

Mastering MANUAL MODE

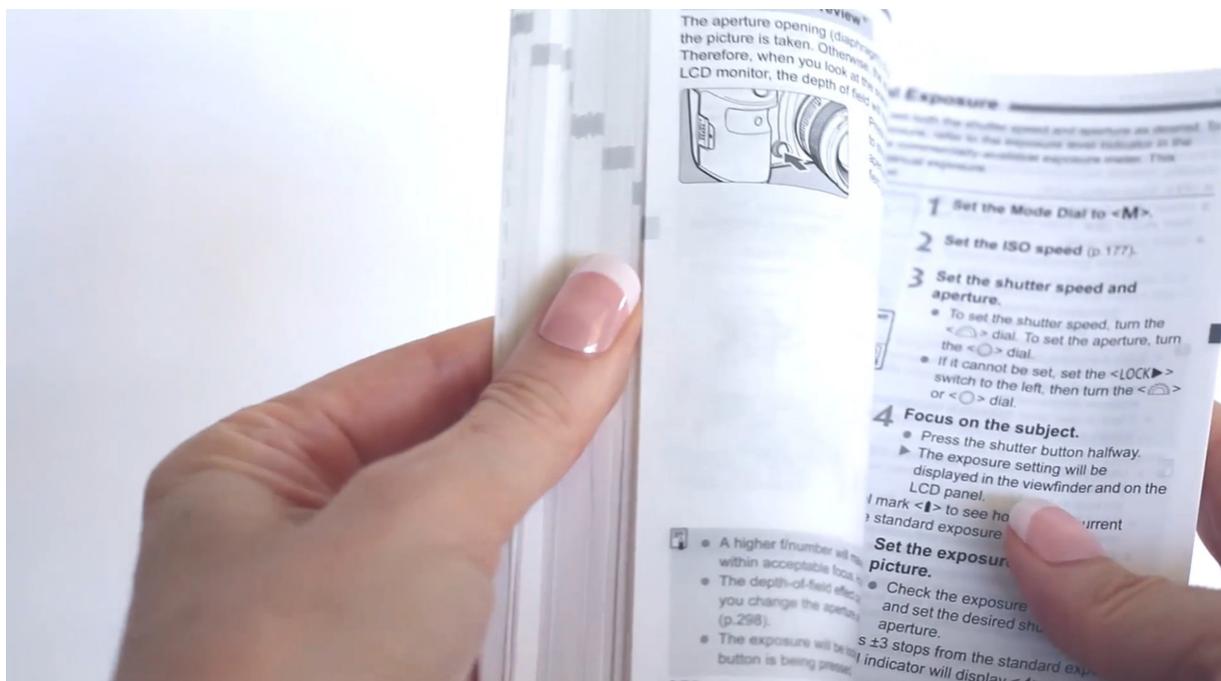
Module 1 Introduction

Getting Started

What you need to get started

This course is suitable for any SLR camera that offers a full manual mode functionality. It has to offer the ability to adjust aperture, shutter speed and ISO manually.

You will also need a copy of your camera manual because every camera has a slightly different way to adjust settings. Throughout this course, I will refer to specific functions and you will need to know where to find them, by referring to your manual.



You can stop the video at any time, and continue once you have discovered how to adjust the necessary setting.

If you don't have a copy of your manual you will be able to download it online directly from the manufacturer's website. Just do a google search on your camera model and add the words 'download manual' and it should pop up. Otherwise, go to the manufacturer's website and view the downloads section in their support portal.



I will often use canon as an example since this is the equipment that I personally use, but any SLR camera is suitable.

What kind of lenses do you need for this course?

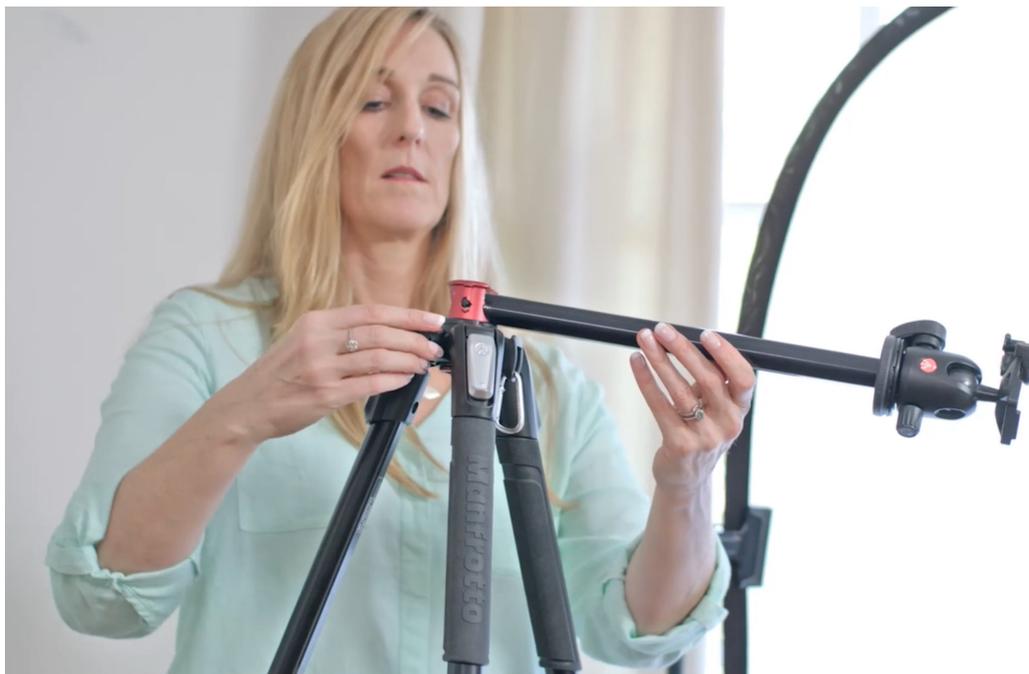
In terms of lenses, this is a big subject in itself. Luckily enough, I've actually written a detailed article about this very topic on my blog which you can find on my website. The link is just below this video in the module notes. The article gives detailed information about which are the best lenses that you can use for food photography, from beginner right through to professional level.

