

Understanding Your Camera's Light Meter

What is a light meter?



A light meter is an instrument inside your camera that tells you if the amount of light reaching the film will be enough or too much to properly expose your image. The light meter takes into account your shutter speed, film speed, and aperture settings.

How to read the meter



Your camera's light meter shows you the amount of light in aperture settings. Each dot on the meter represents a partial "stop", or aperture increment. The numbers represent whole stops. Even though your F-Stop setting controls the aperture itself, the meter readings will also change if you change your film speed or shutter speed.

When to overexpose or underexpose your images



Even though most of the time you will want to keep your meter reading in the center, there are times you will need to deliberately overexpose or underexpose your images slightly. Sometimes this is for artistic effect but usually it is because you are shooting in conditions that can confuse the meter.

Examples of times to overexpose

- Subject is very dark in comparison to background
- Snow
- On a bright day if your subject is in shadow

Examples of times to underexpose

- Subject is very light in comparison to background
- To achieve a silhouette effect
- On an overcast day to increase color saturation

Bracketing

In photography, bracketing is the general technique of taking several shots of the same subject using different or the same camera settings. Bracketing is useful and often recommended in situations that make it difficult to obtain a satisfactory image with a single shot, especially when a small variation in exposure parameters has a comparatively large effect on the resulting image. Auto-bracketing is automatic bracketing by using a setting on the camera to take several bracketed shots (in contrast to the photographer altering the settings by hand between each shot).