

Is Your Smartphone Camera Limiting Your Creativity?

These are the show notes for the Shootorials Podcast, Episode 04. To listen to the podcast go to <https://shootorials.com>.

Camera sales have literally plummeted since smart phones came on the scene and gave you a camera in your pocket, always at the ready. So if you're like most people, you're using your phone to take pictures. Everyone's doing it. I have a million pictures of my cats on my phone. Here are my boys, Indu and Loki...



I have two more cats, Minou and Delphi. All my cat pictures are taken on my phone.

In the podcast, Kam and Eras wondered if I ever took client pictures with my phone and they laughed at the idea. I actually have, but only twice. Some locations won't allow you to shoot with cameras, but they will allow you to take pictures with your phone. And that was the situation with these...



Why use a camera?

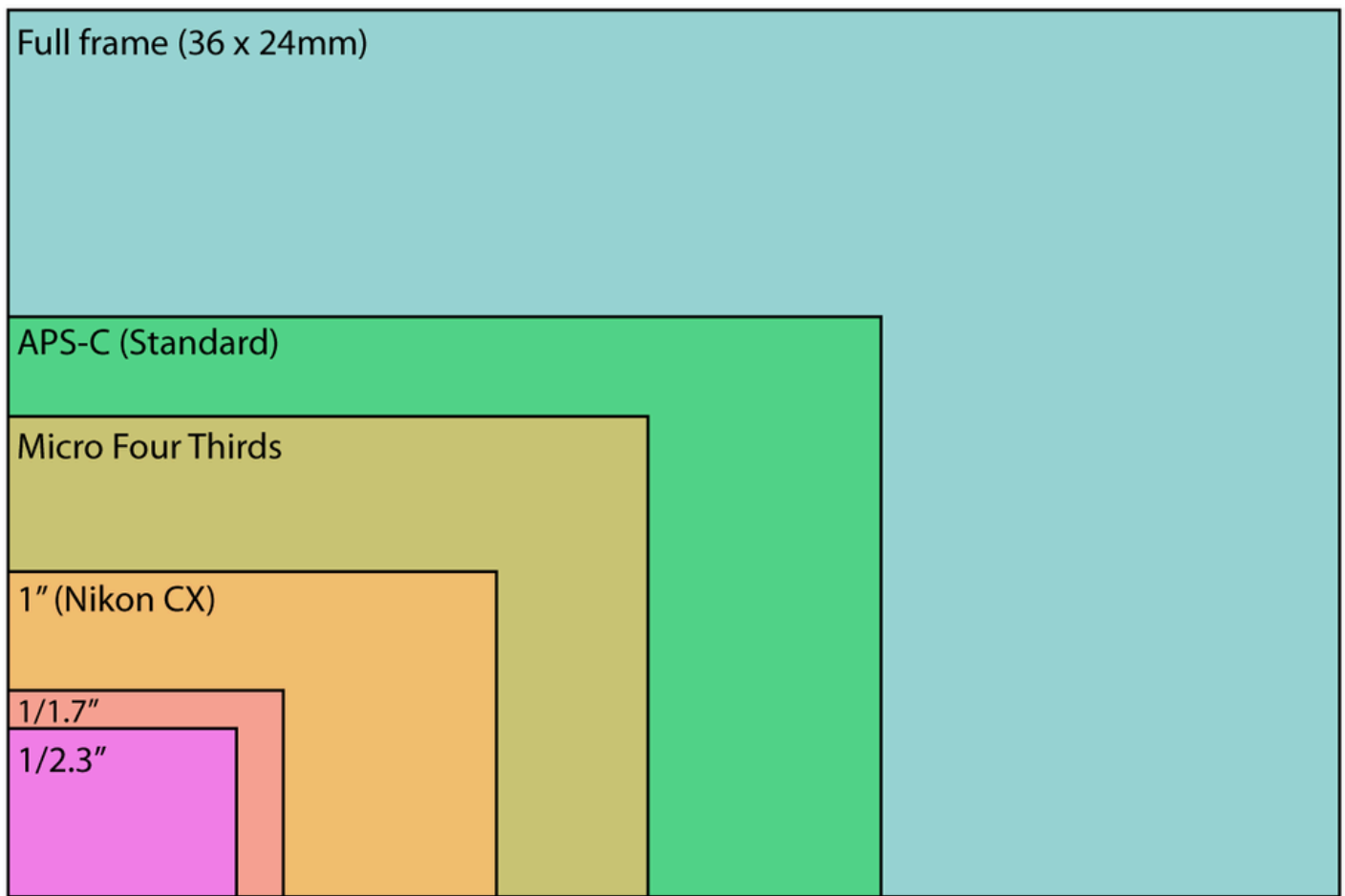
If you really enjoy photography you may be wondering whether there are any advantages to buying a camera. What are the advantages of a dedicated camera like a DSLR or mirrorless camera?

It's true that phones can take some fantastic images. I've even heard some professional photographers say that they wish they could use their phones on some shoots, but it just wouldn't look professional. Phones have a lot of great technology built right in that give you a decent finished image without having to do any significant editing. And that might suit your needs just fine, but if you want to take your photography to another level, you really should consider buying a interchangeable lens camera. Here are my top three reasons to learn how to use a dedicated camera instead of relying on a smartphone:

1. Image Quality

Bigger sensors mean better quality. Cameras, especially those with larger sensors (like DSLRs and mirrorless models), offer significantly better image quality, particularly in low-light conditions. The higher resolution, better color depth, and reduced noise allow for much sharper, clearer, and more detailed images than most smartphones, with their tiny sensors, can provide. The illustration below shows you the relative size of a phone's camera sensor

(pink) compared to a standard DSLR or mirrorless camera's sensor (light blue). Phone sensors are about a half inch corner to corner. That's not even as wide as your pinky finger!



