

# A Glossary of Photographic Terms



## **Adjustable camera**

A camera with manually adjustable settings for distance, lens openings, and shutter speeds.

## **Adjustable-focus lens**

A lens that has adjustable distance settings.

## **Agitation**

Keeping the developer, stop bath, or fixer in a gentle, uniform motion while processing film or paper. Agitation helps to speed and achieve even development and prevent spotting or staining.

## **Ambient light**

The available light completely surrounding a subject. Light already existing in an indoor or outdoor setting that is not caused by any illumination supplied by the photographer.

## **Angle of view**

The area of a scene that a lens covers or sees. Angle of view is determined by the focal length of the lens. A wide-angle lens (short focal length) includes more of the scene—a wider angle of view—than a normal (normal-focal length) or telephoto (long focal-length) lens.

## **Camera Angles**

Various positions of the camera (high, medium, or low; and left, right, or straight on) with respect to the subject, each giving a different viewpoint or effect.

## **Aperture**

Lens opening. The opening in a camera lens through which light passes to expose the film. The size of aperture is either fixed or adjustable. Aperture size is usually calibrated in *f*-numbers—the larger the number, the smaller the lens opening.

## **Aperture priority**

An exposure mode on an automatic or autofocus camera that lets you set the aperture while the camera sets the shutter speed for proper exposure. If you change the aperture, or the light level changes, the shutter speed changes automatically.

## **Autofocus**

The camera focuses automatically on the subject in the center of the viewfinder when you press the shutter release.

## **Automatic camera**

A camera with a built-in exposure meter that automatically adjusts the lens opening, shutter speed, or both for proper exposure.

## **B (bulb) setting**

A shutter-speed setting on an adjustable camera that allows for time exposures. When set on B, the shutter will stay open as long as the shutter release button remains depressed.

## **Background**

The part of the scene that appears behind the principal subject of the picture.

## **Backlighting**

Light coming from behind the subject, toward the camera lens, so that the subject stands out vividly against the background. Sometimes produces a silhouette effect.

## **Balance**

Placement of colors, light and dark masses, or large and small objects in a picture to create harmony and equilibrium.

## **Bellows**

The folding (accordion) portion in some cameras that connects the lens to the camera body. Also a camera accessory that, when inserted between the lens and the camera body, extends the lens-to-film distance for close focusing.

## **Between-the-lens shutter**

A shutter whose blades operate between two elements of the lens.

## **Blowup**

An enlargement; a print that is made larger than the negative or slide.

## **Bounce lighting**

Flash or tungsten light bounced off a reflector (such as the ceiling or walls) to give the effect of natural or available light.

## **Bracketing**

Taking additional pictures of the subject through a range of exposures—both lighter and darker—when unsure of the correct exposure.

## **Burning-in**

Giving additional exposure to part of the image projected on an enlarger easel to make that area of the print darker. This is accomplished after the basic exposure by extending the exposure time to allow additional image-forming light to strike the areas in the print you want to darken while holding back the image-forming light from the rest of the image. Sometimes called *printing-in*.

**Candid pictures**

Unposed pictures of people, often taken without the subject's knowledge. These usually appear more natural and relaxed than posed pictures.

**Cartridge**

A lighttight, factory-loaded film container that can be placed in and removed from the camera in daylight.

**Clearing agent**

A chemical that neutralizes hypo in film or paper, reducing wash time and helping to provide a more stable image.

**Close-up**

A picture taken with the subject close to the camera—usually less than two or three feet away, but it can be as close as a few inches.

**Close-up lens**

A lens attachment placed in front of a camera lens to permit taking pictures at a closer distance than the camera lens alone will allow.

**Coated lens**

A lens covered with a very thin layer of transparent material that reduces the amount of light reflected by the surface of the lens. A coated lens is faster (transmits more light) than an uncoated lens.

**Color balance**

How a color film reproduces the colors of a scene. Color films are made to be exposed by light of a certain color quality such as daylight or tungsten. Color balance also refers to the reproduction of colors in color prints, which can be altered during the printing process.

**Composition**

The pleasing arrangement of the elements within a scene—the main subject, the foreground and background, and supporting subjects.

