Switching Between Aperture Priority, Shutter Priority, and Other Modes

http://www.digital-photo-secrets.com/tip/1570/switching-between-aperture-priority-shutter-priority-and-other-modes/

Cameras these days offer a bevy of different modes, so many that it can easily become a confusing ordeal for someone who is just getting into it. You've got aperture priority mode, shutter priority mode, programmed automatic mode, and of course, manual mode. How do you know when to use which one? Does one particular mode lend itself to better photography in certain situations? Let's stop and take a closer look.

Camera modes were invented to help you isolate your options. Starting from automatic mode and going through programmed automatic to aperture priority, shutter priority, and finally manual mode, there is a trend. The amount of control you have as a photographer goes up. In automatic mode, you point your camera at your subject and shoot. In manual mode, you have to pick the aperture, shutter speed, and ISO speed before you can even get started.

Programmed automatic, shutter priority, and aperture priority modes are the "in-between" modes. They exist so you can isolate and control certain camera functions. In shutter priority mode, the camera basically says, "I'm going to let you pick a shutter speed, and I'm going to pick an aperture that matches that shutter speed. If my light sensors are working right, we'll get something that looks good."

Ditto for aperture priority mode, except you're in control of the aperture, and the camera picks the corresponding shutter speed. What about programmed automatic? Well, it's one step down from straight automatic mode. You can't control the aperture or the shutter speed directly, but you can control something known as the "exposure value."

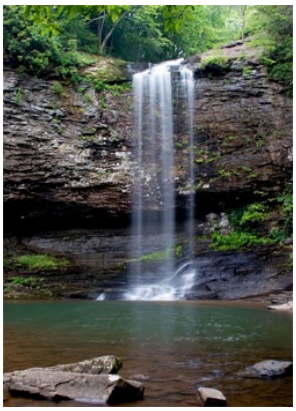
Exposure value, otherwise known as E.V. is a value you set that tells the camera you want the photo to be darker or brighter than the ones it's been giving you recently. It's a quick and easy way to control your camera's automatic functions a little more. You don't actually have to know anything about how a camera works when using E.V. to tweak a photo. You just need to take some sample shots, look at the LCD, and then adjust accordingly.

So what do I actually use these modes for?

Let's forget about programmed automatic, automatic, and manual for the time being. Neither of those modes are particularly suited to any one specific shooting situation. They're more or less good for everything.

Shutter priority and aperture priority, on the other hand, occupy a completely different arena. They are the specialist automatic modes. When you're using one of them, you probably shouldn't be using the other.

As I said earlier, shutter priority mode isolates the shutter speed. You camera allows you to take control of it. This can be useful in situations when you know exactly which shutter speed you're aiming for. Does this happen all that often? Yep. It happens all the time.



Use shutter priority mode and a slow shutter speed to capture breathtaking waterfalls like this one.

Take action and sports photography for example. In order to freeze the action and avoid any blurring, you need to use a pretty fast shutter speed. I'm talking about speeds at or above 1/500s. Anything below that, and the athletes look like a big ball of fuzz when you look at them close up. Shutter priority mode can help simplify your job as a photographer. You tell your camera to go with 1/500s, and your camera does the rest. It picks an aperture that works with the shutter speed you just picked.

Shutter priority mode also does a great job when you want to intentionally blur your subjects. Waterfall and mist photography are examples of this. If you slow down your shutter speed, the water blurs and creates some stunning effects. Your camera can take the heavy lifting out of creating pictures like this. You just have to give it a shutter speed to work with. Something in the realm of 1/15s to 1/5s ought to do give you what you want.

Aperture priority mode is where it's at for most shots

A lot of people overlook aperture priority mode. That's a real shame because it has so much more to offer than shutter priority mode. With aperture priority mode, you pick the aperture, and the camera does the rest. This helps you get a lot more control over the depth of your images.

Decrease your aperture, and the foreground and background blur. Increase it and your entire image becomes sharp. When could something like this be useful? Oh, only in just about every photo you take!

I'm serious about that. Getting control over what we photographers call "depth of field" is one of the first steps

towards mastering photography. Once you learn how to do it, you'll notice a huge difference in the portraits you take and the landscapes you make. That's because controlling the depth of field amounts to controlling the center of focus and overall impression the image gives off.

In fact, it's so important, I write a complete course on Depth of Field called Depth of Field Secrets. It fully explains how to use Aperture to make your shots really special.

Control the depth of field with aperture priority mode, and you can create carefully controlled shots like this one

Let's back up for one second. Have you ever seen portraits where the background is completely blurry or otherwise invisible, but the subject is perfectly clear? That was done by controlling the depth of field, a.k.a controlling the aperture. The photographer picked a small f-number aperture (also known as a "wide" aperture) and focused on the person's eyes. With such shallow depth, only the face is sharp, and the rest of the photo is totally blurry.

This works because it emphasizes the subject you're photographing. It completely removes the distracting background and makes your subject the center of attention. And to think, all you need to do is switch over to aperture priority mode and pick a lower f-numbered aperture. The camera does the rest.

The same goes for scenes where you want to capture everything in the background with as much detail as possible. In aperture priority mode, you can pick a high f-numbered aperture to bring everything into focus. This can really help when your image uses the geometry of a landscape to pull your viewer into the scene. The sharper everything is (from foreground to background), the better.

The other modes

There is a place for automatic, programmed automatic, and manual modes. There's just a few problems. With automatic and programmed automatic modes, you don't really get the same finely detailed level of control that you get with aperture priority and shutter priority modes. You can't, for example, tell the camera that you intend to capture an action shot, and you'll need a shutter speed of at least 1/500s.

Then there's manual mode. It's cryptic. It's mystical. It will take some time to learn, especially if you're not all that technically minded. Manual mode will give the control you need to capture everything in the photographic situations I've mentioned, but you'll have to learn a lot more about how your camera works before you can do anything with it. It should be your goal to learn manual mode. For now, shutter priority and aperture priority modes will do just fine.