

# Focusing Modes

## Understanding Autofocus Modes

Nothing ruins a photograph more than a blurry, un-sharp image. One of the godsend of modern DSLR technology is the autofocus feature. But as useful as autofocus is, sometimes the camera gets it wrong and focuses on the wrong subject.

Additionally, there are situations where autofocus just can't cut it.

The fantastic thing about autofocus on today's cameras is that you can let it do all the work to get the super-sharp images.

The four primary focus modes (Continuous, Single, Automatic and Manual) give you a tremendous amount of flexibility to capture exactly what you want. This comes from my almost exclusive Nikon user experience, but competing brands will ostensibly have similar user features, but maybe differing names.

### Continuous Focusing Mode



AI Servo AF (Canon)/AF-C (Nikon) stands for Continuous Focus, and this mode is most useful for keeping moving objects sharp within the viewfinder as you track the object.

As soon as you begin to depress the shutter release, the camera goes into action and begins to focus. In Continuous focusing mode, the camera detects the subject's movements and refocuses accordingly to keep the object sharp as a tack.

This mode uses a lot of battery power because it is continuously focusing and refocusing.

In addition, the autofocus technology might not accurately predict the direction in which a chaotic, fast-moving subject is going to move so you might still get a blur.

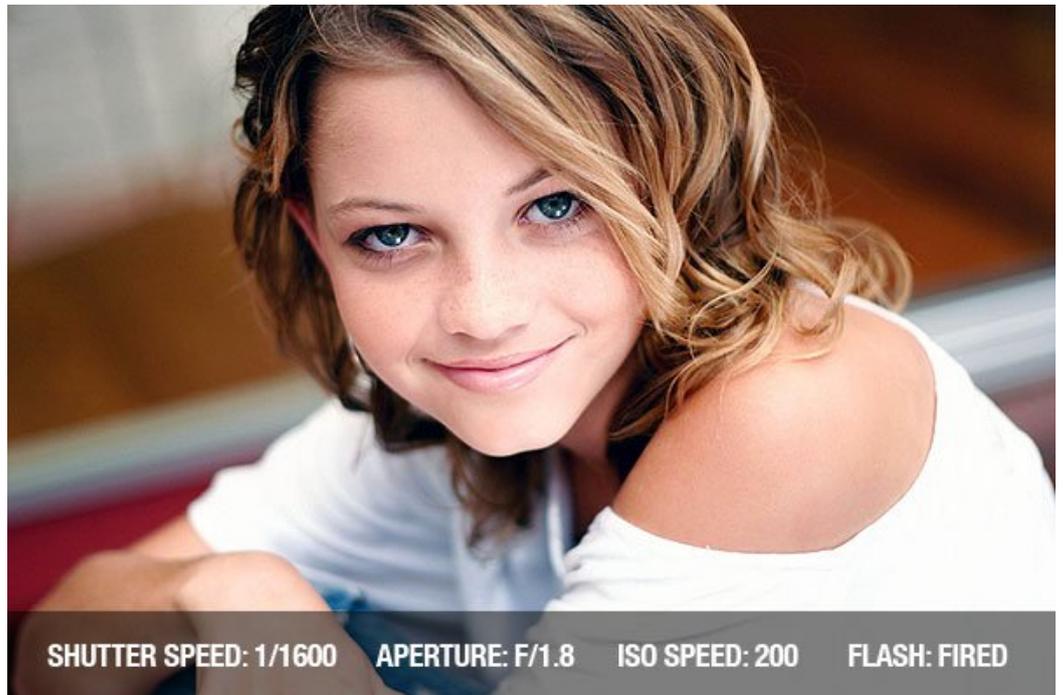
### One Shot Focusing Mode

Next, we have One-Shot AF (Canon)/AF-S (Nikon), which represent single-focus capability.

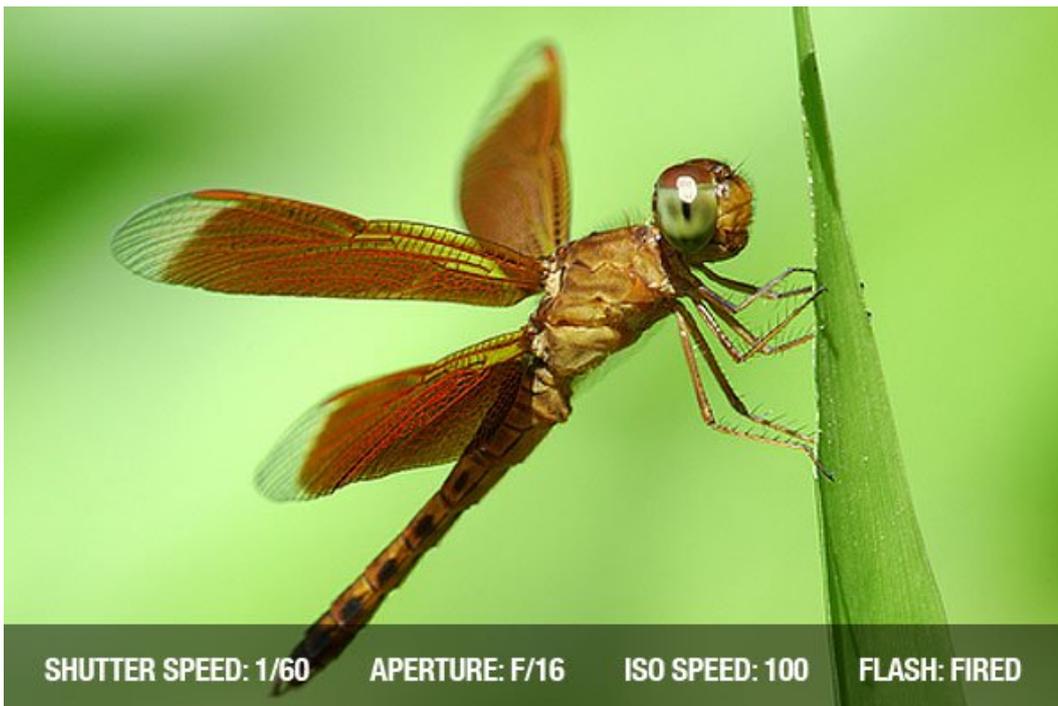
In this mode, when you depress the shutter release halfway, the camera focuses on the subject just once – there's no continuous adjustment.

