up, 285–287
 - graduated ND, 281–282
 - Monochrome picture control, 148, 179–180
 - neutral density, 187, 279–280
 - polarizing, 187, 276–279
 - skylight, 276
 - fireworks, 232, 233
 - firmware updates, 32–33, 51
 - flash
 - disabling, 57–58, 220
 - exposure compensation for, 288
 - external, 221–223
 - fill, 151–152
 - hot-shoe, 8, 287–288
 - manual power mode, 213–214
 - metering modes for, 213–214
 - pop-up, 211–214, 223
 - range/distance, 212
 - Rear Curtain Sync mode, 218–219
 - red-eye reduction, 216–217
 - reflections from, 220, 221
 - shutter speed and, 212, 213
 - sync modes for, 218, 220
 - flash compensation feature, 75, 151, 214–216
 - Flash Off mode, 57–58
 - flash synchronization
 - changing modes for, 220
 - Rear Curtain Sync mode, 218–219
 - shutter speed and, 212, 213
 - Flash white balance setting, 8
 - Flickr group for book, 25
 - flower photography, 228–229, 250
 - Fluorescent setting, 8, 172, 173
 - focal lengths, 39–44
 - focus modes, 14, 76
 - 3D-tracking, 124
 - AF-A, 76
 - AF-C, 76, 122–123
 - AF-F, 261
 - AF-S, 13, 14, 76, 144, 146
 - manual, 15, 124–125, 184–185, 207–208
 - focus points, 13, 14, 123
 - focusing
 - for action photography, 122–125
 - for landscape photography, 182–185
 - for low-light photography, 207–209
 - for portraits, 144–146
 - for video recording, 260–261, 273
 - focusing system, 13–14, 207
 - Food scene mode, 70
 - formatting memory cards, 31–32, 51
 - frame rate for video, 256
 - framing
 - action shots, 129
 - portraits, 153, 155, 157, 160, 161
 - Framing Guides mode, 261, 262
 - freezing motion, 46, 47, 85, 112
 - Front Curtain Sync mode, 218
 - front-of-camera features, 2
 - f-stops, 44, 45–46, 94
 - See also* aperture settings
- ## G
- glass reflections, 220, 221
 - golden light, 181–182
 - graduated ND filter, 281–282
 - grid overlay, 191, 193
- ## H
- hand portraits, 162
 - handheld photography, 58, 204, 224
 - HDMI cable connection, 264–265, 271
 - headphone jack, 258
 - Hess, Alan, 223
 - high-definition video, 255
 - high dynamic range (HDR) images, 239–243
 - assignment on shooting, 251
 - bracketing exposures for, 240
 - in-camera function for, 241–243
 - setting up for shooting, 239–240
 - High ISO Noise Reduction feature, 102, 198, 200, 224
 - High Key effect, 74
 - high-key images, 74, 178
 - Highlight Alert feature, 102, 104–105, 177, 187
 - highlights
 - overexposure warning for, 102, 104–105, 177, 187
 - regaining detail in, 179
 - Highlights display mode, 20, 177
 - Highlight-weighted metering mode, 141
 - histograms, 22–23, 177, 261, 262
 - horizon line, 188, 190, 193
 - hot-shoe flashes, 8, 287–288
 - hyper focal distance (HFD), 182–183, 193
- ## I
- i button, 262–263
 - image formats
 - dual, 37–38
 - exploring, 51
 - JPEG, 6–7, 35–36
 - raw, 36–37
 - image-quality settings, 6–7
 - image resolution, 36
 - image review features. *See* reviewing photos
 - Incandescent setting, 8
 - Information On/Off modes, 261, 262
 - interval timer, 247–249
 - Introduction to the Nikon Creative Lighting System, An* (Hess), 223
 - ISO sensitivity auto control, 120–122
 - ISO settings
 - action photos and, 115, 117, 120–122
 - Auto option, 12, 13
 - changing on the fly, 118
 - expanded settings, 201–202, 224
 - explanation of, 12
 - exposure and, 44, 45–46
 - flash range and, 212
 - landscape photos and, 170–171
 - low-light photos and, 198–202
 - noise and, 13, 64, 170–171, 198, 202
 - prioritizing, 82–83, 102
 - sensitivity control feature, 120–122
 - starting points for, 83
 - steps for selecting, 12–13

J

JPEG file format
explained, 6, 35–36
quality settings, 6–7
Raw+JPEG option, 37–38
reasons for using, 35

