

iPhone's Photo Settings: Where They Are and How to Use Them

One of the first capabilities of the cell phone (besides the phone call, remember those?) was the ability to take pictures. Since that time almost 20 years ago, what started as a fun gimmick has become a technology that has almost completely eliminated the need for a stand-alone camera. But with the incorporation of a high quality camera comes a lot of complicated settings.

The iPhone settings are primarily located within 4 different locations:

- **Settings > Camera**
- **Settings > Photos**
- **Camera App Itself**
- **Photos App Itself**

The best thing with Apple devices is that you can use them easily, but there are a ton of additional features just beneath the surface. Let's run through everything the iPhone camera has to offer.

Settings > Camera

Before you even open the Camera app itself, you can toggle on and off a lot of different options under settings. Open Settings and scroll down to Camera. From here you will see the following options:

- **Preserve Settings**
- **Grid**
- **Scan QR Codes**
- **Record Video/Slo-mo**
- **Settings on Composition**
- **HDR/Smart HDR**

But what does it all mean? Well, let's learn.

Preserve Settings

Firstly, when you head to Preserve Settings you will be presented with three toggle switches:

- **Camera Mode**
- **Creative Controls**
- **Live Photo**

This is an easy one, do not worry. In short, Preserve Settings is just giving you the option whether you want the options you choose to stay on by default the next time you open the Camera app.

Let's say the Camera Mode switch is on. You are at a friend's birthday party taking pictures. Suddenly, the lights go dark and someone emerges from the kitchen with the cake and starts singing "Happy Birthday." Now you want to take a video, so you scroll over to Video while in you Camera and record.

When you reopen the app, your camera will still be in video mode, not standard Photo, since that is the last mode you used. If you would rather start from Photo every time because that is what you plan on doing most often, then leave the Camera Mode switch off.

It is the same idea for Live Photo: switch on and it saves your preference, switch off and you start in Live Photo Mode every time.

Let's go back to our birthday example to explain the Creative Controls preservation setting. If this switch is on, this situation could pose a serious problem. That is because all your lighting specifications, set for a well-lit room, will still be set when your friend turns out the lights. The flash will be off too.

Generally, it is best to leave this switch off unless you will be in the same lighting and exposure situation for a while.

Source: [Apple](#)

Grid

Next you will see an on/off switch for Grid, which is probably turned to off by default. This setting helps you use the "Rule of Thirds" when you are taking photos by drawing lines on your camera screen. This splits the screen into 3 rows vertical by 3 rows horizontal. That way you can adequately split your image into thirds in either direction and also keep your camera straight relative to the horizon.

Using the Rule of Thirds via the grid is really useful. Have you ever taken a photo that ended up with way too much sky? Or way too much grass in the foreground? That is because you were not using the Rule of Thirds. With the grid, keep the main focus of the photo, like your friend's faces, in the middle third of the grid. The top third is sky and the bottom third is ground.

Sources: [iPhone Life](#)
[Apple iPhone Photography](#)

Scan QR Codes

You have definitely seen a QR code before, maybe just without realizing it. They are those futuristic-looking barcodes with alternating, seemingly random black and white blocks. Although their popularity waned a while back, they are still occasionally used in the marketing world to persuade you, the consumer, to a website or product information quickly.

It used to be cumbersome to do this. You would have to take a photo of the code lined up perfectly. Then sometimes you would even have to paste that into your browser. This is still the case if you have this setting switched off.

But now, if you have Scan QR Codes under settings switched to on, this process is simplified. Just follow these steps when you see a QR code:

1. **Open your camera.**
2. **Point it at the code.**
3. **A square will appear around the code, notifying you that the phone sees it**
4. **A drop-down option will appear on your screen, asking if you want to open the link, along with a brief description of what it is.**
5. **Tap on the option and the link will open via your default browser.**

Source: [Wikipedia](#)

Record Video and Record Slo-mo

Tapping on Record Video will give you a list of the following options (4K options only available on iPhone 8 or later):

- **720p HD at 30fps**
- **1080p HD at 30fps**
- **1080p HD at 60 fps**
- **4K at 24fps**
- **4K at 30fps**
- **4K at 60fps**

Specifically, this screen gives you the choice as to which quality and frame rate you want all your videos to record in. 720p is the basic HD quality that looks fine, but not great. 1080p is the standard baseline television quality today. 4K standards for 4 thousand, as in 4 1080p images put together. Each fourth of a 4K image is 1080p quality, offering a truly immersive picture.