**Condenser enlarger**

An enlarger with a sharp, undiffused light that produces high contrast and high definition in a print. Scratches and blemishes in the negative are emphasized.

**Contact print**

A print made by exposing photographic paper while it is held tightly against the negative. Images in the print will be the same size as those in the negative.

**Contact printer**

A device used for contact-printing that consists of a lighttight box with an internal light source and a printing frame to position the negative against the photographic paper in front of the light.

**Contrast**

The range of difference in the light to dark areas of a negative, print, or slide (also called density); the brightness range of a subject or the scene lighting.

**Contrast grade**

Numbers (usually 1-5) and names (soft, medium, hard, extra-hard, and ultrahard) of the contrast grades of photographic papers, to enable you to get good prints from negatives of different contrasts. Use a low-numbered or soft-contrast paper with a high-contrast negative to get a print that most closely resembles the original scene. Use a high-numbered or an extra-hard paper with a low-contrast negative to get a normal-contrast paper.

**Contrasty**

Higher-than-normal contrast including very bright and dark areas. The range of density in a negative or print is higher than it was in the original scene.

**Cropping**

Printing only part of the image that is in the negative or slide, usually for a more pleasing composition. May also refer to the framing of the scene in the viewfinder.

**Darkroom**

A lighttight area used for processing films and for printing and processing papers; also for loading and unloading film holders and some cameras.

**Dedicated flash**

A fully automatic flash that works only with specific cameras. Dedicated flash units automatically set the proper flash sync speed and lens aperture, and electronic sensors within the camera automatically control exposure by regulating the amount of light from the flash.

**Definition**

The clarity of detail in a photograph.

**Densitometer**

An instrument used for measuring the optical density of an area in a negative or print.

**Density**

The blackness of an area in a negative or print that determines the amount of light that will pass through it or reflect from it. Sometimes referred to as *contrast*.

**Depth of field**

The amount of distance between the nearest and farthest objects that appear in acceptably sharp focus in a photograph. Depth of field depends on the lens opening, the focal length of the lens, and the distance from the lens to the subject.

**Depth of focus**

The distance range over which the film could be shifted at the film plane inside the camera and still have the subject appear in sharp focus; often misused to mean depth of field.

**Developer**

A solution used to turn the latent image into a visible image on exposed films or photographic papers.

**Developing tank**

A lighttight container used for processing film.

**Diaphragm**

Lens opening. A perforated plate or adjustable opening mounted behind or between the elements of a lens used to control the amount of light that reaches the film. Openings are usually calibrated in *f*-numbers.

**Diffuse lighting**

Lighting that is low or moderate in contrast, such as on an overcast day.

**Diffusing**

Softening detail in a print with a *diffusion disk* or other material that scatters light.

**Diffusion-condenser enlarger**

An enlarger that combines diffuse light with a condenser system, producing more contrast and sharper detail than a diffusion enlarger but less contrast and blemish emphasis than a condenser enlarger.

**Diffusion enlarger**

An enlarger that scatters light before it strikes the negative, distributing light evenly on the negative. Detail is not as sharp as with a condenser enlarger; negative blemishes are minimized.

**Dodging**

Holding back the image-forming light from a part of the image projected on an enlarger easel during part of the basic exposure time to make that area of the print lighter.

**Double exposure**

Two pictures taken on one frame of film, or two images printed on one piece of photographic paper.

**Easel**

A device to hold photographic paper flat during exposure, usually equipped with an adjustable metal mask for framing.

**Emulsion**

A thin coating of light-sensitive material, usually silver halide in gelatin, in which the image is formed on film and photographic papers.

**Emulsion side**

The side of the film coated with emulsion. In contact printing and enlarging the emulsion side of the film—dull side—should face the emulsion side of the photo paper—shiny side.

**Enlargement**

A print that is larger than the negative or slide; blowup.

**Enlarger**

A device consisting of a light source, a negative holder, and a lens, and the means of adjusting these to project an enlarged image from a negative onto a sheet of photographic paper.

**Existing light**

Available light. Strictly speaking, existing light covers all natural lighting from moonlight to sunshine. For photographic purposes, existing light is the light that is already on the scene or project and includes room lamps, fluorescent lamps, spotlights, neon signs, candles, daylight through windows, outdoor scenes at twilight or in moonlight, and scenes artificially illuminated after dark.

