

Kingston Photographic Club

Lens Cleaning

Camera lens cleaning - so much more fun than sensor cleaning...

If smears appear on your shots, you don't have to be Hercule Poirot to work out that your camera lens needs a good clean. (Tiny hairs of spots in the picture when seen on your computer probably identify a dirty sensor - a different and more serious problem and unless you know exactly what you're doing, you're better off taking the camera to a competent professional)

Cleaning your photographic equipment is essential, especially when it comes to lenses. A lens is one piece of gear that can cost you more than your camera, so it's worth keeping it well-maintained so that it continues to create fine images for a lifetime.

Get the best from your camera lenses by cleaning them regularly. You only need simple kit - a blower brush, a microfibre cloth and some lens-cleaning fluid - all of which you can pick up from your nearest camera store.

Don't forget that while the exposed glass elements are the most important parts of the lens when it comes to optical quality, it's also worth giving the casing a good clean. Some lenses are weather-sealed, but avoid using your cloth dampened with water. If there's dirt that's hard to remove, be careful if you're using liquid-based cleaners, as the electronics inside your lens are extremely sensitive.

Cleaning camera lenses: step-by-step guide

- **Remove the filter**

A good way to protect the front element of your lens is to fit a protective camera lens filter. A standard UV filter such as the Hoya UV(0) is ideal. Before cleaning, remove any filter you've been using. If you haven't removed the filter for a while you may find this difficult, in which case use a cloth to get a better grip. UV filters are particularly useful when shooting near the sea, to protect the front element from salt and sand.

- **Blast away dust**

Dust on the lens can be a real issue, so use a blower brush to remove any loose dust or grit around the front element. Repeat the process for the rear element. You'll need to extend a zoom lens to either its narrowest or widest focal length to make the glass accessible. Sometimes, this is all that's needed to give you crystal-clear optics. Still smudged? Jump to step 3...

- **Get rid of moisture with a microfibre cloth**

As residue left by rain or general moisture may still remain, rub the front element in a circular motion with a microfibre cloth. Repeat with the rear element if required (although you should try and avoid touching the rear element as much as possible). Dry cleaning will shift most dirt, but oil and grease left by fingers can leave a thin film across the glass.

- **Lens-cleaning fluid**

To help remove greasy stains, use lens-cleaning fluid. Tip a small amount on to a microfibre cloth, then rub in a circular motion to remove the last of the dirt. Once dry, use a dry lens cloth to remove residual cleaning fluid. When you've finished, repeat the cleaning process for your filters, then reconnect your filters and lens caps (give then lens caps a quick blow first to remove any dust or particles that have collected in them).

Once you've used lens-cleaning fluid, polish the front element with a clean microfibre cloth again.

Camera lens cleaning kit

Equip yourself with the best lens cleaning kit and you'll find that it's worth its weight in gold (which, admittedly, isn't much when you're talking microfibre cloths). It's a small investment to keep your expensive lenses delivering sharp results. All these items can be easily sourced in stores or online...

- **Lens-cleaning fluid**
Make sure you use a commercially available lens cleaning fluid designed for coated lenses. These are usually alcohol based.
- **Lens wipes**
Lens tissues are an alternative to a microfibre cleaning cloth. They are also useful for wiping down lens contacts and other areas. They're disposable and should only be used once.
- **Silica gel**
Silica gel is a granular material that absorbs moisture, thus reducing condensation and the likelihood of fungus and mould forming inside a lens. Reusable silica gel is a worthy investment - keep some in your camera bag and recharge as necessary.
- **Dust blower**
A large dust blower is an effective way to clean dust particles from your lens and camera gear. It can also be used to blow dust out of the sensor chamber.
- **Soft brush**
A fine brush with soft bristles, such as camel hair, is ideal for removing potentially abrasive dust particles prior to cleaning glass with a lens cloth.
- **Microfibre cloth**
Microfibre cloths are ideal for use in conjunction with lens cleaning fluid. They're soft and made of tiny fibres that suck up dirt and oil. As well as using them on lenses, they're ideal for wiping down the screens and viewfinder of your camera.
- **Lens-cleaning pen**
This nifty little gadget has a retractable cleaning brush on one end and a soft cleaning pad on the other. The pad is impregnated with a cleaning fluid that effectively removes smudges and dirt.
- **Skylight and UV filters**
UV or skylight filters are ideal for protecting a lens's front element, as they're much cheaper to replace if they're damaged. Both filters block UV light, reducing blue haze, but the skylight filter has a slightly warm tint.