



Introduction to Photography Course

Tripod purchasing guide

V1.0-2024

Tripod Components

A tripod consists mainly of four components.

- 1) Legs
- 2) Head
- 3) Centre Column
- 4) Feet

When purchasing a tripod, many (especially at the lower price points) are sold as a combination of the above and when purchasing your first tripod, you will likely be focusing on the leg & head combination.



Legs

Weight Rating

The weight rating on tripod legs determines how much weight the legs can support.

For example, a tripod that can support 4kgs of weight would be able to support the following combination with room to spare:

Canon 750D DSLR Camera	-	weight 555g
Canon EF-S 18-55mm lens	-	weight 200g

A heavier combination might be as follows

Canon 6D DSLR Camera	-	weight 750G
Canon EF 70-200 f2.8 lens-		weight 1.4kgs

At 4kg weight, you still have room to move however, be aware that at times you may be putting your own weight on the tripod. A good rule of thumb would be to find a tripod that supports double the weight of your heaviest camera body and lens combination.

Tripod Weight

The actual weight of the tripod is different from the weight rating. This determines how heavy the tripod will be to carry.



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Different materials used in the construction of tripod legs determines both the strength and the weight of tripod legs. As a general rule, the more you pay, the lighter the legs will become with the benefit of being able to hold more weight.

Positioning

Legs often have a maximum angle for positioning. Some will allow you to take the legs completely horizontal which helps to get low to the ground. It's worth considering how flexible your tripod legs are in allowing you the maximum potential for composition.

Feet

The feet that come with most tripod legs, as well as those sold as a combination of elements, are usually just plastic or rubber and for the majority of uses, these are perfectly fine. Rubber is preferable as it does offer some grip over plastic.

More advanced tripod legs will accommodate a range of different feet which can offer the ability to simply replace those that are worn, or offer spiked alternatives for setting up outdoors.

Head

Heads usually fall into two main types (other head designs are variations on these) and determine the way a head is operated and can be moved.

Heads have their own weight rating too so it's important, just like with the weight rating for legs, that you ensure you have a head that won't sag when mounting your camera to it.

Ball Heads

One of the more common types of head, the ball head is often a light weight, space saving design and is great for those looking to travel.

The mechanism on most ball heads have two adjustments. The first unlocks the "ball" and will allow you to move the central part of the head in any direction including orientating the camera





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from horizontal to vertical. The second allows you to unlock the lower part of the tripod allowing for panorama shooting.

Pan & Tilt Heads

Pan and Tilt heads provide a much more precise method of controlling the position of your camera and are distinctive in their use of adjustment levers.

Cheaper models will come with just two adjustment levers while the better models will come with three.

While a little more unwieldy, they offer a studio based tripod much better control as you are able to adjust one position at a time.

Being bulkier than the ball head design and often heavier, these are generally better suited to those wanting more precise control over their camera positioning and studio setups.



Quick Release Plate

The quick release plate is something you will find on most tripod heads of a reasonable quality and up. It's designed to allow you to leave the plate on your camera and to quickly mount your camera to the tripod through a locking mechanism without having to screw it on each time.

There are a few different styles of quick release plates. Some designs are specific to a manufacturer such as Manfrotto, who have their own quick release plate design which work with their tripod heads.

In more recent times, a style of quick release plate known as Arca-Swiss has been seen as a newer "open standard" and can be found being used by certain tripod head and most third party accessory manufacturers. This style generally offers the potential of being the most flexible system to look for when considering a tripod head (or combination).





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Centre Column

Not necessarily standard on all tripods, the centre column acts as both a way to further extend the height of a tripod as well as, in some cases, offering more flexible mounting positions.

When adjusting your tripod, the centre column should be the last thing elevated as it can introduce some instability.

Tripod Height

Tripod height is determined by the combination of the legs and centre column.

There is often a recommendation to purchase a tripod that will extend to your height to ensure that you are not bending over to look into the viewfinder. It's not bad advice but there is more consider.

Worth keeping in mind is the kind of photography you are planning on doing. Some Macro photography and even landscape photography requires you to be quite low to the ground so a tripod that can get low may also be worth considering.

Portability is another one. A tripod that can fold down to be compact is a tripod that you'll be more likely to take with you when travelling.

Total Weight and Collapsed Size

Weight is always an important thing to consider when choosing a tripod. Materials used in the construction of tripod legs vary and the price tends to rise when tripods offer materials that are both light and can hold more weight.

A decent entry level tripod designed to be taken out into the world would have legs often made from aluminum and with the head, would weigh around the 1.2-1.8kg mark.

Heavier tripods are often designed without portability in mind and are really made for studio work where stability and the ability to hold a decent amount of weight is more important.



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Recommendation

Start with a tripod that is built using reasonable materials and offers portability. Especially as you begin with your photography, you'll likely want a tripod that is easily taken with you and a bulky and heavy tripod will generally be left behind.

Avoid a tripod that is made of plastic as these are not only weak in construction but also have the worst style of head and offer very little stability. They are a single unit and cannot be customised and will generally only provide you with frustration and despite their low-price tag, buyers regret. We have had participants who used plastic tripods have them fail during activities which meant they couldn't participate.

Starting around the \$200 mark, you can find a decent, travel friendly tripod & head combination.

The Essendon Camera Club is not affiliated with, nor endorses any of the companies recommended in this guide. Prices are provided as guidance only.

At the cheaper end of the market, the **Vanguard VEO 3 GO 235AB** offers a 4kg Payload so better suited to the lighter camera and lens combinations and comes in at a travel friendly weight of approx. 1.2kg

Price: \$180.00

<https://www.teds.com.au/vanguard-veo-3-go-235ab-travel-tripod-monopod>

The **Sirui T-005SK** Aluminum Tripod with B-00K Ball Head represents a lighter alternative weighing just 1.1kg

It has a 5KG payload so better suited to the lighter camera and lens combinations.

Price: \$209.00

<https://sirui-photo.com.au/product/sirui-t-005sk-aluminum-tripod-with-b-00k-ball-head/>

If you're looking for something with a bit more holding power, Sirui A-1205 Carbon Fibre Tripod with Y-11 Ball Head is a decent tripod with 8kg payload.

Price: \$299

<https://sirui-photo.com.au/product/sirui-a-1205-carbon-fibre-tripod-with-y-11-ball-head-and-convertible-monopod-leg/>

Of course, if your budget is higher, look for a tripod offering carbon fibre legs and a head which is both flexible and can hold some weight. If you have seen something you are contemplating, have a quick word to any of the course presenters for their opinion and feedback.



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Other suppliers in Melbourne who are worth checking prices at are:

<https://www.digidirect.com.au/>

<https://www.teds.com.au>

<http://vanbarphoto.com.au>