

## Adjusting Exposure

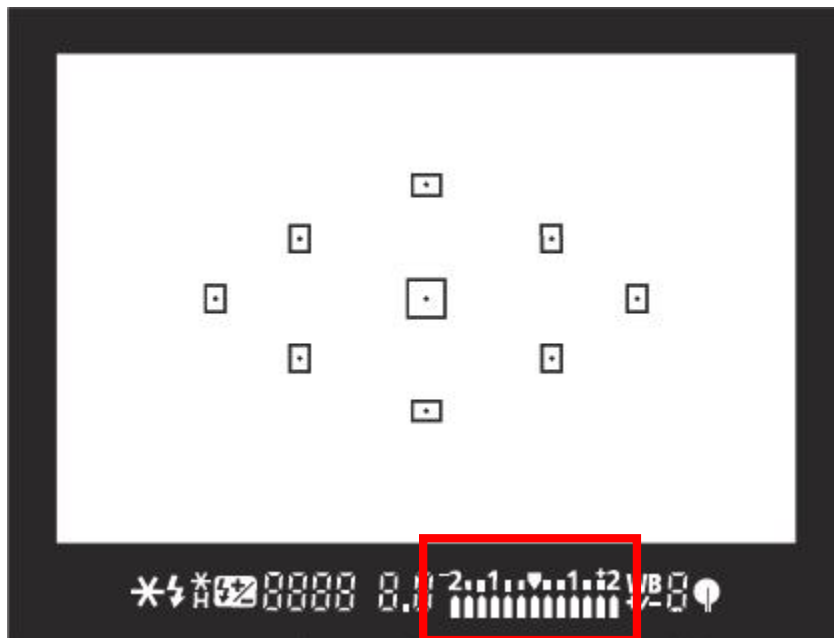
### Monday Morning Tip

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When I wrote the previous MMT about Nailing the Exposure, I should have realized that many people would ask, “How do you enter these corrections/adjustments?” I assumed most people knew the basics of their metering system but this has turned out to be a bad assumption.

This MMT is not about the different metering systems such as Spot, Partial Spot, Evaluative, Matrix, Weighted Average, etc. This MMT is a step-by-step that shows what to look for and how to adjust it.

The viewfinder image below is for a Canon Digital Rebel XTi but it’s pretty much the same for all digital SLRs. Point & Shoot cameras may have similar looking viewfinders but the actual controls will probably be very different.



The exposure level indicator is the area inside the red box. The same indicator will appear in the top LCD of most dSLRs. Only one arrowhead along the bottom will be lit at a time. That tells you the exposure relative to what the meter is measuring. Assuming EC (exposure compensation) is set to zero, when the bottom arrowhead matches the center top arrowhead, your exposure matches what the meter is seeing.

Most dSLRs have either 1 or 2 dials to adjust aperture and shutter speed. On 2-dial cameras, one controls aperture and the

other controls shutter speed. On 1-dial cameras like the Canon XTi, press the Av button to the top-right of the LCD while turning the main dial just behind the shutter release to change aperture. Shutter speed is adjusted by turning the control dial by itself. Other dSLRs will have similar buttons and dials somewhere on the camera.

First, determine what is important in the frame. If scene is predominantly light such as snow or sky without clouds, the meter will try to underexpose because it’s been taught that the world is mainly 18% neutral gray. A dark subject in the scene will be even more underexposed so to correctly expose for the dark subject, you would add +EC.

If, on the other hand, you’re photographing a predominantly dark scene, you’ll have to subtract –EC because the camera will overexpose trying to make the dark scene turn neutral gray. If the subject is largely neutral and the sun is out, trust the meter.

So, step-by-step, acquire the subject in your viewfinder and half-press the shutter release. That will actuate both AF (auto focus) and AE (auto exposure) unless you have changed the sequence in your Custom Settings. Note the overall brightness of the scene and the size of your subject relative to the background. If the overall scene is near neutral gray and the sun is out, the meter is probably correct unless your subject has very light or dark areas of detail. If the overall scene is brighter than neutral gray and your subject is darker than average, add +EC. This may result in a white background with birds in flight but you will preserve the details in the feathers. How much depends on how bright the scene meters and how large your subject is in the frame. If the overall scene is darker than neutral gray and your subject is lighter than the scene, subtract –EC to avoid underexposing the subject.

All this sounds good but why would one want to dial in EC to change the metered exposure? Can't the meter figure out the correct exposure? In a word, no, your meter is an idiot. Like most electronic devices, meters work according to algorithms (formulas) programmed in by some engineer. Don't get me wrong, these are very smart engineers but they're not standing next to you when you meter the scene. They don't know if your subject is backlit, front lit, side lit, top lit or unlit. To top it off, the CPU (computer) inside your camera is a mental midget compared to, say, the Intel Core2Duo running your PC. It can only store so much data and formulae while photos can be taken in an endless variety of conditions and situations. Finally, meters only know dark and light. They don't understand color so Coca-Cola red meters the same as medium blue sky and they both meter the same as bright green grass.



That's why a scene like this osprey needs +1 2/3 EC. The combination of lots of pale blue sky and white breast causes the meter to "see" lots of white. When the meter sees white, it tries to set that as neutral gray because it "knows" the world averages out to 18% gray. In the process, white turns gray. If you've ever taken photos of a smaller dark object in the snow, the snow comes out gray and the dark object is a muddy mess because the whole scene is underexposed. Now you know to add in +1 to +2 EC in snow or light sky conditions.

By adding +1 2/3 EC, I told the meter, "Shut up and do it my way!" I increased the exposure so white came out as white and pale blue came out as pale blue.

Meters work well under "normal" conditions. Camera meters don't do pure black or pure white very well. Of course, being an idiot, it you have a pure white snow covered meadow

filled with black cows so that about half the area is cows and the other half snow, the meter will work just fine. Did I mention the meter is a mental midget?

Until you get this concept under your belt, check the histogram and add +EC to make it brighter or subtract –EC to make it darker.