Sony A6000

Custom Setup Suggestions

A professional's perspective

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Sony Ambassador

MARK GALER has a commercial background in editorial photography and is a recognized Photoshop expert. He is a Senior Lecturer in Photography at RMIT University and has published twenty photography titles for the International publisher Focal Press.

His books have been translated into 7 languages including Chinese and Russian and have been adopted widely across Europe and the USA as curriculum texts for aspiring commercial photographers.

Mark owned the original Alpha 100 and currently owns an A99, A6000 and A7.

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Why customise your A6000 camera?

The Sony A6000 is a camera built for enthusiasts that is highly customisable to meet the demanding needs of a broad range of photographers. This guide has been designed to provide you with ideas and suggestions so that you can start on the path to customise your own A6000 camera.

After extensive shooting with the Sony A6000, I have now settled on the custom settings that enable me to work quickly and intuitively to maximise control and creativity in all shooting situations.

Note > The settings outlined in this guide are suggestions only and are not intended as definitive settings that will suit all photographers.

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Getting Started

To customise the settings of the camera press the ‘Menu’ button (**1**) and navigate the menus using the ‘Control Wheel’ (**2**). Press the ‘Center button’ (**3**) to select an option and press the Menu button to cancel or move back to the main menu.

The camera can be customised by using the first two tabs of the menu.

 Camera Settings

 Custom Settings

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Camera Settings

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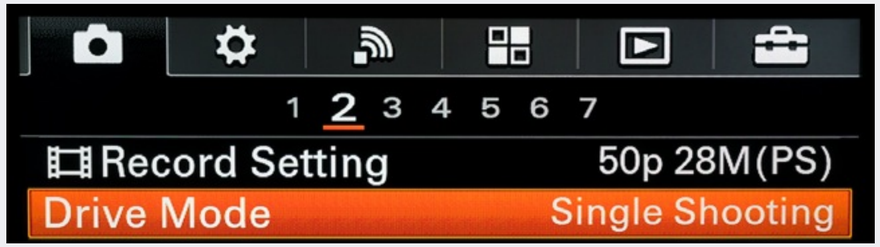
Drive Mode



Drive Mode allows the photographer to choose various options for triggering the shutter of the camera. Drive mode can be accessed via the Camera Settings menu but is more commonly accessed from the 4-way switch on the back of the camera. The Drive Mode options include Single Shooting (the camera takes one picture each time the shutter button is depressed) and Continuous Shooting (the camera keeps taking pictures when the shutter button is held down). Other options include Self-timer and Bracketed images (taking multiple pictures with different settings). The sensor on the A6000 has a very broad dynamic range so I typically increase the exposure bracketing from 0.3 EV (exposure value) to 2.0 EV. This is because minor adjustments to exposure (0.3 EV) can easily be made in Photoshop.

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AF: Illuminator

This may not be a major concern for many photographers but I prefer to switch the AF illuminator to the 'Off' position. In low light conditions I would prefer not to shine a bright red light into the scene I am photographing. In theses instances, if the autofocus cannot find the edge contrast to aid focus, I prefer to switch to manual focus.

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Adjusting Quality: Stills

The default Quality setting for the A6000 camera is to capture Fine Quality JPEGs. For photographers who prefer to process their own images in a Raw converter, such as Adobe Camera Raw or Photoshop Lightroom, this needs to be changed to RAW.

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Exposure Compensation for RAW

Auto Exposure is great for scenes with average tonal values, for backlit subjects, however, and subjects with predominantly dark or light tones, the photographer must compensate (adjust or override) the auto exposure set by the camera. Exposure compensation can be accessed by first pressing the down button on the back of the camera or can be assigned to the Dial Wheel on the back of the camera for quicker access to this essential feature.

Note: As the dial wheel is easily adjusted the photographer must be careful to keep an eye on this setting in the EVF. The ‘Setting Effect’ and live histogram in the EVF should alert you to when the dial has been adjusted inadvertently.

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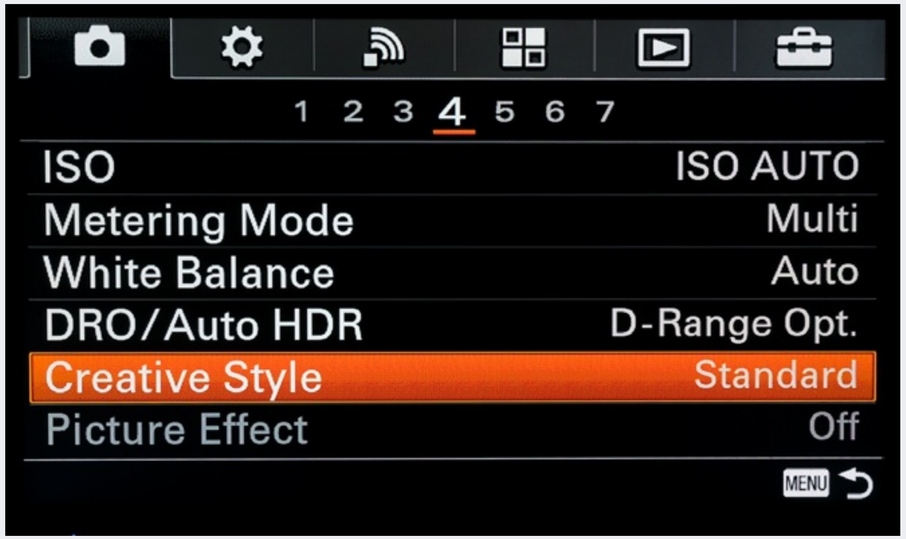
Creative Styles



The Creative Style settings have no effect on RAW files as these files are not processed by the camera. The settings can, however, be used to change the way the scene appears in the EVF (electronic viewfinder), on the LCD screen and in the movie files processed by the camera.

In both instances I prefer to lower the Contrast to -2 or -3. This will make it easier to view shadow and highlight detail in the EVF when the contrast of the scene is high and also protect these details from being ‘clipped’ or lost when recording movies.

Note > If this setting is used for recording movie files, the contrast may have to be restored when the movie files are processed using computer software.

