

Basic Photography

Focusing

Dennis Fritsche

September 24, 2026

Reference

- [Photography Life](#)
- [Backcountry Gallery - Wildlife Photography By Steve Perry](#)

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Photo Stories Through the Lenses of our Readers

SEPTEMBER 12, 2025 BY LIBOR VAICENBACHER | NO COMMENTS



Photography is far from being just a mechanical imprint of light. Photographs can tell stories. And often, without our realizing it, these stories reveal something about us, the people behind the camera. Be it the choice of subject, the lens we use, the tonal palette, or ultimately the final selection...

The State of Nikon Z Firmware Features Today

SEPTEMBER 10, 2025 BY LIBOR VAICENBACHER | 41 COMMENTS



Back in the DSLR era, firmware updates were mostly about debugging or fixing compatibility issues. Nobody really talked about them, because, frankly, there wasn't much to talk about. But with the rise of mirrorless cameras, that changed dramatically. For Nikon, the breakthrough came with the Z9 and even more so...

Nikon ZR 6K Cinema Camera Announced

SEPTEMBER 10, 2025 BY JASON POLAK | 6 COMMENTS



After Nikon acquired RED, many people speculated about a Nikon cinema camera. Well, they have just delivered with the Nikon ZR. The new ZR is a compact, 24MP full-frame camera that can record 6K60 and has a new RED video codec. Moreover, it's being offered at the relatively affordable price...

The Intersection of Wildlife Photography and Mindfulness

SEPTEMBER 9, 2025 BY MASSIMO VIGNOLI | 15 COMMENTS

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PHOTOGRAPHY BASICS



LANDSCAPE PHOTOGRAPH



WILDLIFE PHOTOGRAPH



MACRO PHOTOGRAPH

Fucus Modes For Nikon cameras.

- **Best for static subjects like landscapes – AF-S**

AF-S (single-area autofocus) allows the camera to focus once on a subject a set distance away, and won't refocus automatically if you or your subject move. Once you've achieved focus lock, the focus point will briefly flash green to confirm.

- **Best for tracking moving subjects, such as birds in flight – AF-C**

To use AF-C (continuous autofocus), half-depress the shutter button (or AF-ON) to continually focus on the subject under the active focus point(s). The autofocus system will automatically adjust to keep your subject in focus, and the focus point stays red because the system is continually focusing.

- **Best for both moving and still subjects in the frame – AF-A**

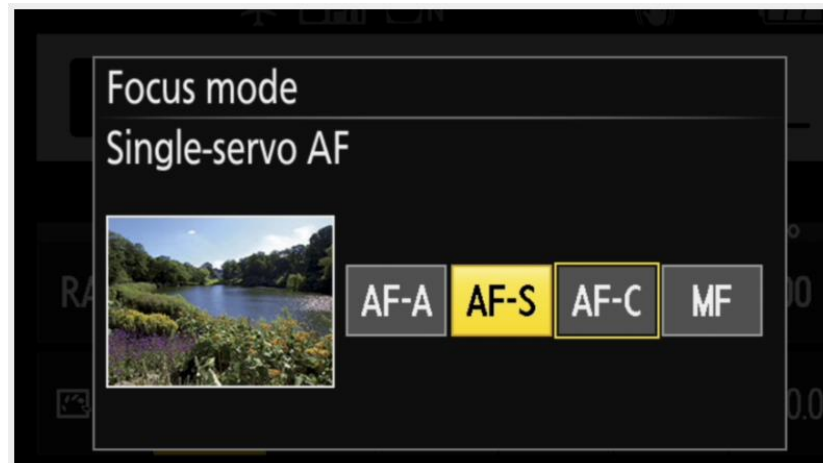
AF-A (auto autofocus) automatically switches between AF-S and AF-C modes, depending on the subject under the active focus point(s). If the camera thinks the subject is static, it switches to AF-S. If the subject moves, it changes to AF-C. High-end cameras don't have AF-A, as there can be a delay when switching between the two modes, which could result in a shot being missed.

- **Best for shooting videos – AF-F**

AF-F (full-time autofocus) automatically tracks subject movement and is constantly focusing during video recording. Use with Face / Eye tracking on a Z series camera for perfect focus.

- **Best for specific focusing requirements – MF**

MF (manual focus) can help you target your subject more accurately in low-light conditions, such as for a tripod-mounted twilight shot, or with fast-moving subjects travelling down a predictable path, like a car on a race track. It's also good for low-contrast subjects, where autofocus would struggle to focus – for example, where there's little difference in colour between your subject and the background. Useful if you want to use focus peaking (more on that below) or have specific focusing requirements.



Focus Area Modes

Option		Description
	[Pinpoint AF]	• With a focus point smaller than that employed for single-point AF, pinpoint AF is used for pinpoint focus on a selected spot in the frame. • Focusing may be slower than with single-point AF. • Recommended for shots involving static subjects, such as buildings, in-studio product photography, or close-ups. • This option is only available when photo mode is selected and [Single AF] is chosen for focus mode.
	[Single-point AF]	• The camera focuses on a point selected by the user. • Use with stationary subjects.

