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Nikon | LEARN & EXPLORE

INTERMEDIATE

Prime Lenses

Featuring **LINDSAY SILVERMAN**



Photo taken with the AF-S NIKKOR 50mm f/1.8G lens.

What is a prime lens? Well, it's a lens that isn't a zoom. A prime lens has a fixed focal length which means it has only one focal length. Examples of NIKKOR prime lenses are the [AF-S NIKKOR 35mm f/1.4G](#) and [AF-S NIKKOR 200mm f/2G ED VR II](#), and the new [AF-S NIKKOR 50mm f/1.8G](#). Some prime lenses are designed for specific uses, such as the Micro-NIKKOR ([AF-S Micro-NIKKOR 85mm f/3.5G ED VR](#)), Perspective Control ([PC-E Micro NIKKOR 45mm f/2.8D](#)), and Fisheye ([AF DX Fisheye-NIKKOR 10.5mm f/2.8D ED](#)) lenses.

If a prime lens gives you only one focal length, but a zoom gives you a range of focal lengths, what are the benefits to using a prime lens?

Prime lenses, are smaller, lighter and more compact than zoom lenses and tend to be faster, offering wide apertures of f/2.8, f/1.8 or even f/1.4. The large apertures let in more light, which benefits the photographer in a number of ways. First, you can use fast shutter speeds with large apertures to freeze motion. This becomes

important when you're shooting in low light. By using a high ISO, and wide aperture, you'll be able to use high enough shutter speeds so you can hand-hold the camera.



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Photo taken with the PC-E Micro NIKKOR 45mm f/2.8D ED lens.

Secondly, because fast lenses let in lots of light, the viewfinder will be brighter, and so it will be easier to confirm focus, ensuring your images will be sharp.

One of the most sought after benefits of using a prime lens is for the Bokeh achievable by photographers, especially portrait shooters. Bokeh refers to the pleasing diffused softness of the blurred background in an image with shallow depth-of-field.

According to many photographers, a byproduct of using a prime lens is that you physically have to walk into- or step back from your subject(s) when shooting—since you can't zoom in and out. This will often cause them to be more creative in their picture making.

Using a Prime Lens for Video

When shooting HD video, prime lenses are ideal to use. They give you the ability

to achieve the same shallow depth-of-field at wide open apertures for your video footage as you already get with your still photography. This is something that is generally difficult to do using a traditional video camera. Many photographers who are shooting HD video with their Nikon D-SLRs will appreciate the prime lenses ability to autofocus precisely and quickly when AF-F (Full-time AF) is selected or even to manually focus, which will lessen the occurrence of noise from the lens being picked up by the camera's internal microphone.

Prime lenses are well suited to a variety of subjects including; portraits, architecture, nature, landscape, sports and action, flora and low light. Nikon offers a range of prime or fixed focal length lenses. [Click here to view the full line of NIKKOR prime / fixed focal length lenses.](#)



Featuring

LINDSAY SILVERMAN

Lindsay is a former Sr. Product Manager, Pro DSLR for Nikon. Early in his career Lindsay served as general manager of Nikon House in New York City's Rockefeller Center, where he hosted some of the world's finest photographers as well as photo enthusiasts and photo writers, editors and educators from around the world. He has held technical, marketing and product management positions for the company, and for 19 years was a contributing writer, photographer and editor of *Nikon World* magazine.

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