K

Kelvin temperature scale, 10
Kelvin white balance setting, 8

L

Landscape mode, 61, 77
landscape photography, 165–193
annotated examples of, 80–81,
166–167
aperture settings and, 90, 182
assignments on shooting, 193
automatic mode for, 61
black and white, 179–180
clouds in, 29, 181
composition in, 188–192
exposure compensation for,
177–179, 187
focusing for, 182–185
golden light in, 181–182
hyper focal distance for,
182–183, 193
ISO settings for, 170–171
manual focus for, 184–185
nighttime, 67
noise reduction for, 171–172
panoramas and, 245–247
picture control for, 174–175
tripods used for, 168–169, 182, 185
waterfall shots in, 185–187
white balance settings for,
172–174
Landscape picture control, 61,
174–175
LCD display
accessories for, 264, 291
reviewing photos in, 19–23, 25
reviewing videos in, 271
zooming in on, 116
lens cloth, 290
lens flare, 235

lenses, 39–44
assignment on exploring, 51
compatible with D750, 292
DX (crop-sensor), 292
how they work, 39
normal, 40–41
portrait, 60, 156
rental of, 292
telephoto, 42, 43
Vibration Reduction, 58, 169, 204
video recording and, 254
wide-angle, 39–40
zoom, 42, 94
LensPen, 290–291
light meters, 95, 97, 141
lighting
Active D-Lighting feature and,
75, 243–244
red-eye reduction and, 216
See also flash; low-light
photography; sunlight
lightning storms, 234
Live View feature, 76
aperture settings and, 265–266
Exposure Preview and, 176–177
Face Priority mode, 150
picture controls and, 175
video recording and, 254–255,
261, 262
white balance settings and, 174
Long Exposure Noise Reduction,
171–172, 210, 234
long exposures
Bulb setting for, 232–234
low-light photography and,
210–211, 225
noise reduction for, 171–172,
210, 234
Shutter Priority mode for, 86, 87
lossy compression, 6
Low Key effect, 74
low-key images, 74, 178
low-light photography, 195–225
annotated example of, 196–197
assignments on shooting,
224–225
disabling the flash for, 220
eliminating flash reflections in,
220, 221

Exposure Delay mode for,
206–207
external flash for, 221–223
flash compensation for, 214–216
focusing for, 207–209
ISO settings for, 83, 198–202
long exposures for, 210–211,
232–234
manual focus mode for, 207–208
noise reduction for, 198, 200, 210
pop-up flash for, 211–214
Rear Curtain Sync mode for,
218–219
red-eye reduction in, 216–217
self-timer mode for, 205–206
Vibration Reduction lenses
for, 204
See also nighttime photography
luminance, 22

M

macro photography. *See* close-up
photography
Manual flash mode, 213–214
manual focus mode
anticipated action and,
124–125, 132
low-light photography and,
207–208
recomposing shots using,
184–185
setting the camera to, 15, 25, 125
video recording and, 261, 273
Manual (M) mode, 95–98, 232
assignment on using, 107
Bulb setting in, 232–234
flash sync speeds in, 212
photo examples using, 96, 97
setting up and shooting in, 98
situations for using, 95–97, 102,
103, 131, 232
Matrix metering mode, 75, 141, 142
MC-DC2 remote release cord,
234, 283
megapixels (MP), 36
memory cards, 30–32
choosing, 30
formatting, 31–32, 51

