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Different Types of Microphones: Audio Recording Tutorial

Once the moviemaking bug bites you, and you begin shooting video with your Nikon HD SLR, you're going to want to consider how you can ensure quality audio is captured as well.

Mic Types

There are a many types of microphones on the market that you can use when making movies. The three main types of mic are: lavalier or lav for short, handheld and shotgun. Mics can either be mono (record to only one channel) or stereo (record to two channels).

Here's an easy analogy to remember how to distinguish the different types of mics. Think of the Nikon ME-1 Stereo Microphone as a wide-angle of mics because it captures audio from a wide pattern in front of the camera; the shotgun mic is the telephoto of mics, recording audio from in front of the mic; and the lavalier mic as the close-up or macro of mics, because they are designed to be clipped to a person's shirt near their neck to capture the audio from a position close to their mouth.

When looking for a microphone to use with your HD SLR, make sure that you also get any necessary adapters or cables that will be needed to connect the microphone to your HD SLR. Some Nikon HD SLRs are equipped with a mic input.

Mic Uses

Shotgun mics are often used on a boom pole, above people while they're speaking on stage or in a scene; but they can also be held near a musical instrument, and out of the frame of the camera, like in our video example of the musician singing and playing guitar. Lavs are great to use when recording interviews or to clip onto musical instruments. Another type of mic is the handheld mic. This is the type of mic that musicians will use for singing, or speakers or reporters use handheld or attached to a mic stand or podium.

Audio Levels

When capturing audio—whether using the camera's built-in mic or an accessory mic, the most important detail to control is the audio levels. Nikon's newer HDSLR cameras have peak audio meters built in and the audio levels are visible on the LCD in Live View. As the audio level rises, they will be represented on the audio level scale. The audio level scale is broken into three distinct sections: white: this is the largest section of audio level measurement and is where most of your audio should fall into; yellow: audio that falls into this area is at the top end of acceptable audio levels; and red: audio that falls into the red, the high end of the range will be distorted.

It is suggested that when capturing audio for your videos, you should always do a test to check the audio levels while Live View is activated and adjust if necessary. The audio levels should be adjusted before pressing the record button. If you notice the levels rising into the red, simply lower the audio sensitivity until the levels drop into the yellow area at the very least, or the white area.

Remember to check your HDSLR camera's User's Manual for instructions on its particular menu navigation and dial layout.