



THE PHOTOGRAPHY DECISION-MAKING CHEAT SHEET

Stop asking “What settings should I use?” – start with “What do I want this photograph to look like?”

Before you press the shutter, think about the photograph you want to make. Your camera settings are tools for achieving that result—not the starting point.

What do you want to control?	Think about
Freeze movement	Shutter speed
Show movement	Shutter speed
Blur the background	Aperture, focal length and subject/background distance
Keep more of the scene sharp	Aperture and depth of field
Work in low light	ISO, shutter speed and aperture
Track a moving subject	Autofocus mode
Control exposure deliberately	Exposure mode
Improve subject separation	Light, background and depth of field

THE 10-SECOND DECISION PROCESS

- ☐ What is my subject?
- ☐ What is the subject doing?
- ☐ What do I want to show?
- ☐ What do I want to keep sharp?
- ☐ What do I want to blur?
- ☐ How much movement do I want to freeze—or show?
- ☐ What is the light doing?

Only after answering these questions should you start thinking about your camera settings.

REMEMBER

- There is no single set of “correct” settings for a photograph.
- Aperture, shutter speed and ISO involve choices and trade-offs.
- Manual mode is not automatically better than Aperture Priority or Shutter Priority.
- Choose the exposure mode that gives you control over the decisions that matter for the photograph.
- Your camera is a tool. The creative decisions are yours.

Better photography starts with better decisions—not more complicated settings.