

BASIC STUDIO LIGHTING

LIGHTING IS A KEY ELEMENT IN PHOTOGRAPHY. OFTEN TIMES THE PHOTOGRAPHER DOES NOT HAVE CONTROL OF THE LIGHT HITTING HIS OR HER SUBJECT AND MUST DEAL WITH “AVAILABLE LIGHT” (LIGHTING ALREADY PRESENT AROUND THE SUBJECT). THIS IS OFTEN THE CASE WHEN SHOOTING OUTDOORS, OR WHEN ADDITIONAL LIGHTS ARE NOT AVAILABLE. HOWEVER IN MANY SITUATIONS LIGHT CAN BE ADDED TO THE SUBJECT TO ENHANCE THE LOOK OF THE PHOTOGRAPH. THE TECHNIQUES OF LIGHTING (PARTICULARLY STUDIO LIGHTING) CAN BE VERY COMPLEX AND INVOLVE ELABORATE SETUPS TO ACHIEVE DESIRED EFFECTS. IN THIS COURSE WE WILL LIMIT OUR DISCUSSION OF STUDIO LIGHTING TO THE BASIC CONCEPTS.

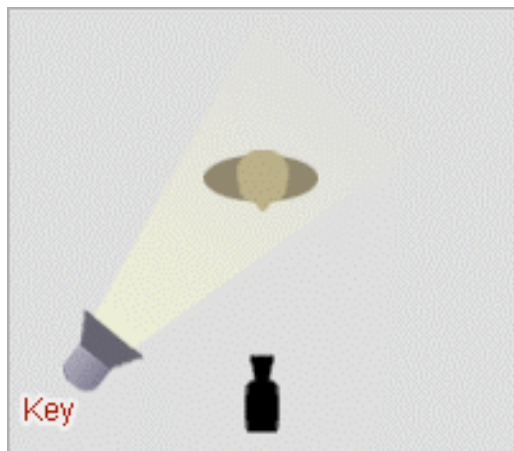
BEFORE WE DISCUSS LIGHTING SET-UPS YOU SHOULD KNOW ABOUT THE “WHITE BALANCE” OF YOUR CAMERA. THE COLOR IN A PHOTOGRAPH CAN VARY GREATLY UNDER DIFFERENT LIGHTING SITUATIONS. OUTDOOR SUNLIGHT LOOKS VERY DIFFERENT FROM ARTIFICIAL LIGHTS. THERE IS EVEN A DIFFERENCE BETWEEN THE COLOR OF INCANDESCENT AND FLORESCENT LIGHTS. MOST DIGITAL CAMERAS CAN SET THEIR WHITE BALANCE TO ADJUST FOR THESE FACTORS; SOME HAVE SIMPLE SCENE SETTINGS, WHILE OTHERS CAN BE MANUALLY SET. IN GENERAL WHITE BALANCE IS USED TO DETERMINE WHAT TRUE WHITE IN THE PHOTOGRAPH SHOULD LOOK LIKE. USING THIS FEATURE WILL KEEP YOU FROM GETTING AN UNWANTED COLORCAST IN YOUR IMAGES.

THE BASIC IDEA OR FORMULA OF STUDIO LIGHTING INVOLVES WHAT IS CALLED “THREE POINT LIGHTING”, THAT IS THE USE OF THREE SPECIFIC LIGHT SOURCES TO LIGHT THE SUBJECT. THESE LIGHTS ARE THE KEY LIGHT, THE FILL LIGHT, AND THE BACK LIGHT.

KEY LIGHT:

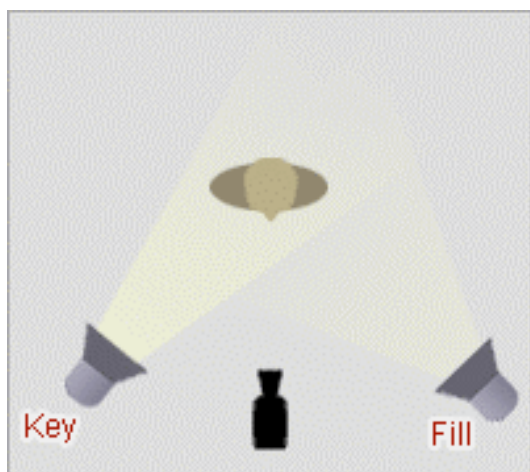
THE “KEY LIGHT” IS THE PRIMARY SOURCE OF LIGHT IN A SCENE. THIS LIGHT IS USED TO CREATE WHAT APPEARS TO BE THE MAIN SOURCE OF LIGHT ON THE SUBJECT AND DETERMINES THE PRIMARY SHADOWS IN THE PHOTOGRAPH. FOR SIMPLICITY SAKE THE KEY LIGHT SHOULD ALWAYS BE PLACED BEFORE OTHER LIGHTS ARE ADDED TO THE SCENE. BY WORKING WITH THE KEY LIGHT FIRST YOU CAN ESTABLISH THE PRIMARY LIGHTING YOU WANT WITHOUT HAVING TO DEAL WITH MULTIPLE LIGHTS AT ONCE.

KEY LIGHTS ARE OFTEN PLACED TO ONE SIDE OF THE CAMERA TO CREATE SHADOWS THAT HELP DEFINE A SUBJECT. THIS SHOULD BE THOUGHT OF AS A BASIC STARTING POINT. THE KEY LIGHT CAN BE PLACED HIGH OR LOW, FAR TO THE SIDE OF THE SUBJECT, OR MORE DIRECTLY IN FRONT OF THE SUBJECT. THE MORE THE LIGHT IS OFF TO THE SIDE, OR HIGH/LOW, THE MORE DRAMATIC THE EFFECT. PLACING THE KEY LIGHT IN FRONT OF THE SUBJECT CAN CREATE A SOFTER (AND OFTEN MORE FLATTERING LIGHT ON A PERSON). YOU SHOULD PLAY WITH THE POSITIONING OF THE KEY LIGHT TO GET THE EFFECT YOU WANT.



