

2015

The Sony A7s Menu Guide

Setting up your camera for video



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When purchasing a new camera most people skip over the instruction manual with good reason the fact of the matter is camera manuals are dry and boring and although the Sony A7s manual is for the most part straightforward it doesn't really explain why or when I should use a specific setting in a given situation so I decided to create this menu guide for anyone in need of help. I won't be going over the entire menu settings cause that can get hairy I'll just stick to the **Camera Settings (Tab 1)** and the **Custom Settings (Tab 2)**. For shooting video these two sections are important to understand. Within the main menu there are six tabs and within those tabs you have pages or sub settings. I'll break down each sub setting into *what it does, your options and what you need to know*. I'll also include some quick tips and my personal preference for some of the settings.

Just to be clear this isn't an in-depth technical white paper or anything the menu guide was created just to supplement the Sony manual by expounding the settings a little bit more and hopefully bring it all together. If you're new to the A7s take some time and try to familiarize yourself with the buttons and menu which will make operating the camera easier and more user-friendly. Now let's jump in!



Camera Settings:

1 > File format

What it does- Here you have an option of selecting from three video compression file formats.

Your options- XAVC-S, AVCHD or MP4.

What you need to know- XAVC-S is the higher quality format good for retaining detail and highlight control. If your computer and editing suite can handle XAVC-S just use it. The advantage of AVCHD over XAVC-S is it's half the file and it won't tax your computer. The image quality is good but not as detailed as XAVC-S. To share quickly with others on the internet just use MP4 it has more compression albeit less quality.

2 > Recording Settings

What it does- Let's you select your video frame rate.

Your Options- 24 p, 30p, 60p, 120p

What you need to know- 120p is good for slow motion recording although this effect isn't done in-camera but in post via your favorite editing suite. Keep in mind that 120p records at 1280X720 only. Your minimum shutter speed in this mode is 1/125. 60p will make fast moving action look smoother great for capturing sports. 30p is good for live events it has a crisper image. 24p just think cinematic look which is the Hollywood motion picture standard

2>Dual Video Recording

What it does- Allows you to simultaneously record two different file formats at the same time.

Your Options- Choose from either XAVC-S and MP4 or AVCHD and MP4. Turn it on for Dual Video Recording or off which will record only one file format.

What you need to know- Dual recording will be disabled if you select either XAVC-S 60p, 120p or AVCHD 60p MP4. You can't select both XAVC-S and AVCHD for dual recording.

4 > ISO

What it does- The higher the ISO the more the camera tries to amplify the signal to produce visible information which makes it superbad in lowlight.

Your Options- Auto, 100-409600

What you need to know- Keep mind that the ISO setting has a direct bearing on the quality of your final image. You can bump up the maximum ISO sensitivity to 409,600 the only downside to a higher ISO is the digital noise the image will contain. So you always want to shoot with the lowest ISO settings possible for maximum quality. If you know this already it's worth repeating *always* choose ISO in full stops or aim for the sweet spot. For example 100, 200, 400, 800 and

so on rather than in 1/3- stop increments like 125, 160, 250, 320 and so forth. ISO 1600 will give you a cleaner image than 1250. Forget Auto ISO take control of your camera manually.

4 > Metering Mode

What it does- Metering is how your camera measures the amount of light available in your scene and then adjusting the exposure accordingly.

Your Options- Multi, Center and Spot.

What you need to know- Camera meters work great when the scene is lit evenly however it gets challenging for light meters to determine the right exposure when there are objects with different light levels. For example your subject is strongly lit but your background is dark. To help nail exposure the A7s has three different modes to choose from.

Multi metering measures is great for evenly lit scenes. For the most part this is the metering mode that you will use most of the time it does an excellent job of evaluating the scene.

Center metering mode looks at the entire frame but it gives more consideration to the center of your frame. Good for portrait shots where your subject is taking up much of the center frame and also used for subject that are strongly backlit.

Spot metering mode takes a specific reading from a very small spot in the center frame often used with a gray card. This is a great mode to use when filming a high contrast scene with areas of bright highlights and dark shadows. If your subject is standing in front of a very dark wall the darkness of the scene could fool the meter in this case spot is the go to metering mode. When in doubt just eyeball the live histogram for instant feedback.

4> White Balance

What it does- The short and simple reason we adjust white balance is to get the colors in your images as accurate as possible.