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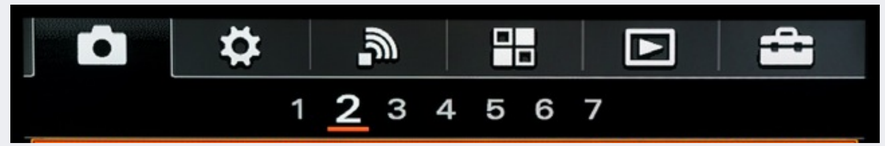
Adjusting Quality: Movies



The default movie Record setting for the A6000 camera is to capture movies in the 50i (interlace) format. This is ideal for burning the movies to Blue-Ray disks and shooting an occasional video in P mode, but for all other purposes it is advisable to select the 50p (progressive) format. Most HD TVs are now 1080p (progressive).

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Memory Recall

It is possible to save custom shooting settings to the three memory recall options that can be accessed from the MR option on the Shooting Mode dial. I typically assign ideal settings for portraits and landscapes to Register 1, wildlife or sports to Register 2 and Movie settings to Register 3. As these three styles of shooting are all very different, I find it easy to quickly change multiple settings on the camera in an instant.

Before going to ‘Memory’ in the Camera Settings tab of the Menu, you must first adjust the capture settings, which can be accessed by pressing the Custom Keys or the buttons on the Control Wheel and the Shooting Mode dial on the top of the camera.

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Optimum focus settings for still subjects

Custom Key Settings	
1 2	
AEL Button	Focus Magnifier
Custom Button 1	Focus Mode
Custom Button 2	Focus Area

Most photographers elect to shoot in either the Aperture Priority or Manual Exposure modes when shooting subject matter that is not moving. It is usual to switch the Focus Area to Flexible Spot and then choose either the Large, Medium or Small focus area. By default this appears in the center of the screen but this can be moved if the subject is not centred in the frame. It is useful to assign both the Custom 1 (C1) and Custom 2 (C2) buttons to the task of modifying the focus settings if this is a priority task.

Note > The Custom Key Settings can be found in the last tab of the Custom Settings menu.

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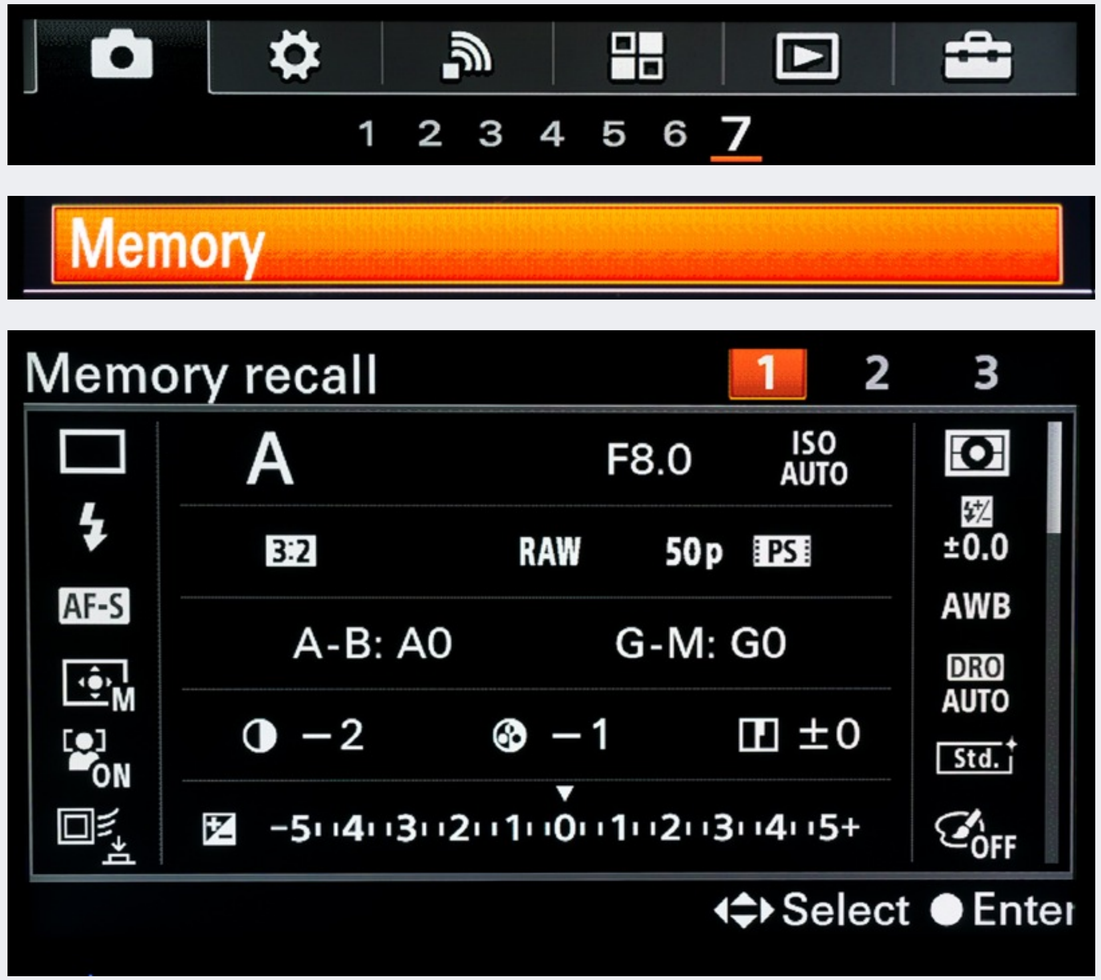
Register Settings: Still Subjects



When you have selected all the optimum settings for shooting a subject that is still (portrait, landscape etc.), you can go to the Memory option in the Camera Settings menu. Press the Center button to enter the register and then press the Center button a second time to register the settings in Register 1.

Note > When you have altered the camera settings for shooting different subjects you can quickly access your saved settings for Still Subjects by turning the Mode dial on the top of the camera to MR and then choosing Register 1.