Focus Area Modes (Continued)

[C]S	[Dynamic-area AF (S)]	• The camera focuses on a point selected by the user. If the subject briefly leaves the selected point, the camera will focus based on information from surrounding focus points. • This option is only available when photo mode is selected and [Continuous AF] is chosen for focus mode.
[C]M	[Dynamic-area AF (M)]	• Use for photographs of athletes and other active subjects that are hard to frame using single-point AF. • The size of the area used for focus can be selected from S (small), M (medium), and L (large). S is the smallest and L the largest. • [Dynamic-area AF (S)]: Choose when there is time to compose the photograph or when photographing subjects that are moving predictably (e.g., runners or race cars on a track).
[C]L	[Dynamic-area AF (L)]	• [Dynamic-area AF (M)]: Choose when photographing subjects that are moving unpredictably (e.g., players at a football game). • [Dynamic-area AF (L)]: Choose when photographing subjects that are moving quickly and cannot be easily framed in the selected focus point (e.g., birds).

Focus Area Modes (Continued)

	[Wide-area AF (S)]	• As for single-point AF except that the camera focuses on a wider area. • Choose for snapshots, subjects that are in motion, and other subjects that are difficult to photograph using single-point AF. • During video recording, wide-area AF can be used for smooth focus when making panning or tilting shots or filming moving subjects.
	[Wide-area AF (L)]	• If the selected focus point contains subjects at different distances from the camera, the camera will assign priority to the closest subject. • The focus points for [Wide-area AF (L)] are larger than those for [Wide-area AF (S)].

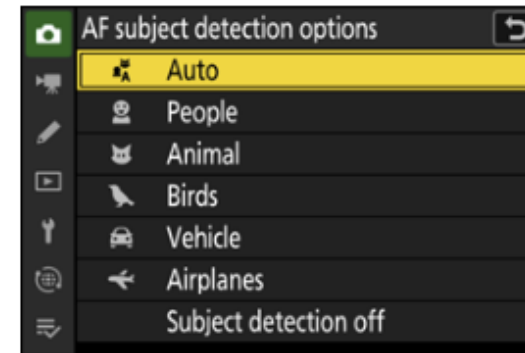
Focus Area Modes (Continued)

	[3D-tracking]	• The camera tracks focus on a selected subject. • Position the focus point over your subject and start tracking by pressing AF-ON or by pressing the shutter-release button halfway; focus will then track the selected subject as it moves through the frame. Release the button to end tracking and restore the previously-selected focus point. • If the subject leaves the frame, remove your finger from the shutter-release button and recompose the photograph with the subject in the selected focus point. • This option is only available when photo mode is selected and [Continuous AF] is chosen for focus mode.
	[Subject-tracking AF]	• Track focus on a selected subject. • Position the focus point over your subject and start tracking by pressing  or AF-ON or by pressing the shutter-release button halfway; focus will then track the selected subject as it moves through the frame. To end tracking and select the center focus point, press . • This option is only available in video mode.
	[Auto-area AF]	• The camera automatically detects the subject and selects the focus point. • Use on occasions when you don't have time to select the focus point yourself, for portraits, or for snapshots and other spur-of-the-moment photos.

Focus Area Modes (Continued)

Choosing a Subject Type for Autofocus

✓ The class of subjects given priority during autofocus can be chosen using the [**AF subject detection options**] items in the photo shooting and video recording menus, which offer a choice of [**Auto**], [**People**], [**Animal**], [**Birds**], [**Vehicle**], [**Airplanes**], and [**Subject detection off**]. The subject detected by the camera is indicated by a focus point.



- In the case of the video recording menu, the choice of subject is made via [**AF subject detection options**] > [**Subject detection**]. Separate subject types can be selected for photo and video modes.
- Subject detection is available when [**Wide-area AF (S)**], [**Wide-area AF (L)**], [**Wide-area AF (C1)**], [**Wide-area AF (C2)**], [**3D-tracking**], [**Subject-tracking AF**], or [**Auto-area AF**] is selected for [**AF-area mode**].