This mode saves battery power and is ideal for subjects that aren't moving. However, this mode falls short when you're trying to capture something that's changing positions.

So, unless you're trying to get a quick shot of a flying Magpie in the early morning or hoping to immortalize your favourite football player getting tackled, then One Shot or AF/S mode is probably your best bet.



## Automatic Autofocus Mode



The last autofocus mode is AI Focus AF (Canon)/AF-A (Nikon), which stands for Automatic Autofocus. This is a relatively new feature which has turned out to be quite useful. In this mode, the camera's focusing computer jumps back and forth between AF-C and AF-S (Nikon) /One-Shot AF and AI Servo AF (Canon) depending on the situation. This is the default autofocus mode on cameras that have this feature.

You have to remember that photography can be an art, and in art, you have to go with what's in your mind's eye. You never know what's going to happen next or what's going to catch your eye, so it's useful to have the camera make quick focus adjustments.

This feature maintains focus if you change subjects or the subject moves.

## Manual Focusing Mode



Manually focusing the camera is perhaps the most frustrating barrier between good and great photography.

Achieving perfect focus requires using the distance measurements on the lens barrel and even perhaps measuring the distance from the lens to the subject with a tape measure; high-end photographers shoot products this way, and so do fine art photographers who are using medium format cameras.

This will give you the most accurate focus point. What if you can't take a tape measure up to a subject?

Well, you have to rely on your internal sense of sharpness and know the critical focus zone that you have at the specified aperture.

There is a diopter adjustment on most DSLRs (it's right next to the viewfinder) that lets you make minute adjustments to the focusing capacity based upon any irregularities in your eyesight.

You can also use the Depth of Field preview button to help determine focus, but this is a more advanced technique.

Manual focus is essential when you focus on a non-traditional subject. For example, a subject that is in the background when the foreground is busy and dominating.

## Full-time Servo Focus Mode

The newer Full-time Servo AF mode, also known as "AF-F", was introduced by Nikon on such DSLRs like Nikon D3100 and Nikon D7000, specifically for recording video in Live View mode. This mode automatically tracks subject movement and acquires focus during video recording. While it seems to sound like a great feature, it does not work very well for fast-moving subjects and Nikon will have to work on improving this mode to make it faster and more usable. Don't worry about this mode if you do not shoot video.

## How Camera Autofocus Works

The nice thing about digital cameras today, is that you do not have to manually focus like people used to before, back in the early film days. Digital photography is much more forgiving in this regard, because unlike film, you can see the results instantly and you can easily change your camera settings and take many exposures without worrying about film cost and replacement. Autofocus has gotten better and better over the last decade and even the cheapest entry-level DSLRs are now equipped with rather complex autofocus systems. So, how do the modern camera autofocus systems work? Let's go over a few basics.

### *Active vs Passive Autofocus*

There are two types of AF (Autofocus) systems – Active and Passive. The “Active AF” system works by shooting a red beam on your subject, then bouncing that light back to your camera to figure out the distance between the camera and the subject. Once the camera knows what that distance is, it instructs the lens to adjust focus based on this information. The nice thing about Active AF, is that it can be used in very poorly-lit environments, where normal (passive) AF does not function. The bad thing about Active AF, is that you can only use it for stationary, non-moving subjects and it only works for close subjects within 15-20 feet. If you use a Nikon or a Canon speedlight that has an “AF Assist” function, it will use an Active AF system.

On the other hand, the “Passive AF” system works very differently – instead of relying on the red beam to find out the distance between the camera and the subject, it either uses special sensors within the camera to **detect contrast** from the light that goes through the lens (known as “Phase Detection”), or uses the camera sensor itself to detect contrast in the image (known as “Contrast Detection”). What does “detect contrast” mean? Without going into complex terminology, this simply means that it tries to look for sharpness in a particular part of an image. If it is blurry, the AF system will adjust the lens focus until sharpness/contrast is achieved. That is why the Passive AF system requires that you have enough contrast in your frame for it to be able to focus properly. When a lens starts to “hunt” for focus on single colour surfaces like white walls or gradient/blurry surfaces, it happens because the camera needs objects with edges (contrast) that stand out from the background to be able to acquire focus. If you would like to find out more about this subject, see my detailed article on Phase Detection autofocus.