2. Lens Versatility

Cameras allow you to switch between a variety of lenses—such as wide-angle, telephoto, and macro—giving you far more creative options and adaptability to different shooting situations. Whether you're capturing landscapes, portraits, or distant wildlife, having the ability to change lenses enhances your photographic range.

3. The biggest benefit from a creative standpoint is Creative Lighting Control

A camera gives you full manual control over settings like aperture, shutter speed, and ISO, allowing you to create specific artistic effects that are hard to achieve with a smartphone. Whether you want to control motion blur, depth of field, or light exposure, a dedicated camera offers more flexibility and precision in crafting your shot.

As well, dedicated cameras allow you to connect external flashes or strobes, giving you complete control over your lighting environment. With external lights, you can:

- Shape Light: Use softboxes, umbrellas, or reflectors to diffuse light and create soft, flattering shadows, or use grids and snoots to focus light and create dramatic effects.
- Sync Multiple Lights: With the ability to control and sync multiple lights, you can build complex lighting setups that help you sculpt your subject in a way that smartphone lighting can't match.
- Creative Flash Effects: With external strobes or flashes, you can experiment with techniques like rear-curtain sync, off-camera flash, or light painting—techniques that are hard to achieve with built-in smartphone lighting.

This flexibility allows photographers to be much more creative and precise with how they light their subjects, making it a significant benefit for those who want to take their photography to the next level.

These three reasons—creative control, superior image quality, and lens versatility—are the key factors that set cameras apart from smartphones and make them a valuable tool for anyone serious about photography. Having said that, I want to be clear that there is no judgement for anyone that uses their phone. The best camera is the one you have. Creativity lives in your mind, not in your gear. Get to know the capabilities of your phone and you'll be able to take some awesome images.

Start Cheap

If you decide to make the leap and go from your phone to a dedicated camera, my suggestion is always to start cheap. Buy an entry level DSLR or mirrorless camera with a kit lens. Expensive cameras won't necessarily make more impactful pictures, so why spend thousands of dollars? If you find that using a dedicated camera doesn't work for you, then you can sell it used and recoup the little bit you spent or you can give it away to a niece, nephew, grandchild, or friend as a gift.



The gear doesn't matter. A camera doesn't take good or bad pictures. A photographer takes good or bad pictures.

Learn the basics on an inexpensive camera and then after you master the fundamental skills you can always upgrade to the camera of your dreams. You'll have a better understanding of how you use your camera and the additional features you'd want when you upgrade to a more expensive

model. You can use the same lenses on your upgraded camera, so you only need to buy the camera body when you upgrade. To save even more money, buy a used or refurbished model.

I'd suggest you buy a kit that includes the camera body and a lens, usually an 18-55mm zoom lens.



Most entry level cameras come in a kit which include the camera body and a “kit lens”, usually a 18mm to 55mm zoom lens.

In addition, buy yourself a 50mm lens, often referred to as a nifty fifty. These are relatively cheap, usually under \$200, and they'll have a wide aperture (usually f/1.8) that will allow you to shoot in

low light and get those blurry backgrounds that seem to be the big thing lately.

You'll find that every photographer has strong feelings about what camera or camera brand is the best one. The truth is that almost every camera produced in the past few years will do a great job of taking pictures.

Having watched beginning and even experienced photographers struggle with camera settings on various models of cameras, I'd say Canon menus are the most intuitive and they have in-camera guides that tell you what the settings do. So while any camera will do, I'm partial to Canon cameras for novice and intermediate photographers. I'm not going to give comprehensive reviews; there are thousands of people who do camera reviews if you want to know more about specific models of cameras. However, be warned: it can be overwhelming and it's easy to find yourself down the rabbit hole.

A few camera recommendations

As I always say, "the gear doesn't matter. Nevertheless, here are some recommendations which can serve as a starting point if you're making the move from your phone to a dedicated camera with interchangeable lenses:

DSLR cameras

Canon EOS Rebel T7

This might be the best bang for your buck. Great image quality. Shoots well in most light conditions. Has built-in WiFi for instant photo sharing. Captures video at Full 1080p HD. Easy-to-navigate LCD without too much of a learning curve.

Canon EOS Rebel SL3

A step up from the T7, it's a powerful and lightweight entry-level DSLR that is perfect for taking on the go and taking excellent photos. It's super lightweight. Even so, it delivers exposure controls and image quality similar to other Canon models. A rather great option for both the price point and form factor. Unlike the T7 it has an articulating screen, which is always a nice feature.

Mirrorless cameras

These are more expensive than DSLRs, but are the future of photography, so you may consider starting with a mirrorless camera. There is no difference in image quality between a DSLR and a mirrorless camera.

Canon EOS R100

If you want to join the mirrorless world, the Canon EOS R100 is one of the least expensive ways to get there.

Canon EOS R50

The step up in this category of beginner mirrorless cameras is the EOS R50. The autofocus is more sophisticated, as are its video capabilities, and it has an articulated touchscreen which is always a plus. But now you're getting close to the \$1000 range which kind of negates the idea of getting a cheap camera to test the waters.

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