

Use Custom Shooting Modes for Fast Camera Changes

By John Gerlach

www.gerlachnaturephoto.com

I find cameras have too many menus filled with options. Many menu options are useful while others I never use. How do I find menu options that must be changed quite often to fit the circumstances? Custom shooting modes come to the rescue.

Custom Shooting Modes for the R5

My main interests are wildlife, landscape, and macro. With the mirrorless R5, there are numerous menu options that must be changed when I switch from landscape to macro or wildlife photos. My Canon R5 offers me three custom shooting modes called C1, C2, and C3. I have assigned all my landscape settings to C1, macro settings to C2, and wildlife to C3. I do wish I had up to five custom shooting modes and could rename them to help remember what each are for. If five custom shooting modes were available on the Canon R5, I would have one for flash hummingbird photography and another for night sky photography.

Custom shooting modes are simple to use. For example, I set all my typical starting point settings for landscapes and then assign everything set in the camera to C1. Anytime I am photographing landscapes, I select C1 instead of manual and all my camera settings switch to those I have set for landscapes. This is much quicker and eliminates mistakes by forgetting one of the key settings that you might make if manually setting all the changes. And once you select the custom shooting mode, it is easy to change a setting. For example, rather than going with the f/16 that initially appears, I can quickly manually change the aperture to f/8 for focus stacking purposes.

Custom Shooting Mode C1 – Landscapes

ISO 100

This is the native ISO of my camera and gives me the best quality.

¼ second

I photograph most landscapes on a tripod allowing me to use any shutter speed. Since the light is often best early and late in the day, slow shutter speeds are the norm. I use ¼ second as the starting point. It is easy enough to change the aperture and shutter speed to suit the circumstances.

f/16

I tend to avoid stopping down more to reduce the negative effects of diffraction at small apertures. But if I need depth I use f/16 but quite often I switch this to f/8 as I do a lot of automatic focus bracketing and assemble the stack of images with Helicon Focus. F/8 is a better aperture to use when focus stacking.

2-second self-timer

Pressing the shutter button creates a little camera vibration and that causes a slight loss of sharpness, so the 2-second self-timer gives the camera vibrations time to dissipate.

AF operation - One shot AF

Since landscapes do not move closer or further away from you, I do not need the camera to change the autofocus to account for this. Of course, there are exceptions. If photographing a beautiful cliff from a moving boat, I would switch to Servo AF to let the camera change the focus as the shooting distance changes.

AF method - 1 point AF

I prefer to use a single AF point and use Touch and Drag to place the single active AF point on the spot in the image where I want the sharpest focus.

Subject to detect - None

Expo simulation - enable

White balance - AWB

By using AWB, I do not have to worry about white balance. And I prefer to make white balance adjustments when I process the image anyway.

The Canon R5 lets you slide your thumb over the LCD to easily move the active AF point to exactly where you need it. It is called Touch and Drag, its fast and precise, and I use it a lot. There are several options for this control. The following are what I use.

Touch and Drag AF Settings

- Touch Control – Sensitive
- Touch and Drag AF – Enable
- Positioning Method – Relative
- Active Touch Area – Top Right

Custom Shooting Mode C2 – Macro

AF method – 1 point AF

I select a single AF point and use touch and drag to move it over to the spot where I want sharp focus.

Subject to detect – none

Since I am not photographing vehicles, wildlife, or people, I leave this set to none.

Touch and Drag Setting

I use the same ones for all three custom shooting modes.

AF turned off on the shutter button and assigned to AF-on

I really do not use back-button focusing that much anymore, but close-ups are a case where I often use it. Why? I frequently use auto focus bracketing where the camera automatically shoots a number of

images at different focus distances to cover extended depth of field. For this to work, the camera and lens must have autofocus active. While it is possible to select the exact spot and move a single AF point over to that spot to tell the camera where to focus first, and then shoot the set of images in the focus bracketing sequence, often the closest spot where you want the focus to begin is tiny and hard to make the camera start with it. And since I usually trigger the camera by gently pressing the shutter button with the 2-second self-timer set to allow vibrations to dissipate, that makes the camera autofocus to begin the sequence and it might focus on the wrong spot. Instead, I decide where I want sharp focus to begin, magnify that spot and manually focus on that spot, and then press the shutter button to begin the auto focus bracketing. With back-button focus set, the camera does not autofocus when I press the shutter button down. But, once the first image is shot, the camera does autofocus to create the set of images that will be combined to achieve greater depth of field.

