

Several of our team members and instructors have acquired the latest model of the Nikon D series camera – the D500, which came out as an upgrade to the D7200. This gave pause for sharing some thoughts about what we should do in setting up a new camera regardless of brand or type. Checking out a new camera is always a good idea. Brian Osborne once had a brand new camera out of the box which would fire but did not record any images! But before we go into the checklist, let's note for the record we realize getting a new camera is an event that only happens occasionally for most photographers. I say "occasionally" because for some that means every 5-6 years or more. For others it may mean an upgrade every 2-3 years to keep up with the rapid advances in camera technology. Whatever the case, new cameras are always exciting (and often a little intimidating)

You may be interested to know the top two things we look for in new cameras are higher ISO capability and improved dynamic range performance (i.e., being able to record the brightest and darkest parts of an image). We also may look for improvements in fast, accurate focusing and other features; but ISO and dynamic range are our top concerns for many situations. It may surprise you to learn we're not looking for more megapixels in our camera sensor. Most of today's modern cameras already have sufficient megapixels to provide more than enough resolution for any conceivable large print one might want to display. And for computer displays, even the best monitors can use only a fraction of the resolution our cameras already have. However, a higher ISO capability gives more options for higher shutter speeds and aperture numbers in low light situations; which in turn give more control over exposure, motion, and depth of field.

So, you've bought or been given a new camera. Now what? Here's a list of things you should do with your new equipment.

New Camera Checklist

- 1) Initial camera setup – pay attention to date & time, time zone, daylight savings time, color space (sRGB), file naming (if applicable you can use your initials instead of the defaults like DSC or IMG), file numbering (consecutive numbering of images), and image quality settings (Large and Fine or Normal)
- 2) Your camera sensor may have pixels that don't work. Check for dead pixels at low-medium-high ISO values by taking pictures with the lens cap on, set to

manual at 1/100 sec, f8. Look for white dots (dead pixels) in each image by zooming in on the computer.

- 3) Test all letter modes (P,S,A,M – Nikon, P,Tv,Av,M – Canon) by shooting a static target image in each mode using various apertures and shutter speeds.
- 4) Shoot a small subject or other static scene with shadows at higher ISOs (one at 1600, 3200, 6400, etc.) and compare the amount of digital noise to get an idea which ISO value may produce unacceptable noise in your image
- 5) Do all your test shots on a tripod with image stabilization turned off
- 6) Test the focusing mechanism on static and moving subjects in normal and low light with test shots
- 7) Take test shots with the lenses you will use with it to make sure they work with the camera properly
- 8) Fill out the warranty card and mail it in or register online once you are satisfied your new camera is in proper working order.
- 9) Check the manufacturer's website every 6 months for firmware updates or sign up for their email alerts

The above checklist should help assure everything is fine with your camera and its performance going forward. Assuming all systems check out OK, you're good to start enjoying your new tool in photography. Spend some time reading your camera's manual; at least the summary or overview section, to get familiar with the controls and features. Remember that most major camera manufacturers offer either Apps to have the instruction manual on your smartphone or allow PDF downloads of the manual from their website.

Finally, attend one of our DSLR Bootcamps or repeat it with your new camera in hand. This is a great way to review the basics and to get more familiar with your equipment.

Have fun and happy shooting

Tom Johnson