- memory cards (*continued*)
 - roles for multiple, 38
 - safeguard against missing, 15–16
 - updating firmware from, 33
 - video recording and, 259–260, 270
 - menu customization, 100–101
 - metering modes, 141–142, 163
 - Center-weighted, 141, 142, 143
 - Highlight-weighted, 141
 - Manual flash, 213–214
 - Matrix, 75, 141, 142
 - Spot, 141, 230–232
 - TTL, 213
 - microphones, 257, 270
 - Miniature effect, 72
 - mini-HDMI cable, 264–265
 - ML-L3 wireless remote, 234, 283
 - Mode dial, 56, 57, 59, 71, 79, 99
 - Monochrome picture control, 147–149, 163, 179–180
 - motion
 - assignments on shooting, 132–133
 - automatic mode for, 62, 64
 - blurring, 46, 48, 86, 128, 129, 133
 - continuous shooting mode for, 126–127
 - conveying a sense of, 86, 127–128
 - focus modes for, 122–125
 - freezing, 46, 47, 85, 112
 - panning, 127–128, 133
 - shutter speed and, 46–48, 112–115
 - techniques for shooting, 127–131
 - See also* action photography
 - Movie Shooting menu, 258
 - Movie-record button, 254, 255
 - multiple-image panoramas, 245–247
 - My Menu screen, 100–101
- N**
- natural light, 163
 - neutral density (ND) filter, 187, 279–280
 - Night Landscape mode, 67
 - Night Portrait mode, 66
 - Night Vision effect, 71, 202–203
 - nighttime photography
 - Manual mode for, 232–234
 - Night Vision effect for, 71, 202–203
 - scene modes for, 66, 67
 - See also* low-light photography
 - Nikon D750 camera
 - accessories, 275–293
 - features illustration, 2–4
 - firmware updates, 32–33
 - setting up, 5–25
 - Nikon Speedlights, 221, 222, 287–288
 - Nikon ViewNX software, 37
 - Nikon website, 32, 33
 - noise in images
 - file size related to, 201
 - ISO setting and, 13, 64, 170–171, 198, 202
 - long exposures and, 171–172, 210
 - Noise Reduction features
 - High ISO Noise Reduction, 102, 198, 200, 224
 - Long Exposure Noise Reduction, 171–172, 210, 234
 - normal lenses, 40–41
- O**
- OK button, 116
 - online bonus chapter, xi
 - overexposure warning, 102, 104–105, 177, 187
 - Overview display mode, 19–20
- P**
- painting with light, 234
 - pan heads for tripods, 282
 - panning, 127–128, 133, 270
 - panoramas, 245–247
 - shooting multiple-image, 245, 246, 247
 - sorting images for, 245
 - Party/Indoor scene mode, 67
 - Pet Portrait mode, 69
 - picture controls
 - auto modes and, 75
 - Landscape, 61, 174–175
 - Live View and, 175
 - Monochrome, 147–149, 163, 179–180
 - Portrait, 60, 149, 163
 - raw files and, 176
 - user manual info on, 174
 - video recording and, 266–267, 273
 - pixel resolution, 36
 - Playback button, 116
 - Playback display options, 20, 21
 - Playback menu, 17, 20, 21
 - polarizing filter, 187, 276–279
 - pop-up flash, 211–214
 - assignment on exploring, 225
 - commander function, 222–223
 - metering modes, 213–214
 - sync speeds, 212, 213
 - See also* flash
 - Portrait mode, 59–60, 77, 138
 - portrait orientation, 157
 - Portrait picture control, 60, 149, 163
 - portraits, 135–163
 - action shots as, 153, 154
 - AE Lock feature for, 142, 144
 - annotated example of, 136–137
 - Aperture Priority mode for, 89, 90, 138
 - assignments on shooting, 163
 - automatic mode for, 59–60, 138
 - backgrounds for, 138, 139, 158, 159
 - black and white, 147–149
 - composition of, 153, 155–162
 - depth of field in, 138–139, 163
 - environmental, 138–140
 - Face Priority mode for, 150
 - fill flash for, 151–152
 - focusing for, 144–146
 - framing, 153, 155, 157, 160, 161
 - lenses used for, 60, 156
 - metering modes for, 141–142, 143, 163
 - Night Portrait mode for, 66
 - Pet Portrait mode for, 69
 - picture controls for, 147–149, 163
 - tips for shooting, 153, 155–162
 - Power Aperture feature, 266
 - Pre white balance setting, 8
 - pre-focusing the camera, 124–125
 - prime lenses, 42

professional modes, 79–107
Aperture Priority mode, 89–94
assignments on using, 106–107
Manual mode, 95–98
Program mode, 82–84
Shutter Priority mode, 85–89
User Settings mode, 99
See also automatic modes
Program (P) mode, 82–84
automatic modes vs., 82
flash sync speed in, 212
photo examples using, 84
setting up and shooting in, 84
situations for using, 82–84
progressive video, 256

Q

quality settings
JPEG format, 6–7
video recording, 255–257
quick-release tripod heads, 283

R

raw file format, 36–37
advice on shooting in, 37
HDR images and, 240
picture controls and, 176
Raw+JPEG option, 37–38
reasons for using, 36
Rear Curtain Sync mode, 218–219, 225
reciprocal exposures, 45–46
Red-Eye Reduction feature,
216–217, 225
reflections, flash, 220, 221
remote release cord, 234, 283–284
resolution
image, 36
video, 256–257
reviewing photos, 17–23
assignment on, 25
display modes for, 19–21
histograms used for, 22–23
timer settings for, 17, 18
turning on feature for, 17
zooming in for, 116
reviewing recorded videos, 271
RGB colors, 10

RGB Highlights view, 105
RGB histogram display mode, 20, 21
rule of thirds, 188–190, 193