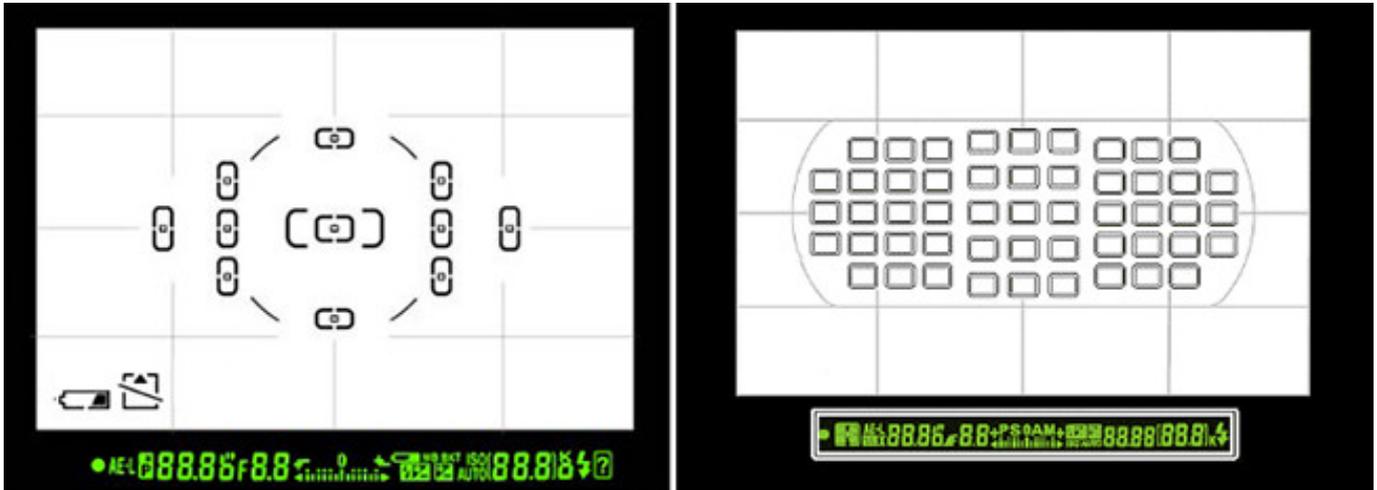
By the way, if your DSLR has an “AF Assist” lamp in front of the camera, it is not an “Active AF” beam – all it does is fire direct light at your subject like a flashlight would, so it still relies on your camera's “Passive AF” system.

Many digital cameras such as point and shoot cameras, video cameras, etc. often use the “Contrast Detection” AF method to obtain focus, while most modern DSLRs can use both Phase and Contrast Detection to acquire focus. Since the “Contrast Detection” AF method requires light to actually hit the sensor, DSLRs must have their mirrors raised in order for this to work, which means that contrast detection autofocus in DSLRs can only be done when the camera is in “Live View” mode. The Phase Detection AF is great for tracking moving subjects, while the Contrast Detection AF is great for stationary subjects. Contrast Detection is often more accurate than Phase Detection, especially in challenging or low-light situations. The nice thing about Contrast Detection, is that you can use any part of the image (including extreme corners) on your sensor to acquire focus, while with Phase Detection, you must use one or more of the focus points on your DSLR. The disadvantage of Contrast Detection on DSLRs at the moment, is that it is quite slow. I'm sure manufacturers will soon catch up with this, since the speed of autofocus while capturing videos is getting more and more important on modern DSLRs and some mirrorless cameras (particularly Micro Four Thirds) already have fast Contrast Detection autofocus. Modern high-end mirrorless cameras combine the two autofocus systems, utilizing fast Phase Detection in good light and slower Contrast Detection in low-light situations. Some manufacturers even found ways to integrate Phase Detection pixels right on camera sensors, which greatly enhances the accuracy of Phase Detection AF when compared to traditional DSLR Phase Detection autofocus.

Don't worry about all this if it sounds too confusing – the technical information above is just provided to help you understand how autofocus functions. Just remember that the default autofocus behaviour on your camera relies on the light that passes through the lens and the type of focus mode you pick (as explained further down below).

## Focus Points

Focus points are the little empty squares or dots that you see when you look through your viewfinder. Manufacturers often differentiate entry-level DSLRs from professional ones by implementing different types of autofocus systems. Entry-level DSLRs generally have simple AF systems with a few focus points for basic focusing needs, while pro-level DSLRs have complex, highly configurable AF systems with lots of focus points. These focus points are a part of “Phase Detection AF”, so each one of the focus points can be used by the camera AF sensors to detect contrast. The focus points are intentionally laid out in certain parts of the frame and the number of focus points, along with the layout vary not only by the manufacturer, but also by camera models. Take a look at these two types of autofocus systems with a different number of AF points and different layouts:



As you can see, Nikon D5000 has a total of 11 AF points and Nikon D300s is equipped with a total of 51 AF points – a big difference in the number of AF points. Is the number of AF points important? Of course it is – not only do you have more AF points to use while composing your shot and focusing on a particular area of an image, but also the camera AF system can use those different AF points for subject tracking (extremely useful for sports and wildlife photography). However, it is not just the sheer number of focus points that make a difference – there are also different types of focus points.

