The lens and the look

Full course PDF

Learn framing, camera, light, prompts and delivery through short lessons and practice.

5. The lens and the look

The focal length is fixed. Name the term: _____.

Prime lens

The focal length is fixed.

Nikon’s explanation of physical lenses. A lens name in a generation prompt does not install that optical system.

https://www.nikonusa.com/learn-and-explore/c/tips-and-techniques/understanding-focal-length · 2026-09-16

The focal length is adjustable. Name the term: _____.

Zoom lens

The focal length is adjustable.

Nikon’s explanation of physical lenses. A lens name in a generation prompt does not install that optical system.

https://www.nikonusa.com/learn-and-explore/c/tips-and-techniques/understanding-focal-length · 2026-09-16

For the same camera format and viewpoint, it narrows the view and increases magnification. Name the term: _____.

Longer focal length

For the same camera format and viewpoint, it narrows the view and increases magnification.

Nikon’s explanation of physical lenses. A lens name in a generation prompt does not install that optical system.

https://www.nikonusa.com/learn-and-explore/c/tips-and-techniques/understanding-focal-length · 2026-09-16

For the same camera format and viewpoint, it widens the view and reduces magnification. Name the term: _____.

Shorter focal length

For the same camera format and viewpoint, it widens the view and reduces magnification.

Nikon’s explanation of physical lenses. A lens name in a generation prompt does not install that optical system.

https://www.nikonusa.com/learn-and-explore/c/tips-and-techniques/understanding-focal-length · 2026-09-16

Designed to focus close to small subjects. Name the term: _____.

Macro lens

Designed to focus close to small subjects.

Nikon’s explanation of physical lenses. A lens name in a generation prompt does not install that optical system.

https://www.nikonusa.com/learn-and-explore/c/tips-and-techniques/understanding-focal-length · 2026-09-16

The opening through which light enters the lens. Name the term: _____.

Aperture

The opening through which light enters the lens.

Nikon’s explanation of aperture. Compare changes with the other camera and scene conditions held constant.

https://www.nikonusa.com/learn-and-explore/c/tips-and-techniques/what-is-aperture · 2026-09-16

A larger lens opening admits more light. Name the term: _____.

Low f-number

A larger lens opening admits more light.

Nikon’s explanation of aperture. Compare changes with the other camera and scene conditions held constant.

https://www.nikonusa.com/learn-and-explore/c/tips-and-techniques/what-is-aperture · 2026-09-16

A smaller lens opening admits less light. Name the term: _____.

High f-number

A smaller lens opening admits less light.

Nikon’s explanation of aperture. Compare changes with the other camera and scene conditions held constant.

https://www.nikonusa.com/learn-and-explore/c/tips-and-techniques/what-is-aperture · 2026-09-16

The span of distances that appears acceptably sharp. Name the term: _____.

Depth of field

The span of distances that appears acceptably sharp.

Nikon’s explanation of aperture. Compare changes with the other camera and scene conditions held constant.

https://www.nikonusa.com/learn-and-explore/c/tips-and-techniques/what-is-aperture · 2026-09-16

It reduces depth of field when other conditions stay fixed. Name the term: _____.

Wide aperture

It reduces depth of field when other conditions stay fixed.

Nikon’s explanation of aperture. Compare changes with the other camera and scene conditions held constant.

https://www.nikonusa.com/learn-and-explore/c/tips-and-techniques/what-is-aperture · 2026-09-16

How would you use this principle: Grade from a reference and the story's arc, not shot by shot?

choose the anchor frame for a sequence and match to it. A reel graded one pretty shot at a time has no shape, and an audience should feel the film brighten or cool because the story does.

https://shotcraft.video/learn/crafts/colorist/

How would you use this principle: Respect the display transform?

in a colour-managed pipeline the path from scene-referred data to the display is fixed, and the grade belongs in front of it. Fighting the transform, clipping highlights to force contrast and then rescuing them, is why a grade stops travelling between HDR, SDR and a phone.

https://shotcraft.video/learn/crafts/colorist/

How would you use this principle: Contrast before colour?

putting black, white and the mid-tone where they belong does most of what people call the look. Hue moves made before the tonal range is set have to be made again.

https://shotcraft.video/learn/crafts/colorist/

How would you use this principle: Shape the eye's path?

a frame is a hierarchy. Windows, tracked mattes and small desaturations decide what a viewer looks at first, second and never. This is closer to lighting than to painting.

https://shotcraft.video/learn/crafts/colorist/

How would you use this principle: Latitude is finite and belongs to the story?

log camera negative holds a great deal but not everything. Spend the recoverable highlight or shadow range where the scene needs it and stop reaching for more.

https://shotcraft.video/learn/crafts/colorist/

How would you use this principle: Shots match when the faces match?

scopes keep you consistent and legal, but the judgement is made on skin, sky and any object the audience already knows the colour of.

https://shotcraft.video/learn/crafts/colorist/

How would you use this principle: A focus pull is a rehearsed performance, not a reaction?

it is a set of physical marks and a rhythm learned in rehearsal. When the actor changes the timing, you follow their intention rather than their distance, which is why the good ones watch the performer and not the barrel.

https://shotcraft.video/learn/crafts/first-ac/

How would you use this principle: The subject is a decision, not a fact?

in a two-shot at a wide stop, somebody is soft. Knowing which eye of which actor the scene needs sharp on which line is the difference between a focus puller and a rangefinder.

https://shotcraft.video/learn/crafts/first-ac/

How would you use this principle: Prep is where the day is won?

a lens with drifting back focus, a loose mount or an unbalanced head produces failures that look like operator error and cost hours on the floor. Collimation and tracking get checked before the camera leaves the rental house, not on set.

https://shotcraft.video/learn/crafts/first-ac/

How would you use this principle: Report the soft take?

the only expensive mistake is the one found in the edit. Saying 'that one was soft' within five seconds is the job, and the role rewards people who are comfortable being briefly unpopular.

https://shotcraft.video/learn/crafts/first-ac/

How would you use this principle: Own the physical order of the truck and the cart?

kit packed in shooting order buys minutes at every setup, and those minutes are what let the cinematographer light the last shot of the day properly.

https://shotcraft.video/learn/crafts/first-ac/

Progress can be exported to a file and imported again. With no server, that file is the only real guarantee — browsers do clear storage.