Q: My friend borrowed my digital camera for her vacation, but she just emailed me to say that she lost it. I assume she'll offer to replace it when she returns, but what if she doesn't?

A: Ideally, your friend will come back, bringing you a new camera! If she doesn't, she should offer to replace it immediately, and you should graciously accept: "Okay, thank you. I'll get the model number to you."

If she simply offers an apology, but doesn't offer to replace it, you should say:

"I'd like you to replace it—does that sound like a reasonable solution?"

Most people will agree, and they'll take the model number to purchase something comparable. Or they may offer to give you cash—a quick solution to an awkward situation.

If your friend can't afford to buy a replacement, she may feel too embarrassed to say so. If you sense that this is the case—or if weeks go by and she hasn't done anything—you can suggest a timeline: "Do you think you can replace it by X date?"

If she doesn't follow through in a reasonable amount of time, remind her: "Just wanted to check in about the camera—when do you think you could take care of that?"

How many times you check in is up to you. You may have to let go of the camera if you want to stay friends.

Friends and money rarely mix well. Avoid lending things you can't afford to lose—especially when a friendship might be one of them.

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