when to use
DIFFERENT FILMS

Film is sensitive to light. That's why and how it records images. Control over how much light lands on your film is the heart of photography, and certain films give you more control in certain situations. Two key ideas — latitude and film speed (ASA/ISO) rating — will help you make the best choice of film types for the best pictures a situation will allow.

When light hits film, there's a chemical reaction. A film with a high speed rating (the numbers are always printed on the cardboard box and the film magazine) is very sensitive: a reaction will happen with very little light. Oppositely, a film with a low speed rating number needs lots of light to record an image.

Latitude is a range in which a film will be properly exposed — even when the camera's exposure settings are a little bit "off." In a sense, latitude is the freedom to make mistakes, a "width" on either side of the correct exposure wherein a picture will still be okay. Some films have generous latitude, others have very little.

Let's start with color. Transparency film is processed directly to the final slide with no intermediate printing step to show corrections, so color print film gives you more latitude and therefore a slightly better chance of getting your pictures right. Kodachrome and Ektachrome films are popular transparency films, while Kodacolor and Vericolor films yield prints.

Does speed affect latitude? Yes, but not a great deal. All films of medium speed have slightly better latitude.

Black-and-white photography begins, on the low-speed side, with Panatomic-X film, which rates at ISO 32. A carefully made picture can be enlarged to mural size and still be surprisingly sharp.

On the high-speed end, there's Kodacolor 400 film. Like its slide film cousin, Ektachrome 400, this is best when light is scarce or when you're trying to photograph a fast-moving subject.

In more average light, and even in slightly dim lighting, Kodachrome 64 film is a good bet. Sharpness — essential if you later want to get a blowup — is quite good.

Kodachrome 25 is the slide film of choice whenever light is plentiful — at the beach, on sunny ski slopes, etc. Although the speed is slow, the fineness of detail is tops.

When light is meager, there's Ektachrome 400 film. Also, when you want to stop action cold in your photographs under normal lighting, the higher speed will let you run a very fast shutter speed.

In the medium range, Plus-X pan film is a 125 ISO film with considerable latitude. Like Kodachrome 64 and Kodacolor II films, it's a film that almost doesn't allow you to make a mistake — use it for all-around situations.

For color prints, Kodacolor II film carries an ASA of 100, so it's ideal for normal situations, or when you're using a flash. In fact, this is one of the highest in latitude of all popular films.

Naturally, there's also a black-and-white that works best for low-light and fast-action situations. It's Tri-X pan film, which is the film you're most likely to see a newspaper photographer using.

FOR DIFFERENT
situations

SKI SHOTS

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The Shoot

CAMERA SETTINGS. These will change according to light conditions and what effects you wish to achieve, such as stopping the action, getting greater depth of field, etc. However, keep this in mind: most automatic light meters in cameras give a reading to produce an average tone of gray.

PAUL RYAN

A thick snowfall covers the skier (and the photographer) with an otherworldly fog.

If the light meter sees a predominance of black, it will tell you to increase the exposure, but if it sees white (which is going to be the case around snow, of course), it will tell you to cut down the exposure. So, after you get your reading, open up a stop, otherwise the snow will be gray when the film is developed and not the bright clean white that you want it to be. For example, if your meter tells you to shoot at f/11, you should open up a stop and shoot at f/8. Ryan has found that his average camera setting is f/8 at 500th of a second.

To capture the motion of a skier, shoot with the camera at a 60th of a second or even a 30th. As the skier goes by, pan as you press the shutter. This will blur the background, yet keep the skier in focus, an effect