

Topic 33

Lighting for Photography

Studio lights

Studio lighting can seem a daunting task. However, most portrait photography lighting techniques are not nearly as scary as most people think. By using a simple home photo studio kit with just a couple of flash heads and a few basic accessories, you can get great results in no time at all. In fact, it's arguably easier to use a studio lighting setup than off-camera flash.

There are some of the key tools you'll be needing to create the classic studio lighting techniques



1. Light stands

Studio flash is all about positioning the light source away from the camera, so stands are crucial. They support the flash heads, which means they can be positioned at the right distance and angle to the subject.



2. Flash heads

Most kits have two flash heads. Along with a flash tube, there's a modeling light. Most

have a switchable ‘slave’, enabling one flash to be triggered by another, so you only need to have your camera connected to one of the heads.



3. Umbrella

A brolly is the most standard form of lighting accessory. The flash is directed into the brolly so the light is reflected back onto the subject. They are available in different reflective surfaces – typically white, silver or gold.



4. Soft box

Soft boxes are slightly more sophisticated than brollies and once you’ve worked out how to assemble these tent-like devices, they create a softer and generally more flattering light, with a more even illumination.



5. Snoot/honeycomb

Both of these tools help to concentrate or ‘focus’ the light. They’re ideally suited for use as backlights or for isolating a particular part of an image.



6. Reflector

A simple reflector can be really useful in a studio lighting setup, especially if you’re only using one light. You use it the same way you would with natural light – to bounce light back onto your subject and fill in any hard shadow areas.

Steps of Studio Lighting

1. Rembrandt

This studio lighting technique is ideal for artistic shots with depth



A simple reflector can be really useful in a studio lighting setup, especially if you're only using one light.

You use it the same way you would with natural light – to bounce light back onto your subject and fill in any hard shadow areas.



Position one flash head with a silver brolly at a 45° angle to the model at about six feet high.

This creates a strong, hard, direct light from the side and above. This is called a **key light**.

To even the lighting, position a reflector on the other side of the model to bounce the light back into the shadow side.

There should be a small triangle of light on the subject's face – this is referred to as **Rembrandt lighting**.

2. Clamshell

This studio lighting technique is used to capture every detail with even light



This studio lighting setup is great for beauty images as the lighting is flat and even.

It's pretty easy to achieve this effect too – all you need to do is place two soft boxes on either side of your subject at the same angle and at an equal distance.



Set the power so it's the same from each light. Try using a reflector under the face – your model should easily be able to hold this.

This will bounce light up and onto the face.

3. Backlight

This studio lighting technique is used to add depth and drama with rear lights



To add drama, use a honeycomb or snoot accessory on one of the lights. This will narrow the beam of light.



We're going to position this behind the model, pointing back towards the camera so that it lights the back of her head.

This is a great way to add drama and depth to a photo, and it also creates a sense of separation from the background.

Of course, you need to make sure the backlight isn't visible in the shot.

4. Rim lighting

This studio lighting technique is used to create an exciting style with good definition



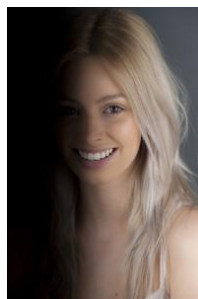
Place both lights slightly behind the subject, pointing back towards the camera. This setup requires some tweaking and can work really well with nudes as it helps define body shape.



You'll need to watch out for lens flare, though, as the lights are pointing back towards the camera. A set of 'barn doors', a lens hood or a shield can help prevent this.

An assistant who can hold a carefully positioned reflector is useful – this will help fill in those areas of deep shadow.

Tips on Studio Lighting



Avoid the wrong shutter speed!

Tip 1

The shutter speed you choose is less significant in a studio setup but obviously needs to be fast enough to avoid any camera shake. However, you also need to be careful not to set a shutter speed faster than the camera's specified sync speed – on most cameras this is usually either 1/200 sec or 1/250 sec. Go any faster and you'll have horrible black stripes across your images.

Tip 2

The power of flash is measured in Watt-seconds. Each of the heads we're using is 400Ws, which approximates a guide number of 64. This is fine for regular portrait work.

Tip 3

Switch your camera to manual and use the histogram and LCD to assess the exposure and effect of the lights. Use the dials to change the power of the lights and the aperture to alter the exposure.

Tip 4

A sync cables or a wireless trigger is needed to connect your camera with the lights so that when you press the shutter, the lights fire at the same time. Some wireless triggers are so cheap now that they're the best option, especially as many popular DSLRs don't have the PC socket you need in order to use a more traditional sync cable.