

Topic 5 - Basic DSLR Settings

Learning Outcomes

In this topic, you will learn about the functions of the buttons on the top, the side and the back of your camera. This will give you the platform to begin to experiment and practice with the settings and from here, your confidence can only grow. It might be clichéd but the more you practice, the better you will become with mastering the camera controls.

Let's start with the top of the camera!

The top of the camera is usually where you'll find the most commonly-used controls. I like the interface of the Nikon D5600 because it keeps it as simple as possible with just the essentials so it's perfect for us to look at today.



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Video start-stop button is used to shoot video. It's usually labelled with a red dot on most camera models.

Power switch, as the name suggests, turns the camera on and off. Nikon power switches typically encircle the shutter button, but many other brands will put this switch elsewhere on the camera body.

Shutter button is used to take the photograph and it's almost always located in the same position on all interchangeable lens cameras.

Exposure compensation-aperture button – If you want to control aperture, you need to hold down this button. If not in manual mode, this button allows you to adjust exposure compensation. This means making the image brighter or darker while still allowing the camera to make its own decision about which settings to use.

Mode dial will set the camera to your preferred shooting mode. The standard modes are the following:

Program, Shutter Priority, Aperture Priority, and Manual (denoted by the P, S, A, and M positions on the dial).

The “green box” automatic mode will raise the pop-up flash automatically when needed. A no-flash automatic mode is located directly below full automatic. Scene modes contain automated presets for capturing landscapes, portraits, and sports, while Effects modes usually offer different digital enhancements, like selective color. I try to stay away from these presets and when you master the manual control of the camera you will see that there are greater benefits to controlling it yourself. It's useful though to play with these presets and to notice the different effects with each.

Live view switch is a switch, or a button, and it locks the mirror in a DSLR, blocking the optical viewfinder and allowing you to preview your image directly on the LCD screen. Mirrorless cameras are always in live view, so they won't have this switch. However, if you have a mirrorless camera with an electronic viewfinder, you will have a button to change from the viewfinder to the rear screen.



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Command dial allows you to adjust shutter speed and, when the exposure compensation-aperture button is held, aperture. You can also usually use the command dial for navigating menus or controlling other context-sensitive functions (like ISO or white balance).

Those are the functions on the top of the camera and three most important buttons are the shutter button, the mode and command dial.



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LENS AND SIDE OF THE CAMERA



Generally, buttons placed on the side of your camera won't be for commonly-used functions. There are some interesting controls on the D5600, however, that make it worth investigating.

The **Flash button** location may vary from camera to camera, but the “lightning bolt” symbol is universal, so you'll always be able to find it. Holding this button will let you adjust flash exposure compensation, allowing you to adjust how bright you want the flash to be.

Function button is useful because it can be programmed to do whatever you want. If there's a feature of your camera that's hidden in the menu but you'd like it to be more accessible, it's likely that you can assign it to a function button.

Zoom ring is usually the larger of the lens rings, turning the zoom ring zooms the lens in or out.



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Focus ring is the smaller of the lens rings, rotating this ring allows you to adjust focus when autofocus is turned off. You'll notice the focus ring is particularly small on this lens. Lenses for high end professionals will often have larger focus rings because experienced users are more likely to use manual focus than beginners.

Lens retract button — Retractable lenses are becoming increasingly popular as they are more compact than non-retractable models. You must press this button to initially “zoom” the lens into its operational position, and again to retract it when you're done shooting.

Lens release button — Press this button to unlock the lens mount and detach the lens by rotating it. You don't need to press it when mounting a lens.

Drive mode button — This lets you control the camera's drive mode, allowing you to take a single shot, shoot continuously, or use a countdown timer. This button is in a pretty unique position in our example, but most manufacturers will place it on the back or top of the camera. Nikon's designers, however, likely needed to make use of that negative space, so they put it here. Like the flash symbol, the icons used for continuous drive and the timer are universal, so you'll be able to easily identify these on other cameras. Keep in mind that many cameras won't have a dedicated button for these features, however, meaning they will live within the menu somewhere.



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THE BACK OF THE CAMERA



At the back of the camera, it's pretty easy to understand the controls because most of them are pretty self-explanatory. When I first began photography, that was the first thing that surprised me. The functions on the back are mostly concerned with menu navigation and playback. Playback can be looking at photography or it can be watching video that you shot.

Let's start at the top.

The **Menu button** brings up the camera's menu, where you can change image quality, autofocus settings, and a range of other features.

Diopter Adjustment allows you to focus the viewfinder. With my first camera, I remember being really confused as everything looked out of focus when I looked into the eye piece, even when autofocus was turned on. Of course, the issue was with the diopter adjustment and not the lens. If you play around with it, you'll see the image in the viewfinder becoming sharp.



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The **Info button** is very useful while shooting because if you press this button during image playback, it can display metadata, a histogram, and other important information about the photograph that you are looking at.

The **Autofocus/ Auto exposure lock** will be useful once you get plenty of practice with the camera. If you hold this button while using autofocus and auto exposure, it will lock those settings and even if you move the camera you can use it to take several shots with different framings and everything will stay focused and exposed.

The **Image playback button** to review images and videos on the LCD screen.

This **i button** that you see is just on Nikon cameras, many other brands have a similar button, usually denoted by a “Q,” for “quick menu.” This brings up a set of functions on the camera’s LCD screen, which can be controlled directly. This can be useful for adjusting ISO, white balance and drive mode settings.

The **OK button** is used primarily for selecting menu items, but it can also center the active focus point when using single-point autofocus.

Multi selector – Although this may be known by a different name on other brands, most cameras incorporate some sort of four-way controller like this. Beyond using it for navigation, many manufacturers will map shooting functions to each direction. This can also be used to move the active focus point in single-point AF mode, although some cameras will have a separate, dedicated control for this.

Magnify button – We took the liberty of labeling this as “magnify” rather than “zoom” in order to avoid confusion, as this button has nothing to do with zooming the lens. This is for magnifying an image during playback, allowing you to see greater detail, which is often useful for ensuring the camera focused where you wanted it to. Some cameras even let you use this button to magnify a live-view image.



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Delete button – Denoted by a universal trash can icon, pressing this button will let you delete a photo from your memory card during playback. Every manufacturer does it a bit differently, but it won't ever be a one-touch process. You will have to press the button twice, or another button – like the OK button – afterward to confirm your decision.

Demagnify button – Again, we're not calling this "zoom out." This is the opposite of the aforementioned magnify button, but will also let you expand the playback view to show multiple image thumbnails at once. Some cameras will even let you pull back into folder or calendar views. This can be useful for quickly navigating through large image libraries, as modern memory cards can hold thousands of images. You'll also notice that Nikon has a "?" next to the magnifying glass symbol. This button performs double duty as the help button; you can press it to see tips regarding a particular menu function.



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What have we learned today? A Summary

This overview has given you a clearer understanding of how the controls work on a DSLR. It's very likely that you might only use some of the controls that we have went thorough as they are not all a requirement when you want to take a photograph.

Being comfortable with the mode dial, command dial, and shutter release will set you up well.