The term fps stands for “frames per second.” Remember, a video is made by many frames, or still images, being recorded at a rapid rate. When played back at such a fast pace, those images move smoothly as one video. The more frames you use per second, the smoother the video becomes.

So why not always turn on 4K at 60fps? Space. Think about it: recording a 5-minute video would be the equivalent of taking 18,000 high quality photos. Even on a 128 GB iPhone, that adds up fast. Using the Record Video options, you can decide which setting is best for what you are recording while at the same time minimizing the amount of space you are taking up.

Record Slo-mo, short for slow motion, is a similar concept. Here you will be presented with just two options:

- **1080p HD at 120 fps**
- **1080p HD at 240 fps**

Your iPhone creates slow motion video by greatly increasing the number of frames per second. Playing back at normal speed with all those additional frames means that it takes longer to progress through the action, giving the effect of slow motion.

It also means a lot more frames, so Apple keeps your quality low to minimize the amount of space used. Slo-mo videos are generally rather short anyway, so not to worry.

Composition

Composition refers to, quite literally, what the image is composed of. Are you taking a photo at your friend's birthday party? Then the image's composition might include things like:

- **Your friends**
- **Cake**
- **Drinks**
- **Tables**
- **Chairs**

These settings, located more readily with the newer models' 3 camera system, **focus on the items just outside the frame**. There are switches here for both photo and video. With the switch off, your iPhone will simply take a picture of what is within the frame.

However, with these switches on, it will also capture the things immediately outside the frame. That way you can go back later and adjust where you actually want the frame to be. If you tried to take a picture of the cake, only to realize later you also wanted your friend's face in the shot as she blows out the candles, you can make that adjustment the next day.

As a space saving maneuver, the composition outside the frame is only saved for 30 days. Additionally, if you would like your phone to make these fixes for you, feel free to switch on Auto Apply Adjustments.

Source: [Iceland Photo Tours](#)

HDR and Smart HDR

"Hold on, that one was no good. Let me take another." This is the problem that HDR, or High Dynamic Range, solves. By keeping this on, your iPhone will automatically take three exposures of the same image. Then you can keep your favorite one. Naturally, switching this off will save space on your phone, but that comes with a risk in quality.

Keep Normal Photo is switched to on? That will automatically keep an additional photo under normal exposure. Additionally, newer models also feature an option called Smart HDR. Here your phone will take the best parts of each exposure and combine them into one breathtaking photo.

Source: [iPhone Photography School](#)

Settings > Photos

Congratulations! Now you know how everything works on all of your camera settings and can take the best photos! But what about once those photos are stored? Stay in Settings and head into the section labeled Photos. Here you will find:

- **Connections to Siri and Search**
- **iCloud connectivity**
- **Shared albums**
- **Data usage**
- **Auto-Play**
- **Memories**
- **Transferring to a home computer**

This way you can both catalogue and beatify them once they are saved in your Photo app.

Siri and Search

Here the first thing you will see is Siri and Search. These are designed to let Siri, your iPhone's AI (artificial intelligence), learn your habits in photos and make them easier to find. The following options exist here:

- **Learn from this App**
- **Show in Search**
- **Suggest Shortcuts**
- **Show Siri Suggestions**

Learn from this App allows Siri to make suggestions to you within the app based on what you have done before. Search and Shortcuts let you find long lost photos much easier.

Siri Suggestions occurs when you are using the camera from the lock screen. It will give you secure camera and photo options without needing to unlock your phone.

iCloud

Under the iCloud subheading you will see a few different features:

- **iCloud Photos**
- **Optimize iPhone Storage or Download and Keep Originals**
- **Upload to My Photo Stream**

Essentially, all these settings revolve around utilizing your iCloud account to save you physical space in your phone's memory. As long as you are logged into your phone with your Apple ID, you have an iCloud account. This can be accessed either directly through your Photo App or on your PC by logging in.