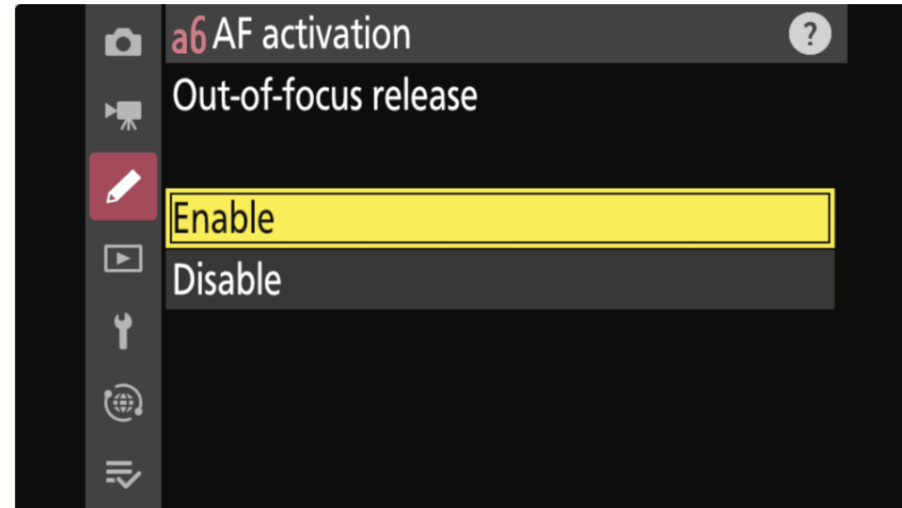
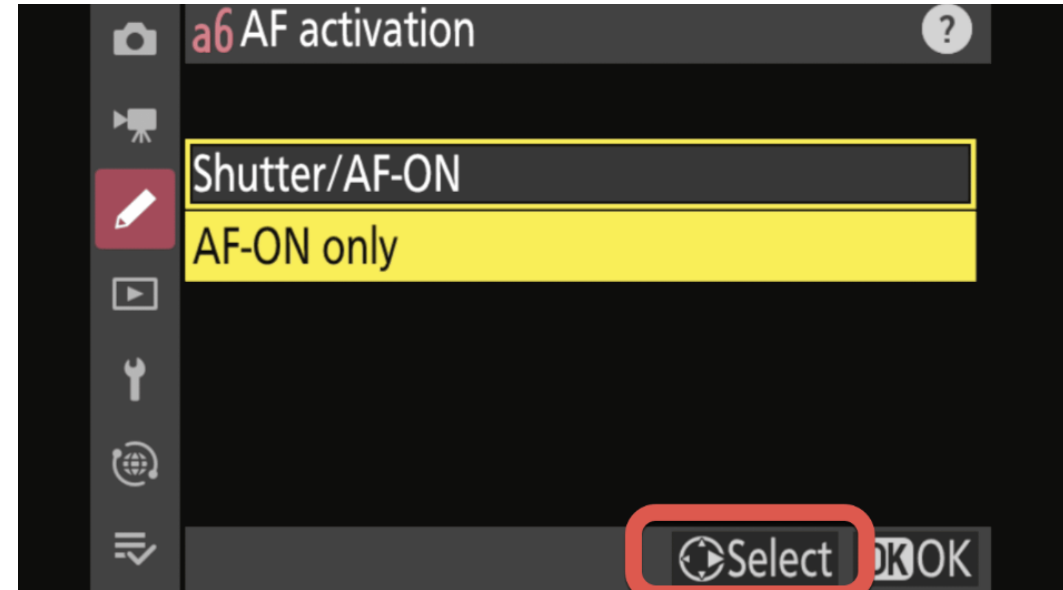
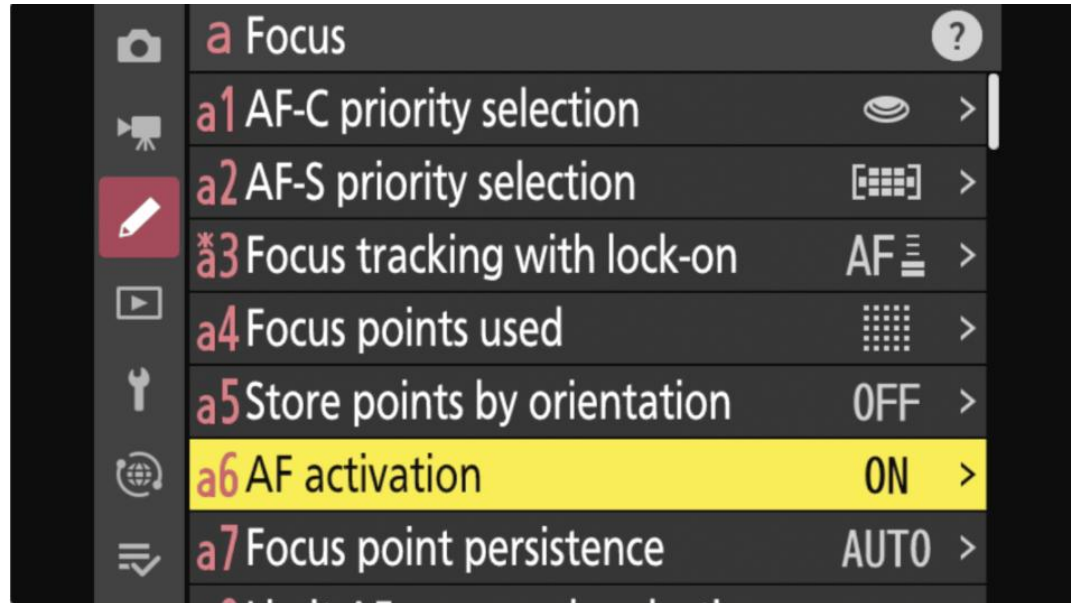
My Use

- Back Button Focus
- Single Point - AF for static Subjects
- Wide Area (L) and appropriate subject for animals and people.
(Because that is what Alan D. told me to do.)

Back Button Focus

- Back Button AF uncouples autofocus from your shutter release and moves it exclusively to a button on the back of your camera (AF-ON for Nikon).
- Setup BBAF (next slide)
- Enable AF-C
- Use
 - Static subject - press AF-ON and release – operates like AF-S
 - Moving subject - press and hold. Press shutter to shoot.
- This is not for everyone and takes some getting used to.
- Inform anyone using your camera.