Your Options- (Auto/Daylight/Shade/Cloudy/Incandescent/Fluor.: Warm White/Fluor.: Cool White/Fluor.: Day White/Fluor.: Daylight/Flash/Underwater Auto/C.Temp/Filter/Custom 1-3/Custom Setup)

What you need to know- Each white balance term is self-explanatory use the option that is appropriate to a given scene for example if it's sunny use daylight if it's very cloudy use shade

and so on. My personal preference is C.Temp/filter because I like to manually dial in my color temperature to whatever I like as well as fine-tune the color shift. BTW the color shift is a great feature which can be adjusted in real time. To adjust the white balance manually highlight the C:Temp/filter option then press the right side of the control wheel and move it up or down for your desired color temperature. The ball park for outdoor lighting is a 5600 or indoor tungsten light at 3200. After you're done selecting your white balance you can make fine adjustments by using the color shift. Simply press the color wheel in white balance to the right you'll see the color shift graph then tweak to taste. If you want to be extremely accurate with white balance use the custom setup here's the procedure:

Set the mode dial to manual mode (M) then select menu Camera Settings/White Balance/Custom Setup. (Note: You can't use custom setup in Movie mode) Press control wheel button to take a picture of a white reference in the scene. I suggest using a white card or any white surface should do. Now select the custom number you want to store the image by rotating the control wheel and selecting # 1, 2 or 3. Here's a tip for new users don't white balance your sunset you want golden sunlight to look warm not cool.

5> Picture Profile

What it does- Enables you to make changes to the overall look of your image like color, gradation, sharpness gamma curves etc.

Your Options- Black level, Gamma, Black Gamma, Knee, Color mode, Saturation, Color Phase, Color depth and Detail.

What you need to know- One of the best features of the A7s is the Picture Profile settings. There are seven default presets along with several gamma curves included to shoot in different conditions but you don't need to stick to these settings you can customize Picture Profile to your heart's content and if you ever need to revert back to the default settings just do a reset. (Not to be confused with the setting reset in the Setup section. The reset button I'm referring to is located in the Picture Profile settings)

Preset #7 has the Gamma set to SLOG-2 which has the ability to capture greater dynamic range. Here's a few things to keep in mind when shooting in SLOG-2. In manual mode disable silent shooting (Custom Settings/4/Silent shooting) or else you won't get an accurate exposure also select 16:9 aspect ratio (Camera Settings/1/Aspect Ratio/16:9). Keep in mind that you will need to grade your footage to make it shine especially if you using SLOG-2 which looks very milky or flat. Your minimum ISO for SLOG-2 is 3200 so for strong daylight you will need to add a ND filter. I only use SLOG-2 for high contrast lighting situation mostly indoors in fact I don't use it

much in most situations the cine gammas work fine for me with cine gamma 4 being my favorite for outdoors. You know I'm not going to leave you hanging so here's my own special home brew that I'll share with you.

Black level -1, | Gamma Cine 4 | Black Gamma Range Narrow | Level +7 | Knee Mode Manual Point 105% Slope +5 | Color Mode Cinema | Saturation -1 | Color Phase -1 | Color depth R0, G-1, B0, C-1, M+2, Y0 | Level -7.

Let me explain my settings. I always feel safer when I sharpen in post than in-camera it just doesn't work well the other way around. I prefer colors to be washed out a little so I use cinema and keep the saturation down. I occasionally use S-Gamut but skin tones tends to look greenish this color mode definitely needs grading. Picture Profile is something you need to play around with overtime you will learn what works best for you. One more thing to keep in mind when using Manual mode Picture Profile and Picture effects is disabled so your only choice is to use Creative Style. In movie mode you can use either Picture Profile or Picture Effect, Creative Style is disabled.

>7 Movie

What it does- Allows you to select your desired exposure to fit your subject.

Your Options- Manual Exposure, Shutter Priority, Aperture Priority and Program Auto.

What you need to know- Operating your camera in manual mode is empowering.

>7 SteadyShot

What it does- Reduces shaky footage while holding the camera.

Your Options- On or Off

What you need to know- I would just turn on the SteadyShot to avoid nausea-inducing footage unless you are deliberately trying to create tension or a mood. Don't forget to turn it off when you mount your camera on a tripod.

>7 Auto Slow Shutter

What it does- This sets whether or not to adjust the shutter speed if the environment of your subject is too dark. Works in Movie mode only.

Your Options- On or Off. *On* is the default.

What you need to know- If recording in a dark area and Auto Slow Shutter is *on* your shutter speed will automatically slow down. By turning it *off* you will have less object blur. I don't like Auto anything so I have it set to off.