**Exposure**

The quantity of light allowed to act on a photographic material; product of the intensity (controlled by the lens opening) and the duration (controlled by the shutter speed or enlarging time) of light striking the film or paper.

**Exposure latitude**

The range of camera exposures from underexposure to overexposure that will produce acceptable pictures from a specific film.

**Exposure meter**

An instrument with a light-sensitive cell that measures the light reflected from or falling on a subject, used as an aid for selecting the exposure setting. The same as a light meter.

**Exposure setting**

The lens opening plus shutter speed selected to expose the film.

**Fill-in light**

Additional light from a lamp, flash, or reflector; used to soften or fill in the shadows or dark picture areas caused by the brighter main light. Called *fill-in flash* when electronic flash is used.

**Film**

A photographic emulsion coated on a flexible, transparent base that records images or scenes.

**Film speed**

The sensitivity of a given film to light, indicated by a number such as ISO 200. The higher the number, the more sensitive or faster the film.

**Note:** ISO stands for International Standards Organization.

**Filter**

A colored piece of glass or other transparent material used over the lens to emphasize, eliminate, or change the color or density of the entire scene or certain areas within a scene.

**Finder**

A viewing device on a camera to show the subject area that will be recorded on the film. Also known as *viewfinder* and *projected frame*.

**Fixed-focus lens**

A lens that has been focused in a fixed position by the manufacturer. The user does not have to adjust the focus of this lens.

**Fixing bath**

A solution that removes any light-sensitive silver-halide crystals not acted upon by light or developer, leaving a black-and-white negative or print unalterable by further action of light. Also referred to as *hypo*.

**Flash**

A brief, intense burst of light from a flashbulb or an electronic flash unit, usually used where the lighting on the scene is inadequate for picture-taking.

**Flat**

Too low in contrast. The range in density in a negative or print is too short.

**Flat Lighting**

Lighting that produces very little contrast or modeling on the subject plus a minimum of shadows.

**f-number**

A number that indicates the size of the lens opening on an adjustable camera. The common f-numbers are *f/1.4*, *f/2*, *f/2.8*, *f/4*, *f/5.6*, *f/8*, *f/11*, *f/16*, and *f/22*. The larger the f-number, the smaller the lens opening. In this series, *f/1.4* is the largest lens opening and *f/22* is the smallest. Also called *f-stops*, they work in conjunction with shutter speeds to indicate exposure settings.

**Focal length**

The distance between the film and the optical center of the lens when the lens is focused on infinity. The focal length of the lens on most adjustable cameras is marked in millimetres on the lens mount.

**Focal-plane shutter**

An opaque curtain containing a slit that moves directly across in front of the film in a camera and allows image-forming light to strike the film.

**Focus**

Adjustment of the distance setting on a lens to define the subject sharply.

**Fogging**

Adjustment of the distance setting on a lens to define the subject sharply.

**Forced development**

(See **Push-processing**)

**Foreground**

The area between the camera and the principal subject.

**Frame**

One individual picture on a roll of film. Also, a tree branch, arch, etc., that frames a subject.

**Frontlighting**

Light shining on the side of the subject facing the camera.

**Graininess**

The sand-like or granular appearance of a negative, print, or slide. Graininess becomes more pronounced with faster film and the degree of enlargement.

**High contrast**

A wide range of density in a print or negative.

**Highlights**

The brightest areas of a subject and the corresponding areas in a negative, a print, or a slide.

**Hot shoe**

The fitting on a camera that holds a small portable flash. It has an electrical contact that aligns with the contact on the flash unit's "foot" and fires the flash when you press the shutter release. This direct flash-to-camera contact eliminates the need for a PC cord.

**Hyperfocal distance**

Distance of the nearest object in a scene that is acceptably sharp when the lens is focused on infinity.

**Hypo**

The name for a fixing bath made from sodium thiosulfate, other chemicals, and water; often used as a synonym for fixing bath.

**ISO speed**

The emulsion speed (sensitivity) of the film as determined by the standards of the International Standards Organization. In these standards, both arithmetic (ASA) and logarithmic (DIN) speed values are expressed in a single ISO term. For example, a film with a speed of ISO 100/21° would have a speed of ASA 100 or 21 DIN.

