



Digital Photography: Definition & Terminology

Do you have a camera? Is it digital? Learn some important terms related to digital technology and file formats.



Digital cameras allow you to view your image right after taking it

Do you have a favorite photo of family and friends? Did you take it? Many people enjoy using a camera to take pictures.

Cameras and the resulting photos are ways to document important moments and preserve happy memories. Today, most people, including perhaps you, use digital cameras to take those pictures. A digital camera is an

electronic device that takes a picture by using a light sensitive device inside called an image sensor. The image sensor turns light into electrical signals.

At one time, photography used a thin piece of coated plastic called film. The camera exposed the film to light, and then photographers used chemicals to develop it and print images on paper. But after the 1990s, digital cameras came into regular use and they've become increasingly popular. The image sensor eliminates the need for film and allows you to instantly view images after you take them. Today, digital cameras are everywhere. Odds are, if you have a smartphone, it includes a digital camera.

Digital Photography Terms: Pixels and Megapixels

But do you understand how a digital camera works? Let's discuss some basic terms.

As mentioned, a camera's digital sensor captures the picture by turning light into electrical signals, which are stored as tiny dots or bits of data. In the camera, these data bits form a bit map, with rows and columns of dots. All the tiny dots combine to create the whole image. Digital sensors come in many different sizes, so these bitmaps can vary greatly in size.

To view the image on a computer or to print it on paper, the file from the camera is downloaded onto a computer, which translates the bitmap into components called pixels, or picture elements. One million pixels form a megapixel (MP). You'll often see camera manufacturers advertise cameras by highlighting the number of megapixels. They've created the impression that more megapixels mean a higher quality image.

While, in general, a high MP camera produces beautiful pictures, the MP number has more to do with file size, than it does with picture quality. The MP number determines

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the maximum size image that can be produced from the file. This is different from resolution, or the density of the dots. Resolution determines how sharp and clear the image is.

If you're using your camera to take pictures to share on your computer, or you're printing them as snapshots, you don't need a camera with extremely high megapixel numbers. Many cell phones today have cameras with MP range of 9 - 13, and they produce nice, crisp images with excellent resolution.

So when do you need a camera with a very large megapixel count? If you're a professional photographer shooting images to be enlarged into posters, or used on wall-size billboards, then a large MP number is important.

One more helpful term to know, related to your camera and the pictures it takes, is ISO speed. ISO refers to the light sensitivity of the image sensor, and your digital camera has a setting on it that lets you change the ISO speed to enable it to be more, or less, sensitive to light. In general, low ISO speeds mean less light and crisper images. High ISO speeds allow for images in dark areas but they might not be clear.

Vocabulary:

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Device: dispositivo

Tiny: diminutos

Coated: cubierto

Snapshots: instantáneas

Everywhere: por todas partes