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Optimum settings for moving subjects

1. The Custom 2 button, by default, gives access to the Focus Modes. For moving subjects this should be switched from AF-S to AF-C or Continuous Autofocus.

2. Press the left button of the Control Wheel to change the drive mode from Single Shooting to Continuous shooting. The ‘Speed Priority Continuous’ option will allow for a higher ‘frames per second’ burst, but at the expense of accurate focus tracking.

3. Switch on the Lock-on AF option in the Camera Settings menu (no. 5). I prefer to activate this feature by half-pressing the shutter release (Start w/shutter).

4. SteadyShot may be ideal for subjects moving towards you but when moving the camera to follow a moving subject you should consider switching SteadyShot off in the Camera Settings menu (no. 6). This may not be an option if the lens is not equipped with SteadyShot.

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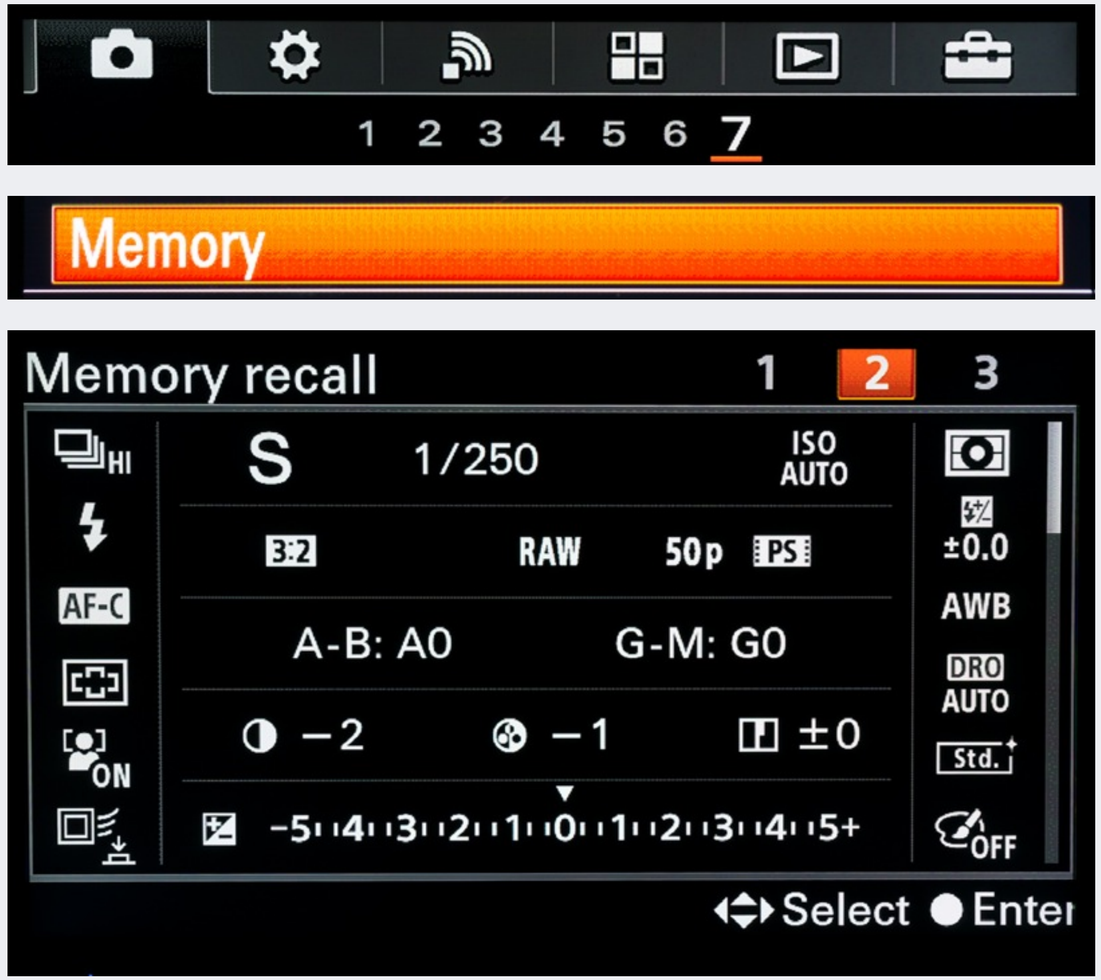
Register Settings: Moving Subjects



When you have selected all the optimum settings for shooting a moving subject, you can then go to the Memory option in the Camera Settings menu. Press the Center button to enter the register and then press the Center button a second time to register the settings.

From the illustration to the left you will see that I have selected Shutter Priority, 1/250 Second shutter speed (a good starting point for capturing a moving subject), AF-C, Wide Focus Area and Auto ISO which will ensure appropriate exposure when lighting conditions are not ideal. It is also important to note that with a fast SD card and Continuous shooting set to ‘Hi’ you will only be able to capture for 2 seconds at 11 frames per second until the frame rate slows (the camera becomes busy writing files). Switch to Medium Speed where a longer burst of frames is required.