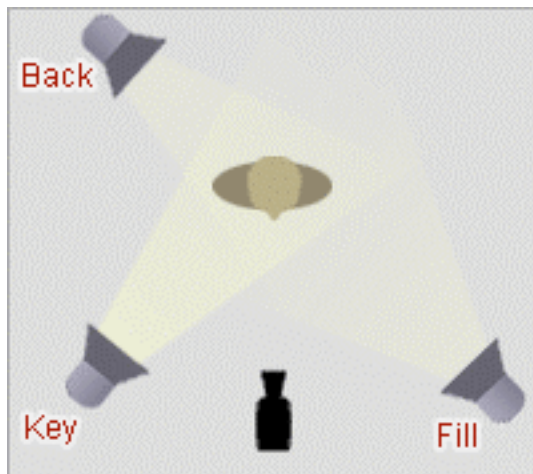
FILL LIGHT:

THE “FILL LIGHT” AS THE NAME IMPLIES IS USED TO FILL IN THE HARSH SHADOWS THAT CAN BE CREATED BY THE KEY LIGHT. IT IS USUALLY NOT AS STRONG A LIGHT AS THE KEY LIGHT, AND IS PLACED SO THAT IT COMES FROM THE OPPOSITE DIRECTION IN ORDER TO LIGHT THE SHADOW AREAS OF THE SUBJECT. ONCE YOU HAVE SET YOUR KEY LIGHT YOU SHOULD PLAY WITH THE PLACEMENT OF THE FILL LIGHT TO SOFTEN THE SHADOWS AND CREATE THE MOOD YOU ARE LOOKING FOR.



BACK LIGHT:

THE “BACK LIGHT” IS A LIGHT THAT IS USED TO FILL IN PARTS OF THE SUBJECT THAT MAY NOT BE LIGHT BY THE KEY AND THE FILL LIGHTS. IT IS CALLED THE BACK LIGHT BECAUSE OFTEN TIMES WHEN THE KEY AND THE FILL LIGHTS ARE PLACED IN FRONT OF THE SUBJECT THERE ARE AREAS AROUND THE EDGES THAT ARE STILL IN SHADOW. A BACK LIGHT CAN ALSO BE USED TO ILLUMINATE THE BACKGROUND BEHIND THE SUBJECT IF DESIRED. USUALLY THE BACK LIGHT IS THE WEAKEST LIGHT IN THE SETUP, AND MAY NOT EVEN BE NECESSARY IN MANY SCENES.



THREE POINT LIGHTING REPRESENTS A FUNDAMENTAL LIGHTING SETUP. EVEN WITH THIS BASIC SETUP YOU CAN ACHIEVE DRAMATIC AND VARIED MOODS IN YOUR PHOTOGRAPHS. REMEMBER TO WORK WITH ONE LIGHT AT A TIME AS THINGS CAN GET RATHER CONFUSING WHEN YOU ARE TRYING TO ADJUST SEVERAL LIGHT SOURCES ALL AT ONCE.

BACKGROUND LIGHT:

IN ADDITION TO LIGHTING THE SUBJECT, ONE MUST LIGHT THE BACKGROUND. THE "BACKGROUND LIGHT" IS A LIGHT OR COLLECTION OF LIGHTS THAT ARE USED TO ILLUMINATE THE BACKGROUND.

ADDITIONAL TOOLS:

IN MORE COMPLICATED ARRANGEMENTS THERE MAY BE ADDITIONAL LIGHTS ADDED TO AFFECT SELECTIVE PARTS OF THE SUBJECT. THERE ARE ALSO MANY TOOLS THAT CAN BE USED TO AFFECT THE WAY THE LIGHTS ILLUMINATE THE SUBJECT. OFTEN TIME'S REFLECTIVE AND DIFFUSING SCREENS OR UMBRELLAS ARE USED TO REDIRECT OR SOFTEN THE LIGHT COMING FROM VARIOUS LAMPS. THESE TOOLS CAN DRAMATICALLY ALTER THE WAY THE LIGHT HITS THE SUBJECT AND CHANGE THE MOOD OF THE PHOTOGRAPH. IN ADDITION THINGS LIKE COLORED GELS CAN BE PLACED OVER THE LAMPS TO AFFECT THE COLOR OF THE LIGHT THEY CAST. PROFESSIONAL STUDIO PHOTOGRAPHERS OFTEN HAVE THOUSANDS OF DOLLARS IN LIGHTING EQUIPMENT AND YEARS OF EXPERIENCE USING ALL OF THEIR TOOLS.

WHILE YOU MAY NOT HAVE ACCESS TO ALL THE EXPENSIVE EQUIPMENT OF A PROFESSIONAL STUDIO YOU MAY FIND YOU CAN BE QUITE CREATIVE WITH WHAT IS AVAILABLE. VARIOUS LAMPS AROUND YOUR HOUSE CAN BE USED THE SAME WAY STUDIO LIGHTS ARE, AND YOU'D BE SURPRISED AT WHAT YOU CAN DO WITH OTHER SIMPLE THINGS. A SCARF DRAPED IN FRONT OF A LIGHT OR OVER A LAMP SHADE CAN CHANGE THE MOOD DRAMATICALLY. THE IDEA IS TO TAKE THE TECHNIQUES WE HAVE STUDIED AND USE THEM IN YOUR PHOTOGRAPHY.

ONE WORD OF CAUTION: BE CAREFUL WHERE YOU PLACE YOUR LIGHTS AND WHAT YOU PLACE OVER THEM.