

Mastering MANUAL MODE

Module 3 Aperture

Aperture Assignment

Setting Up for the Exercise

I suggest using a table of at least a meter long for this exercise and have one or two props to hand also, that can be in the background behind your simple dish. You will need to set up a front view position with a vertical background and again select something very simple to shoot in a well-lit space, with the light coming from one side.

This time when we're going to use aperture priority mode on your camera. First, if you're using a Canon camera, please make sure that your set to the 'on' position as opposed to the 'on+' position. This will prevent you from accidentally changing other settings when you're adjusting your aperture. Aperture priority mode is set via the AV setting on the dial of a canon camera or by the A setting on a Nikon camera.



Once in this mode, you can use the wheel in the top right corner of your Canon camera, just beside the trigger button, to change the aperture value. On a Nikon, you can use the wheel just in front of the trigger button.

In this assignment, you're going to try a variety of different examples. Setup to shoot just like you did in the previous assignment. This time, however, you will be taking a photograph of a foreground subject and a background prop.

Start off on the largest aperture that you can achieve with your lens. To do this select aperture priority mode on your camera dial, which is AV on a Canon or A on a Nikon.

If you are using a kit lens that limits aperture at the top end of the scale, make sure you are at the minimum zoom level for your lens. Then dial your aperture up to the largest possible aperture (smallest number). The camera will then take care of the other settings. As before if the aperture number starts to flash, this means that the camera doesn't perceive enough light in your environment to be able to balance the shot with other settings, so you'll need to find a brighter location.



The other reason the camera might not take the shot is if you are within the minimum focus distance for your lens. All lenses have a minimum focus distance. Your lens will often have the minimum focus distance written on it, but if not, refer to the technical specifications for your lens online. A macro lens has a special ability to focus at closer distances than standard lenses. Macro lenses are particularly useful in food photography. So if you're finding that the camera lens isn't focusing properly, then you need to move a bit further back and try again.



If you have a kit lens it's likely that your largest aperture is going to be f3.5 or 4. If you've already invested in something like a 50mm lens with a larger aperture range, you might be able to set your aperture all the way up to f1.4. For your second shot change your aperture to a smaller aperture f11 for example. When you compare the images you should see a significant difference in the area of focus.



Again when you changed to a smaller aperture, if your camera started flashing the number and it wouldn't take a shot, this means that there is not enough light in your scene to allow the camera to take a shot at your selected aperture. In this case, move to a brighter location, or shoot at a brighter time of day or choose a slightly larger aperture and try again.

Area of focus exercise

Now the other thing that we're going to do is we're going to take a few shots to understand the relationship between distance and area of focus. First, reset your aperture to f4. Make sure that your background prop is far from the subject, almost touching the background. Take your first shot. Then move the prop much closer, almost directly behind your subject, and take a shot.

Try and have your backgrounds at least half a meter or preferably up to a meter away from the front of your table so that you have plenty of distance to test this concept properly. I usually shoot with a distance of about 1m so that I have plenty of scope to create several layers of props if I'd like to.



Physical distance exercise

In the final exercise that we're going to try is to help you to understand the effect that your physical distance from the subject has. Again, choose your largest available aperture. Take your first shot as close as you can to your subject and then move maybe a meter back and take the same shot with the same aperture.

Download both images to your computer and crop the one that you shot from further away so that it has a similar framing to the one that you took closer to the subject. Now compare the resulting focus areas by using identical camera settings and moving your position in relation to the subject.

Finally, pick your two favourite images from each exercise and send them to me via the student assignment upload form on this page, and include any questions that might have come up for you as a result of this exercise.