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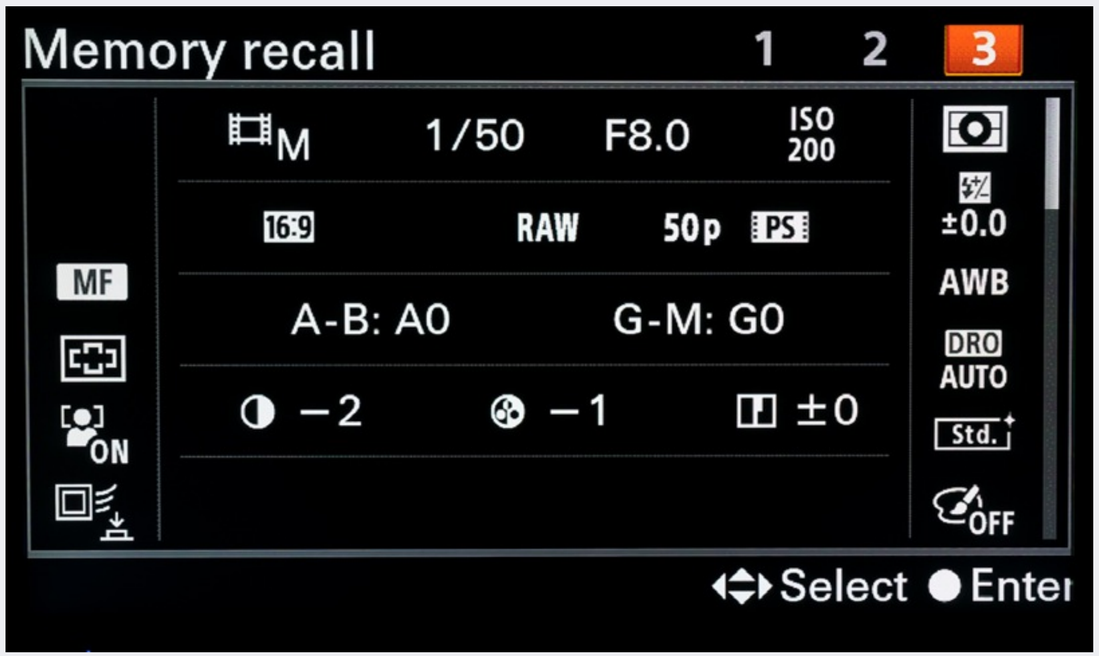
Register Settings: Movies



For the third Memory recall option I have saved all my favourite movie settings to this register. These include:

- Manual Focus
- Auto ISO
- Manual Exposure @ 1/50 Second (optimum for shooting with 25p video) although this could be raised to 1/100 when shooting with 50p.
- AVCHD movie file format.
- Creative Style Setting that includes -2 Contrast and -1 saturation (some videographers would also lower sharpness but Lightroom cannot sharpen video, so I leave this set to zero).

Note > Shooting at 1/50 second may require the use of a Neutral Density filter in bright conditions where shallow depth of field is required.

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Long Exposure Noise Reduction

For long exposures there is an apparent increase in noise (even when the ISO is kept low). The Long Exposure Noise Reduction option processes the file in-camera to reduce this noise as it is written to the card. This also applies to files being saved in the Raw file format. This can become problematic for time-lapse photography where the intervals may be of a shorter duration than the time it takes for the camera to process the noise reduction. This option is best disabled if you shoot time-lapse at dusk or dawn or would prefer to handle the noise reduction in Photoshop.

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The Path by Mark Galer
Sony A6000 with SEL1018 F4
1/250 sec at f/8 100 ISO

Custom Settings

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Live View Display: Setting Effect

If you are used to using an optical viewfinder, instead of the OLED Electronic Viewfinder (EVF) of the Sony A6000, there is a custom setting that will need some explanation. With the Setting Effect switched ON (go to the Live View Display option), the viewfinder or LCD screen will appear too dark or too light if the exposure is not appropriate for the scene being photographed. This makes Exposure Compensation very intuitive, e.g. if the image appears too dark increase the exposure. The only reason to switch this effect off is when the camera is being used in Manual mode using studio flash (the modelling light of the studio flash is not the intensity of light used for the final exposure.

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Auto Review

Fo the casual photographer who wants to review every image after they have captured it, the Auto Review is a useful feature. For a photographer capturing sequences of images over a short period of time the Auto Review feature would serve to distract from the image capture process. I prefer to turn this feature off.

One instance where I am keen to turn this feature back on is when creating a Time Lapse sequence at dawn or dusk so that I can monitor the exposure between each and every shot.

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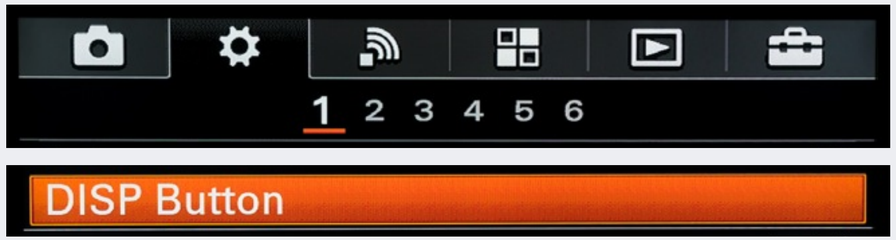
Display Options



Another important advantage of an EVF display over an optical viewfinder is the information that can be included in the finder. Perhaps the most useful information that a photographer can have access to at the time of capture is a live histogram (a graphical representation of the exposure values). This can be added to the display by checking the Histogram from the Finder options. Go to Custom Settings > DISP Button > Finder.

If you are primarily using the EVF to view and review your work, it is useful to check the ‘For Viewfinder’ option in the ‘Monitor’ display options. This option will give you a comprehensive list of the camera settings that can be accessed by pressing the Fn key (not just the12 you have set up).

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Exposure Settings Guide

The Exposure Settings can be displayed temporarily in the EVF or on the LCD screen in a magnified view as the photographer makes a change to the settings (other settings will be hidden from view when the Exposure Settings appear). To enable this feature, go to the Custom Settings > ‘Exposure Set. Guide’ and switch the feature to ON.

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Manual Focus Settings

When I decide to work in Manual Focus (usually when the depth of field is very narrow and sharp focus is very critical) I prefer not to have to hold the AF/MF button down to disable the Autofocus. I would prefer to press it once to switch it off and again to switch it back on. This preference can be actioned by selecting the AF/MF button and setting it to Toggle rather than Hold.

Note > I have also decided to change the AEL button to Focus Magnifier as I use the Exposure Compensation dial when I need to override the 'Meter Indicated Exposure' (M.I.E.). I have also set the Focus Magnifier Time to 'No Limit' in the first tab of the Custom Settings menu.

