

Some cameras are sold complete with a lens, usually a fixed-focal-length normal lens (50mm or so) or a moderate wide-angle-to-telephoto zoom (35–80mm or similar). Others are sold “body only,” which means you buy the lens of your choice separately.

In time, you may want different lenses, perhaps a telephoto zoom (such as an 80–200mm), a very wide angle (such as a 20mm), or a fast moderate telephoto (maybe an 85mm f/1.8). Not only must you choose what focal length and maximum aperture you want, you also must choose what brand. And you must make sure that lens is compatible with your camera.

Compatibility is crucial. A lens from one manufacturer may or may not fit on a camera from another manufacturer. Also, autofocus and manual lenses are generally not interchangeable. With few exceptions, autofocus lenses fit only automatic cameras and manual lenses fit only manual cameras—even when the lenses are made by the same manufacturer.

The safest bet is to buy lenses made specifically for your camera from the camera’s manufacturer. But there are independent lens manufacturers that sell lenses that fit a variety of cameras. These independent brands generally are good quality and relatively affordable. Regardless of whether you buy the “name” or independent brands, make sure you specify your model camera to the camera store or other lens supplier to ensure compatibility.