

Back-Button Focusing

What is Back-Button Focusing (BBF)?

With most cameras, you depress the shutter button half way to focus and then to actually take the picture the button is pressed the entire way. With back button focusing, you use (as the name implies) a button at the back of your camera to control the focus, taking it away from the shutter button entirely. It is recommended to use BBF in continuous auto focus mode (that is **AF-C** on Nikon, **AI-Servo** on Canon).

Why Use BBF?

Lock Your Focus For Re-composition

It's much easier to lock your focus with back-button focusing. We often want things off centre and must hold the shutter button half way until we reposition. With BBF, once you've locked your focus you're free to move left or right and shoot off centre as many times as you like without having to re-focus.

The same applies when you're waiting for something to happen or move; you don't have to wait with the button half pressed. And if something moves in front of your shot, you don't have to worry about re-focusing once it's moved. It also helps to stop the focus confusing itself and hunting in a 'busy' setting.

If you're worried about tracking action shots then you can still do that in the same way; just holding the back button down rather than the shutter (if you're shooting in AF-C/AI Servo as recommended earlier).

Switch From AF to MF More Effectively

Switching from auto-focus to manual focus becomes much easier. Usually you have to flick a switch to MF otherwise the autofocus would just override it when you pressed the shutter. If you're using the BBF and want to switch to manual, you can just turn the manual ring on your lens and use the shutter without AF interfering.

Filters

One that is particularly handy with this feature is when it's used with a filter. If sometimes you use a 10 stop ND filter: you have to focus on the subject before you put the filter on because focusing your shot with a filter can be tricky.

Using back button focus means once you've got the focus correct, you don't have to worry that pressing the shutter button will make it readjust once you have the filter on and try to take your shot.

Ergonomics

It sounds silly, but ergonomically it's pretty good too. It may not feel right at first, but in time it became more comfortable than shutter focus. Plus, it ever so slightly shifts the weight

balance so it can even reduce hand shake in images. Holding the camera using back button focusing eventually feels comfortable

How to set up BBF

Okay, if you are convinced of the joys of BBF you need to know how to set it up on your camera? Most high end DSLRs will have a button already dedicated to this labelled **AF-On** or similar.

Many cameras will have a dedicated button but if not, you can still assign your own

Don't worry if yours doesn't, you can often still nominate another button to do it, just check your manual.

You'll still need to make some changes in your menu. Canon users, you'll find it in your **Custom Controls** section; change your shutter button function to **Metering Start Only** (without the AF). On a Nikon D800 it is **Autofocus > AF activation > AF-ON only > OK**

Conclusion

It doesn't come easily, exactly, switching between shutter focus and back button, but it's worth it. When you make the change, you will find yourself furiously pressing the shutter for a second before you get used to it. Stick with it. The benefits are numerous, from easier re-composition to being confident your shot is still in focus after putting a filter on. It's a more comfortable and natural way to hold your camera too, particularly when you have a heavy lens attached, so hopefully you will find this is the case for you too.