

AF-S Zoom-Nikkor 17-35mm f/2.8D IF-ED lens review

Introduction

This is the best professional wide-angle zoom lens for Nikon film cameras and the image quality that it delivers on the whole is better than that of fixed focal length lenses (AF-D series). I compared the [AF Nikkor 28mm f/2.8D](#) with the zoom set at 28mm and it took only about three minutes of looking at the test slides to decide that there was no point in keeping the prime lens.

Do you need more information on the lens? No and yes. No—with respect to making the purchasing decision. If this is the lens you need and you can afford it, then go and buy one. And yes—in the sense that you will need to learn how the lens performs at different focal length and aperture settings to get the best out of it.



[This](#) and [this](#) photograph was taken with this lens. If necessary, you can find simple explanations of the terms below [here](#).

Handling

The lens has the right weight and shape—it balances perfectly on a Nikon F100 (and, I reckon, on any camera body of similar calibre). Do not listen to the people who complain that it is too bulky and heavy—many of them also complain that cheaper lenses are too light and "plasticy". When mounting/dismounting the lens, I recommend setting its focal length to 35mm—at this focal length the rear element retreats into the lens and thus can not be accidentally scratched.

Sharpness

This lens is plentifully sharp at all focal length settings. Nothing to be added here, really. When comparing it with the AF Nikkor 28mm f/2.8D, I could not discern any difference in sharpness from about f/4 on. At f/2.8 the zoom is slightly softer (especially in the corners); however, at this aperture its fixed focal length counterpart exhibits such strong light fall-off that its advantage of being a bit sharper becomes irrelevant.

Light fall-off

I was amazed at how relatively little light fall-off the lens exhibits. When set to 28mm, it has about the same degree of the aberration at f/2.8 as the AF Nikkor 28mm f/2.8D at f/4! Another interesting point is that light fall-off is worst at 17 mm and gradually gets better towards 35mm. At 35mm, the aberration is almost not noticeable even at f/2.8.

Distortion



The lens shows quite visible barrel distortion at 17mm (the photo above); I, however, reckon that those who do not know what distortion is and do not look for it on purpose would never notice it. The lens is free from distortion at about 22mm (the photo below). It then starts showing pincushion distortion, which gradually grows worse towards the 35mm end. I would suggest using the lens in the 20-24mm range if you have long straight lines in the picture; set it to 22mm for crucial architectural applications. The zoom at 28mm and the AF Nikkor 28mm f/2.8D show about the same degree of distortion, with the only difference that the former shows pincushion distortion while the latter exhibits barrel distortion.



Flare and ghosting

In the two images in the *Distortion* section of this review there are quite a few sources of very bright light—and they have caused no problem whatsoever. Not too bad at all.

Other things to keep in mind

The lens is *very* wide at 17mm. See the psychedelic sky in the first picture in the *Distortion* part of the review? It was not obvious it would turn out like this when I was taking the picture. Same holds for flash photography—make sure that your flash provides adequate coverage (at 17mm you will need to use a diffusion dome even with the SB-800). Apart from this, watch out for small things unnoticeably getting into the picture—such as your own shoes ☺.

Conclusions

Once again, this lens is pretty much as good as lenses get at the present stage of lens design and production technology. If you need and can afford it, just get one. Upon that, simply remember its distortion and light fall-off signatures to get the best out of it depending on each particular task.