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# NIKON GLASS

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MONDAY, MAY 5, 2008

## D300 Custom Settings (Version 2.0)

This is basically the same article as my original D300 Custom settings article but has been updated with some minor changes and enriched with more helpful info.

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Thankfully with every generation of camera, setting them up for ones personal style is getting easier and more effective. Even so, some newcomers are still finding it hard to make the right selections. I'm posting my personal selections together with some commentary in an attempt to help others better understand the options available. Please note though that my selections may not be fit for someone else's shooting style. Hope you find this article informative and would welcome your comments and suggestions at the end of this post.

### Banks

The settings for the "Shooting menu" and "Custom Setting menu" can be stored in one of four banks in each menu. In the "Shooting menu" I have stored 4 different combinations (as seen below) but in the "Custom Settings menu", I have only one combination. That's because the differences between my 4 possible combinations are minimal and don't warrant the creation of 4 different combinations. But I still have quick access to all my needed settings from the menu "My menu" (as seen below) where I can store all my most frequently used settings for easy and quick access!

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### Playback menu:

Image review = On/Off

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When shooting events amongst crowds such as in weddings, parties, street photography etc I prefer to switch off the image review and use the Play button when I need to do any checking. I have placed this setting in "My menu" for easy access.

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## Shooting menu:

### BANK A: 12bit/Compressed Color/400ISO

The majority of the times I pick up my camera it's for shooting birds, so this is the bank I use most often. I have pretty much standardised on 400 ISO for my wildlife photography and feel comfortable going up to 1600 or even 3200 ISO if the situation warranted such a speed. I use this bank for pretty much 85% of my photography.

### BANK B: 12bit/Compressed B&W/800ISO

I use this bank when I find the time for some street photography or when I visit a new place and find myself shooting the locals. I don't use this bank as often as I would like to.

### BANK C: 12bit/Compressed Color/Auto ISO (125/3200)

I haven't used this bank much for my personal photography, but for work (reportage) I have used it quite often and I think the Auto ISO feature is the way of the future. It's very practical and seems very effective, yet I find myself wanting to be in control of the ISO. Still, in some low light conditions and in situations where the lighting conditions change rapidly this bank has helped me continue working while automatically providing me with the necessary shutter speeds at the best possible ISO's while I stay focused on my subjects. I use this bank when not using a flash in difficult, changing and unpredictable lighting conditions.

### BANK D: 14bit Uncompressed

I have created this bank for landscapes and other tripod work but I find myself avoiding it quite often since the gain versus the extra inconvenience of the large and slow files are mathematically not worth it. Maybe my next revision of this D300 Custom Settings article won't have this option available! The future will tell.

*Some common settings for all banks:*

### Set Picture Control: Velvia 50

I shoot RAW so my choices concerning exposure and some other

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Digital Photography Greece

nikongear.com

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factors can be changed (to a certain degree) after the fact. But I have created a Picture control file that contains just the right amount of sharpening for easy judging of focus as well as other characteristics so I can better judge my shots on the rear LCD. When I transfer my images to my PC I still utilize the **Velvia 50** picture control to do my selections. Only after I have pin pointed the top images and import them into Capture NX do I revert to the Neutral picture control with no sharpening applied. I then use Capture NX to fine tune my images.

#### **Color Space: Adobe RGB**

My whole workflow (camera, view NX, Capture NX, Photoshop CS3) is based on the Adobe color space and only change over to sRGB when exporting for the internet. I would suggest to those users who don't understand color spaces to just stick with sRGB for a more reliable result.

#### **Active D-Lighting: Off**

I have tested and used Active D-Lighting and have decided not to use it. It underexposes and uses a strong gamma curve to help include more highlight detail at the cost of adding noise in the shadows and midtones. This may be a good feature for someone shooting in bad light but it is of no benefit to me.

#### **Long Exposure NR: Off**

I have tested and used Long Exposure NR and have decided to use it when shooting night scenes since it's very effective. The one downside to this feature is the extra time needed for its implementation. I leave this option off and switch it on when needed that's why I have placed this setting in "My menu" for easy access.

#### **High ISO NR: Off**

I have tested and used High ISO noise reduction and have decided not to use it. This feature doesn't offer the quality I expect plus it adds more processing time in Capture NX. Thankfully though, the performance of the D300 without noise reduction is excellent (in my opinion) and I find large prints are more tasteful with a touch of "grain" so I leave this option off (Though I still have this option placed in the "My menu" for easy access for rare occasions).

