

Film Speed

Film speed indicates how sensitive the film is to light. High-numbered film speed is more sensitive to light and therefore the film is faster so that the resulting image does not become overexposed or too bright. On the contrary, low-numbered film speed is less sensitive to light and needs more time to absorb enough light to make an image that isn't underexposed or too dark.

Slow Speeds (100-200 ISO)

Slow-speed film, such as 100- or 200-speed needs a large amount of available light to take a crisp, clear photo. These speeds are best used outdoors on bright sunny days. If there isn't enough available light, your prints may turn out dark and blurry. Since low-speed film needs more time to absorb the light, you'll want to hold your camera very still when shooting to prevent blurs. A tripod is a fantastic tool for low-speed shooting. Benefits of using low-speed film also include being able to make enlarged prints without producing a grainy texture. Since the film has had a longer time to absorb the light and produce an image, details are captured much more effectively with a low-speed film.

Medium Speeds (400 ISO)

A good all-around film to use for most situations is 400-speed film. It allows you to snap photos without much worry about whether there is enough light to produce an acceptable image. Especially if you will be taking the same roll into a variety of circumstances (indoor, outdoor, shady areas, children, landscape, etc.), you'll be most pleased with the entire roll if you use a versatile film speed such as 400. Another good time to use 400-speed film is if you are taking indoor portraits with available light (such as through a window or doorway).

Fast Speeds (800 ISO)

Fast-speed film, most commonly 800-speed, is great to use when shooting fast-moving subjects. Late-afternoon baseball or soccer games when the light isn't quite bright enough for a low-speed film is a perfect time to use a fast speed. The film is fast enough to capture and freeze the action. Fast-speed film also works well in dimly lit situations such as a fireworks show, photos taken outdoors at the end of a sunset, or a candle-lit dinner. Film speeds higher than 800 are usually considered a professional grade of film.