How to Enable Back Button (Only) Auto Focus on the Nikon Z8



Reference

- [Backcountry Gallery - Wildlife Photography By Steve Perry](#)
- [Backcountry Gallery Web Store – Backcountry Gallery Web Store](#)
- [Secrets To The Nikon Autofocus System: Mirrorless Edition – Backcountry Gallery Web Store](#)
- [AF-On And Back Button Autofocus - Backcountry Gallery](#)

Depth of Field and Hyperfocus Distance

Depth of Field – Portion of the photograph in “acceptable focus”

- Depth of Field determined by
 - Focal length
 - Aperture
 - Distance to subject
- Depth of field calculators online and for phone
 - I use Depth of Field Master online <https://www.dofmaster.com/dofjs.html>
 - And “Digital Depth of Field” app on my phone
 - PhotoPills – App and Online [Depth of Field \(DoF\) calculator | PhotoPills](#)

Depth of Field (DOF) - Impact of Variables

Parameter	Focal Length	Aperture	Distance
Focal Length	Shorter = Greater DOF	Fixed	Fixed
Aperture	Fixed	Smaller = Greater DOF	Fixed
Distance to Subject	Fixed	Fixed	Longer = Greater DOF

[Depth of Field \(DoF\) calculator | PhotoPills](#)

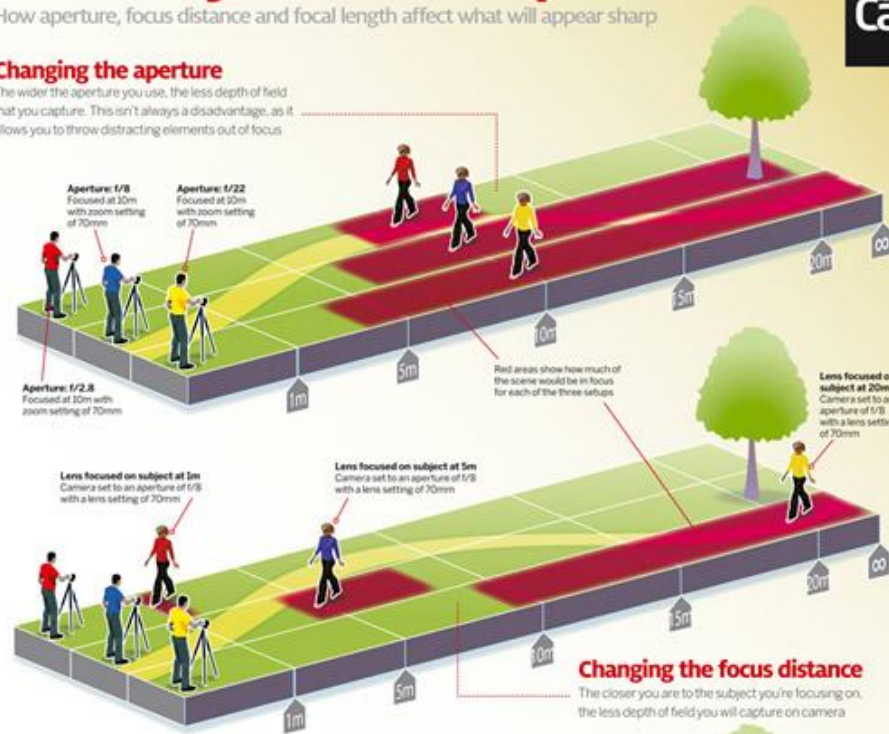
Three ways to affect depth of field

How aperture, focus distance and focal length affect what will appear sharp



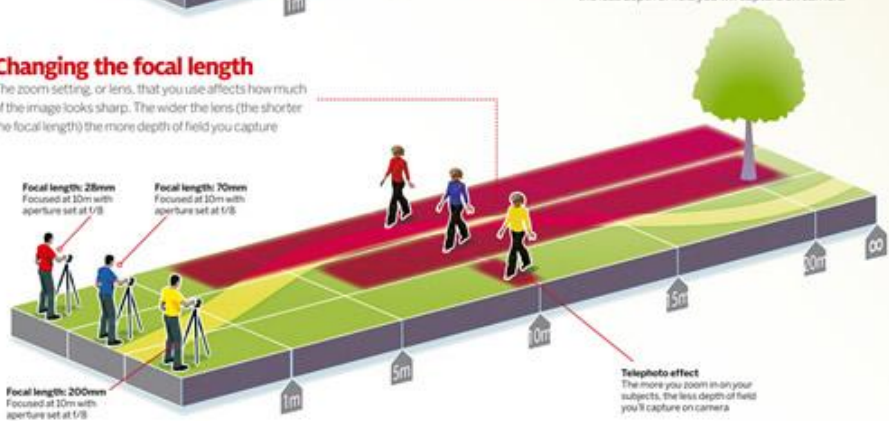
Changing the aperture

The wider the aperture you use, the less depth of field that you capture. This isn't always a disadvantage, as it allows you to throw distracting elements out of focus.



Changing the focal length

The zoom setting, or lens, that you use affects how much of the image looks sharp. The wider the lens (the shorter the focal length) the more depth of field you capture.



Changing the focus distance

The closer you are to the subject you're focusing on, the less depth of field you will capture on camera.

