What scale is right for your next project? That depends on the subject of your model, and what characteristics you find most important. Some of us are "constant scale" builders—we build all our models to a single scale, sometimes regardless of the subject. This allows easy size comparisons and lets us combine several models in a diorama. It also reduces the time you spend browsing at the hobby shop, but you'll have to decide for yourself if that's an advantage.

Others of us, though, skip around a bit scale-wise, and that's also a rational approach. Unlike our cousins in model railroading or radio control, we don't usually operate our models, so they don't need to be of the same scale to make operation possible. Likewise, though many of us may build a small diorama or two, few of us build large multi-subject scenes. Mostly, we enjoy the occasional change of scale, which provides variety and adds to our options—we have more kits from which to choose and can take advantage of each scale's strengths, and so maximize our modelling pleasure.

What are the strengths and weaknesses of the various scales, though? We at FSM can offer a few opinions based on experiences and conversations with modelers around the world. We didn't consider cost because it's too subjective. In fact, larger-scale models often cost less per modeling hour than their smaller counterparts because larger-scale models tend to be more complex and offer greater detailing opportunities. So the final cost is probably not as big a factor as kit prices make it appear. What is important is how much enjoyment you get from building, modifying, and painting each of your models. FSM

**AIRCRAFT**

1/24 SCALE
Pros: Big, real big. Plenty of room for details. Parts are easier to handle than in smaller scales. Impresses when complete. Can be combined with auto models and model railroad figures in dioramas. If you have the space.
Cons: Big, real big. Can look bare without details. Relatively few subjects available. Few aftermarket parts or decals.
Overall: Great if you have the space and your subject is large.

1/32 AND 1/35 SCALE
Pros: Impressive size. Parts somewhat easier to handle than in 1/48 scale.
Cons: Completed models are a bit too large for many bookshelves. Relatively few detail parts and aftermarket decals.
Overall: Same as for 1/24 scale.

1/48 SCALE
Pros: Often somewhat easier to build than 1/72 scale, and details can be more to scale. Many diorama accessories and figures available. The hottest scale for aircraft right now in the U.S. Most major single-engine types available, plus some multi-engine. Large and growing supply of aftermarket parts and decals. Great diorama possibilities.
Cons: Subject choices are limited compared to 1/72 scale.
Overall: If you can't decide on a scale for your next airplane project, 1/48 scale is probably your safest choice unless your subject is very large. Because the kits are often newer than their 1/72 scale counterparts, the parts often fit together more easily.

1/72 SCALE
Pros: Largest variety of kits available, and by a wide margin. Relatively easy to store and display. Especially with newer kits, less need to add details than on larger-scale kits. Many aftermarket parts and decals. Can combine with 1/32 scale armor and figures in dioramas. Great selection of beginner kits.
Cons: Some smaller parts often mold too large for scale. Detail work can be somewhat finicky. Many older (and some newer) 1/72 scale kits have fit problems.
Overall: For the builder who wants to build everything, loves obscure subjects, or is short on space, 1/72 scale is a great choice. It's also the largest practical scale for models of very large aircraft.

1/144 AND SMALLER SCALES
Pros: Good variety of kits of airliners and multi-engine military types. Easy to store and display. Many aftermarket air-liner decals.
Cons: Detail and paint work can be tricky. Few details available. Limited diorama possibilities. Relatively low level of detail, unless you have surgeon-quality skills.
Overall: Small scales are great for airliner buffs and fans of really large military aircraft, but demand excellent building and painting skills.

1/16 AND 1/25 SCALE
Pros: Wopping big models that are impressive. Great detailing possibilities. Diorama possibilities with both autos and aircraft, but you'll need some space. Some models operate.
Cons: You'll be making your own details in many cases. Fewer choices of models.
Overall: As with big-scale planes, these models have a high "wow" factor. Be sure you have the space, though. You may need to fabricate a few parts.

1/35 SCALE
Pros: Widest variety of armor subjects available. Plethora of aftermarket parts, decals, and dry transfer letters.
Overall: The simplest choice for building most military subjects, and a good variety of kits to choose from. Furthermore, there's a relatively high level of detail, and the kits are often well made.
nice compromise between “big enough to see” and “small enough to display.” Watch out for older kits, however — some are tiny, but many are clunky.

1/48 SCALE
- Pros: Excellent diorama possibilities, especially for 1/48 scale O scale railroads.
- Cons: Limited scale use due to tight space.
- Overall: Limited use in railroads.

