

What types of neutral density filters are available on the market?

There are plenty of neutral density filters on the market today. It really depends on how much light you need to keep out of the photo you're taking. All [neutral density filters](#) are given a rating that corresponds to an "f-stop" reduction. That's a fancy way of saying each neutral density filter you attach mimics an increase of your shutter speed by a certain number of stops. If you get an ND2, it's like increasing the shutter speed by one stop. Get an ND4, and the light coming into the camera would be like the light you would get from increasing the shutter speed by two full stops. (Note: you aren't actually increasing your shutter speed. You're just getting less light from outside, something that mimics a faster shutter speed in one way).

At the very end of the scale, you have the ND8192. This powerful light blocking filter reduces the light by a full 13 stops. I personally can't think of how I would use something like this, but you might want to use it to get a very intense motion blur effect (similar to the ones you see in night-time photography) during the day.



What is a graduated neutral density filter?

Some neutral density filters aren't so "neutral" after all. A graduated neutral density filter blocks more light on one side than the other. Half of the filter might block out 4 f-stops on one side and only one f-stop on the other. Where might this be useful? Landscape photography is an immediate candidate. When you are taking pictures of landscapes, the sky tends to be much brighter than the ground underneath it. By using a graduated neutral density filter, you can get the right brightness levels in the sky and the ground at the same time.



You can achieve some amazing photographic effects when you combine a graduated neutral density filter with a sunrise filter and others as Sean McGrath has done here.

Photo By [Sean McGrath](#)

Do I need a neutral density filter?

Unless you intend to create motion blur effects during the middle of the day, you probably don't need a standard neutral density filter. It's easy enough to turn down the intensity of the light by simply using your camera settings. When you switch to a faster shutter speed, a smaller aperture, or a lower ISO speed number, you are effectively blocking out more of the sun's light. The standard neutral density filter helps only when you can't do one of these 3 because you are going after a certain photographic effect.

Graduated neutral density filters, on the other hand, are a must have for anyone. They are great because they let you have your cake and eat it too. You get rich and colourful skies without making the ground look too dark. I would highly recommend them to anyone who is interested in getting better at landscape photography.