

Digital ...

A monthly column by Harry

This month is for **beginners**. Please send your questions – and comments – by email to harry.iris@usa.net or use the Discussion at www.flickr.com/groups/marlborough_camera_club which also has illustrations for this article. Now get out your camera and then read on.

Why go beyond auto?

Small cameras are amazingly smart. (Professional cameras are brawny but smaller ones have the brains.) Think of you and your camera as a team. Here's how to collaborate with your camera to get the picture you want.

Every photograph is a compromise. For example, the exposure is a balance between exposure time, lens aperture, and ISO (sensitivity). Happily, we can leave this technology to the camera.

You can, however, work with your camera to get the compromise that suits your idea of the image.

For example:

Someone important to you is sitting on a rock in front of a lovely landscape. Use this step-by-step method to take the photograph: compose the image, zooming in or out as necessary; now point the camera directly at the person; press the exposure button halfway down and hold it there; move the camera back to the image composition you want; calmly press the exposure button all the way down.

This process focuses on the person. However, do you want the background to be sharp, emphasizing the location, or do you want the background a bit blurry, to make more of a portrait? How can you tell the camera what you want?

Find your camera's scene modes. They include one for portraits and one for landscapes and probably several others. The portrait mode emphasizes the person, by softening the background, while the landscape mode tries to get everything sharp.

Switch your camera from auto to the scene mode you want and take the picture again. Try the other scene mode too, for fun. Compare your results with the example I put on the Club Flickr site mentioned in the first paragraph.

Your camera takes care of the technicalities. Basically, for portraits it opens up the lens aperture while for landscapes it closes down the aperture. The depth of field (amount that is in focus) depends on the aperture and the zoom setting. The scene mode automatically sets the appropriate aperture and other exposure parameters.

Use your scene modes to communicate with your camera; it will handle the technical issues, while you develop your creativity.