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### **My Menu:**

I like the "My Menu" feature. I can now have in one easily accessible

place all of my most frequently used options so I can change them if needed on the spot without searching in multiple menus.

- A3: Dynamic AF area (I usually choose between 21p or 51p&3D tracking)
- A5: AF Activation (there are times when I may need to resort to AF by the shutter button)
- E3: Flash control for built-in flash (I need quick access to this for flash control)
- Multiple exposure (I like this feature and want it handy)
- Long exposure NR (I like this feature and want it handy for those night scenes)
- High ISO NR (I want easy access to this feature for special occasions in 3200 territory)
- C3: Self timer delay (I often find myself in situations where I need quick access to this)
- Image review (I like switching this on and off depending on where I am)
- D2: Viewfinder Grid display (another feature I like having handy)
- Non-CPU lens data (definitely need easy access to this)

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## Custom Setting Menu:

### a1: AF-C Priority selection: Release (unchanged default)

As far back as I can remember Nikon photographers have been debating over the release versus focus issue of this option. Personally I have always used the “release” option. This choice was based on a test I had conducted over ten years ago with the Nikon F5 that showed that it was the better one to use. But that was such a long time ago so I decided to look the matter up to see what the consensus is today and I was amazed that a lot of photographers prefer the “focus” option. So I decided to do another test just to get a better feel of where the AF system stands today. And sure enough the “release” option won once again. Unlike the last time though, the differences between the results are so small that they really are not worth considering when choosing one of the three options. So you can choose what suits your workflow better without worrying if one will offer less chances of getting keepers than the other. So I see no need to change my choice of the “release” option.

### a2: AF-S Priority selection: Focus (unchanged default)

I don't use this option so I leave the factory setting as is.

### **a3: Dynamic AF area: 21p or 51 points 3D-Tracking**

I have this option also available in the My Menu for easy access. For the majority of my shooting though, I use 21-points mostly.

### **a4: Focus tracking with lock on: Normal (unchanged default)**

I haven't had a chance to even try this option yet. All my testing of the AF system so far has been with this option set at normal. This is a good sign for a couple of reasons: firstly, I have done a lot of successful tracking of birds amongst branches with the D300 without any hiccups plus I remember when using the D200, I had it disengaged to improve the AF, and so "normal" is a good choice for now.

### **a5: AF activation: AF-ON**

This is an option that many photographers hesitate to try or simply find it hard to decide what's best. For auto-focusing I use the AF-ON button on the back of the camera simply because in my field of photography (nature & wildlife) it offers me the best of both worlds. Both AF (continuous and single mode) and MF are at my finger tips without removing my eyes from the viewfinder.

- I can pre-focus using AF and then recompose after I have released my thumb from the AF-ON button
- I can focus manually simply by not using the AF-ON button (AFS & AFI lenses)
- I can track focus the subject while pressing the AF-ON button continuously

I should point out though that I primarily use AF only for action since I still love the control that MF offers me (most of my focusing is done manually). I also need to point out that for this to work as advertised; you will have to have the AF mode selector on the front of the camera set to Continuous all the time which in itself is another advantage, since you don't need to bother with that switch again. I also have placed this setting in "My menu" for easy access just in case.

### **a6: AF point illumination: Off**

I turn this feature off, I'm not sure why, I seem to want a clean and unobtrusive viewfinder. If your shooting style includes long sessions and you need to conserve battery power, then turning off this feature will help.

**a7: Focus point wrap-around: No wrap**

Personally, I don't see the need for the wrap around option, especially since now with option a8 I can have fewer points to select from making the whole procedure faster, easier on my thumb and with a more natural feel.

**a8: AF point selection: 11 Points**

When I first got the camera and was thumbing my way through all 51 points, I thought to myself what a big waste of time and energy to get to certain part of the frame. But then I discovered this option which is really great. It doesn't effect AF, but rather reduces the points available for the initial selection making it faster to select the initial focusing point, whether using single, 9, 21 or 51 points.

**a9: Built-in AF assist illuminator: Off**

This is one setting I always choose the off option mainly because I shoot wildlife and I rather not have any lights going off when I least expect it.

**a10: AF-ON for MB-D10: AF-ON (unchanged default)**

Since I use the AF-ON in the landscape orientation, I obviously would use it for the portrait orientation as well.

