



AUTORAMA

A Quick Guide to Photographing Scale Models

Introduction

Photographing scale models is a fun and rewarding way to share your hard work, track your progress, or even enter competitions. The good news? You do not need a professional studio or expensive gear to get great results. With a few simple tricks, the right setup, and a little practice, anyone can take crisp, eye-catching photos that do their models justice.



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In this guide, I will walk you through everything you need to know, from choosing your camera to setting up the perfect background and lighting. I will keep things simple, practical, and actionable, so you can start snapping great shots today. Let's get started!

WHY THIS GUIDE

A well-built model deserves a photo that does it justice. This guide covers the fundamentals of camera choice, lighting, backgrounds, and settings so your photos match the work you put into the build. No expensive gear required.

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01 Choosing the Right Camera

You do not need the fanciest camera. Modern digital cameras, and even smartphones, can produce excellent results. If you want more control, look for a camera that lets you adjust shutter speed, aperture, and flash manually.

TYPES OF CAMERAS

- **Point-and-shoot:** Easy to use, but limited manual controls. Great for quick snaps.
- **All-in-one (bridge cameras):** More features, built-in zoom, and some manual settings.
- **DSLR:** Interchangeable lenses and full manual control. Best for modelers who want to experiment and grow.

Compare a few models before you buy. Features, convenience, and price all matter.

02 Image Formats and Resolution

- **JPEG:** Most common format. Every re-save loses a bit of quality, so use high quality settings whenever possible.
- **TIFF:** Larger files, but no loss of quality. Great for archiving or editing.
- **RAW:** A digital negative. Maximum flexibility for editing, but needs to be converted before sharing or printing.

HOW MANY MEGAPIXELS DO YOU NEED?

5 to 7 MP is plenty for most model photography and prints up to 8x10 inches. More megapixels do not always mean better photos. Lighting and technique matter far more.

RAW, JPEG & TIFF

UNDERSTANDING IMAGE FORMATS FOR SCALE MODEL PHOTOGRAPHY

RAW	JPEG	TIFF
 RAW The Digital Negative	 JPEG The Everyday Standard	 TIFF The High-Quality Master
✓ File Type: Unprocessed data from the camera sensor ✓ Quality: Highest image quality, maximum detail ✓ Editing: Maximum flexibility in exposure, white balance, contrast, color, and recovery of details ✓ File Size: Very large ✓ Best For: Post-processing, archiving, and professional work where maximum quality is required ✓ Compatibility: Requires specific software (Lightroom, Photoshop, Capture One, etc.)	✓ File Type: Compressed image ✓ Quality: High quality with adjustable compression ✓ Editing: Limited editing potential (some data is lost each time you save) ✓ File Size: Small to medium ✓ Best For: Everyday use, sharing online, quick edits, and when storage space is limited ✓ Compatibility: Universally supported on all devices and platforms	✓ File Type: Uncompressed or lossless compressed ✓ Quality: Very high, no quality loss (lossless) ✓ Editing: Excellent for editing and retaining details ✓ File Size: Very large ✓ Best For: Printing, professional workflows, and archiving master files ✓ Compatibility: Widely supported in professional software and printing labs
WHICH ONE SHOULD YOU USE?		
 Shoot in RAW Capture the maximum detail and color information. Gives you the most flexibility during post-processing.	 Use JPEG for Sharing Perfect for web, social media, and quick previews. Choose the right balance between quality and file size.	 Use TIFF for Printing & Archiving Ideal for high-quality prints and long-term storage. Preserves all the details without loss.
 PRO TIP: Shoot in RAW, edit your images, then export as high-quality JPEG for sharing and TIFF for printing or archiving.		

03 Setting Up Your Scene: Backgrounds

- **Infinite background:** A sheet of poster board curved up behind your model gives a clean, distraction-free look.
- **Background color:** Avoid bright reds, yellows, or greens, since they pull attention away from the model. White is classic but can read gray in photos. Sky blue is a safe default for most subjects.
- **Pro tip:** Light your background separately if you can, to keep it crisp and clean.

FROM SIMPLE SETUP TO PROFESSIONAL RESULT

With a few inexpensive tools and basic lighting, you can create clean, high-quality photos perfect for your scale modeling projects.

WHAT YOUR CAMERA SEES (THE SETUP)				WHAT THE FINAL PHOTO LOOKS LIKE			
							
 REFLECTOR Bounces light back onto the subject and softens shadows.	 WHITE BACKGROUND Creates a clean, seamless look and eliminates distractions.	 WHITE CARD Fills in shadows and adds balance to the lighting.	 LIGHT SOURCE Placed to the side and above for soft, even illumination.	 CLEAN BACKGROUND Pure and even background keeps the focus on your subject.	 BALANCED LIGHTING Soft highlights and gentle shadows create depth and dimension.	 TRUE COLOR Accurate colors make your model or object look its best.	 PROFESSIONAL LOOK A simple setup delivers studio-quality results every time.



PRO TIP

You don't need expensive equipment. Understanding light, reflections, and a clean setup is the key to amazing photos of your scale models and miniatures.

04 Resolution and Printing

- **For web:** 72 DPI is fine.
- **For printing:** 300 DPI gives crisp results.

Always shoot and save at the highest quality your camera allows. You can resize later, but you cannot add detail that was never captured.

