

# 2012

## Model Train Beginners Starter Guide



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<http://www.ModelTrainBooks.org/>

# *Do You Consider This a Dream Layout?*



Image - Courtesy of David

*"Before you can achieve an outstanding layout like David's you must first have your fundamentals in place from the start."*

I know you're excited about model railroading now and anxious to get started, but before you rush out and buy your first train set and begin designing your layout, there are a few things to think about...

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# Model Railroad Theme

The first thing you should do is decide on a theme for your railroad.

- What is your railroad's purpose? Where are your trains going to and coming from and why? Are they going to carry passengers from one town to another? Will they mostly carry coal to towns or local ports, timber to lumber yards, or farm goods to markets, etc?
- What is the setting: the location and era? Where and during what time period will your trains be operating? These can be either specific or general. If you like steam trains you will want to model the era before 1955. Diesels became popular in the late 1940's and beyond. The period between 1945 and 1955, the transition era, saw both steam and diesel running the rails. The location you want to model would help you decide which particular railroads - like Union Pacific or Norfolk Southern, etc.- you want running through your layout.
- What kind of model trains or equipment do you want to run on your layout? Again the place and the time you want to model may help you decide. Or it could be the other way around. You may really want to model the Lehigh Valley Railroad because you like the colors, for example, in which case the general location and time frame would already be known.
- What type of service will your model railroad provide and to whom? What industries and/or towns will your trains be carrying goods (or people) to and from? Do you like coal-hauling, logging, farming, oil industries, passenger service?

These are very important decisions that will lay the foundation for how you will design and build your layout.

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# Model Railroad Scale

You then need to decide on what scale to use. (Scale refers to the ratio between the measurement of a model compared to that of the prototype.) In other words what size trains do you want to run?

There are several different popular train scales available. Which one you choose depends on:

- a) How much space you have?
- b) How much money you can comfortably devote to the hobby?
- c) Whether you like a lot of scenery vs. more emphasis on the trains
- d) Do you prefer long running trains or shorter trains?
- e) Do you have the patience, the visual acuity, and finger dexterity to deal with very tiny engines on tiny tracks?



Incidentally, the words scale and gauge are often confused.

Scale refers to the ratio between the measurement of a model compared to that of the prototype.

Gauge is the term used to describe the distance between the 2 rails of track - usually 4 ft 8-1/2in ("standard gauge") in the prototype. "Narrow gauge" is a term used for rails that are closer together than standard gauge - usually around 3 to 3 1/2 ft.

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# Model Railroad Displays

The third thing to decide in your model railroading adventure is how you will show off and operate your trains.

- Are you building this railroad for your own enjoyment?
- Will you have friends helping you and participating in the operation of the railroad when it is completed?
- Is it mostly for your children or grandchildren to enjoy?
- Will it become part of a larger club layout?
- Do you want to build a small scene that you could sell at a craft show or on eBay?

There will most likely be some limiting factors that may enter into this decision also, such as space, time and monetary considerations.



Image - Courtesy of Richard Schumacher

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# What To Do Next

So you can see there are many things to consider when deciding what kind of railroad you want and how you want to show it or operate it. However, don't get so hung up on the decision-making process that it prevents you from moving forward. Like they say in the commercial, once you have considered the options, "just do it".

Okay, now that you have considered the location, the era, the scale and what type of display you want to model, you're ready for the next step.

The main problem I see with beginners is their lack of understanding of the fundamentals needed to be build a great model train layout. You don't need to spend a fortune nor to do you have to spend exorbitant amounts of time researching - you can get all of the basics in one place.

This book I found is a perfect solution to get you started - [Take a look](#)

Then after you have set that up and had some fun with it, read more at ModelTrainBooks.org about how to expand your set into a realistic track plan, construct bench work for it and enhance it with mountains and scenery, light up your buildings and passenger cars.

Now you're talking! You'll never be the same again!



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