**b1: ISO sensitivity step value: 1/3 STOP (unchanged default)****b2: EV steps for exposure control: 1/3 STOP (unchanged default)****b3: Exp comp/fine tune: 1/3 STOP (unchanged default)****b4: Easy exposure compensation: ON (Auto Reset)**

I have used this feature a lot and find it very handy and love it while using it.

**b5: Center-weighted area: 8mm (unchanged default)****b6: Fine tune optimal exposure: (Unchanged default)**

There are a lot of mistaken reports that the D300 overexposes and that it should be corrected by utilizing some form of correction. This is not true. Unlike previous models from Nikon, the new version of Matrix metering in the D300 (and most probably the D3) will try to utilize the right side of the histogram by exposing as much to the right as it thinks the subject will allow in an attempt to try and avoid the noise zone. It seems to also be utilizing some form of

smart gamma correction on individual color channels as well. So in effect the new camera does not produce overexposed images, but brighter images. And this is the preferred result to get from a camera since reducing the brightness or correcting the black point in post processing produces cleaner files compared to trying the opposite of lightening up the shadows which intensifies noise.

So before you go and use this correction tool, make sure your camera is actually overexposing which means it is burning, beyond correction, needed highlights and not spectral highlights.

I suggest you use the following test to check the accuracy of your metering. On a bright sunny clear day and with the sun over your shoulder and behind you select an aperture of f/16 and a shutter speed the reciprocal of your chosen ISO. For example if you are using a setting of 200 ISO the shutter speed should be set at 1/200sec or 1/250sec. Select spot or centerweighted metering, use a normal to short telephoto lens and point the camera upwards towards the dark blue part of the sky (about 30-40 degrees above the horizon line). Your meter indication should show a correct reading. If you own a Kodak gray card, you can use that to measure the brightness from instead.

If you find your spot/center weighted meters are off (beyond ½ stop), something I feel is very unlikely, then you can use this correction tool to compensate. But the real reason for doing this test is to see whether your matrix needs correcting as well since if your spot and center weighted metering systems are both off by the same amount then obviously the chances are high that matrix will be effected as well.

So if you feel you have a problem with wrong exposures, check your spot and center weighted metering systems first. If they don't pass, then maybe you do have a problem that needs some correcting measures.

I would like to remind you that I only shoot in RAW so JPG shooters may find that a -0.3 correction could produce a more pleasant result.

#### **c1: Shutter-release button AE-L: OFF (unchanged default)**

If you are using matrix metering, it would be pretty pointless using this option. This could have been useful back in the old film days when using spot or center weighted for portraits and reframing techniques but I don't use this option.

**c2: Auto meter-off delay: 6 seconds (unchanged default)**

If your shooting style includes long sessions and you need to conserve battery power, set 4 sec for this feature.

**c3: Self-timer delay: 10 seconds (unchanged default)**

I have placed this setting in “My menu” for easy access.

**c4: Monitor off delay: 20sec (unchanged default)**

As I have mentioned earlier, I don't use economy mode anymore, so 20 sec seem like a good number. Basically what I do now is tap the shutter button to turn off the screen while shooting if I'm too lazy to use the “play” button. If your shooting style includes long sessions and you need to conserve battery power, select 10 sec for this feature.

**d1: Beep: OFF**

This is one setting which with all my previous cameras I had always chosen the off option mainly because I shoot wildlife and I rather not have any beeps going off when I least expect it. If your shooting style includes long sessions and you need to conserve battery power, turn this feature off.

**d2: Viewfinder grid display: OFF (unchanged default)**

With my D200 I had this option on all the time, but for some strange reason, with the D300 I have this set to off. I think it has something to do with my desire for the cleanest view possible with nothing interfering. So I don't want to ruin that feeling by using the grid. If your shooting style includes long sessions and you need to conserve battery power, turn this feature off. I have placed this setting in “My menu” for easy access.

**d3: Viewfinder warning display: ON (unchanged default)**

I see no reason to turn this useful feature off so I leave this as is.

**d4: CL mode shooting speed: 3 FPS (unchanged default)**

With the D300 I now have 6 & 8 fps in Ch shooting mode for high speed action shooting. 3fps feels like a good speed for trying to capture face expressions without wasting too many frames. So Cl is my choice for people and portraiture and Ch for action.

**d5: Max. continuous release: 100 (unchanged default)**

I only shoot RAW, so this doesn't change my limit (17 frames @ 8fps).

