

# Buying your first 35mm film camera for students (ebay article)

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Buying a 35mm camera has never been less expensive for students and beginners. With the market going digital many fine cameras are appearing on eBay daily at prices that are incredible. In the past resources were few, only local camera stores provided any kind of deals and prices required a sizable investment to get started. As a result many people bought cameras that were less than ideal for a serious photographer.

What should a student look for when deciding on one of the many cameras out there? To begin with I would always recommend a manual camera over any electronic or auto-focus camera. A manual camera tends to last longer and has fewer problems, electronic cameras are dead if the electronics are shot and repairs today will cost more than the purchase price of the camera.

Although electronic cameras have shutter speeds down to 30 seconds I prefer to set the shutter on 'B' and time the exposure with a stop watch. Electronic cameras nearly all require a rare and expensive electronic shutter release cable whereas all manual cameras use a simple and inexpensive common shutter release cable. This is of critical importance for subjects such as nature, night photography, architecture and still life. The shutter release cable is essential to use in combination with a tripod for sharp pictures.

The best lens to start with is a 50mm f/1.8 or f/1.4, general the least expensive lens for any system it is also the most common. The advantage is being able to open the lens wide enough to get interesting effects from no depth of field. The majority of zoom lenses have a minimum f/stop of f/4 which slows your shutter speed considerably and provides too much depth of field for your outer limits. Myself and several professional friends have discussed how our least expensive lens (the 50mm) is also the lens we use the largest percentage of the time.

Wide angle and telephoto effects are like spices used sparingly for interest. A zoom lens also gives a beginner too many options to really learn about the look of different focal lengths.

Nikon: I myself prefer Nikon, from the beginning of the company they insisted on quality in both their bodies and lenses. The Nikon bayonet mount has been used since their first SLR, the Nikon F and is still in use today. I can use all of my old lenses on my digital Nikons. There is a difference between the earlier non-AI lenses and the later AI (auto-indexing) lenses, but many of the body styles can use either one. Chronologically Nikon F and F2 - the awkward meter is in the pentaprism, few of those early meters work very well now. Nikkormat - Nikon's early consumer camera, simple and elegant in design with an excellent matched needle type of meter, heavy and

durable like a brick. Nikon F3 - my particular favorite camera, solid and professional, a great meter, light and ergonomic it fits nicely in the hand. Nikon FM - the next edition consumer camera from Nikon using much of the F3 technology, the FM2 is particularly prized by collectors and generally has a high price. Nikon FE - probably the cheapest camera Nikon ever made, it is not recommended for anything other than a paper weight. Nikon FA - an excellent consumer edition camera with titanium shutter, the FA's have a nice crisp sound when the shutter is released, usually as expensive as any F3. Nikon F4 - Nikon's earliest electronic camera with auto-focus, heavy and awkward to hold they are not worth getting except to collect for the shelf.

Nikon electronic consumer cameras with numbers like 2002, 8008, or any of the N series are not recommended, Nikon's brief attempt to compete in the massive consumer market cheapened many of their standards in design and construction. Nikon F5 - another professional electronic and auto-focus camera, much improved over the F4 but still not recommended. Nikon F100 - this was an F5-lite, many of the features of the F5 and much easier to handle but fraught with electronics problems. Nikon FM10 - the current FM series camera using nylon composites making it a very light but durable camera with all the features necessary for a beginner, depth of field preview, accurate shutter speeds from 1 second to 1/2000th and of course 'B', you can still buy them new as a kit but come with a zoom lens. Nikon F6 - Nikon's newest professional film camera it has all the modern electronic features and auto-focus but is ergonomic like an F3, quite expensive. Nikon F200 - the newest advances, it is an F6-lite.

Olympus has an excellent system with their OM series, surprisingly affordable they don't seem to sell for much on eBay. The viewfinder is large and bright, making focus and composition easy. Meters work well in an easy to perceive manner and are durable. The body itself is very light and a pleasure to hold with all the features a basic manual camera needs. Lenses are sharp and smooth but seem to be rare and expensive when you want something other than a standard 50mm. I do not recommend the OM10, double digit bodies from Olympus lack basic controls like shutter speed preferring 'aperture priority' (in other words, no shutter speed control, only f/stop control) until the OM40. Still the OM1, 2, 3, and 4 are common enough and I consider them to be a great buy.

Canon's manual cameras are limited, the A1 is considered to be collectible by many Canon lovers. The AE-1 is more consumer accessible but has some inherent problems with durability, for example, losing the bottom plate screws seems to be common to the design. The FT-b Canon embraced the consumer market early in their history and have only recently been favored by professionals with many of their digital cameras. Lens designs changed so radically from the earlier FD mounts to the electronic EF mounts, that they are NOT interchangeable. The Rebel models are ubiquitous, they've sold millions of them but Rebels have the limitations of electronic cameras as discussed above.

Pentax has a few reliable manual cameras from their past. The K1000 was a standard for inexpensive manual cameras but has one basic flaw, the meter is always on unless the lens is covered and losing a lens cap can cost you in batteries. The Spotmatic was their next model up and the ME may have been their best body. One advantage is that all Pentax K-mount lenses will work on ALL Pentax bayonet bodies, including autofocus.

Minolta doesn't have a large number of bodies to choose from in a manual camera. The X-700 is the only one I've had experience with and it was awkward and had an inconsistent meter. The lens mount for Minoltas never changed until the Maxxum autofocus series came out. Autofocus Minoltas cannot accept manual focus lenses. Obviously I recommend Nikon cameras for getting started, nowadays the cost isn't nearly as prohibitive as it was in the past. They are durable, hold their value, have excellent optics and are functional when you are ready to upgrade your equipment. Ultimately the choice comes down to what feels best to you. Good luck.

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