

How to Use a Telescope

You love the stars, and have a burgeoning interest in astronomy. You have gone out and purchased a state of the art telescope, and are standing on your back patio eager to get a glimpses of the solar system and far away galaxies. Then it hits you: you don't actually know how to use a telescope!

Even before the point when you are in your backyard staring blankly at your new telescope, there are two important steps you need to do to properly use your telescope. First, you need to check the weather. Do not waste time setting up your telescope if the weather report calls for heavy cloud cover. Cloud gazing can easily be accomplished during the day. And unless you are planning on look at the moon, you will have more success looking for stars with a new moon. Second, make sure you have chosen an appropriate location for your stargazing. This will be easier if you have a general idea of where in the sky you plan to look that evening. If you are just planning on a leisurely night of stargazing with no specific objects in mind, ensure that you have a relatively clear view of the heavens without any tall trees or buildings in the way. Although this can be tricky in urban environments, your view will be far better if you can find an observation point away from buildings, street lamps, and other light sources. Try local parks, or find the darkest part of your backyard (and turn off your exterior lights).

Once you have picked the perfect night and the perfect spot, it is finally time to set up your telescope. The first thing you can worry about is making the telescope stable. Most telescopes come with a tripod that can be adjusted to work on a variety of surfaces. Take the time now to ensure that your telescope will not rock back and forth on uneven ground - think of the frustration of losing sight of a celestial wonder because you did not know how to use a telescope properly and set it up poorly.

After the telescope is steady, give yourself five minutes for your eyes to adjust to the dark. During this time, be sure to keep the lenses on your telescope to prevent the accumulation of dew. Your telescope in general will require an hour to acclimatize to the outside temperature, so if possible set your telescope up in advance of when you plan to stargaze.

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