

Portrait Lighting

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What do I want you to walk away with after tonight's demonstration?

- A basic understanding of the tools in a studio environment
 - Backgrounds, Speedlight, Studio Strobes, Light Modifiers & Reflectors, Wireless Trigger Systems
 - How do I choose the tools to use?
- How to build different photographic portrait looks with lighting
 - Dramatic, Beauty, Commercial, Fashion
- A few key elements in portraiture
 - The eyes are the windows to the soul
 - What is your subject's best side? Make sure to ask
 - Why round is better than strait
 - Is posing necessary?

What makes flash pictures look unnatural?

- Direction - from a few inches above the lens
- Size - small light source that creates harsh shadows
- Light falloff - distance between subject and background relative to distance between light source and subject

Types of Lights

- Continuous lights (LED, Fluorescent, Tungsten)
- Strobes / Large flash units
- Speedlights
- Flash triggering (on camera, wired, simple master/slave, commander/remote)

Exposure control

- Continuous lights are handled like ambient light. Standard camera exposure controls are used.
- Camera set to Manual exposure and flash in TTL mode - when the flash is set to TTL, even if the camera is set to manual exposure control, the flash will emit the right amount of light. It allows for manual control of speed and aperture, but still have the flash put out the right amount of light. It works when the flash is the main source of light.
- Controlling ambient light vs. flash (aperture / speed) - shutter speed doesn't affect the exposure coming from the flash, only ambient light. The flash duration is much shorter than the shutter opening. Changing shutter speed controls how much ambient light affects the picture, keeping the flash exposure constant.

Light power and quality

- Direction - the worst place for the light source is to be too close to the lens. Raising the light higher and often to the side provides more attractive and natural-looking lighting.
- Size of light source - the larger the light source is, relative to the subject, the softer the light is. Light modifiers, (e.g., umbrella, soft box, beauty dish, reflector, wall, or a large bounce card), provide softer light.
- Distance from subject - the closer the light source is to the subject, more but softer light hits the subject.
- Distance of subject from background - light falls off over distance. When the background is relatively far from the subject, less light will hit it. Bouncing the light from a wall or ceiling makes the relative distance between the subject and the background less significant, making the exposure of the subject and background more balanced.
- Camera distance from subject - there's no effect on exposure.

Portrait Photography

Set up / Posing

Recommended clothing

Simple - avoid big collars that cast shadows; avoid bright colors that may cast color and distract from the person. Dark color hides the area and bright color gets the attention to the area.

Avoid distracting patterns. It's about the person, not the outfit

Individual

Body - leaning forward, stretch neck, create angles and curves, show negative space

Direction of face - unless a profile, pay attention to nose and eyes

Expression - pay attention to eyes, smile, wrinkles

Cropping Dos and Don'ts

Couple / Group

Angle, touch points, negative spaces

Avoid one casting shadow on another

Show interaction

Light

Best light is soft light with no harsh shadows and bright highlights

Still need some highlights and shadows to shape the portrait. Rick Sammon: "Light Illuminates; Shadows Define"

Open / Covered shade

Open - open sky above - bright forehead and nose; dark eyes

Covered - no direct light from above - even lighting; may want to add front light with a reflector or fill flash

Cloudy day

Bounce flash indoors

Flash with large modifiers

Handling tough lighting (mid-day sun)

Look for a dark background

Harsh sunlight

Best direction - behind subject

Expose for best skin tone

Shaping Face / Body with light

Light direction and quality

Shadows

Backlight

Portrait Lighting 101: Crash Course for Beginner Portrait Photographers

HOW TOPHOTO

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When it comes to shooting techniques, the defining feature of a great portrait is great lighting. It's certainly possible to achieve superb portrait lighting using nothing more than window light or the naturally occurring diffuse daylight on overcast days. However, shooting consistently outstanding portraits indoors, whether in the studio or your living room, requires some kind of artificial lighting setup. These lighting outfits are either based on continuous light sources, such as floodlight or spotlights or instantaneous light sources, like strobes. These units are complemented with a variety of umbrellas, reflectors, and diffusers, plus an assortment of light stands to let you to position and aim them. The great advantage of using continuous light sources, especially for those new to portraiture, is that you can see the effects of lighting and lighting changes directly, or by looking through the viewfinder. To help you pre-visualize lighting effects with strobes and position them for the lighting you want, many of these units incorporate modeling lights.