## Types of AF Points

Let's talk about different types of AF points now. As I have pointed out above, the number of focus points is not the only most important factor in autofocus systems – the type of AF points is also very crucial for getting accurate results. There are two types of AF point sensors available – **vertical** and **cross-type**. Vertical sensors are one dimensional and they only detect contrast on a vertical line. Cross-type sensors are two dimensional and they can detect contrast both on vertical and horizontal lines, which makes cross-type sensors much more accurate than vertical sensors. What this means, is that the more cross-type sensors your camera has, the better and more accurate autofocus is going to be. That's why when new cameras are announced, you will typically see something that says “x number of focus points and x number of cross-type sensors” – manufacturers proudly state the number of focus points and the number of cross-type sensors, especially when those numbers are high.

## Other factors that impact AF performance

As you can see, both the total number of focus points and their types are very important. However, those are not the only two things that are needed to get accurate results. The quality and the amount of light is another important factor that can seriously affect autofocus performance. By now, you probably already know that your camera autofocus works great when you shoot in daylight, under bright sun and starts to suffer when you move indoors to challenging light. Why is this the case? Because in low-light conditions, it is much tougher for your camera to detect contrast. Remember, Passive Autofocus completely relies on light that passes through the lens. If the quality of that light is poor, so is autofocus performance.

## AF-Area Modes

To make things more confusing, many DSLRs also have something called “AF-Area Mode”, which allows photographers to choose several options to use while operating in Single Area/Continuous modes like AF-S, AF-C, AF-A and AF-F. Many of the entry-level/semi-professional DSLRs allow you to pick a certain “AF-Area Mode” within camera menu.

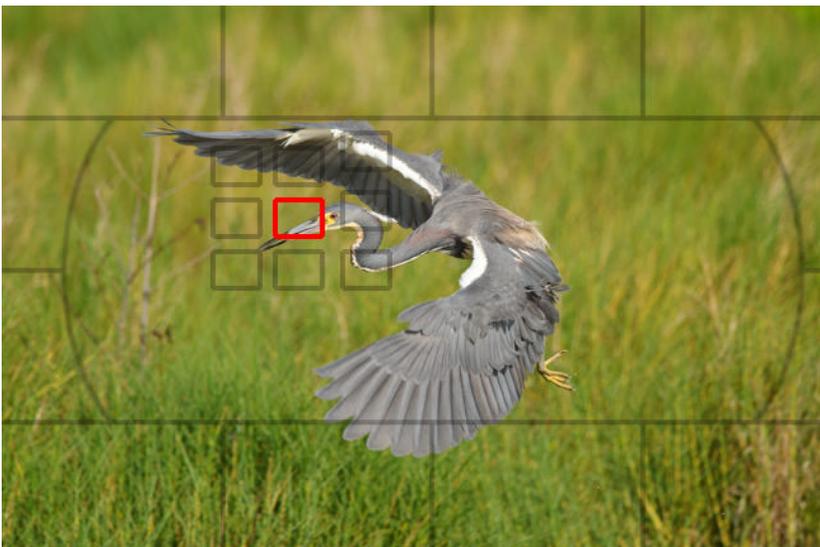


### Single-Point AF-Area Mode

When you choose the “Single Point” (Nikon) or “Manual AF Point” (Canon) AF-Area Mode, the camera only uses **one focus point** that you choose in your viewfinder to acquire focus. So, if you move your focus point up/down/left/right, the camera will detect contrast only on that particular focus point, using either vertical or cross-type sensors (depending on which one you have chosen). I use Single Point AF-Area Mode when photographing landscapes, architecture and other stationary subjects.

### Dynamic AF-Area Mode

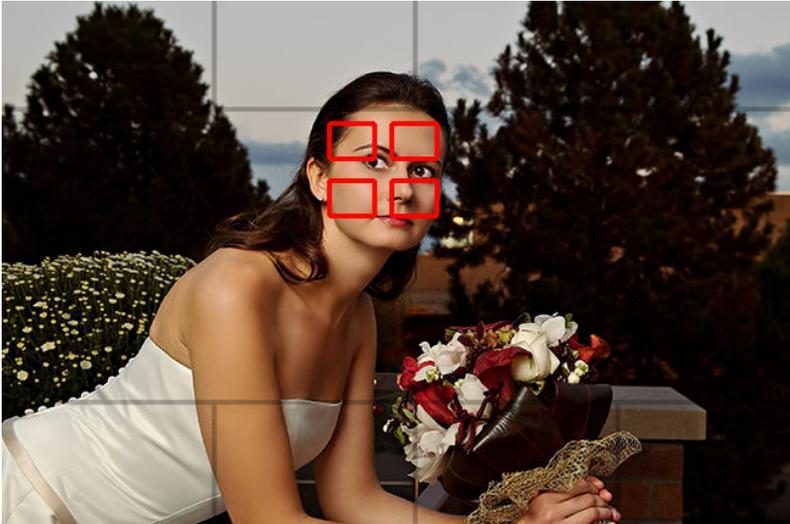
In “Dynamic” (Nikon) or “AF Point Expansion” (Canon) AF-Area Mode, you still choose one focus point and the camera will initially acquire focus on that particular focus point. However, once focus is acquired, if your subject moves, the camera will utilize the surrounding focus points to track subject movement and keep focus on your subject. You are expected to track the subject by panning the camera along with the subject and making sure that the subject stays close to the initially selected focus point. If camera selects a surrounding/different AF point, it will not be directly visible inside the viewfinder, but will be visible after the image is taken.



