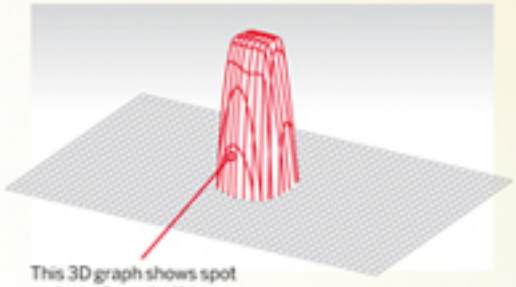
At-a-glance guide to metering modes

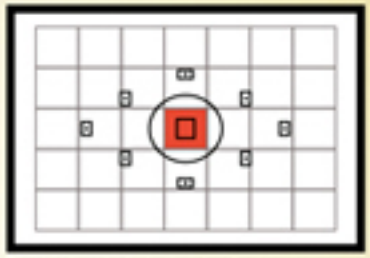
How each of the metering patterns works, and when to use them

Spot metering

Spot metering only measures the intensity of light over a small circular area in the centre of the viewfinder. The average is calculated by measuring just 2-4% of the picture area (depending on your camera model). Not all cameras offer spot metering.



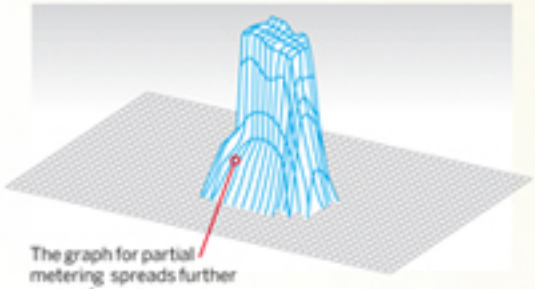
This 3D graph shows spot metering's central bias



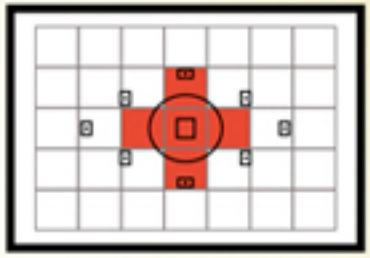
The centre circle in the viewfinder gives a rough guide to a spot meter's coverage

Partial metering

Most DSLRs offer this metering mode. It measures the intensity of the light over a larger circular area than in Spot mode. The average is calculated by measuring 8-13% or the picture area (depending on your camera model).



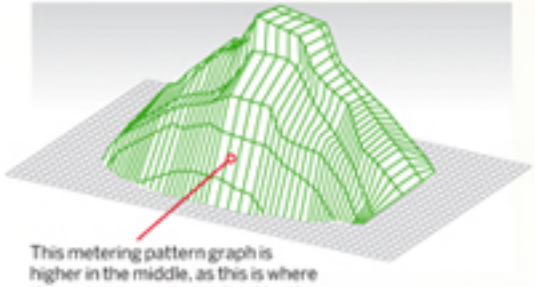
The graph for partial metering spreads further across frame



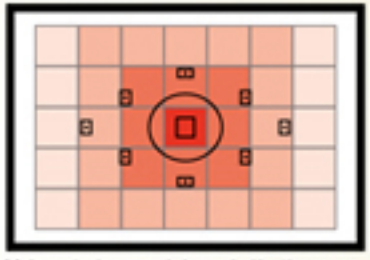
The coverage of the partial meter spreads out slightly beyond the viewfinder's centre circle

Centre-weighted average metering

This light metering mode measures the light across the whole picture area, but strongly biases the reading to the centre of the viewfinder area. Unlike with Evaluative, it does not take the focus into account, so uses the same averaging pattern for every shot.



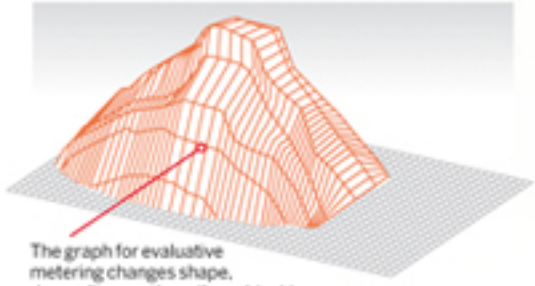
This metering pattern graph is higher in the middle, as this is where the meter concentrates its attention



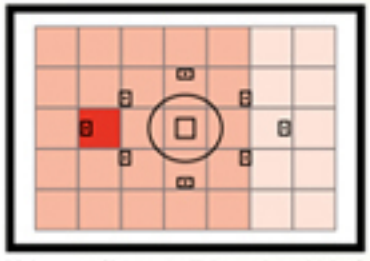
Main metering zone is bounded by the seven central focus points (SLRs with nine AF points)

Evaluative metering

The default metering mode on most DSLRs, and the only option if you choose one of the basic automatic exposure modes. Measures light across the whole frame, but strongly biases the reading to the area around the autofocus point currently being used.



The graph for evaluative metering changes shape, depending on where the subject is



Main zone of interest will depend on which of the autofocus points has been used