The most important concept to understand about all the traditional or classic "studio lighting" concepts covered here, is that they were initially intended to mimic the effects of natural light—that is, to capture the look and feel of daylight. Obviously, you can throw any of the rules and suggestions that follow out the window if your goal is creating portraits that are wildly creative, deliberately unflattering, creepy, or comical. However, as with all creative undertakings it's best to begin by mastering the basics first. While it's not possible to provide anything like a complete course in portrait lighting in this small space, we hope you'll find that the following suggestions are useful and point you in the right direction.

1. **The Key Light**, or **Main Light** functions like the sun in any lighting setup, and it can be positioned high and aimed directly at roughly 45 degrees to the subject from the right of the camera to produce classic glamour lighting, or moved progressively lower, and farther to the right of the subject to produce more directional lighting effects that make the face look slimmer. However, the Key Light should never be positioned below the height of the subject's head unless your goal is to produce an "unnatural" effect.

2. **The Fill Light** is a secondary or supplementary light, weaker than the Key Light, that in many cases, is placed on the other side of the Key light (e.g. aimed at the subject from the shadow side) to moderate shadows and shadow lines and produce better modeling of the subject's contours. In many cases the Fill Light is set or positioned to deliver about ½ to 1/3 the illuminations level of the Key Light. For the classic glamour look the Fill light can even be placed directly under the Key light and both lights aimed at the subject, with a reflector positioned on the opposite side of the subject to fill in the shadows.

3. **The Hair Light** or **Kicker** should generally be placed above the subject to throw highlights on the hair only and not to fall on the subject's face. It is almost always pointed in the opposite direction from the Key Light.

4. **The Background Light**, if you use one, should be placed low and behind the subject so it throws a semi-circular light pattern on the background so it's lighter in the center and gets progressively darker toward the edges of the frame. This technique is especially effective with seamless backgrounds that are uniform in color.

5. **Soft Light** or **Diffuse Light** sources are much easier to control. While veteran pros that take a traditionalist light approach often use parabolic reflectors on their light sources to create striking effects, diffuse light sources created with a softbox, diffusion discs, or by bouncing the light into an umbrella, are far easier to control and their placement is far less critical. Indeed, so many professionals that shoot studio portraits today rely on diffuse light sources, it has become the dominant style. If you decide to go the traditionalist route with harder light sources, it definitely helps to master soft lighting beforehand.

3 Basic Portrait Lighting Setups

Butterfly Lighting, aka Glamour Lighting: Place the Key Light high and aim it directly at the front of the subject's face. Place the Fill Light right below the Key Light, and use a reflector opposite both lights and close to the subject to fill in the shadows. Optional: Add a hair light directly above the subject aimed at the hair, and a background light aimed at the background from a low angle. If you do it right you'll see a butterfly-shaped shadow just below the subject's nose.

Rembrandt Lighting: Place the Key Light at a nearly 90-degree angle and slightly in front of the left side of the subject's face, and place the Fill Light on the opposite side of the camera from the Key Light, close to the line between the camera and the subject. Kickers are often used to bring out the sides of the face and define the shoulders.

Split Lighting: gets its name from the fact that the Key Light illuminates only half the face, and it yields a dramatic effect when no Fill Light is used at all. The Key Light is aimed at one side of the subject's face (typically the left) at nearly right angles but positioned slightly behind the subject. A weak fill light can be positioned on the other side, close to the camera to minimize facial defects, If you use hair light and background light place them above and behind the subject respectively, and aim the latter at the background.