The Dynamic AF-Area Mode works great for fast-moving subjects like birds, because it is not easy to keep focus on birds in flight. Higher-end DSLRs have the ability to control the number of surrounding focus points to activate for this type of shooting. For example, most Nikon DSLR allows choosing between 9 points, 21 points and 51 points in Dynamic AF-Area Mode. So, if you only wanted to track a small portion of the scene, you would pick 9 points and if you wanted to track the entire frame, you could pick all 51 points to track your subject. Lastly, many of the modern DSLRs from Nikon have a “3D-Tracking Mode”, where you initially pick the AF point and

the camera will automatically activate as many focus points as needed to track subject movement. The cool thing about the 3D-Tracking mode, is that it uses a special scene-recognition system that actually reads colours and will track your subject automatically, letting you compose your shot while the subject moves. For example, if you are photographing a white bird among many black birds, the 3D-Tracking system will automatically focus on and track the white bird, even if the bird moves or if you move the camera, letting you compose your shot. If you compare 3D-Tracking to Dynamic AF-Area with a certain number of focus points selected, the 3D-Tracking method will use

all available focus points on the camera to track your subject, while Dynamic AF-Area mode divides the focus points to “zones”, activating only the surrounding focus points (as many as you selected). For example, if you choose 9 focus points, subject tracking will only work within a zone of 9 total focus points that are surrounding the focus point you picked. If your subject moves away from all 9 focus points, the camera will not be able to focus on the subject anymore. In 3D-Tracking mode, the camera will continue tracking the subject (newly selected focus points will be displayed in the viewfinder), even if it significantly moves away from your initial focus point. I use the Dynamic AF-Area mode a lot when photographing birds and wildlife and typically shoot with a smaller number of focus points activated, between 9 and 21 focus points. I have some mixed feelings about the 3D-Tracking mode for photographing birds hand-held, since it does not seem to be as quick as the non-3D mode, especially when a smaller number of focus points is used.



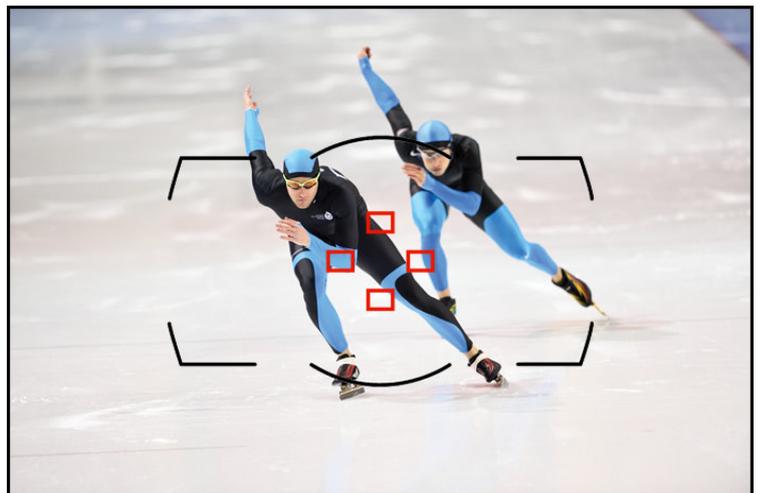
### **Auto-Area AF Mode**

The “Auto-Area AF” (Nikon) or “Automatic AF Point Selection” (Canon) Mode is the “point-and-shoot” method of acquiring focus. Depending on what you are photographing, it will automatically pick what to focus on. It is a pretty complex mode, because it will actually recognize skin tones of a person in the frame and will automatically focus on him/her. If there are multiple people in the frame, it will focus on those that are closest to the camera. If the camera does not detect any skin tones, it will typically focus on the closest and largest object in the frame. If you

shoot in Single Area/AF-S mode and select “Auto-Area AF”, the camera will actually display what focus points it will use for a second, allowing you to see and confirm the area the camera will focus on. The same thing can be done on Canon DSLRs, but it is called “Automatic AF point selection in One-Shot AF mode”. I never use this mode, because I want to control where to focus, instead of letting the camera do it for me.

### **Group-area AF Mode**

The latest Nikon DSLRs like D810 and D4S came with the a new “Group-area Autofocus”. When compared to the regular single point AF mode, Group-area Autofocus activates five AF points to track subjects. This focus mode is great for initial focus acquisition and tracking of subjects when compared to a Single-Point or Dynamic AF, especially when dealing with smaller birds that fly erratically and can be really hard to focus on and track. In such situations, the Group-area AF mode might give better results than Dynamic AF, showing better accuracy and consistency from shot to shot.

