

Topic 32

Lightening for photography

Hard or Soft light

When you photograph indoors or out, the scene is illuminated by light that ranges from hard to soft.

1. Hard Light

Hard light coming from a source that's small compared to the subject casts hard shadows and has high contrast. Outdoors you see this light on a bright sunny day. The sun may be very large but it's also far away and small in the sky so it casts hard light on subjects.

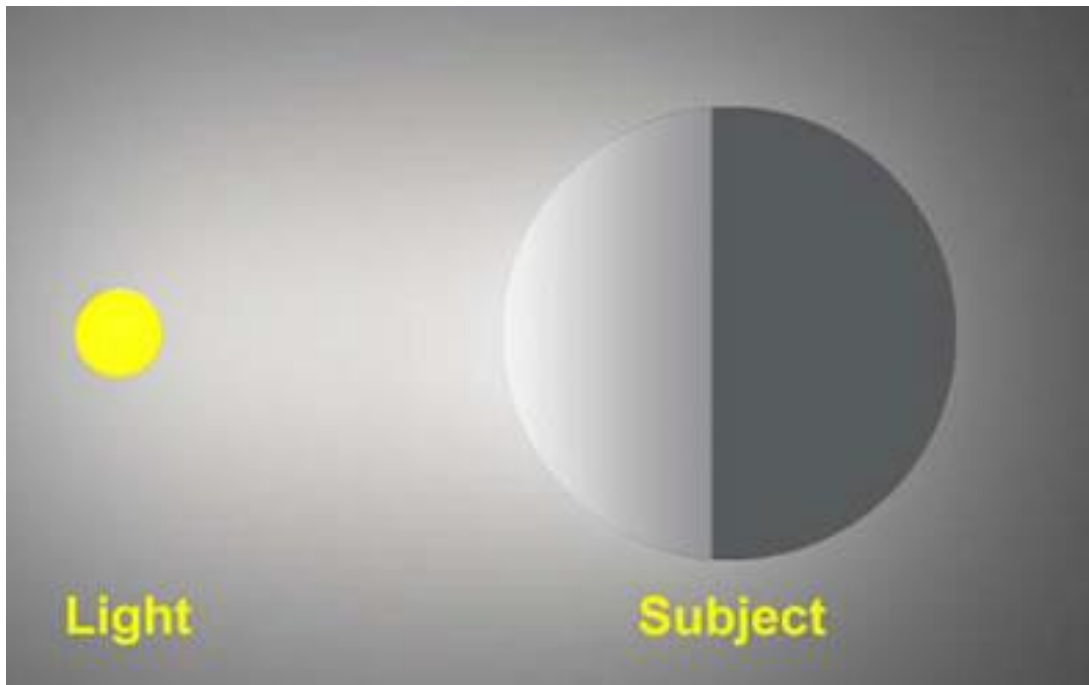
2. Soft Light

Soft light falling on the subject from a source that's large compared to the subject, wraps light around the subject, filling shadows and lowering contrast. Outdoors you see this light on a cloudy bright day when the entire layer of clouds is the light source.

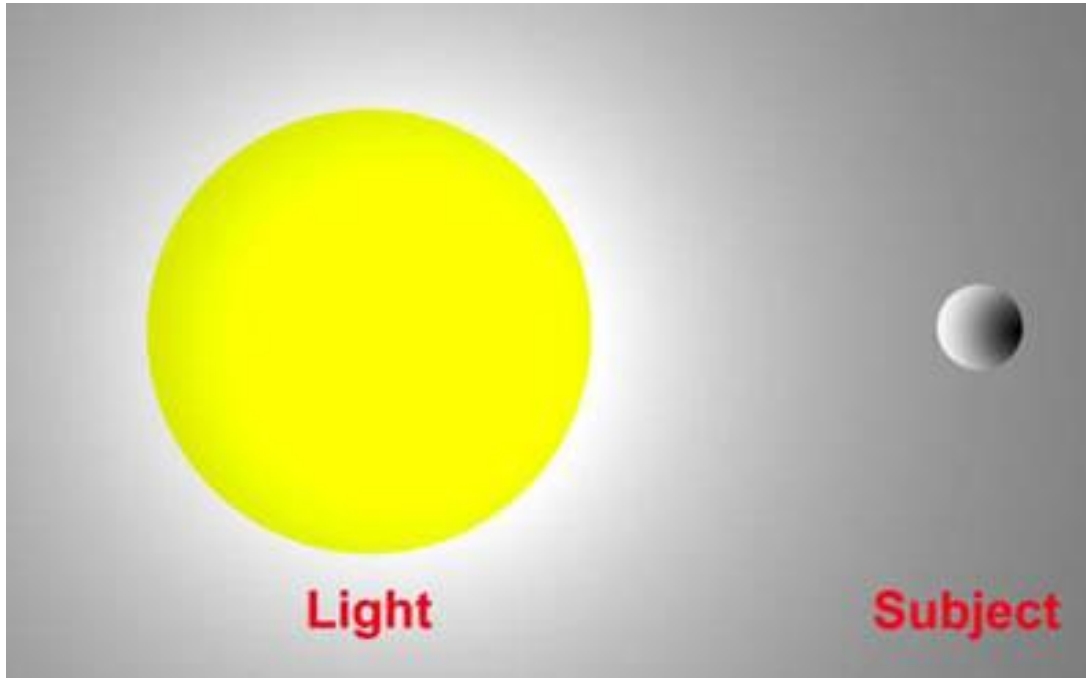
Whether light falling on a subject is hard or soft depends on one thing, the relative sizes of the light source and subject. A large source will wrap light around a small subject filling shadows and lowering contrast. A small source will direct light onto a large subject creating hard shadows and high contrast. To imagine this, think of the light falling on a landscape on a bright sunny day. The sun is small compared to the landscape, so the light is hard. Pictures have black shadows or burned out highlights. Now imagine a thin layer of clouds drifting across the sky from horizon to horizon. The sun hits the cloud layer from above, and it retransmits the light from all parts of the sky. The light source has gotten dramatically larger and its diffuse light softens shadows and lowers contrast.

How to create Hard and soft light?

There are **two ways** to soften light indoors in addition to moving a light closer to the subject—using reflectors and diffusers. To get harder light, move the light farther from the subject or use a bare bulb or bare bulb flash. When a bulb is mounted in a reflector, it's really the larger reflector that is the light source. A bare bulb has no reflector so the light source is much smaller. Since it's more of a point source, it casts a hard light on the subject. Because it lacks a reflector to focus the light, its range is shorter than other kinds of light.



Hard light is created when the light source is small relative to the subject



Soft light is created when the light source is large relative to the subject