1/72, 1/76, AND 1/87 SCALE
- Pros: Good variety of kits. A popular scale in Europe.
- Cons: Limited use due to tight space.
- Overall: Limited use in railroads.

1/20, 1/18, AND LARGER SCALES
- Pros: Impressive size. Potential for jaw-dropping detailing.
- Cons: Limited scale use due to tight space.
- Overall: Limited use in railroads.

1/24 AND 1/25 SCALE
- Pros: Wider variety of kits and aftermarket parts. Completed models large enough to detail and small enough to display. Can combine with 1/24 scale aircraft in dioramas. Good selection of beginning kits.
- Cons: Possible confusion between 1/24 and 1/25 scales. (There’s a 4 percent size difference; so be careful when swapping parts between kits.) Otherwise, not many cons.
- Overall: The default choice for car modelers, and with good reason. Is it a coincidence that 1/48 scale aircraft, 1/25 scale tanks, and cars in these scales are all about the same size when built? Probably not.

1/43 SCALE
- Pros: Good selection of foreign and racing subjects, as well as die-cast models to kitbash. Convenient size for display. Very few injection-molded plastic kits. Fewer U.S. subjects than in 1/25 scale.
- Cons: Limited detail. Small size often forces compromises on scale and prototype fidelity.
- Overall: A good choice if you’re short on space or are really into race cars, but be prepared to work harder than in 1/24 or 1/25 scale.

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- Overall: A good choice if you’re short on space or are really into race cars, but be prepared to work harder than in 1/24 or 1/25 scale.

1/72 SCALE
- Pros: Do not take up much space. Often relatively simple to build. Good variety of kits, especially for World War II Pacific Theater modelers. Nice size for displays and dioramas.
- Cons: Just big enough to make you want to detail them just small enough that it’s tough to do.
- Overall: If you’re not sure you want to build a ship, or if you’re sure you want to build a lot of ships, try 1/700.

LARGER THAN 1/350 SCALE
- Pros: “Wow” factor — can be a life-long project, but there’s the possibility of building models so good they truly can’t be told from the prototype in a photo.
- Cons: Few kits are available. Plenty of space required for display. Few aftermarket parts. Projects can get involved.
- Overall: If you have the space, time, and talent, you should try at least one. Well-built large ships are worthy of museum displays, and that’s where many end up.

1/350 SCALE
- Pros: Possibility of fantastic detail. Impressive when complete.
- Cons: Relatively few kits available in plastic. Completed models are large.
- Overall: Still impressive, and more manageable than larger scales. The masterpiece scale for the rest of us.

1/700 AND 1/720 SCALE
- Pros: Good variety of kits, especially for World War II Pacific Theater modelers. Nice size for displays and dioramas.
- Cons: Just big enough to make you want to detail them just small enough that it’s tough to do.
- Overall: If you’re not sure you want to build a ship, or if you’re sure you want to build a lot of ships, try 1/700.

LARGER THAN 1/14 SCALE
- Pros: Possibility of magnificent likenesses.
- Cons: Dioramas get pretty large, equipment somewhat limited.
- Overall: These models can be absolutely terrific, but be prepared to modify or scratchbuild some parts.

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SHIPS
- Pros: “Wow” factor. Excellent for dioramas, wargames, and large collections.
- Cons: Some models are pretty rough.
- Overall: Mostly for the gamers.

AUTOS
- Pros: Impressive size. Potential for jaw-dropping detailing.
- Cons: Limited scale use due to tight space.
- Overall: Limited scale use due to tight space.

FIGURES
- Pros: Good figures. Great diorama possibilities.
- Cons: Big enough that you have to paint eyes and skin tones. Small enough that doing so is not easy.
- Overall: Great for dioramas, but a little small for single-figure displays.

1/48 SCALE
- Pros: Excellent selection. Truly stunning models possible.
- Cons: Few figures available. Limited scale use due to tight space.
- Overall: Possibly the best all-around figure scale — big enough to paint, small enough to display.

1/32 SCALE
- Pros: Excellent selection of military figures. Great diorama possibilities.
- Cons: Big enough that you have to paint eyes and skin tones. Small enough that doing so is not easy.
- Overall: Great for dioramas, but a little small for single-figure displays.

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FURTHER READING
For details on understanding and converting scale ratios, see Chris Appoldt’s “Tips for the scales” in the December 2000 issue of FSM.