The iCloud Photos switch, firstly, lets you decide whether you want all your photos automatically backed up to iCloud. If you have privacy concern, you may leave this switched off. However, if something happens to your phone, you will lose all of your photos. By keeping your photos backed up to iCloud, your memories will be preserved.

The next option essentially lets you choose between saving space and quality. Download and Keep Originals will keep all of your photos in full quality saved directly on your phone. If any were uploaded in the past, it will re-download them.

But if you want to save space, hit Optimize iPhone Storage. Doing this will move all your photos and videos, in their highest quality, up to iCloud. You will still hang on to a lower resolution copy on your phone to browse through, and the higher resolution copy is still easily accessible if needed.

My Photo Stream is a neat new feature that lets you see all your recent photos (from the past 30 days) on all of your devices. For example, if you also own an iPad, you can show a photo you took on your iPhone to someone using your iPad's much larger screen.

Conversely, you can show a photo you took at home with your iPad to somebody when you are out and about with your iPhone. To avoid being surprised with a full phone, photos taken on another device are not automatically saved to your library. Although you could always choose to do so.

Shared Albums

Shared Albums is kind of like Photo Stream, but with other people. Sure, you can always text someone a photo or two that you took. But let's say you are going on vacation together. It is rather silly for you both to keep taking dozens of pictures of the same stuff. But now you go home and you have to figure out which pictures your friend has and which ones you have.

Shared Albums simplifies this. By switching this on, you can create and share in Shared Albums where you can both put pictures of your trip and access anytime you like. Want to print it out? Go ahead, that is your photo too now. And do not worry, your friend will only have access to the photos in that shared album, not your other albums in your iPhone.

Data Usage

Unfortunately, moving photos between iCloud or your friends does not just magically happen. You need an internet connection to send that information back and forth, and that comes from either a local Wi-Fi connection or your phone's data plan.

The last thing you want is to run out of data a week into your billing month just because your phone was constantly backing up your 400 HDR photos to iCloud while you were in the Bahamas. It is smart to leave this switched to off, especially if your data allotment per month is low or you are in a crowded family plan.

Your phone will simply wait until it is connected to Wi-Fi to do any backups. Of course, if you have an unlimited data plan, you may as well leave this switch on. Keep in mind that constantly having this running in the background may slow down your phone though.

Auto-Play

This is an easy one. By now your Camera Roll is probably filled with:

- **Photos**
- **Live Photos**
- **HDR Photos**
- **Videos**
- **Slo-Mo Videos**

Unless you specifically go looking for videos in the Video album, these will simply be listed in the order you took them all. If Auto-Play is on, videos and live photos will instantly start playing, with volume, the moment you scroll to them.

This is a matter of personal preference. Some people, who want to have the full memory experience anyway, would love to just jump right in. For others, this is incredibly annoying, so they might leave this turned off.

If you leave it off, the video or live photo will be presented as a still image. For a live photo, simply hold down on the image and it will play. Release and hold down again to play it again. For a video, a play button will appear in the middle of the image. Tap that button and the video will play.

Memories

Memories is a cool feature that, if turned on, allows your iPhone to create curated batches of photos using past experiences. Naturally, the number of photos you take on the few days you are on vacation goes up significantly from just another week at the office. With Memories on, your iPhone will notice that, along with the special location.

One year later, or even many years later based on information retained in iCloud, your phone will surprise with a batch of photos and a description of what happened. It is always nice to be at home and receive a memory notification labeled something like “Beach Day 2014” or “Trip to New York 2019.” From here you can choose to redownload or send to a fellow traveler.

Source: [Apple Support](#)

Transferring to a Home Computer

This is new setting that concerns that backing up on photos. Here you are presented with two options: Automatic and Keep Originals. The idea here is that typically all our devices are not the same generation. You may have a brand-new iPhone, but your iPad might be 5 years old.

By switching on Automatic, your photos and videos will automatically be transferred to a compatible format. For example, a 4K video from your iPhone X will be converted to 1080p when it arrives at your iPad. This is convenient in this instance as it requires less work on your part.

However, this can take a little time. In addition, if you do not really ever use old devices, the process is unnecessary. If that be the case, select Keep Originals and the process will be smoother.

