



Video focus techniques

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Control of your focus is one of the elements that can add a really professional touch to your videos. A combination of narrow depth of field and precise focus control is one of the many things that makes shooting video with your Nikon DSLR so rewarding.

Autofocus

Autofocus is great for general shooting situations. To get started, turn on Live View, use it to frame up your shot, then press the shutter button half way down. When the red box on the Live View screen turns green, your subject is in focus. (please note that if you are using a microphone on camera, the audio will pick up the sound of the autofocus motor, as well as any audio taking place). This is one of the big advantages of using AF-P lenses, as they are completely silent in their operation.

Manual focus

If you want to be a bit more creative, try manual focus (MF). You manually focus the camera by switching the AF button on the front of the camera from AF to MF, then turning on Live View and manually turning the focus ring on your lens to change the focus between near and far.

Focus Pulling

One of the techniques that movie cinematographers often employ is focus pulling to switch the focused emphasis in the scene from one subject to another. Start by switching on Live View and choosing a subject in, say, the foreground to focus on. Now gradually switch the focus to another subject behind it by smoothly turning the focus ring on the lens barrel until the second subject is sharp and the original one defocused. It takes a bit of practice, and it works best with a telephoto zoom and a tripod to keep everything steady, but the results are well worth the effort.

Handy focus-assist accessories

There is a good range of accessories made by third-party companies to help you focus when shooting video.

- A viewfinder loupe attaches to the camera back-plate, covering the LCD so you can bring the camera to your eye as if you were using the viewfinder to frame your scenes. This magnifies the scene and helps you see more detail in the frame, and also blocks out extraneous light that can make it easy to see the image on the screen – especially useful when shooting outdoors. Different loupes offer different variations of magnification to help you see and focus accurately.
- An external monitor attached to the HDMI port enables you to see the scene unfolding on a larger display than the camera's LCD screen, making it easier to frame up shots and check the focus. It's also helpful when you're shooting video with one person operating the camera and another person who also needs to see the footage as it's being captured.