ISO 100

Most of the time I use ISO 100 when photographing still objects, whether close-ups or landscapes.

f/16

F/16 is a good place to start and frequently change the f-stop to suit conditions. For example, if I am shooting a focus stack, then I use the sharper aperture of f/8.

1/5 second

Macro shots are often made in soft light and when I shoot auto focusing bracketing sets of images, 1/5 second is the longest shutter speed I can use. Hopefully, future cameras will allow auto focus bracketing at any shutter speed.

Manual exposure

Macro subjects are typically still, allowing more time to think about things. This is where I greatly prefer manually selecting the ISO, aperture, and shutter speed. I always set my exposure for my RAW images to produce the first blinkies in the highlights. Since I know blinkies are based on the embedded JPEG in a RAW file, I know the highlights really are not overexposed yet, just getting close in my RAW data.

Auto WB

I am used to tweaking the white balance when I process my RAW files with the latest version of Canon's DPP4 software.

Electronic first-curtain Shutter

This option lets me set the shutter speed to shutter speeds longer than 1/5, unlike Electronic shutter. This option lets me shoot macro shots in dim light where I need exposure times such as 2 seconds. And I can manually shoot a focus stack of images using this mode at prolonged exposure times.

Exposure Simulation

Since I am not using flash as the main light, this option provides a bright viewfinder and LCD screen to allow composing the image and setting various options, so I normally have it On. It does simulate the ambient exposure quite well and is a particularly useful aid. Be aware if you use flash as the main light, your exposure simulation will be dark and could be so dark you cannot see much in the viewfinder.

2-second self-timer

For closeups, most of the time I use this option to allow vibrations created by pressing the shutter button down to shoot the image to dissipate. There are times when you must catch the peak of the action or the peak of stillness, such as a flower that finally holds still in a light breeze, and then a remote release is better.

Custom Shooting Mode C3 – Wildlife

AF method 2. Servo AF

I have had good luck with this method, so continue to use it. I set tracking sensitivity to -2 and leave Accel./Decel. Tracking to 0. But there are many options, and some may be more suited for the subjects you photograph.

AF method - eye

Eye detection - enable

Subject to detect – Animals

I prefer eye detection whenever it works! Naturally, the AF method must be set to Eye Detection and also it must be enabled.

Touch and Drag Setting – Enable Relative Top Right

I always have this enabled and I prefer relative as then I do not have to reach and touch the left side of the LCD to put the active AF point there.

Auto ISO

Sometimes I must react quickly to fleeting spectacular light or the sudden appearance of an animal. Having Auto ISO set nearly always gets the exposure close to ideal without taking my precious time to set it manually.

f/8

1/400 second

Both f/8 and 1/400 second are suitable starting points for many subjects. Naturally, when I have time, I frequently use other aperture/shutter speed combinations to suit the circumstances.

Auto WB

I use auto WB to get me close and adjust the white balance in processing – it only takes a few seconds!

Electronic shutter mode

I use this shutter mode most of the time for wildlife. There is less wear on the camera, wildlife does not hear the camera, and the camera shoots 20 images per second. Of course, I wish I could set the number of images per second when using this mode as often 20 images per second is far too many, especially for still or slow-moving animals.

Exposure simulation on

Again, I leave this on as I like the viewfinder to simulate the exposure I set. Only when I am using flash as a main light do I disable exposure simulation. I should add that if I use flash as a fill light, then I keep exposure simulation on.

Summary

By setting my camera to C1, C2, or C3, I quickly get all the options set for whatever I am photographing instantly. And naturally, often some things must be changed such as aperture or shutter speed and that is quick and easy to do in the usual way. I find using the custom shooting modes save me a lot of time and most importantly, I am ready to shoot photos to suit the subject quickly.

Menu Tabs

Another helpful way to change settings is to assign key menu options to MY Menu tabs. The Canon R5 offers three of them, My Menu1, My Menu2, and My Menu3. Assigning a menu choice to one of these My Menu tabs makes it much easier to find the option, rather than searching every menu in your camera.

Here are the menus I assigned to a My Menu tabs.

My Menu1

Multiple exposure

Focus bracketing

HDR mode

Shutter mode

AF operation

Cropping/aspect ratio

My Menu2

AF method

Eye detection

Format card

Battery info

Record function + card/folder set.

