

SHUTTER SPEAK

PHOTOGRAPHY 

Set Your Nikon Z Up in 10 Minutes

Stop fighting your camera. Start shooting with confidence.

A fast, practical setup that turns your Nikon Z into a camera that works *for you*—not against you.

Set Your Nikon Z Up in 10 Minutes

A setup guide for Nikon Z users who want a cleaner, faster, and easier camera setup.

What this guide does

This guide gives a practical starting setup for many Nikon Z cameras. Menu names, feature availability, and exact locations can vary by model and firmware, so use this as a smart baseline rather than a rigid rulebook.

Instead of dumping a huge list of menu settings on new users, this guide focuses on the controls that make a Nikon Z camera easier to use right away: the i Menu, My Menu, Function buttons, and backup settings.

Before you begin

- Use this as a starting point, not a universal rule for every genre.
- If a menu item is not on your camera, skip it and keep going.
- Stills shooters should use this first, then adapt for video if needed.

Your 10-minute setup

1. Start from a clean baseline

If the camera has been heavily customized, begin from a known setup so later changes are easier to understand. Nikon also allows menu settings to be saved to and loaded from a memory card using the Save/load menu settings feature.

Why it matters: Hidden settings can affect autofocus, displays, button behavior, and shortcuts in ways that confuse beginners.

2. Build your i Menu first

Customize the i Menu with the controls you may want to change while actively shooting.

Typical location: *Custom Settings > Controls > f1 Customize i Menu* (this may vary slightly by body and firmware).

- Focus mode
- AF-area mode
- Subject detection options
- White balance
- Metering
- Silent mode / shutter type
- Image quality
- Vibration reduction or e-VR if relevant
- Self-time

- Flash mode or bracketing if needed
- Picture Control
- ISO sensitivity settings

Why it matters: The i Menu should hold settings you may need quickly, without digging through deeper menus.

3. Build My Menu around practical access

My Menu is best for settings you want to find quickly, but do not need every few seconds while the camera is to your eye.

Rank	Item	Why it belongs here
1	<i>Subject detection options</i> Custom Settings > Controls > f1 Customize i Menu, or a related AF-area / subject-detection control depending on model	Put this first so Fn3 can jump straight to it on many Nikon Z bodies.
2	<i>Format memory card</i> Setup Menu > Format memory card	Important to find quickly, but not something that belongs in the i Menu all day.
3	<i>Save/load menu settings</i> Setup Menu > Save/load menu settings	Useful for backup, recovery, and restoring your setup later.
4	<i>Silent mode / shutter settings</i> Photo Shooting Menu or Custom Settings, depending on body; commonly controlled through the i Menu or silent/live view options	Helpful when the camera suddenly behaves differently and you need to confirm shutter behavior fast.
5	<i>Exposure delay mode</i> Custom Settings > Shooting/Display > d4 Exposure delay mode	Useful for tripod work and slower, more deliberate shooting.
6	<i>USB power delivery / charging</i> Setup Menu or a related USB/power submenu, depending on model	Worth quick access on supported bodies.
7	<i>Starlight View</i> Usually a custom settings display/viewing feature on supported Z bodies; location varies by model and firmware	Excellent on supported cameras for seeing the display more clearly in dark scenes.
8	<i>Monitor brightness</i> Setup Menu > Monitor brightness	Useful in bright daylight or very dark conditions when the monitor needs quick adjustment.

9	<i>Image review or display settings</i> Playback Menu > Image review or Playback display options	Helpful when playback or display behavior is not what you expect.
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4. Set up your Function buttons

Function buttons should be reserved for settings you may need instantly with the camera at your eye, not buried in the full menu system.

Typical location: *Custom Settings > Controls > f2 Custom Control Assignment* (may vary slightly by body and firmware).

Control	Recommended assignment	Why
Fn1	AF-area mode	Lets you change focus behavior quickly while shooting.
Fn2	Metering or another high-frequency control	Keeps a commonly changed setting under direct access.
Fn3	Access top item in My Menu	Makes the first My Menu item instantly available on many Nikon Z bodies.
AF-ON	AF-ON / back-button focus	Useful for photographers who want separate focus and shutter control.
Lens Fn	Playback zoom or AF-area mode	A strong choice when the lens supports custom button behavior.

For most Nikon Z cameras, the smart shortcut is to set Fn3 to Access top item in My Menu and make the top My Menu item Subject detection options.

For the Z9, the cleaner recommendation is to assign Fn3 directly to Subject detection options if that direct assignment is available on the body and firmware being demonstrated.

5. Save your setup to card

Save/load menu settings writes a settings file to the memory card, and saved filenames begin with NCSET. Cameras can only load files intended for the same model.

Typical location: *Setup Menu > Save/load menu settings* (may vary slightly by body and firmware).

Why it matters: Once your camera feels right, saving the setup protects you from resets, experiments, and future frustration.

Final note

- This guide is intentionally broad so it can work across many Nikon Z bodies. Exact menu wording, layout, and feature availability will vary depending on your model and firmware.