

Manual mode DSLR photography for people in a hurry:

The purpose of this brief instruction set is to give you a quick way to start taking photos using the manual mode your DSLR camera features. If you follow the instructions, you will get a decent photo using manual mode. You will not, however, max out the ability of your camera or lens in all cases. To do that, you may need to take one of our courses.

A few things you'll need to know to get the most from this tutorial:

How to change the Whitebalance setting

How to change the ISO of your camera

How to change the Exposure Mode of your camera to Manual Mode

How to change the Aperture setting

How to change the Shutter setting

Please consult the manual that came with your camera.

Set your camera to the Manual Exposure Mode, usually denoted with an M. (Not to be confused with the A/M or AF/MF switch. That one is for Autofocus/Manual Focus.)

Set your camera to ISO 100, if you're outside, 1600 if you're inside, to start.

(Nikon users: Turn Auto ISO off).

If you're outdoors, set your camera's Whitebalance to cloudy.

Now, let's look at your lens. We're looking for 2 different numbers. The first is the longest focal length your lens is capable of. This may be expressed as a single number or as a range. In the example on the left, it's a single number: 85mm. In the examples in the middle and on the right, focal length is expressed as a range. For the middle lens, the focal range is 24-70mm - see it there on the upper left curve of the lens? - so the longest focal length is 70mm. For the lens pictured on the right, the focal range is 17-85mm, so the longest focal length is 85mm.



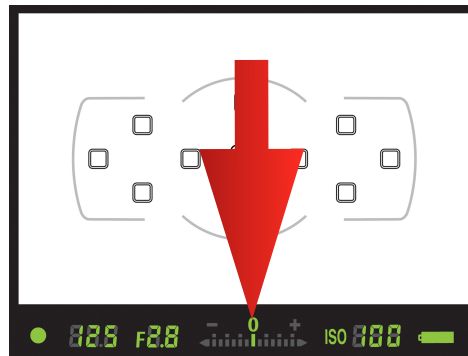
Once you have that number, set your shutter speed to it, or higher. In other words, if the longest focal length of your lens is 85, set your shutter to 1/85 of a second or faster. As there is no 1/85 setting, you would need to choose 1/100. If you are photographing sports or something that moves fast, set your shutter speed at least to 1/125 or 1/250, depending on how far away you are and how fast things are moving.

The other number we need to find on your lens is the aperture. This is typically shown as a 1:, followed by a single number or by a range of numbers. If you find a range there, like in the lens on the right - the 1: 4-5.6 - use the larger of the two numbers. 5.6 in this case. If it's a single number, just use that. Whatever you find there on your lens, set your aperture to that number. If you need the background to be more clear, e.g. for a landscape, set your aperture to f/8 or f/11.

To learn more about what settings to use in different situations, we recommend our Photography The Basics course. That will answer many questions and help you demystify a lot of the confusion.



Now, all that's left is adjusting the ISO setting until your meter is centered. Start at ISO 100 outdoors, ISO 1600 indoors. Double the ISO setting until the meter registers in the center, as shown below. If you overshoot a little, just increase your shutter speed a touch, to get it centered.



Once your meter is centered, you can take the photo. And the exposure should be pretty decent.

Now you know the “how” of shooting in manual mode. If you’re curious about the “why” of it all, and you’d like to really understand the ways your camera’s systems work together, or, if you find all this very confusing, I’d encourage you to join our Photography the Basics course. Taking a more thorough approach and knowing why things work the way they do will give you a more solid footing and more faith with your camera.

But don’t just take our word for it. Read what some of our students have had to say:

In Photography the Basics, I learned how to actually take a picture - how to get out of automatic mode into manual, and how to set a picture up so it actually looks good. Now I'm able to control what I'm getting out of the picture, instead of the camera controlling what I'm getting out of the picture.
Brittni, Pepperell, MA

I got everything I wanted to out of Photography the Basics and more. I've had my camera forever, and I wish I'd had this course when I first got the camera. It would have saved me a lot of frustration. Everything from the camera manual that I couldn't understand was taught in this course in a very comprehensive manner. The best part was the assignments - getting to go home and put everything I'd learned to work was fun.
Heather, Brookline, NH

After taking Photography the Basics, I feel a lot better shooting in manual. I was really hesitant to do that before. I would sometimes use the aperture priority and the shutter priority, but if my photos didn't turn out right, I never really knew what was wrong with them. I'm never going back to those. I feel so much more confident in being able to understand how aperture, shutter and ISO work together. I'm so much more comfortable knowing how to change my settings to get the effects I want.
Erica, Litchfield, NH

I learned so much in the Basics course. I think the most valuable thing for me was learning whether to lead with aperture or with shutter speed, depending on the subject of my photo. Learning some of the basics of composition was good too. I have a better understanding of how to tell, when I'm looking at something to photograph, if it makes a good composition or not.
Mary Ann, Manchester, NH

Before I took the Basics course, I didn't even know that there was a relationship between shutter, aperture, and ISO. I always just chose the landscape setting on my camera, and if my photos were too dark, I couldn't figure out how to correct them. I'm leaving C1M feeling very confident that when I look in the viewfinder and it's dark, I know what to do, or if my subject's moving, I know how to adjust my camera.
Chuck, Nashua, NH