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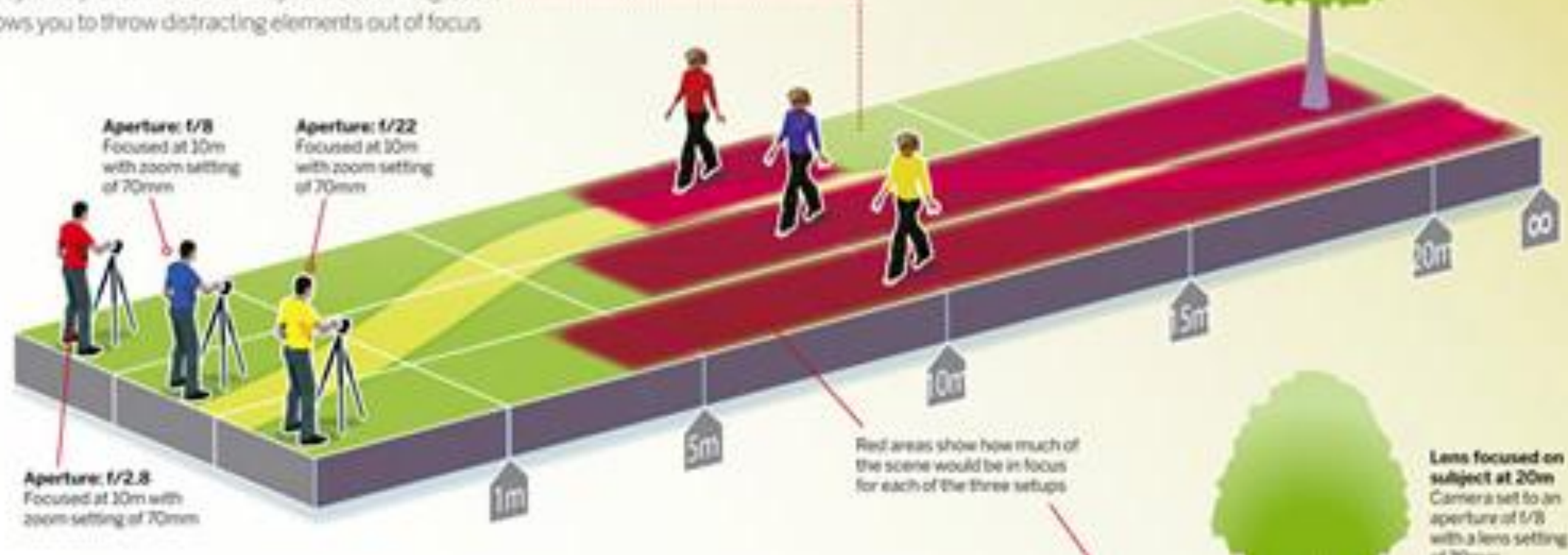
Three ways to affect depth of field

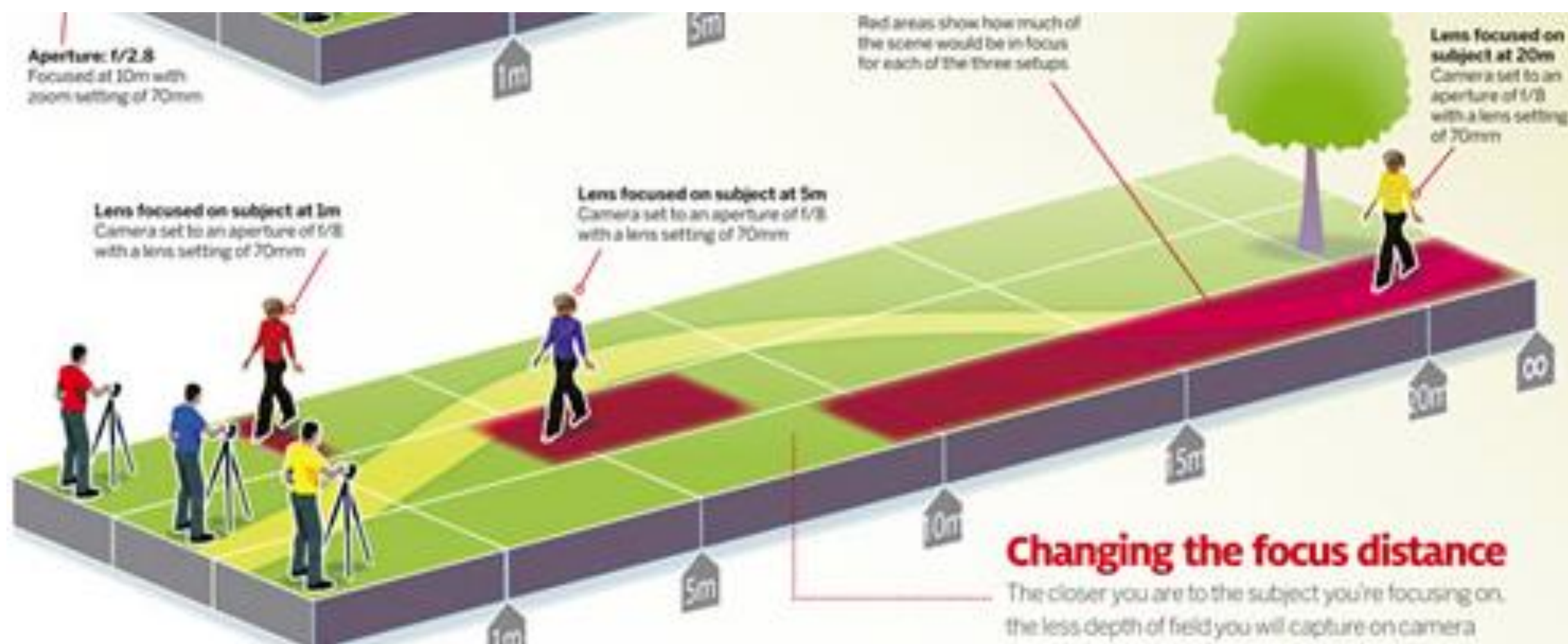
How aperture, focus distance and focal length affect what will appear sharp