05 Lighting and Flash

- **Natural light:** Shoot near a window with soft daylight whenever possible.
- **Lamps:** Two desk lamps with daylight bulbs work well. Use one as your main light and the other to fill in shadows.
- **Diffusers:** Soften harsh light with a thin white cloth, or even a shower cap.
- **Reflectors:** A piece of white foam board bounces light into shadows for a balanced look.
- **Flash:** Turn it off if you can. On-camera flash often creates harsh shadows and unnatural highlights.

06 Camera Settings for Sharp, Detailed Photos



1. **Aperture:** Use a higher f-number (smaller aperture) for more depth of field, which keeps your whole model in focus.
2. **Shutter speed:** Use a tripod for slower shutter speeds to avoid blur.
3. **ISO:** Keep it low, around 100 to 200, for clean images. Higher ISO adds noise.
4. **White balance:** Auto works for most situations, but presets like daylight or cloudy give better color accuracy. If you shoot RAW, you can adjust white balance later.

07 Color Modes

- **sRGB**: Best for web and most screens.
- **Adobe RGB**: Wider color range, good for editing and printing.
- **CMYK**: Reserved for professional printing.

COLOR MODES

Understanding color spaces helps you get the best results from your photos, whether you're editing, sharing online, or printing.

sRGB	Adobe RGB	CMYK
Best for: Websites, social media, blogs, and most monitors. The standard color space for the web. Ensures colors look consistent across phones, tablets, and computers. The recommended choice for publishing photos of your scale models online.	Best for: Advanced editing and high-quality printing. Captures a wider range of colors than sRGB, especially greens and blues. Ideal if you edit your photos in Lightroom or Photoshop before printing. Requires color-managed software and compatible displays for accurate viewing.	Best for: Professional printing only. Used by commercial printing presses. Has a smaller color gamut than RGB, so some colors may appear less vibrant. Keep your images in sRGB or Adobe RGB during editing, and convert to CMYK only if your print provider specifically requests it.
sRGB Standard color space for the web	Adobe RGB sRGB Wider color range than sRGB	CMYK (Print) sRGB Smaller color gamut than RGB

RECOMMENDATION FOR SCALE MODEL PHOTOGRAPHY

Publishing online (web, social media): Use **sRGB**.

Editing and printing high-quality photos: Use **Adobe RGB**.

Professional printing (magazines, books): Convert to **CMYK** only when required.

08 Actionable Steps for Great Model Photos

- Set up your infinite background with a clean, neutral color.
- Use two light sources, such as a window plus a lamp, or two lamps and a reflector to fill shadows.
- Mount your camera on a tripod for sharp images.
- Use a high f-number, like f/8 or above, for deep focus.
- Turn off the flash and use longer exposures if needed. Do not forget the tripod.
- Check your white balance for natural colors.
- Shoot in the highest quality format your camera allows.
- Experiment with lighting, backgrounds, and angles. Review your results and adjust.

09**Real-Life Example**

You have just built a detailed model airplane. Here is how to set up the shot.

- Set up a sky-blue poster board as your background, curving it up behind the plane.
- Place your model near a window, with a desk lamp on the other side and a piece of white foam board to bounce light onto the shadow side.
- Mount your camera on a tripod, set to f/11, ISO 100, and use a 2-second timer to avoid shake.
- Turn off the flash.
- Take a few test shots, adjusting the lamp and reflector until the shadows look soft and natural.
- Review your photos, tweak your setup, and shoot again.

Final Thoughts

THE BOTTOM LINE

You do not need expensive gear or professional skills to take great photos of your scale models. Focus on lighting, background, and camera settings. Experiment, review, and have fun. Your best shot is just a few tweaks away.

Appendix: Glossary of Key Photography Terms

Quick reference for the terms used throughout this guide.

Term	What It Means
Aperture	The opening in the lens that controls how much light enters and how much of the shot stays in focus. A higher f-number keeps more of the model sharp.
CCD / Sensor	The component inside the camera that captures the image.
DPI	Dots per inch. Higher DPI for printing, lower DPI for web use.
DSLR	A camera with interchangeable lenses and full manual control.
Flash	A quick burst of light. Use sparingly, since on-camera flash tends to flatten detail.
Gigabyte (GB)	A unit of digital storage. More GB means more photos fit on a memory card.
JPEG / JPG	A compressed image format that is easy to share, but loses a little quality each time it is re-saved.
Megapixel	A unit of image resolution. More megapixels mean more detail, but 5 to 7 MP is enough for most model photography.
Pixel	The smallest unit of a digital image. More pixels mean more potential detail.
RAW	An unprocessed file format, ideal for editing since nothing is compressed or discarded.
Resolution	The amount of detail in an image, measured in DPI for print or pixels for screen.
Shutter Speed	How long the camera's sensor is exposed to light. Fast speeds freeze motion, slow speeds let in more light but risk blur without a tripod.
Startup Time	How quickly the camera is ready to shoot after it powers on. Matters more for action shots than for static model photography.
TIFF	A high-quality, uncompressed image format, well suited to archiving and editing.
White Balance	The setting that adjusts color so whites look neutral under a given light source.
Pixelation	The blocky, jagged look that appears when a low-resolution image is enlarged. Avoid it by shooting and saving at high quality.
Optical Zoom	Zoom achieved through the lens itself. Preserves image quality.
Digital Zoom	Zoom achieved by cropping and enlarging the image digitally. Reduces quality, so optical zoom is always the better option.

About Auttorama

Auttorama is scale modeling art and resources built by Jorge Damico, a modeler with more than 40 years of experience in 1/35 military dioramas and 1/18 motorsport photography. Auttorama shares builds, techniques, and history for modelers who take the craft seriously.



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