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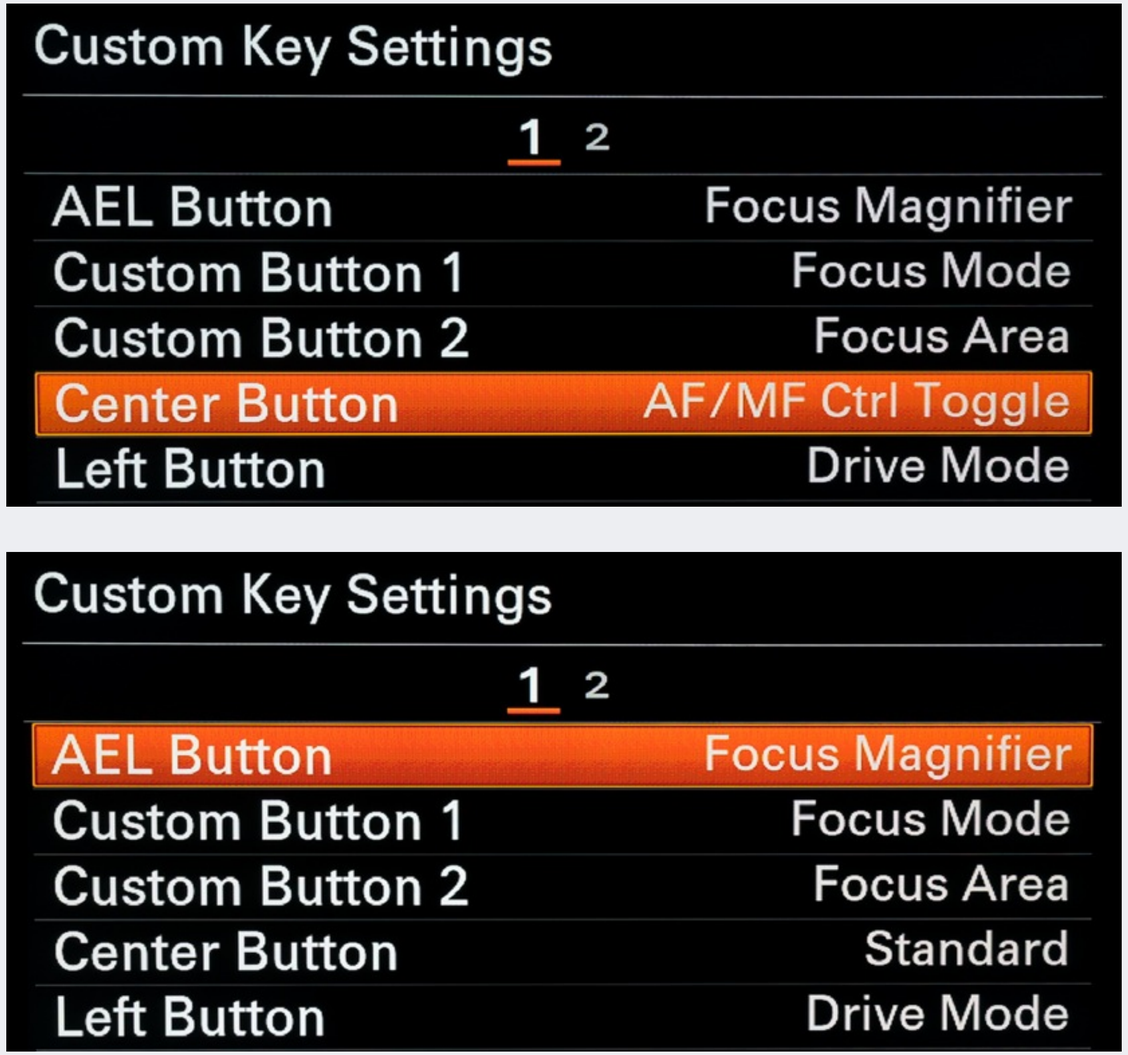
Manual Focus Settings



As a photographer I tend to switch to Manual Focus frequently (usually when the depth of field is very narrow due to a wide aperture and sharp focus is very critical). If you share this workflow you may like to consider assigning a custom key to the role of switching quickly between Autofocus and Manual Focus. I have chosen to assign the Center button to this role and have chosen the AF/MF Ctrl Toggle option so that I don't have to hold the Center button down to keep it in Manual Focus.

Note > I have also decided to change the AEL button to Focus Magnifier. I use Exposure Compensation to override the 'Meter Indicated Exposure' (M.I.E.) rather than locking the the exposure using the AEL button.

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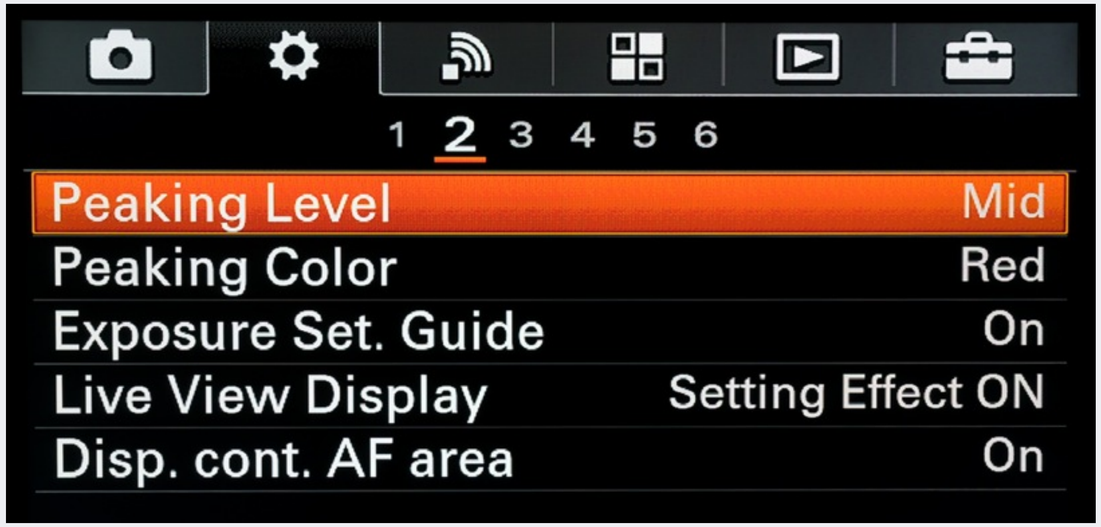
Focus Peaking & MF Assist



'Focus Peaking' is a feature that allows you to see what parts of your image are sharp by highlighting high contrast edges in your scene with yellow, red or white. It is strongly advised to switch this to Low, Mid or High and then choose a 'Peaking Color'.

