

Definitions:

Depth of Field:

Depth of field is the distance between the closest and farthest objects in a photo that appears acceptably sharp. Now your camera can only focus sharply at one point. But the transition from sharp to unsharp is gradual, and the term 'acceptably sharp' is a loose one! Without getting too technical, how you will be viewing the image, and at what size you will be looking at it are factors which contribute to how acceptably sharp an image is. It also depends on how good your vision is!

Aperture is the opening in your lens that lets light pass through to the sensor. Think of it as a pupil for your lens. It dilates to let more light in, and contracts to restrict light when it is bright. Aperture is probably the first thing most photographers think of when they want to adjust the depth of field.

Camera-Subject Distance

Another important factor affecting depth of field is the distance between the camera and the subject. The shorter that distance, the smaller the depth of field. Have you ever tried to take a close-up shot of a flower or insect, but can't get the entire subject in focus, even with a small aperture? This is because the closer you are to your subject, the shallower the DoF.

In my opinion, it is not worth getting hung up over how many inches the DoF is in a picture. That would completely take away from the enjoyment of photography. It is much more important to know when you need a small DoF and how to create it. And the same is true when you need a large DoF. The beauty of digital is that you can take a shot, and then review it on the LCD. Quickly reviewing your image is much easier than pulling out your phone and calculating DoF! If you don't get the result you are looking for, change your camera-subject distance or the lens aperture to get the desired effect.

To achieve a shallower DoF you can either move closer to your subject or open up your aperture. For greater DoF, move away from your subject or close down your aperture. You can also use a longer focal length to achieve a 'perceived' shallower depth of field.

Understanding what factors affect the depth of field in a photograph will give you the artistic freedom to make the images you want to create. You will learn the most from practicing. Take time to experiment with your camera; get to know it better. Try different focal length lenses, change apertures, move your feet to change your perspective. Analyze your photographs so you know how your gear performs. Then when it comes time to take pictures that really count, you will be ready.