

Shutter Delay

Overcoming digital hesitation

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One of the biggest complaints about the new digital camera technology is the problem of shutter delay. When you press the shutter on some digital cameras, there is a time lag before the shutter opens and the image is taken. This is because digital cameras take time to prepare the focus, calculate the exposure and change the LCD from a viewing to a shooting mode. Shutter delay can cause images to be misframed when either the subject or the photographer moves before the shutter closes.

Here are some things you can do to help reduce the effects of shutter delay and obtain some great underwater digital images:

1 Stay Charged — When battery power is low due to depleted or low-amperage

batteries, the camera systems work slower. This increases the time from when you press the shutter to when it actually fires. Use fresh batteries on each dive whenever possible.

2 Go Auto — Set your camera menu setting for continuous autofocus. Although it will use more power, it will reduce the time the camera needs to focus before shooting.

3 Start Half Cocked — Another method for shortening the delay time is to press the shutter halfway down so the camera autofocuses continually. This way the camera is ready to go when you press the shutter fully.

4 Learn from Mistakes — The biggest advantage of the digital camera is that you can see what mistakes you are making right away. This allows you to modify the way you shoot, thus reducing the problems associated with shutter delay or misalignment of your strobe.

5 Consider SLR — Digital single-lens reflex (SLR) cameras work much like film SLR cameras, and do not have a shutter delay. These cameras are generally more expensive, but they provide an excellent solution to the shutter delay problem.

6 Practice Makes Perfect — Take time to learn how long it takes for the shutter to fire with your camera. If your subject is stationary, make sure you stay steady after pressing the shutter to avoid movement.

7 Pan the Picture — If the subject is moving, you will need to move the camera in line with the action, which is called panning. You will need to pan the camera with the subject and press the shutter as it passes by. This is a bit more complicated, but you can review the images on the LCD screen and then modify your panning technique.

8 The Shotgun Approach — The Sports mode allows you to rapidly shoot five or six photos. This shotgun approach helps capture the peak of the action, but can only be used with available light, as the flash cannot recycle fast enough to keep up with the shutter.

9 Shoot, Shoot, Shoot — Since your digital film allows for more than the normal 36 exposures available with film, you can keep shooting until you get the shot. Once back on the boat, you can review your mistakes and delete them.

As new digital cameras come on the market, the internal image processors are becoming faster, much like computers today. Eventually shutter delay will be reduced to the point where it is no longer a problem.

We know that editing and digital camera questions will continue to arise, so send them to us at digitalduo@jackandsuedrafahl.com and we will try to answer them directly or in an upcoming column. For more in-depth information, you can purchase our new book, *Digital Imaging for the Underwater Photographer*, directly from our Web site at www.jackandsuedrafahl.com.