**Latent image**

The invisible image left by the action of light on photographic film or paper. The light changes the photosensitive salts to varying degrees depending on the amount of light striking them. When processed, this latent image will become a visible image either in reversed tones (as in a negative) or in positive tones (as in a color slide).

**Lens**

One or more pieces of optical glass or similar material designed to collect and focus rays of light to form a sharp image on the film, paper, or projection screen.

**Lens shade**

A collar or hood at the front of a lens that keeps unwanted light from striking the lens and causing image flare. May be attached or detachable, and should be sized to the particular lens to avoid vignetting.

**Lens-shutter camera**

A camera with the shutter built into the lens; the viewfinder and picture-taking lens are separate.

**Lens speed**

The largest lens opening (smallest *f*-number) at which a lens can be set. A fast lens transmits more light and has a larger opening than a slow lens.

**Light meter**

(See **Exposure meter**)

**Macro lens**

A lens that provides continuous focusing from infinity to extreme close-ups, often to a reproduction ratio of 1:2 (half life-size) or 1:1 (life-size).

**Magazine**

A lighttight metal container (cartridge) that holds 135 film (cylindrical magazine).

**Motor drive**

A mechanism for advancing the film to the next frame and recocking the shutter, activated by an electric motor usually powered by batteries. Popular for action-sequence photography and for recording images by remote control.

**Negative**

The developed film that contains a reversed tone image of the original scene.

**Negative holder**

A device designed to hold the negative in proper position in an enlarger.

**Normal lens**

A lens that makes the image in a photograph appear in perspective similar to that of the original scene. A normal lens has a shorter focal length and a wider field of view than a telephoto lens, and a longer focal length and narrower field of view than a wide-angle lens.

**Off-the-film metering**

A meter which determines exposure by reading light reflected from the film during picture-taking.

**Ortho (orthochromatic)**

Denotes film sensitive to blue and green light.

**Overexposure**

A condition in which too much light reaches the film, producing a dense negative or a very light print or slide.

**Panning**

Moving the camera so that the image of a moving object remains in the same relative position in the viewfinder as you take a picture.

**Pan (panchromatic)**

Designation of films that record all colors in tones of about the same relative brightness as the human eye sees in the original scene; sensitive to all visible wavelengths.

**Panorama**

A broad view, usually scenic.

**Parallax**

With a lens-shutter camera, parallax is the difference between what the viewfinder sees and what the camera records, especially at close distances. This is caused by the separation between the viewfinder and the picture-taking lens. There is no parallax with single-lens-reflex cameras because when you look through the viewfinder, you are viewing the subject through the picture-taking lens.

**Perforations**

Regularly and accurately spaced holes punched throughout the length of 35 mm film for still cameras.

**Polarizing screen filter**

A filter that transmits light traveling in one plane while absorbing light traveling in other planes. When placed on a camera lens or on light sources, it can eliminate undesirable reflections from a subject such as water, glass, or other objects with shiny surfaces. This filter also darkens blue sky.

**Positive**

The opposite of a negative. An image with the same tonal relationships as those in the original scenes—for example, a finished print or a slide.

**Print**

A positive picture, usually on paper, and usually produced from a negative.

**Printing frame**

A device used for contact printing that holds a negative against the photographic paper. The paper is exposed by light from an external light source.

**Printing-in**

(See **Burning-in**)

**Processing**

Developing, fixing, and washing exposed photographic film or paper to produce either a negative image or a positive image.

**Program exposure**

An exposure mode on an automatic or autofocus camera that automatically sets both the aperture and the shutter speed for proper exposure.

**Projected frame**

(See **Finder**)

**Push processing**

Increasing the development time of a film to increase its effective speed (raising the ISO number for initial exposure) for low-light situations; forced development.

**Rangefinder**

A device included on many cameras as an aid in focusing.

**Reflector**

Any device used to reflect light onto a subject.

**Reticulation**

Cracking or distorting of the emulsion during processing, usually caused by wide temperature or chemical-activity differences between the solutions.

**Retouching**

Altering a print or negative after development by use of dyes or pencils to alter tones of highlights, shadows, and other details, or to remove blemishes.