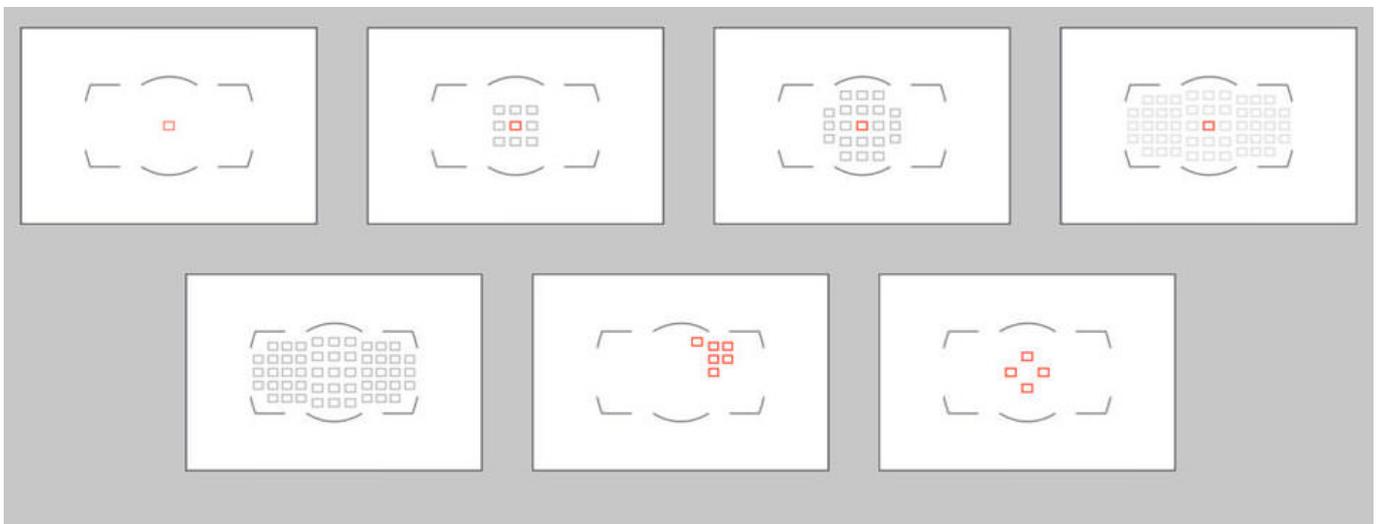


How does Group-area AF work? Basically, within the viewfinder you see four focus points, with the fifth one in the middle hidden. You can move all four focus points by pressing the multi-touch controller on the back of the camera (ideally, you want to stay in the middle, because the focus points in the centre of the frame are cross-type and the most accurate). When pointed at a subject, all five focus points are activated simultaneously for the initial focus acquisition, with priority given to the closest subject. This differs from the Dynamic 9 AF mode quite a bit, because D9 activates 8 focus points around the centre focus point, with priority given to the chosen centre focus point. If the camera fails to focus using the centre focus point (not enough contrast), it attempts to do it with the other 8 focus points. Basically, the camera will always prioritize the central focus point and only fail-over to the

other 8 if focus is not possible. In contrast, Group-area AF uses all 5 focus points simultaneously and will attempt to focus on the nearest subject, without giving preference to any of the 5 focus points.

Group-area AF is especially useful when photographing birds, wildlife and non-team sports. In the above sample image of speed skaters, if your goal is to focus on the front runner, Group-area AF would do wonders, as it would automatically acquire focus on and track the runner that is closest to the camera. Another good example can be a perched bird sitting on a stick and you are looking at it a little from above, so the ground behind the bird is clearly visible. With Dynamic AF mode, whatever you are pointing at is where the camera will initially attempt to acquire focus. If you are right on the bird, the camera will focus on the bird. If you accidentally point to the ground behind the bird, the camera will focus on the background instead. This can get quite challenging when photographing small birds, especially when the branch or stick they are sitting on is constantly moving. Getting initial focus point is important and the quicker you do it, the better the chance of capturing and tracking action, especially if the bird decides to suddenly take off. As I have mentioned above, with Group-area AF, there is no preference given to any focus point, so all 5 focus points are active simultaneously. In this particular situation, since the bird is closer than the background, as long as one of the 5 focus points is near the bird, the camera will always focus on the bird and not the background. Once focus is acquired, Group-area AF will also track the subject, but again, only if one of the 5 focus points is near the subject. If the subject moves fast and you cannot effectively pan your camera in the same direction, focus will be lost, similarly to what happens in Dynamic 9 AF mode. In terms of tracking, I personally found Group-area AF to be pretty fast, but it is hard to say if it is as fast as Dynamic 9 AF – in some situations, Dynamic 9 AF seemed to be a bit faster.

Another important fact I should mention, is that when you use Group-area AF in AF-S mode, the camera will engage face recognition and attempt to focus on the eye of the nearest person, which is neat. For example, if you are photographing someone between tree branches and leaves, the camera will always attempt to focus on the person's face instead of the nearest leaf. Unfortunately, face recognition is activated only in AF-S mode, so if you photograph fast-moving group sports and you need the camera to lock and track on a subject's face (and not on the nearest object), your best bet will be to use Dynamic AF instead.



