

How to create a narrow depth of field

Transcript

This afternoon, I'm filming an interview and I want to get a nice soft background whilst getting my interviewee in focus.

Just go back to where you were there, that's it, great, find that light under there.

You need to find a big enough space so you can have room to zoom in. Filming someone in a small space will make creating a narrow depth of field really tricky.

When you're playing with depth of field you want as much space as you can get between your camera and your subject and the background.

One of the easiest ways to achieve a narrow depth of field and really blur out that background is to zoom in. Obviously that's easiest on a tripod; it just cuts out the wobbles.

By zooming in, I'm getting a nice soft-focus background but my interviewee is in focus.

I'm pretty happy with that, but I'm just going to move in to show you what it would have looked like without using zoom.

Now, if I move my camera closer to my interviewee, and frame up a similar shot, but this time zoom in, it increases the depth of field, allowing both the interviewee and the background to be in focus.

For me it's an uglier shot because I can see the canteen and I'm not so focused on my subject.

When you compare these shots side by side, although they're similar in their framing, the look achieved is completely different.

So to get the shallow depth of field, you want as much space as possible between the camera, the interviewee, and the background.

Something to look out for when filming interviews with a shallow depth of field is that your focus is far more critical than if you were on a wide. When an interviewee leans forward, you can lose focus. You've got a fine focus and just keep an eye on it, you have to be a bit more attentive.

The iris, which controls the amount of light you let in to your camera, is another way to help you achieve a shallow depth of field. The more you open the iris, the lower the f-stop number and the narrower the depth of field becomes — in this case, defocusing the background.

When you're filming outside, to get more of a blurred, out of focus background, to really get that narrow depth of field, you want to whack in ND as much as you can, but also still getting your exposure right. Whack the ND on and you can really see how much more blurry the background is.

And of course using what you've learned about getting a narrow depth of field can really help you get that lovely final pull-focus.