

AF-Nikkor 300 mm f/4 ED-IF	4 (F5)	This is a nice lens with very good optical rendition, but it handles less well than the other 300's due to the placement of the focusing ring towards the front of the lens assembly. An aperture setting between f/8 and f/11 produces the sharpest images.
AFS 300 mm f/4 Nikkor ED-IF	(5 if life is kind to the photographer) (1 in the real world, on a tripod with a heavy camera attached) (2-5 when a lighter camera, such as F-100, is used with it on a tripod)	<p>A long-awaited design, the newest addition to the AFS line-up is a mixed blessing. It focuses very close so at the near limit at 1.45 m impressively tight shots are obtained. AF works fast and reliably both on D1 and F5. Images obtained with D1 under well-lit conditions (at fast shutter speeds) were crisp and sharp across the entire frame.</p> <p>My main objection relates to the really poor tripod collar. It is a detachable and cantilevered design which - for some inscrutable reason - is very thin and thus flexes easily. I'm unable to hand-hold a 300 mm lens so using such lenses tripod-mounted is a prerequisite. However, when combined with my F5 (made even heavier by its attached "L" bracket) on my standard Sachtler tripod, the AFS 300 f/4 didn't yield a single, critically sharp image. Yes, it is true. This is easily the worst test result I've yet encountered. In fact, the viewfinder directly showed the proneness to shake. Read the details and see the test pictures for yourself.</p> <p>Concurrent test shots with my 300 mm f/2.8 Nikkor using an identical setup were crisp and clear. True, shutter speeds during test shooting ranged from 1/60 down to 1/2 sec, so they fell squarely into the "danger zone" for vibrations. But again, absolutely no problems were encountered with the 300/2.8 lens under these conditions.</p> <p>I scrutinised the test pictures at high magnification and found clear, tell-tale signs of vibration. Probably, my heavy F5 excited a strong resonance frequency in the camera/lens/tripod setup. The Sachtler tripod is very light and extremely rigid, so this explanation sounds likely. Later, I repeated test shooting with a heavy-duty Sachtler fluid video head instead of my Foba ball head, and got slightly better results. Replacing the F5 with a lighter camera did reduce - but not eliminate - the vibration problems. No mirror lock-up was used for these shots, and I strongly object if this remedy should be mandatory just for shooting with a moderate focal length such as a 300 mm. In fact, I have shot with lenses up to 1600 mm on my Sachtler tripod to get excellent results.</p> <p>I can only hope for a revised lens with a redesigned tripod collar. In fact, there is plenty of space for adding a wider and stronger collar to this AFS Nikkor. I really have an axe to grind with Nikon over this lens, but on a more positive note, I won't be tempted to buy myself yet another lens ...</p> <p>A final note: A (well-known, but not very critical) reviewer claims my findings about poor support is hogwash, because he got sharp pictures at two seconds exposure. My comment is that this is outside the critical range for camera shake, so proves nothing. Feed-back from other users of the 300 AFS has confirmed my findings, though.</p> <p>IMPORTANT 15 Dec, 2000: I discovered that the tripod collar of this lens (and the 80-400 VR as well) is ever so slightly improved by a better and less brittle casting. Thus, tripod operation may be improved, but still the design is basically flawed. Initially, I had high</p>

hopes for this new collar, but I'm now convinced it doesn't solve the problem in most cases.

Numerous owners of the AFS 300/4, mainly from the US, have shared their experiences with me on the poor stability of this tripod collar, so Nikon should consider this a major issue and aim to rectify the situation. My advice is to return the lens forthwith for a money refund, if you are dissatisfied with the tripod collar, or return it for replacement of the tripod collar as a warranty issue. Either way, you help build a pressure on Nikon to concede they screwed it all up with this collar design (same as on the 80-400 VR, by the way).