I use the AEL button to access the Focus Magnifier feature and so I prefer to set the MF Assist option to OFF (so the view does not automatically magnify when I adjust the focus ring on the lens).

Note > Focus peaking provides the photographer with approximate focus. It is strongly recommended when using wide apertures to use the Focus Magnifier to achieve critical focus.

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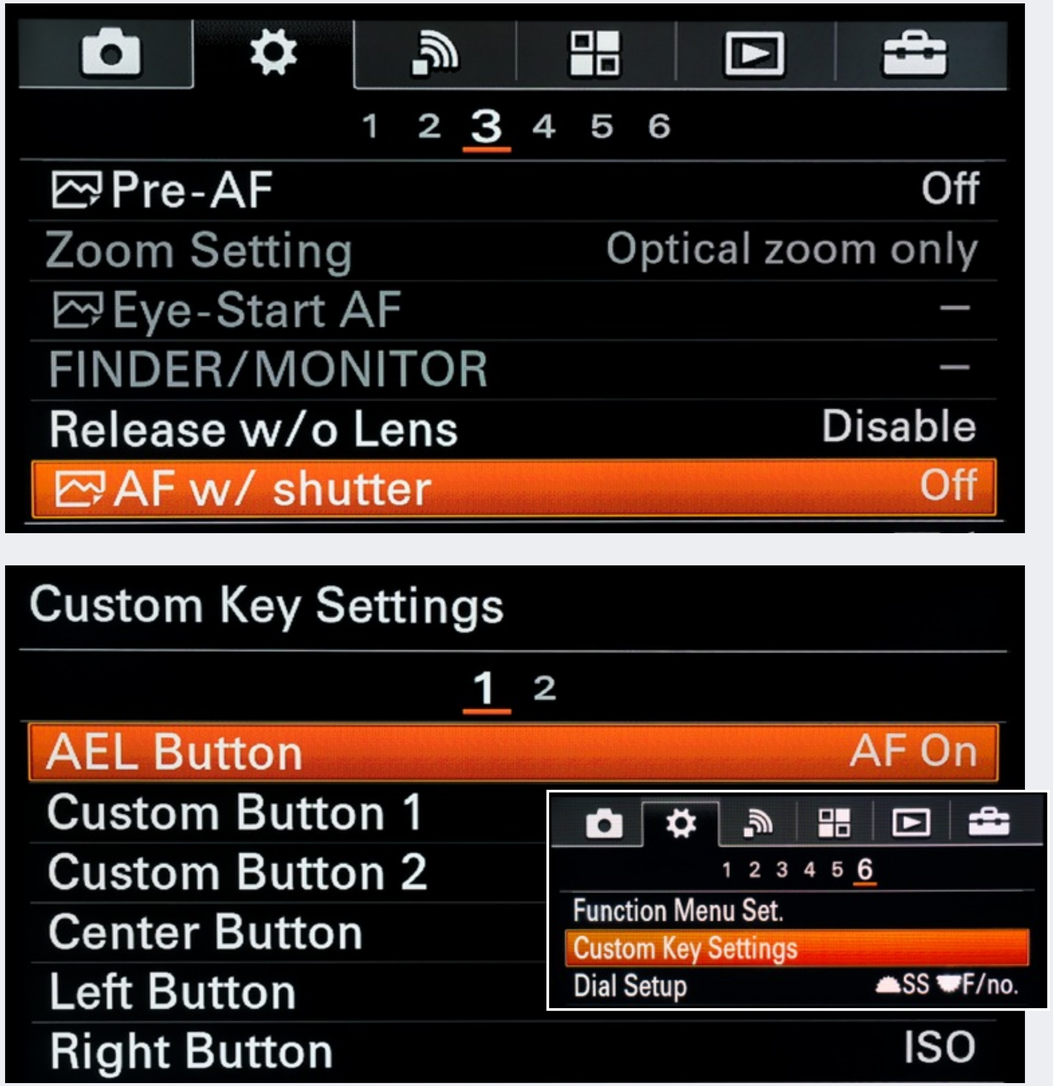
Back-Button AF (Alternative Technique)



In the default setting the camera will autofocus when the shutter release is half-pressed. Some photographers, however, prefer to disable the autofocus feature from the shutter release button and activate it by pressing another button on the back of the camera. This method of activating the autofocus is called Back-Button AF.

On the A7 or A7R camera this can be set up by first setting the Focus mode to Continuous AF or AF-C (press the C2 button). Set the AF w/ shutter button in the Custom Key Settings to Off and change the function of the AEL button (Auto Exposure Lock) to AF-On.

This focus method may take a while to get used to, so you may need to give it a week or two before your decide if Back Button AF better suits your needs.

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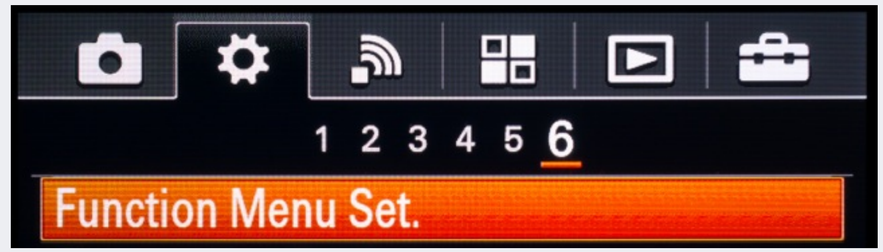
Function Menu Settings



When all of the custom features are set up on the A6000 camera, most photographers will find that they are only accessing the menu button to format the memory card. Up to 12 frequently accessed custom settings can be accessed via the Fn button on the back of the camera. As a Raw shooter you may struggle to think of 12 things you want to change regularly. To clean up the view in the EVF and on the LCD panel you have the option to set the first 6 function settings on the Upper level to ‘Not set’. This will clear the entire row of options.