*Clockwise from the top left: Single-point AF mode, Dynamic-area AF mode (9 points), Dynamic-area AF mode (21 points), Dynamic-area AF mode (51 points), 3D-tracking mode, Auto-area AF mode and Group-area AF mode.*

### ***When to Use Different AF-Area Modes***

Why do you need to know how and when to use different AF-Area Modes? Because each one of them can be combined with Focus Modes! To make things easier to understand, I compiled a chart with examples for you (for Nikon DSLR Cameras):

AF-Area Mode	Nikon Focus Modes		
	AF-S Mode	AF-C Mode	AF-A Mode

**Note:** Not all of the above focus modes may be available on your Nikon DSLR. The new AF-F and other AF-Area video modes are not included in the above chart.

 <p><b>Single-Point AF-Area Mode</b></p>	Camera acquires focus only once and on the selected single focus point only.	Camera focuses on the selected single focus point only and will reacquire focus if the subject moves.	Camera detects if subject is stationary or moving and will automatically select whether to use AF-S or AF-C. Only one focus point is used in either case.
 <p><b>Dynamic AF-Area Mode</b></p>	Disabled, works just like Single-Point AF.	You choose an initial focus point and once the camera acquires focus on the subject, it will engage the surrounding focus points to track subject movement. The number of surrounding focus points to use can be selected in camera menu.	Camera detects if subject is stationary or moving and will automatically select whether to use AF-S or AF-C.
 <p><b>Dynamic AF-Area with 3D-Tracking</b></p>	Disabled, works just like Single-Point AF.	Instead of using a particular number of surrounding focus points, the 3D-Tracking activates all available focus points and uses color recognition to track subjects. You pick the initial focus point and the camera will track the subject across the frame automatically, letting you recompose the shot without losing focus on the subject.	Camera detects if subject is stationary or moving and will automatically select whether to use AF-S or AF-C.
 <p><b>Group-Area AF Mode</b></p>	Camera activates five focus points and focuses on the nearest subject. If faces are detected, the camera will	Camera automatically focuses on the nearest subject and will track the subject in the frame, as long as the subject remains close to the five selected	Not available.

AF-Area Mode	Nikon Focus Modes		
	AF-S Mode	AF-C Mode	AF-A Mode
	give priority to portrait subjects.	points. Face detection is disabled.	
 Auto-Area AF Mode	Camera automatically picks a focus point, depending on what's in the frame.	Camera automatically picks a focus point on a moving subject and will track the subject in the frame.	Camera detects if subject is stationary or moving and will automatically select whether to use AF-S or AF-C.

### Autofocus Scenarios and Examples

So far you have read a lot of technical information on each focus mode and AF-area modes. Let's now go through different scenarios and examples for you to fully understand and grasp the information above. The camera settings I show below only apply to Nikon DSLR cameras.

#### Scenario #1 – Photographing Outdoor Sports

Which autofocus mode and AF-area mode would you choose when photographing outdoor sports like football? Let's start with choosing the right Autofocus Mode. Obviously, using the Single Area/AF-S mode is not going to work, since you need the camera to readjust focus continuously as you half-press the shutter/AF buttons on your camera. Therefore, we must use either AF-C or AF-A modes. I would not let the camera decide how to focus and would therefore switch to AF-C mode in such situations. What about the AF-area mode? Should you use the Single-point AF-Area Mode, Dynamic AF-Area Mode, Group-Area AF Mode or the 3D-Tracking Mode? I would personally choose the 3D-Tracking mode and let my camera deal with tracking the subjects while I compose my shots. If you find that 3D-Tracking is not working out well and it fails to track your subjects correctly, then switch to Dynamic AF-Area mode with a relatively high number of focus points, especially if you are close to the action. Group-Area AF would work great if you only want to track the subject that is closest to the camera. Here is a summary of settings I would use:

1. **Autofocus Mode:** AF-C
2. **AF-Area Mode:** 3D-Tracking, Dynamic AF-Area or Group-Area AF
3. **Custom Settings->Dynamic AF Area:** 21-points or 51-points
4. **Custom Settings->AF-C Priority Selection:** Release+Focus

#### Scenario #2 – Photographing People Outdoors

When taking portraits of people that pose for you outdoors in daylight, any of the autofocus modes should work perfectly fine. If you shoot in AF-S mode, the camera will only focus once when you half-press the shutter, so just make sure that you or your subjects don't move once you acquire focus right before taking a picture. By default, your camera should not let you fire, if focus is not properly acquired in AF-S mode. If you are shooting in AF-C

mode, just make sure to acquire good focus before taking a picture. AF-A mode works great for portraits as well. When it comes to AF-Area modes, I would stick with the Single-point AF-Area Mode, since your subjects are stationary.

1. **Autofocus Mode:** AF-S, AF-C or AF-A
2. **AF-Area Mode:** Single-point AF-Area
3. **Custom Settings->AF-S Priority Selection:** Focus
4. **Custom Settings->AF-C Priority Selection:** Release+Focus

It goes without saying that you should always focus on the closest eye of your subject, especially when standing close.

### ***Scenario #3 – Photographing People Indoors***

Photographing people indoors can be quite challenging, especially in low-light. If the light levels indoors are poor, I would shoot in AF-S mode to make sure that my AF-Assist beam helps me when needed. If you are using a speedlight, AF-S will make your speedlight use the AF-Assist red beam to acquire focus. You cannot do that in AF-C mode. The AF-A mode should also work well for these types of situations, but I would still opt to use the AF-S mode instead. In terms of AF-Area modes, I would pick the Single-point AF-Area Mode and choose the center autofocus point for better accuracy when shooting in low-light situations.