Changing the aperture

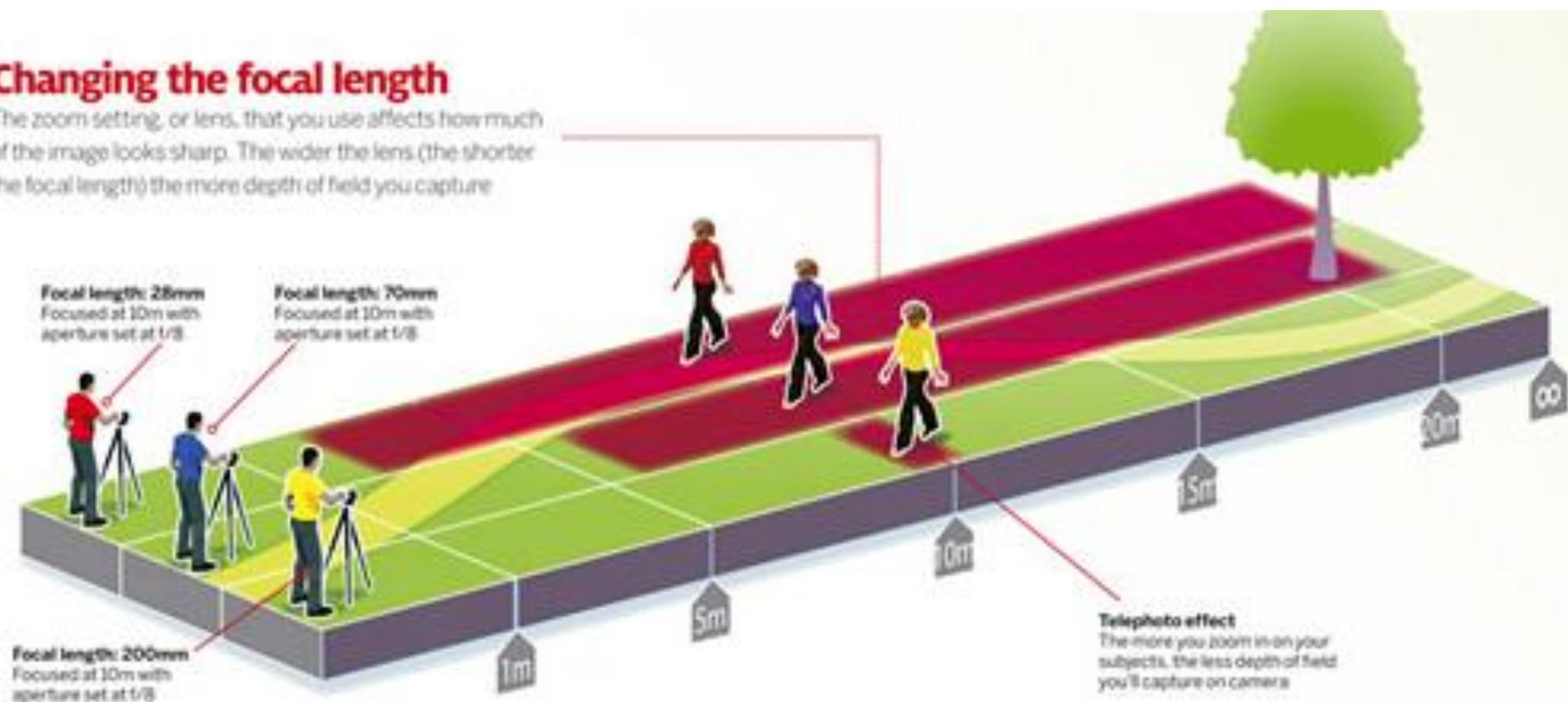
The wider the aperture you use, the less depth of field that you capture. This isn't always a disadvantage, as it allows you to throw distracting elements out of focus.





Changing the focal length

The zoom setting, or lens, that you use affects how much of the image looks sharp. The wider the lens (the shorter the focal length) the more depth of field you capture



Hyperfocal distance:

Hyperfocal distance: The closest distance at which a lens can be focused while keeping objects at infinity acceptably sharp. When the lens is focused at this distance, all objects at distances from half of the hyperfocal distance out to infinity will be acceptably sharp.

WHAT IS HYPERFOCAL DISTANCE?