Expo. simulation

My Menu3

IS (image stabilizer) mode

Custom shooting mode (C1-C3)

As a result of using Custom Shooting Modes and the MY Menu tabs, I can quickly set my camera to suit the situation before me and not leave something out! I have used both for a long time and find it to be enormously helpful to me and maybe you too! It would be nice if future cameras let you select your own letters for C1, C2, and C3 and I could use a C4 and C5 as that would let me also have a custom shooting mode for hummingbirds with flash and the night sky.

Do not send the following

Custom Shooting Mode C1 – Hummingbirds with flash

ISO 400, no Auto ISO

I use four to eight Yongnuo Speedlites simultaneously when doing multi-flash photos of hummingbirds. I usually set the flashes to only 1/64 power as that low power level not only freezes the bird's wings but more importantly to me it lets me shoot at a rate of 14 images per second. While I do not get 14 perfectly exposed flash photos in one second as the power in the flash drops before it can fully charge itself, I do get around 10 perfectly exposed shots in less than a second. Therefore, if the hummingbird hovers in one spot for ½ second, I capture several perfectly exposed images in that brief time, and this is important when only a few hummingbirds are coming to the setup or one species that you want does not come in very often. The more shots you shoot that are perfectly exposed, the more likely to catch a pleasing pose.

Flash WB

When I am using all flash for the exposure, I always set the white balance to Flash and do not use Auto white balance as that can vary too much from shot to shot when flash is the primary light source.

Shutter mode Elec. 1st-curtain

I normally use electronic shutter because the camera is completely silent and does not alarm wildlife and it shoots at 20 images per second and there is less wear and tear on the camera. But, with the Canon R5, electronic shutter and flash do not work together. So, I use this shutter selection instead.

1/200 second

This shutter speed is a fast sync speed for the Canon R5. Using the fast sync speed reduces the chance of getting harmful effects from natural light. Of course, there are times when I use a slower shutter speed to blend flash and natural light together for hummingbirds as this shows some wing motion from the ambient light portion of the exposure.

f/16

Hummingbirds are small and photographing them is a bit like close-up photography where you need to use more depth of field due to the small subject size to get more of the bird sharp.

Exposure simulation disable

This is a big one! I really enjoy the exposure simulation offered by mirrorless cameras, but it is a problem when using flash as the main or only light source. I typically photograph hummingbirds early or late in the day and under a porch roof, so the ambient light is low and that eliminates ghosting of the bird. When the typical exposure setting in this situation is ISO 400, f/16, and 1/200 second, the ambient light is typically three to six stops underexposed. If you have exposure simulation on, the camera shows you the exposure simulation for the ambient light and does not consider the flash contribution. That means the viewfinder is dark, so dark that you probably cannot see anything in the viewfinder. Disabling exposure simulation returns you to a bright viewfinder.

H+ shooting speed

This is the fastest frame rate I can use on the Canon R5 – about 14 shots per second. And it only works when I use a flash on the camera set to a low power ratio such as 1/64 power and the Yongnuo receiver flashes set to S1. When the flash fires on the camera (the transmitting flash), the receiving flashes set to S1 “see” the light from the camera-mounted flash and fires the receiving flashes. This happens really fast. When I used the radio controls on the Yongnuo flashes, the controller on the camera sends a radio signal to the receiving flashes and then they fire. Apparently, radio signals are slower than light, so the maximum speed I can shoot at with radio signals is 9 shots per second. Therefore, I use the flash on the camera and the receiving flashes set to S1.

For most animals, the eye focus works quite well. I have not tried it on insects, and it does not work on some animals where the eye and the fur blend together and offer little contrast, such as a bison.

AF Operation

Since hummingbirds change their distance when at my sugar water setup, it is important to Servo AF to allow the camera to change focus automatically as the subject distance changes.

AF Method

I use eye focus to allow the camera to detect the eye and focus on it. This is terrific technology for capturing better focused images.

Subject to Detect

People, Animals, Vehicles, and None are the choices. For hummingbirds, I set Animals.

Eye detection

Enable or Disable are the options and I use Enable.

AF on the shutter button

While I used back-button focusing for 25 years when it first came out, I largely do not use it anymore as I prefer to rely on eye focus for wildlife. For non-wildlife, I tend to use the new touch and drag option where I touch the LCD with my thumb and drag the active AF point over to the spot that I wish to be in sharp focus.

Servo

I use Servo for all wildlife images. Unlike one-shot autofocus, Servo continuously changes the focus as the subject distance changes.