

5 Things You Should Know About Your Camera's LCD

Popular Photography by Kathleen Davis -- Sept. 21/09

1. What You See May Not Be What You Get

If you shoot RAW, the LCD actually shows you the JPEG preview. So don't panic if the color, contrast, and exposure aren't exactly what you were looking for—your file will contain more data and be more flexible. On the other hand, the LCD image may look better than your final print—images on LCD screens often seem brighter and sharper because they are smaller and backlit, so some exposure and focus issues may not be detectable.

2. You Can Zoom In To Check for Problems

LCDs on both compacts and DSLRs almost always let you zoom in on areas in an image. Use yours to check for sharpness and depth of field.

3. It Can Help You Compose Your Picture

Many cameras allow you to place grid lines over the image on your LCD during live-view shooting (and sometimes during playback). Use this grid to make sure your horizon is level, remind yourself not to place your subject squarely in the middle.

4. It May Display Histograms for Both Exposure and Color

The exposure histogram graphs the tones in your image from shadows (black on the left) to highlights (white on the right). The higher the peaks on the histogram in a given spot, the more pixels of that tone there are in your photo. A warning will blink over the areas in your image that are overexposed.

Many cameras also have RGB histograms—three separate graphs for each color channel. Find them in the custom functions or via the Info menu. These work the same way as the exposure histogram and can help you figure out if you're losing detail in a particular color.

5. You Can Modify the JPEG Preview of a RAW File With Out Changing the Image File

The LCD allows you to preview different versions of your image. For instance, you can compare how the image would look set for "natural" versus "saturated" color, or check it out with more or less contrast. Shooting JPEGs? You can modify the file itself through controls on the LCD.