

Choosing a Digital Camera

January 1, 2000

Digital cameras are quickly coming of age as a glance at any computer products catalog will reveal. A few years ago, only a handful of these cameras were available. Today, there is an overwhelming plethora of digital cameras.

So how do you choose which camera is best for you? Here are some of the things you should look for when selecting a digital camera for use in yearbook photography:

- Select a camera capable of High Res resolution or better (see table). Low and Standard resolution cameras are best suited for web pages or newspaper photos.
- Select camera resolution based on the maximum photo reproduction size you will need (see table). Photos enlarged beyond this size will have a noticeable loss of resolution and may look pixelated.

	DIGITAL CAMERA RESOLUTION		MAX PHOTO REPRODUCTION SIZE	
	Width	Height	in Inches	in Picas
Unacceptable	320	240	n/a	n/a
	576	436	n/a	n/a
	640	480	n/a	n/a
	768	512	n/a	n/a
High Res	1024	768	3.4" x 2.6"	20p5 x 15p7
	1152	768	3.8" x 2.6"	22p10 x 15p7
	1152	864	3.8" x 2.9"	22p10 x 17p5
	1152	872	3.8" x 2.9"	22p10 x 17p5
	1174	884	3.9" x 2.9"	23p5 x 17p5
Very High Res	1280	960	4.3" x 3.2"	25p10 x 19p2
	1280	1024	4.3" x 3.4"	25p10 x 20p5
	1344	1008	4.5" x 3.4"	27p0 x 20p5
	1344	1024	4.5" x 3.4"	27p0 x 20p5
	1440	1080	4.8" x 3.6"	28p10 x 21p7
	1536	1024	5.1" x 3.4"	30p7 x 20p5
Professional Res	1600	1200	5.3" x 4.0"	31p10 x 24p0
	1712	1368	5.7" x 4.6"	34p2 x 27p7
	1760	1168	5.9" x 3.9"	35p5 x 23p5
	1792	1200	6.0" x 4.0"	36p0 x 24p0
	1800	1200	6.0" x 4.0"	36p0 x 24p0
	2000	1312	6.7" x 4.4"	40p2 x 26p5

- Use normal camera evaluation criteria when shopping for a digital camera. For example, SLR cameras will almost always be a better choice than models with a separate shutter and viewfinder.
- Only use “optical zoom” specs and settings for comparing cameras and actually taking photos. The “digital zoom” feature only enlarges an area of the photo and inserts interpolated pixels to boost the resolution back to the original, non-digitally-zoomed value.
- Avoid cameras labeled, “takes still pictures only.” These cameras require a perfectly still scene for several seconds while they capture the image.
- Make sure the camera comes with an LCD viewer so you can evaluate and review your photos immediately after taking them. You can then delete and retake bad photos on the spot.
- Cameras that store their images on Flash or PCMCIA (PC) cards offer more “sharing” options than those that use other media. These cards are much easier to read on laptop or desktop computers. If you don’t have a card reader for your desktop computer or a PC slot on your laptop, plan on getting a PC card reader and at least one extra card when you get the camera. If the camera uses Flash cards, make sure to get a PC adapter for Flash cards. The PC card reader allows the photographer to keep taking photos using the second card while photos on the first card are being download into the computer. Get several additional cards if you want to be able to arm your photographer with multiple “rolls” of this digital film.
- For direct camera-to-computer connections, Firewire and SCSI are preferred over standard serial or USB (universal serial bus) connections. Serial and USB can be relatively slow while Firewire and SCSI are lightning fast. You may need to purchase a Firewire or SCSI interface card for your computer if these ports are not included, but you will probably find this additional expense well worth the time savings.