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Function Menu Settings

The Fn options can prove very useful for photographers who don't want to lower the camera to use the LCD panel. This functionality is especially useful for photographers who have used the diopter adjustment dial (next to the EVF). In this instance lowing the camera to use the LCD panel would require the photographer to put on their reading glasses to adjust the camera settings.

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Hanging Rock by Mark Galer
Sony A6000 with SEL1018 F4
1/60 sec at f/11, ISO 100

Additional Information

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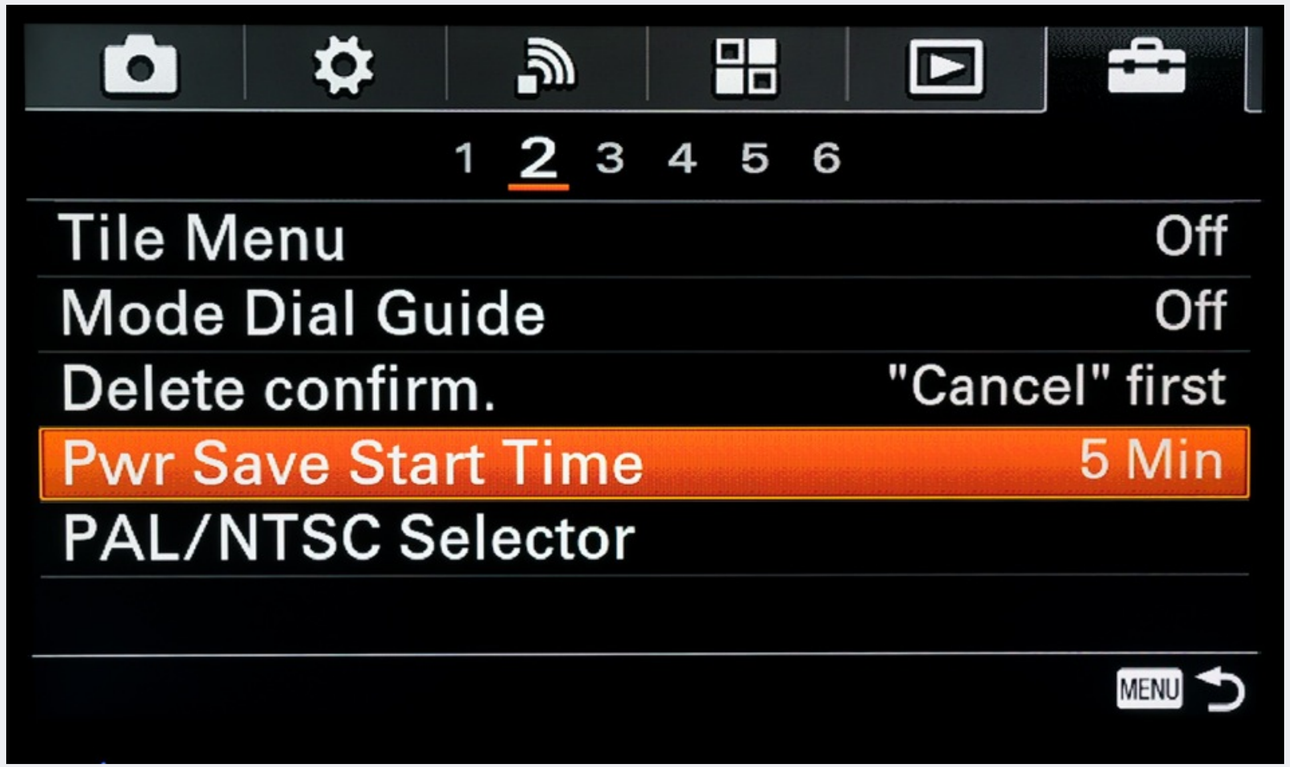
Setup: Power Save



One setting that I would strongly recommend changing is the default time of the Power Save Start Time. It can be annoying if the camera is continually sending itself to sleep between shots and then having to wait a few seconds for the camera to wake up so you can capture another decisive moment that may now have passed. I would recommend selecting either the 5 or 30 minute options and carrying a spare battery in your pocket. In this way the camera will usually be ready to capture those fleeting moments.

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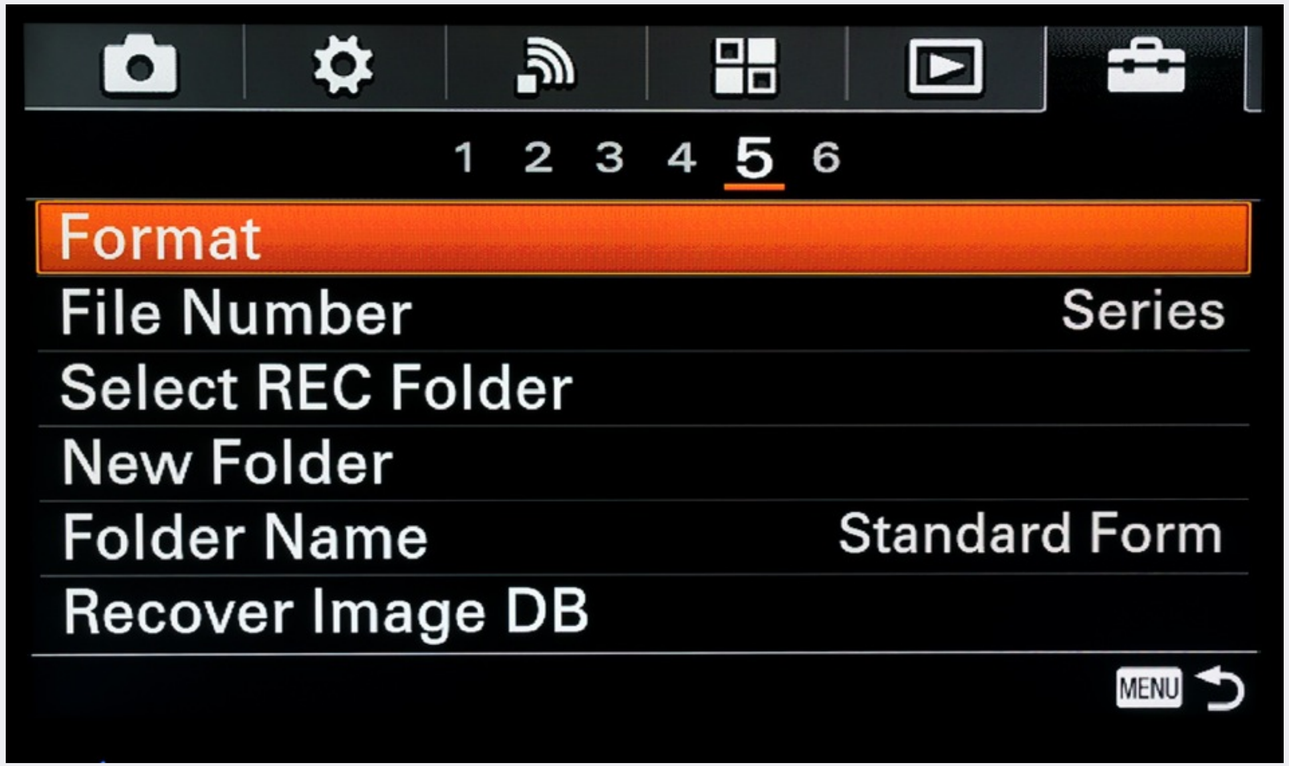
Setup: Format