A technique to increase the depth of field & keep your landscapes sharp

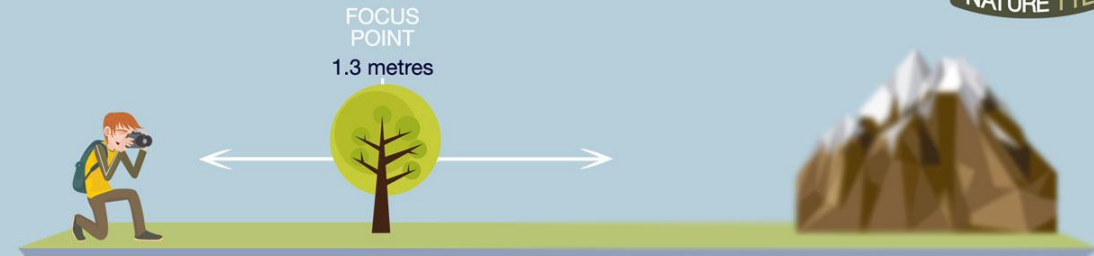


FIGURE A. Focusing on the foreground



FIGURE B. Focusing at infinity

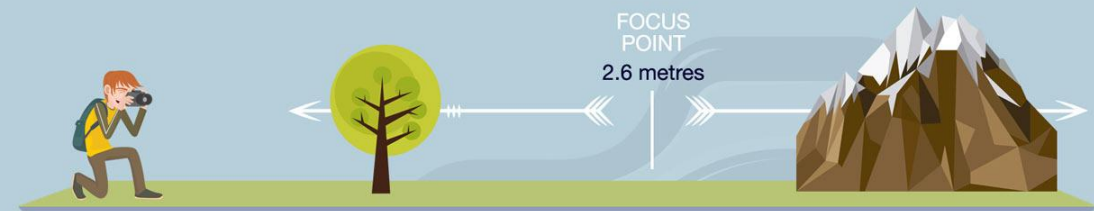


FIGURE C. Focusing at the hyperfocal distance

Hyperfocal distance is a technique used by landscape photographers to maximise the depth of field and keep as much of a scene in focus as possible.

Usually, the depth of field doesn't stretch as far towards the camera from the focal point as it does towards the background. So, the closer you focus towards the camera, the smaller the area in focus is.

To keep more of the scene in focus, you can focus further away from you. This is the principle behind hyperfocal

distance. The hyperfocal distance is the distance between the camera and the optimal point of focus for maximum depth of field.

You can use calculators to work out the hyperfocal distance of your lens at the chosen aperture. For this example, using a 28mm lens at f/16 with a 1.6x crop sensor would have a hyperfocal distance of 2.6 metres.

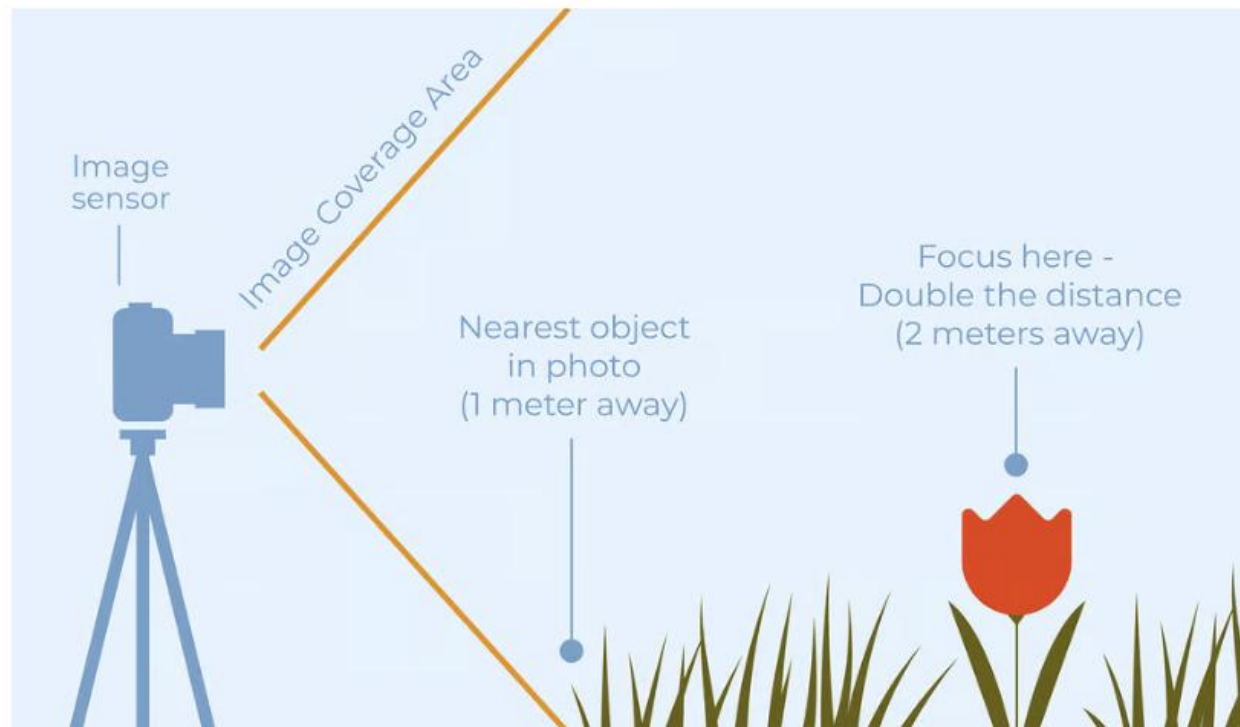
Figure A shows focusing close to the camera will result in less being in focus and a lot of 'wasted' depth of field.

