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Top Tips for Capturing Time Lapse Video with a DSLR

Time Lapse videos allow a moviemaker to alter reality in a fun and creative way. Time Lapse means that you shoot a single frame of video at a certain time interval that you choose, such as one frame per second or one frame per minute. Then, when you play it back, it looks like you've sped up time so that events go by faster.

There are a couple of ways to shoot Time Lapse with select Nikon DSLRs.

One is to use the camera's Time Lapse Photography function, which will create a silent movie at the specifications you have set in the Movie Settings.

Quick Tips

Make sure that you're using a solid tripod so that the camera doesn't move while shooting.

Manually adjust the exposure settings and manually set the focus so that nothing changes from shot to shot.

Using the Time Lapse Photography Setting

Navigate to the Time Lapse Photography setting, where you first choose the interval, the rate at which you want the camera to record each individual frame. You can select any interval from 1 frame per second all the way up to 1 frame every 10 minutes.

Next, set the shooting time, how long you want the camera to automatically shoot individual frames. This can be set for just a few minutes, or several hours.

If you don't want to do the math, just look at the information screen, which lets you know how long the video will be.

Press OK to get it started, and the camera will automatically shoot away for the specified time.

Using the Interval Timer

If you want to do an interval longer than 10 minutes every second, use the Interval Time Shooting setting. Instead of ending up with a finished movie right out of the camera, the Interval Time Shooting setting will take a series of still images, which need to be combined using optional third party software to create a Time Lapse movie.

The advantage here is that the interval can be set for anything from 1 frame every second, all the way up to 1 frame nearly every 24 hours. And instead of setting a shooting time, you choose the amount of total frames you want shot and the camera will continue shooting up to that number. This is perfect for long duration Time Lapse movies shot over many hours or even days, as long as you've considered the power requirements and protection of your camera in these long Time Lapse set-ups.

A benefit of using the Interval Timer is that because you're capturing very high-resolution still images, you can create Time Lapse movies that are 4K resolution or higher. And if you're working in Full HD Video, you can also take advantage of the higher resolution images by using optional third party software to add motion such as pans and zooms to your final Time Lapse movie.