Topic 79
18% Grey Card

A **gray card** is an object of neutral color which reflects a certain amount of light. It is used to solve two color related problems in photography. One problem is a so called **color cast** in images caused by different illumination conditions and the cameras (in) ability to neutralize it. The other problem is the lack of a reference point for managing **exposure time** (amount of light captured), to prevent an image turn out too dark or light.

There are several good reasons to buy a professional gray card but if you are in a hurry or want to experiment you can also print a gray card first.

Description	RGB Value	Lab Value
12% Gray Card	31.37% / 80	34%
12% Gray Card	33.33% / 85	36%
18% Gray Card	47% / 119	50%
18% Gray Card	**50% / 128**	**54%**
90% Gray Card	93.33% / 238	94%
Post Processing	multiple	multiple

To use a gray card, hold it up in the light that is the same as the light hitting your subject, point your camera at it (preferably using spot metering mode for best results) and you now have a 'perfect' setting. This 18% gray card is what your camera assumes the world is; placing such a card in front of your camera now makes it able to meter the light with better accuracy.

Just like eating enough fiber or getting enough sleep, you know using a gray card is good for you(r photography) but you don't do it all the time. I don't do it all the time either. Why? My number one reason is the card is not always with me. A dedicated shoot I am being paid for? Of course it is there. But taking my daughter to school and seeing something worth shooting on the way? It's not with me 100% of the time (also because I test many camera bags and it doesn't always get packed into the right bag). Plus, who has time to pull out the card when the lighting is just right and the card is in your bag in the car? I'm as good at making excuses as the next guy.

As long as you have two hands, your gray card can always be with you.

The technique is simple and the idea is that the color and tone of the palm of your hand doesn't change much. Certainly not as much as that back of your hand which has more pigment and sees more sun? Why not use that?

To use your hand as a gray card you will first need a gray card. They are cheap and you can order them online or find them at a local photo shop. In a nice even light, using spot metering and manual exposure mode, point your camera at the gray card. Set your ISO so it is not on Auto and maybe to 800, the number isn't too important. Now adjust aperture and shutter speed until the camera metering is at zero, meaning it is not over or underexposed according to the camera. Next place your hand (I suggest your left hand) where the card was, with your fingers together. Ensure the center metering spot is completely covered by your hand.