>7 Audio Recording

What it does- Sets whether to record audio when shooting a movie.

Your Options- On or Off.

What you need to know- I would just leave it on. You never know when you might get a great sound bite.

>7 Audi Record level

What it does- Adjusts the audio recording level during movie recording.

Your Options- Level can be set using the Audio Record level. View and adjust meters on screen. There's also a reset button which will reset the levels.

What you need to know- The internal microphone on the A7s is surprisingly good for ambient sound but for dialog I recommend an on-board shotgun microphone like the Rode VideoMic Pro to isolate the sound.

>8 Audio out Timing

What it does- Sets the timing of audio output during the movie recording.

Your Options- Live or Lip Sync

What you need to know- If you're watching your talent while recording just set this to Live which is the default. If you're looking at the viewfinder then set this to Lip Sync. I usually have this set to Live.

>8 Wind Noise Reduction

What it does- Reduces wind noise during movie recording.

Your Options- On or Off

What you need to know- I usually have this set to off. My personal preference is to use an on-board microphone and record scratch audio with the built-in A7s microphone.



Custom Settings

1> Zebra

What it does- Tells you which parts of the image is overexposed by using zebra stripe patterns. There can be a little zebra pattern but not too much.

Your Options- Off/ 70-100+

What you need to know- Use it to help you spot blown highlights in the scene. If I'm using Cine gammas I usually keep mine at 100+ although I find it easier to use the histogram and camera meter for exposure.

1>MF Assist

What it does- Displays an enlarged image when focusing manually.

Your Options- On or Off

What you need to know- I usually turn this off and just assign one of the custom buttons on the camera as the focus magnifier (Custom Settings/6/Custom Key settings/ Custom button 1-3/Focus Magnifier). To get a tighter focus press the center control wheel again. You can turn on MF assist and every time you focus it will magnify the image automatically. To set the *Focus magnify Time* go to (Custom Settings/1/Focus Magnif. Time) *No Limit* is a good choice. BTW Manual focus doesn't work in Movie Mode only in Manual mode.

1> Marker display

What it does- Sets whether to display the marker on the monitor when recording movies. Marker Settings allows you to choose from several guide.

Your Options- On or Off

What you need to know- I usually leave this on which helps with framing the shot but make sure you choose your desired *Marker Setting* which is covered in the next section.

1>Marker Setting

What it does- Display on the monitor different size grid lines on the monitor.

Your Options- Center/Aspect/Safety Zone/Guideframe

What you need to know-The most important option for me is the Aspect ratio. Instead of using the default 16X9 you can use some other common widescreen aspect ratios like 1.85:1 this is the one I use most of the time or the 2:35:1 anamorphic film look. If filming in Manual mode you will only see the grid line once you start recording. There's also a safety zone option which I don't think is used much these days unless you're filming for broadcast.

2>Audio level display

What it does-Displays audio level on the screen.

Your Options- On & Off

What you need to know-If you're not recording audio then I would shut it off to un-clutter your screen. I have my audio display turn on but I assigned the control wheel via the custom key settings to hide the audio levels if needed.

2> Peaking level

What it does-Helps with focus by enhancing the outline of your subject using a color.

Your Options- High/Mid/Low/Off

What you need to know-I usually leave this set to low and use the color red. Colors can be set in Peaking Color your option are Red, Yellow or White. If you output to an external monitor or EVF you won't be able to see the peaking on the back of the camera or viewfinder.

5>APS-C Size capture

What it does-Sets whether or not to record with an APS-C size equivalent area.

Your Options- On/Auto/Off

What you need to know- If set to Auto and you attach an APS-C size lens on the camera it will decrease your field of view in other words crop your image. Basically you're getting two different focal length in one so for tighter shots I'll turn it on and get a crop factor of 1.5 more or less. Keep in mind that by turning it on you will increase the noise in the image but don't let that stop you from using it you can always clean up the image in post by using a plug-in like Denoiser or something similar.

>7 Movie Button

What it does-Enable or disables movie recording button when using Manual mode.

Your Options- Always/Movie Mode Only

What you need to know- I would just keep this set to Always you never know when you might want to shoot in Manual mode.

Well that's all folks! I hope you've found this menu guide informative and helpful. If you have any questions or comments please let me know I'd love to hear from you. Visit my website and subscribe to my mailing list for *FREE* valuable tutorials, tips and reviews.

Peace, smiles and videos

-kaj

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