My suggestion for this course would be to ideally have at least one lens from the list of recommendations in the article, but you can absolutely use any lens that you already have to get started. You can always upgrade later. As long as you have a lens that attaches to your SLR camera, you're ready to rock!

Do you need a tripod?

Many food photographers are also bloggers. They often don't use or recommend a tripod. The reason for this is that they have a location with an ideal lighting scenario, and they use this same lighting scenario all the time. They are also often self-taught and haven't necessarily learnt the versatility that tripods offer.

The problem is that a large proportion of people actually don't have an ideal lighting scenario in their home or work environment. And this is where your tripod is key. Using a tripod for food photography can feel a bit restricting initially until you get used to it. (Believe me, I resisted for a long time!) But once you have got the hang of it, it's actually very freeing, because it offers you a whole extra range of possibilities that are inaccessible without it.



Apart from low-light environments, another scenario that a tripod is an absolute essential is when you want to use slow shutter speeds. Using slow shutter speeds without a tripod will result in blurred images.

So what kind of tripod should you use? Well, you need to choose something stable and steady. This is different to what you might select for taking nature shots while you're trekking for example. In that case, you're looking for something light and portable. For food photography, however, you want something strong, steady and easy to adjust in micro-increments. For a beginner, I would suggest avoiding very cheap tripods. While pricewise, they are very tempting, they are usually very flimsy. The extension points are very weak and they often become a bin item very quickly.



Bear in mind that a tripod is a solid piece of equipment that doesn't go out of date, that you will potentially use for decades. If you are planning to shoot food long term, it is worthwhile to buy a decent one. If you're thinking of buying a new tripod I have written a guide to tripods on my website that will point you in the right direction. The link is in the modules notes below.

BUT if you already have a basic tripod right now, there's nothing to stop you starting this course and using this tripod. If you find at some stage that you need to upgrade it, then that's an easy thing to do. If you don't have a tripod at all, that's OK too. You can still start the course, but you will need to have one when we are doing exercises with slow shutter speeds.

What other equipment do you need?

If you have already read my book, *The Ultimate Guide to Natural Light for Food Photography*, (which is included for free in eBook format with this course) you'll already know that a diffuser and a reflector are essential items for manipulating light in natural light food photography. If you don't have this knowledge yet, I suggest that it would be ideal for you to learn a bit about natural light manipulation as soon as possible. You can still continue with this course and learn the full functionality of your camera, but to get the results I know you really want, you will need to know a bit about lighting also. So pick a quiet day and settle in for a bit of reading and experimentation so you can be up to speed as soon as possible.



As well as your camera and preferably a tripod, you will also obviously need a subject to photograph. Now I suggest because your full attention should be on learning the manual mode functionalities in your camera, you don't want to be wasting time faffing around with styling and cooking and all those other great things that are usually part of creating a great food image.



Start out with a really simple subject so that you can be laser-focused on how your camera works. Fruit is an excellent subject or anything that's pre-cooked, pretty and ready to go, like cookies or waffles for example. Put together a single plate subject. Don't worry about other props for now.



The one other thing that you will need is a background. Now, you may start out thinking that you're going to do an overhead shot. So you might only put a base background down, but inevitably you'll find, if you choose to do an overhead shot and only set up a baseboard background, you'll undoubtedly end up deciding halfway through that you want to shoot a front view shot also. So I always make sure to set up a vertical background as well. I would say nine times out of 10 I do end up taking a few shots from that angle also.

Also when you've gone to all the effort of actually setting up a shoot, it's ideal to make the most of that effort by taking shots from a few angles. So my tip is to always set up a vertical as well as a base background. If you'd like some guidance around sourcing the best backgrounds, you will find a detailed article on my blog. The link is in the lesson notes below.

Where to shoot your assignments

The best environment to do your assignments in is in a room with generous natural lighting. Ideally, position your key window light to one side of your shoot table, and filter the light with a diffuser. For lots of detailed information on creating the best natural lighting, please refer to the eBook that came with this course as a free bonus, *The Ultimate Guide to Natural Light for Food Photography*.

If you are in an environment that isn't bright enough, some of the semi-automatic functions on your camera might not work. I explain this in more detail later. If you come across this situation, you need to find a setting with more light to be able to do some of the assignments. Once you have learnt manual mode this won't be an issue, because you'll know how to use slow shutter speeds, which means that low-light won't be a problem.