One menu setting that you will need to access frequently, that cannot be assigned to either a custom key or Function menu (Fn), is the Format command that is found in the fifth tab of the Setup menu. This needs to be implemented each time you want to reformat the memory card. It's one of the few menu settings you will have to commit to memory, until such time that Sony updates it's firmware to allow this option to be accessed via the Fn menu. Another option that never made it to the Fn menu is 'Live View Display/ Setting Effect On' which needs to be disabled when shooting with studio flash.

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When manual is still auto?

This is not a custom setting but is a feature that can easily be overlooked if you are new to professional Sony cameras.

Manual Mode on the A6000 can be used in conjunction with Auto ISO.

This means that the optimum shutter speed and aperture is set by the photographer and the ISO is adjusted automatically by the camera. This ensures an average auto-exposure is achieved. Use exposure compensation to increase or decrease the exposure. I prefer this setting to Aperture priority when using wide-angle lenses because the shutter speed selected by the camera in Aperture Priority can sometimes be too slow for the moving subject I am photographing.

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Useful Accessories

Some accessories for your A6000 camera that you may like to consider is a spare battery or two (NP-FW50) and a dedicated battery charger. Sony's BC-QM1 allows you to charge two batteries at the dame time from a single power point (the one in the charger and the one in the camera). As the megapixel count of the A6000 is generous and the High Speed Continuous Shooting mode very fast, it is worth considering moving up to a large 'Class 10' SD card (94 MB/s). For photographers working with the camera on a tripod, Sony's RM-VPR1 remote release is a perfect companion.

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Lens Adapters

Sony's new LA-EA4 Adapter will allow you to mount any Sony A-Mount lens onto your A6000 (older LA-EA adapters appear to have been discontinued). The adapter effectively expands the range of lenses that you can use with your camera. Lens adapters for Nikon, Canon, Leica, Voigtlander and other makes of lenses are also available to use with the E-Mount of the A6000 camera.

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PlayMemories apps

You can increase the fun and functionality of your A6000 camera by exploring Sony's PlayMemories camera apps. My first recommendation would be to download the free Smart Remote Control app that allows you to use your mobile device to control your camera.

You can also purchase apps such as Lens Compensation that will enable you to correct lens distortions from non-Sony lenses (in-camera), even when using the Raw file format. The Time Lapse app installs an intervalometer in your camera. The app can make a time-lapse movie in the camera or you can choose to shoot JPEG or Raw stills that you can later use to make the time-lapse movie on your computer.

I have found it easier to download and install the apps directly from the camera rather than using a computer.

https://www.playmemoriescameraapps.com

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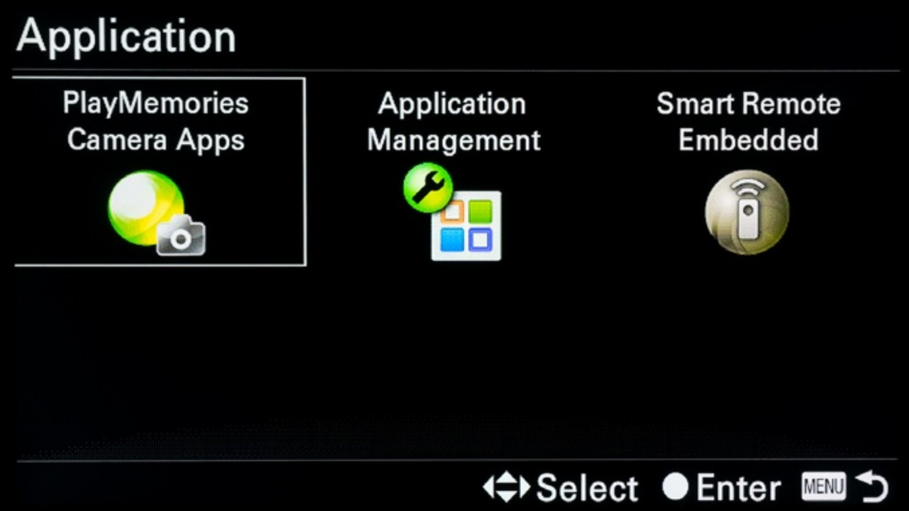
Set Access Point (Set up Wi-Fi)

To download apps directly to the camera (rather than via a computer), you will first need to go to the Wireless menu settings in the camera and Choose Access Point Set from the second tab. When you enter this menu you will be asked to choose your Wi-Fi network and then enter the password before you can connect. Once this has been done you can proceed to the Application menu, Select ‘Application List’ and then choose PlayMemories Camera Apps.

https://www.playmemoriescameraapps.com



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