#### d6: File Number sequence: ON (unchanged default)

This is another of those options I have always set to on as soon as I get the camera. It just gives me a rough indication of the number of shutter actuations fired just by looking at file name.

#### d7: Shooting info display: Auto (unchanged default)

The info display is one of the many new features of the D300 that I like but after a couple of months of using the new camera, I find myself still not using it as often as I should since I still find myself using the top LCD. Hope this will become second nature soon. As for the d7 option I recommend auto simply because the dark version is no good for daylight shooting and the light version is too bright for night time shooting. Auto will use the appropriate setting according to ambient light levels, pretty cool.

#### d8: LCD illumination: Off (unchanged default)

For as long as I can remember, I had this feature set to off on all my Nikons. I can't see any reason why anyone would want this on, since switching on the LCD illumination is easy and quick from the ON-OFF dial.

#### d9: Exposure delay mode: Off (unchanged default)

If you do landscapes without a cable release, this may interest you. The mirror goes up and the shutter actuation happens seconds later giving a chance for any mirror vibrations to settle first. I don't use it since I still have my old MC-20 cable combined with the M-up selection.

#### d10: MB-D10 battery type: Ni-MH

The AA battery holder of the MB-D10 has put my rechargeable flash batteries back in heavy use providing me with 8fps.

#### d11: Battery order: MB-D10 (unchanged default)

Obviously you want to deplete the batteries in the pack first.

#### e1: Flash sync speed: 1/250 Auto FP

#### e2: Flash shutter speed: 1/60 (unchanged default)

#### e3: Flash control for built-in flash: COMMANDER

I usually have the Built In flash set to TTL -0.7 and groups A and B set to TTL at zero compensation. I have placed this setting in “My menu” for easy access.

**e4: Modeling Flash: OFF**

**e5: Auto bracketing set: AE/Flash (unchanged default)**

I don't seem to use this feature anymore, so I leave it as is.

**e6: Auto bracketing (Manual mode): Flash/Speed (unchanged default)**

**e7: Bracket order: Meter/Under/Over (unchanged default)**

**f1: Multi selector center button: Playback/Zoom/Low**

**f2: Multi-selector: Off (unchanged default)**

**f3: Photo info/playback: Off (unchanged default)**

**f4: Assign FUNC button: Flash off (Function button + dials = OFF)**

**f5: Assign preview button: Flash value lock (Preview + Command dials = OFF)**

**f6: Assign AE-L/AF-L button: Spot (AE-L/AF-L + Command dials = OFF)**

**f7: Customize command dials: Reverse rotation/on, Change main sub/on, Aperture setting/on, Menus & playback/off**

I never liked the orientation of the dials and especially the exposure graph. They all seemed wrong, so I was especially happy that now I can have things changed to my liking. I can reverse the rotation of the command dials so their rotation matches the direction of the graph (see f10 below). So when using Manual exposure mode, rotating either dial towards the right (away from the lens) will add exposure and left (towards the lens) will reduce the exposure. These adjustments add to a more natural way of using the camera.

**f8: Release button to use dial: Off (unchanged default)**

**f9: No memory card?: Lock**

Have you ever in the past shot an event on a film camera only to find out there was no film in the camera or that it didn't wind on the taking spool? Well with most digital cameras, those fears have disappeared unless you leave this setting at its default setting! So if

you don't want to start shooting an important event with no memory card in the camera set this to Lock.

### f10: Reverse indicators: -0+

I love this option! I now can reverse the exposure graph so that it reads in the more natural way of starting from minus on the left and gaining positive values towards the right.

POSTED BY JOHN CAZ AT 4:05 PM

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### 3 COMMENTS:

staRush said...

Really nice example of reasonable set of options. I just starting to learn my brand new D300 (arrived yesterday evening) and it gives me to understand how to use the whole power of this great camera.

Just curious, may I get anyhow the file with these settings saved to? :-)

MAY 9, 2008 5:37 PM

John Caz said...

Unfortunately, no.

MAY 17, 2008 10:55 PM

Anonymous said...

There is a great spreadsheet that is available that outlines all of the menus and features of the D300. I have found it invaluable as a reference. You can find it at:

[http://www.nikonians.org/forums/dcboard.php?az=show\\_topic&forum=149&topic\\_id=104364#113926](http://www.nikonians.org/forums/dcboard.php?az=show_topic&forum=149&topic_id=104364#113926)

Good luck!!

JUNE 1, 2008 4:37 PM

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