S

scene modes, 59–70
Autumn Colors mode, 70
Beach/Snow mode, 67
Blossom mode, 69
Candlelight mode, 69
Child mode, 62, 63
Close Up mode, 65
Dusk/Dawn mode, 68
Food mode, 70
Landscape mode, 61
Night Landscape mode, 67
Night Portrait mode, 66
Party/Indoor mode, 67
Pet Portrait mode, 69
Portrait mode, 59–60
Sports mode, 62, 64
Sunset mode, 68
See also effects modes
screen display. *See* LCD display
SD memory cards, 30, 51, 270
SDHC memory cards, 30
Selective Color effect, 73
self-timer mode, 205–206
semiautomatic modes, 86, 89
sensor cleaning, 34–35, 51
Setup menu, 31, 33, 35, 99
Shade setting, 8
sharpening raw images, 36
sharpness of photos, 183, 188
Shooting data display mode, 20, 21
Shooting menu, 38, 121
shooting modes
automatic modes, 53–77
effects modes, 70–74
professional modes, 79–107
scene modes, 59–70
Shutter Priority (S) mode, 85–89
action photos and, 85, 102, 115
assignment on using, 106
flash sync speeds in, 212
photo examples using, 85, 86,
87, 88

setting up and shooting in, 89
situations for using, 85–88,
102, 187
shutter speed
action photography and, 85, 102,
112–115
exposure and, 44, 45–46
flash synchronization and,
212, 213
handheld photography and,
204, 224
lens limitations and, 86–87
motion and, 46–48, 112–115
prioritizing, 85–89, 115
silky waterfall shots and, 185
slow vs. fast, 85
tripod use and, 168
VR lenses and, 204
Silhouette effect, 73
silhouetted subjects, 95, 96
Single Frame mode, 126
Single-Point AF mode, 123, 124
single-point focusing, 13, 14, 123, 146
skies, exposure compensation for,
177–178
skylight filter, 276
slot empty release lock, 15–16
Slow Sync mode, 218
sound recording, 257–259, 270
speed of subject, 112, 113, 114
Speedlight flashes, 221, 222, 287–288
Sports mode, 62, 64, 77
sports photography. *See* action
photography
Spot metering mode, 141,
230–232, 251
setting up and shooting in,
230–231
situations for using, 230
sunrise/sunset photos and,
231–232
sRGB color space, 10, 11
star trail photos, 247, 249
subject-to-camera distance, 114–115
subtractive color, 11
sunlight
creative use of, 236
ISO settings and, 83
lens flare from, 235

sunlight (*continued*)
 portrait photography and, 158,
 159, 163
 white balance setting for, 8
sunny 16 rule, 45
sunrise/sunset photos, 181,
 231–232, 251
Sunset scene mode, 68

T

tack-sharp images, 183
telephoto lenses, 42, 43
Time mode, 234
time-lapse video, 267–269
timers
 auto-off, 17, 18
 interval timer, 247–249
 self-timer, 205–206
tonal range, 22
tonemapping process, 239
top-of-camera features, 4
tripods
 advice on choosing, 169, 282–283
 HDR photography and, 239
 landscape photography and,
 168–169, 182, 185
 macro photography and, 250
 multiple-image panoramas and,
 245, 247
 stability considerations for, 168
 video recording and, 255,
 263–264
 VR lenses and, 169

TTL metering, 213
TV connections, 264–265, 271

U

underexposed images, 23, 104
updating the firmware, 32–33, 51
User Settings mode, 99

V

Vibration Reduction (VR) lenses, 58,
 169, 204
video recording, 253–273
 accessories for, 263–265
 assignments on, 273
 book recommendation, 272
 depth of field for, 254,
 265–266, 273
 DSLR lenses for, 254
 focusing for, 260–261, 273
 Live View mode for, 254–255
 memory cards for, 259–260, 270
 picture controls for, 266–267, 273
 quality settings, 255–257
 reviewing/editing videos, 271
 sound settings, 257–259, 270
 time-lapse feature for, 267–269
 tips for improving, 269–270
 tripods used for, 255, 263–264
 view modes for, 261–263
 white balance settings, 267
Virtual Horizon mode, 261, 262

W

warm colors, 10, 181
waterfall photography, 86, 87, 88,
 185–187
white balance settings, 7–9
 assignment on using, 25
 automatic modes and, 75
 choices available for, 8
 color temperature and, 10
 landscape photography and,
 172–174
 Live View feature and, 174
 steps for selecting, 9
 video recording and, 267
wide-angle lenses, 39–40
 depth of field and, 40
 distortion caused by, 139
 environmental portraits and,
 139–140
 landscape photography and, 183
 situations for using, 40
Wi-Fi feature, 284
wildlife photography, 247
Wireless Mobile Utility (WMU), 284
wireless remote, 234, 283, 284
workshops with author, 293

Z

Zoom In/Out buttons, 116
zoom lenses, 42, 94