Camera App Itself

While the vast majority of settings can be found in Settings (as one would hope), a few fine-tuning adjustments can be found within the Camera and Photos apps themselves. The Camera app features a few options that are rather intuitive:

- **Camera icon with spiral arrows**- switch between back camera and front camera
- **Lightning bolt**- flash. You can either leave this on:
 - **Auto**- Your iPhone uses its best judgement based on your surroundings.
 - **On**- Always works every time you take a photo
 - **Off**- Never turns on when you take a photo
- **HDR**- Turn HDR on and off (depending on your special concerns and quality needs)
- **Concentric circles**- Live Photo on and off
- **3 merging circles**- adjust exposure

In addition, the clock icon stands for Time Delay. Usually you would keep this off. But if you want a photo with a group of people, a selfie might not be realistic. With Time Delay, you can set/balance your phone somewhere and still have time to put yourself in the shot before the picture is taken. Delay options are for 3 seconds or 10 seconds.

Lastly, on the bottom of the screen, you can toggle away from Photo and directly into other camera options like:

- **Square**- for square rather than rectangular images
- **Pano**- for panoramic shots
- **Video**
- **Slo-Mo**
- **Time-Lapse**

Sources: [Mimeo Beginner's Guide](#)
[Lifehack](#)

Photos App Itself

Within the Photos app itself are also a few additional settings. While most features here are mainly for navigating or creating albums and memories, there are a few editing features you should know about. Head to a photo and tap Edit and then meet me in the next paragraph.

There are a few more options here that are quite useful. It really depends on how elaborate you want to go. For most of us, tapping on the bottom right square with arrows will reveal the few basic editing features we need such as:

- **Mirror**- Flip the photo on its vertical access. Ideal for mirror glam shots.
- **Rotate**- Rotate the photo clockwise 90 degrees. Keep tapping to keep turning it. You can also turn be a different degree by holding the image and twisting it while in this mode.
- **Auto**- Automatically adjusts the photo to a reasonable dimension and orientation.
- **3 Dots**- Option screen where you can add shortcuts to your favorite editing options.

However, if you really want to go down to the highly technical photography features, locate the three circled symbols just under the image while still in the basic Edit landing page. You can scroll these over to reveal all of the different advanced editing features:

- **Auto adjust**
- **Exposure**
- **Brilliance**
- **Highlights**
- **Shadows**
- **Contrast**
- **Brightness**
- **Black Point**
- **Saturation**
- **Vibrance**
- **Warmth**
- **Tint**
- **Sharpness**
- **Definition**
- **Noise Reduction**
- **Vignette**

Source: [Apple iPhone Photography How To](#)

Sounds Complicated? Only if You Want It to Be

While the sheer volume of photo settings may seem overwhelming, it is important to note a couple of things. For one, Apple knows that most people are casual photographers wanting to record happy memories, not professional photographers. They aim to eventually put camera companies out of business by putting all your photography needs all in one place.

Therefore, all these complicated options, like the ones in the list above, exist for those who want to do advanced editing. But for people like you and me, there is no need to make it so complex. Apple by default programs its iPhones for average conditions and user inputs.

That means, generally speaking, your iPhone is ready to go with at least 80 percent of your preferences right out of the box. The rest you can easily fix by heading over to settings. **If your last phone was an older iPhone, logging in with your Apple ID will ensure all of your preferences remain the same.**

Another thing to note was that the article so far was a complete guide with all the details you need. In practice, all of these settings are really intuitive; you should be able to find at least half of these options easily. In addition, many of the switches under settings have descriptions underneath to explain what they do.

Source: [Mimeo Photos](#)

Recap

Lastly, these are all of the photo settings that exist in the current newest iPhone edition in 2020, the iPhone 11 Pro Max. More and more features have been added to the camera throughout the iPhone's history, as you can compare on Apple's website [here](#). So, if you have an older iPhone it is very well possible that not 100 percent of the options described above exist in your phone.

Additionally, the Pro series in addition adds a lot of features to many apps, like photos, that do not exist even the standard 11. Contrary to what Apple would lead you to believe though, settings do not change that drastically between iPhone generations, so unless you are a professional photographer, you honestly will not notice much of a difference.

The best way to learn on an iPhone is by doing. Try out some features. If you do not like them, switch them back off or revert to original copies.