Similarly, Figure B shows focusing to infinity results in a focused background, but the foreground still isn't in focus and there is still 'wasted' depth of field behind that point.

Figure C shows focusing at the hyperfocal distance. The depth of field extends from half this distance to infinity, allowing the foreground and background to be in focus at the same time.

Rule of Thumb 1

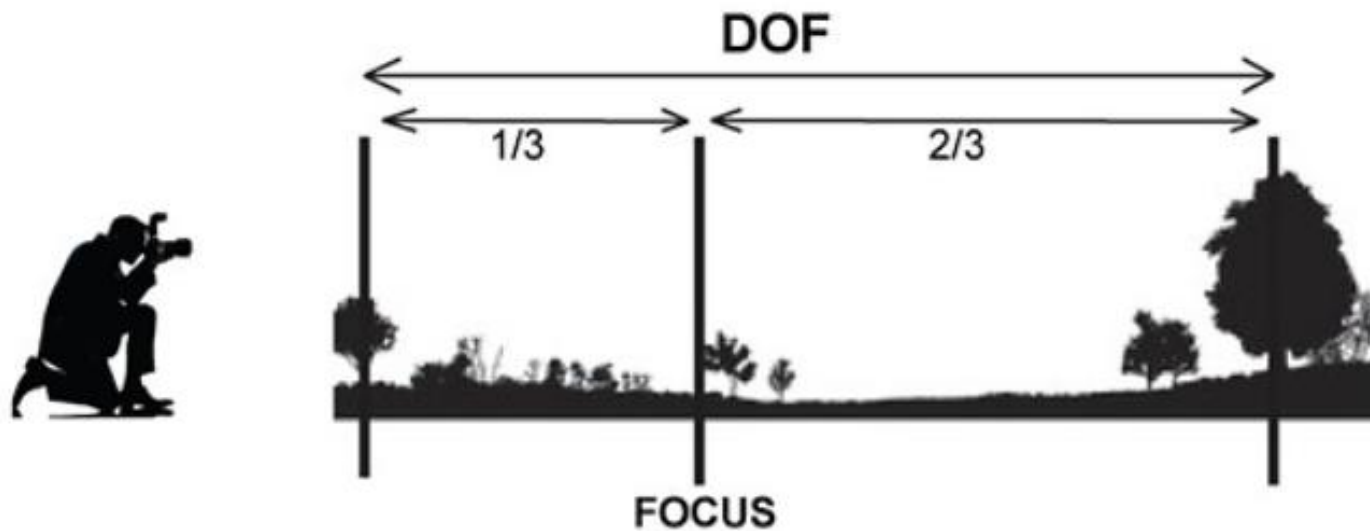
- If you have a close object, focus at twice the distance to the closest object.



From Photographylife.com

Rule of Thumb 2

- For distant subjects, focus 1/3 of the way into the scene.

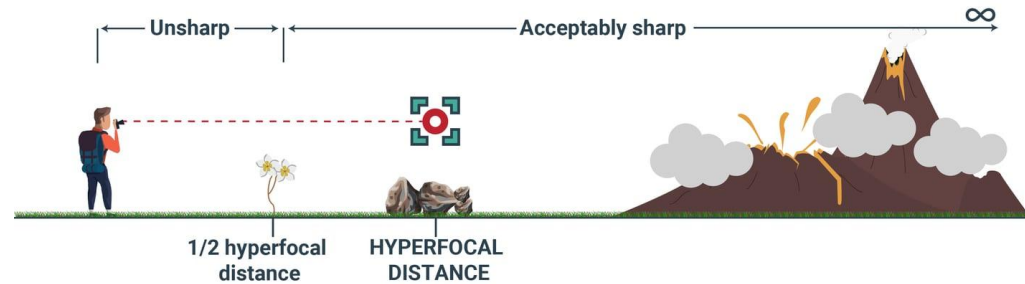


Rule Thumb 1

- [Understanding Hyperfocal Distance in Photography-How it Works? \(capturetheatlas.com\)](https://capturetheatlas.com/understanding-hyperfocal-distance-in-photography-how-it-works/)
- ***Focus twice the distance as the nearest object you want in focus.***

UNDERSTANDING HYPERFOCAL DISTANCE

WHAT IS HYPERFOCAL DISTANCE?



Hyperfocal distance is the focusing distance where we achieve the maximum depth of field

When we focus our lens on the hyperfocal distance, everything from half of the hyperfocal distance out to infinity is going to be acceptably sharp

You can use a hyperfocal distance calculator or chart to calculate the hyperfocal distance according to your camera, focal length, and aperture

Rule of Thumb 1

- *For photo with a near object.*
- *Focus twice the distance to the near object.*



Rule of Thumb 2

- For photo with no near objects
- *Focus 1/3 of the way into the scene.*