1. **Autofocus Mode:** AF-S
2. **AF-Area Mode:** Single-point AF-Area
3. **Custom Settings->AF-S Priority Selection:** Focus

### ***Scenario #4 – Photographing Birds in Flight***

Birds are extremely tough to photograph, since it is hard to predict their behavior and they are often very fast. As I have pointed out above, I would shoot in Continuous/AF-C mode and pick either Group-Area AF Mode or Dynamic AF-Area Mode with focus points between 9 and 21 (I prefer to leave focus points at 21, but 9 is generally faster). I have tried using 51 focus points and also tried shooting in 3D-Tracking mode, but found those to be slower and less reliable than using less focus points. I use the center focus point 99% of the time when photographing birds and only change focus points when birds are perched on something. Again, the center focus point is normally going to give you the best results. If you are dealing with small birds and have a hard time with initial focus acquisition, give Group-Area AF a try (if available).

1. **Autofocus Mode:** AF-C
2. **AF-Area Mode:** Dynamic AF-Area or Group-Area AF
3. **Custom Settings->Dynamic AF Area:** 9-points or 21-points
4. **Custom Settings->AF-C Priority Selection:** Release+Focus

### ***Scenario #5 – Photographing Landscapes and Architecture***

For landscapes and architecture, all focus modes work fine, but I prefer to switch to AF-S mode, since there is nothing to track. In low-light situations, you will not be able to utilize the AF-Assist function on your camera, because of distance issues. So, if your camera has a Live View mode, try to use that instead on a tripod and use the contrast-detect method to focus on a bright object in your scene. Otherwise, the only other option is to turn off autofocus and manually focus your lens. When taking pictures of landscapes and architecture, you have to be extremely careful about where to focus and need to understand such things as depth of field and hyperfocal distance well. You can find more information about these in my Landscape Photography Guide. In terms of AF-Area modes, you definitely want to use Single-point AF-Area Mode in order to focus precisely on a certain part of the frame.

1. **Autofocus Mode:** AF-S

2. **AF-Area Mode:** Single-point AF-Area
3. **Custom Settings->AF-S Priority Selection:** Focus

### ***Scenario #6 – Photographing Large Animals/Wildlife***

When photographing large animals, I would shoot in Continuous/AF-C mode and use Dynamic AF-Area or 3D-Tracking modes, both of which work great. Animals are normally not as fast as birds (although they can be even faster at times), so unless you are shooting fast action, I would just pick Dynamic AF-Area with the highest number of focus points or use 3D-Tracking.

1. **Autofocus Mode:** AF-C
2. **AF-Area Mode:** Dynamic AF-Area/3D-Tracking
3. **Custom Settings->Dynamic AF Area:** Highest number of AF points or 3D
4. **Custom Settings->AF-C Priority Selection:** Release+Focus

Hopefully the above scenarios will be useful for you to understand when to use which Autofocus and AF-Area modes. Now might be a good time to go back and review the chart above and see how well you can understand it.

### ***Scenario #7 – Photographing Small Groups***

I frequently get asked about how to focus when photographing a small group of people. Before I talk about focus modes, let me point out a few important things here. If you are using a standard or a telephoto lens, you have to be careful about the camera to subject distance when shooting at large apertures. If you stand too close to the group and shoot at large apertures like f/1.4-f/2.8, only one or two people might be in focus while everyone else is blurred, unless everyone is located on the same plane. The solution is to either change your aperture to something smaller like f/5.6 or f/8 or to stand back/move away from the group, so that your depth of field is increased, or do both. If you want to blur the background and shoot at large apertures, your only choice is to put everyone on the same plane, parallel to your camera. Imagine how the group would be standing if they were all touching a flat wall with their heads – that’s how they need to stand. In terms of autofocus modes, if you are shooting in broad daylight, any of the AF modes work fine and I would pick Single-point AF-Area Mode for focusing.

1. **Autofocus Mode:** AF-S, AF-C or AF-A
2. **AF-Area Mode:** Single-point AF-Area
3. **Custom Settings->AF-S Priority Selection:** Focus
4. **Custom Settings->AF-C Priority Selection:** Release+Focus

Note: As you may have noticed, I always leave my “AF-S Priority Selection” and “AF-C Priority Selection” to be “Focus” and “Release+Focus”, respectively. Here is why. By keeping “AF-S Priority Selection” at “Focus”, I force my camera to not let me take a picture when I do not have good focus. I do not use the AF-S mode very often, but when I do, I want to make sure that my focus stays good. As for the “AF-C Priority Selection”, the “Release+Focus” mode works great for most situations – the camera will do its best to acquire good focus, but won’t hold up or delay the shutter too much, letting me shoot when I want. I don’t see the point of using either “Release” or “Focus” in AF-C mode. “Release” won’t care if your focus is good or not (what’s the point of autofocus then?) and “Focus” won’t let you take a picture until focus is locked. If I want my focus to be that accurate, I will switch to AF-S mode instead. Just leave these two settings as shown above and forget about them.