



Camera and Lens Buying Guide

Aug 2025

Please Remember (in no particular order):

- You'll adapt to (and be happy with) any top brand camera — so don't agonize over it!
- We recommend Canon, because that's what we use, know inside-out, and can help you troubleshoot. (Back in 1995 (when I purchased my first "real" camera, the shop guy pointed me to Canon — and here we are.)
- Nikon and Sony are also excellent. If you already own them, no problem — you'll still gain fully from the ZTP Master Class.
- If you're starting fresh, Canon makes the most sense for our students since we can support you best.
- Five quick criteria for picking Canon/Nikon/Sony:
 1. Does your teacher use it?
 2. Do your friends use it?
 3. Is there a service center nearby?
 4. Is it cheaper?
 5. Is it available to buy easily?
- The biggest difference is in autofocus — mirrorless cameras are faster, more accurate, and more consistent. That alone makes them the future of photography. That said, we still recommend one DSLR in our "Play It Safe" category. Why? Because DSLRs are far cheaper on the second-hand market, and for beginners they're more than enough to learn on. You'll get professional-quality results, save money up front, and upgrade later once your skills (and confidence) grow.
- Spending more usually means better gear — but early on, you may actually shoot better with something simpler until your skills catch up.
- Canon's lineup is designed to push you up the ladder — don't get lost in the options. Stick with the tiered guide and you'll be fine.
- All prices are quoted from B&H Photo (NYC) in USD.
- The "essential" lenses listed are perfect for natural-light, outdoor portraits — exactly what you need for the Master Class.
- The "optional extras" are mainly for studio or event work — don't rush into them. Build confidence with the basics first, then expand.

The 5 Photographers

Choosing the right camera can feel overwhelming — there are so many models, specs, and price points. To make things simple, we've created five clear categories of photographers. Just find the one that best describes you, and you'll know exactly where to start:

The Hacker

The Play It Safe

The Connoisseur

The Gung Ho

The Ultimate

Which Category Do You Best Fit Into?

★ The Hacker

You're not looking to turn photography into a business — at least not now. You just want to learn how to take beautiful photos of your family, friends, trips, and life moments. This is the best choice if you want something simple, light, and affordable that still delivers stunning results.

★ The Play It Safe

You *might* want to turn photography into a business someday, but you're not ready to commit yet. This option gives you a real taste of full-frame photography without breaking the bank. When you're ready to upgrade later, you won't feel like you overspent on your first camera.

★ The Connoisseur

You know exactly what you want: either you're serious about starting a photography business on a budget, or you're a passionate hobbyist who wants professional-quality results for personal work. This tier delivers pro-level image quality without the premium price tag of the higher options.

★ The Gung Ho

You're all in. You're committed to going pro and you're not worried about budget. This is a powerhouse setup that will easily cover almost any type of photography. For most photographers, this level is already more than enough — with very little real-world advantage to going higher.

★ The Ultimate

This tier is mainly for those considering the *highest level of work*, like weddings or heavy-duty professional photography. The jump from "Gung Ho" to "Ultimate" is not huge for most people, but if you think you'll be shooting events where every technical edge matters, it may be worth considering. If you're leaning this way, it's smart to check with the school admin before pulling the trigger.

The Hacker

- Canon R50 (Body Only) — \$709 — [View at B&H!](#)
- Essential Lens → RF 50 mm f/1.8 STM — \$219 — [View at B&H!](#)
- Optional Lens → RF-S 18–45 mm f/4.5-6.3 STM — \$329 — [View at B&H!](#)

The Play It Safe (DSLR Option)

- Canon EOS 70D (Second-Hand) — \$300–\$350 — [For example!](#)
(Purchase second-hand on eBay or other reputable used gear sites)
- Essential Lens → Canon EF 50mm f/1.8 — \$135 — [View at B&H!](#)

The Connoisseur

- Canon EOS R8 (Body Only) — \$1,399 — [View at B&H!](#)
- Recommended Lenses (choose one):
 - Canon RF 85mm f/2 Macro IS STM — \$649 — [View at B&H!](#)
 - Canon RF 24–70mm f/2.8L IS USM — \$2,399 — [View at B&H!](#)

The Gung Ho

- Canon EOS R6 Mark II (Body Only) — \$1,999 — [View at B&H!](#)
- Recommended Lenses (choose one):
 - Canon RF 85mm f/2 Macro IS STM — \$649 — [View at B&H!](#)
 - Canon RF 24–70mm f/2.8L IS USM — \$2,399 — [View at B&H!](#)

The Ultimate

- Canon EOS R5 (Body Only) — \$2,999 — [View at B&H!](#)
- Recommended Lenses (choose one):
 - Canon RF 85mm f/2 Macro IS STM — \$649 — [View at B&H!](#)
 - Canon RF 24–70mm f/2.8L IS USM — \$2,399 — [View at B&H!](#)