**Safelight**

An enclosed darkroom lamp fitted with a filter to screen out light rays to which film and paper are sensitive.

**Saturation**

An attribute of perceived color, or the percentage of hue in a color. Saturated colors are called vivid, strong, or deep. Desaturated colors are called dull, weak, or washed out.

**Selective focus**

Choosing a lens opening that produces a shallow depth of field. Usually this is used to isolate a subject by causing most other elements in the scene to be blurred.

**Shutter**

Blades, a curtain, plate, or some other movable cover in a camera that controls the time during which light reaches the film.

**Shutter priority**

An exposure mode on an automatic or autofocus camera that lets you select the desired shutter speed; the camera sets the aperture for proper exposure. If you change the shutter speed, or the light level changes, the camera adjusts the aperture automatically.

**Sidelighting**

Light striking the subject from the side relative to the position of the camera; produces shadows and highlights to create modeling of the subject.

**Simple camera**

A camera that has few or no adjustments to be made by the picture-taker. Usually, simple cameras have only one size of lens opening and one or two shutter speeds and do not require focusing by the picture-taker.

**Single-lens-reflex (SLR) camera**

A camera in which you view the scene through the same lens that takes the picture.

**Slide**

A photographic transparency (positive) mounted for projection.

**Soft focus**

Produced by use of a special lens that creates soft outlines.

**Soft lighting**

Lighting that is low or moderate in contrast, such as on an overcast day.

**Spotting**

Retouching a processed print with a pencil or brush (with watercolors or dyes) to eliminate spots left by dust or scratches on the negative.

**Stain**

Discolored areas on film or paper, usually caused by contaminated developing solutions or by insufficient fixing, washing, or agitation.

**Stop bath**

An acid rinse, usually a weak solution of acetic acid, used as a second step when developing black-and-white film or paper. It stops development and makes the hypo (fixing bath) last longer.

**Stopping down**

Changing the lens aperture to a smaller opening; for example, from *f*/8 to *f*/11.

**Telephoto lens**

A lens that makes a subject appear larger on film than does a normal lens at the same camera-to-subject distance. A telephoto lens has a longer focal length and narrower field of view than a normal lens.

**Thin negative**

A negative that is underexposed or underdeveloped (or both). A thin negative appears less dense than a normal negative.

**Through-the-lens focusing**

Viewing a scene to be photographed through the same lens that admits light to the film. Through-the-lens viewing, as in a single-lens-reflex (SLR) camera, while focusing and composing a picture eliminates parallax.

**Through-the-lens metering**

A meter built into the camera determines exposure for the scene by reading light that passes through the lens during picture-taking.

**Time exposure**

A comparatively long exposure made in seconds or minutes.

**Tint**

Shades of white in a finished print, controlled by the color of the paper, varying from white to buff.

**Tone**

The degree of lightness or darkness in any given area of a print; also referred to as value. Cold tones (bluish) and warm tones (reddish) refer to the color of the image in both black-and-white and color photographs.

**Toning**

Intensifying or changing the tone of a photographic print after processing. Solutions called toners are used to produce various shades of colors.

**Transparency**

A positive photographic image on film, viewed or projected by transmitted light (light shining through the film).

**Tripod**

A three-legged supporting stand used to hold the camera steady. Especially useful when using slow shutter speeds and/or telephoto lenses.

**Tungsten light**

Light from regular room lamps and ceiling fixtures, not fluorescent.

**Underexposure**

A condition in which too little light reaches the film, producing a thin negative, a dark slide, or a muddy-looking print.

**Unipod**

A one-legged support used to hold the camera steady.

**Variable-contrast paper**

Photographic paper that provides different grades of contrast when exposed through special filters.

**Viewfinder**

(See **Finder**)

**Vignetting**

A fall-off in brightness at the edges of an image, slide, or print. Can be caused by poor lens design, using a lens hood not matched to the lens, or attaching too many filters to the front of the lens.

**Wide-angle lens**

A lens that has a shorter focal length and a wider field of view (includes more subject area) than a normal lens.

**Zoom lens**

A lens in which you adjust the focal length over a wide range. In effect, this gives you lenses of many focal lengths.

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