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1

Introduction

Lighting is easily the most important aspect of photography. I would even go as far as saying that lighting is photography. It is even in the word itself; "Photography" is Greek for "light drawing" or "drawing with light". Without light, you cannot take photos.

Figure 1-1: *As a photographer, your challenge is to use light and absence of light in your favor. Can you see the heart in the photo on the left? Keep your eyes always ready to spot unique possibilities! This photo was taken with a Canon EOS 5D Mark II, 24-105mm IS lens at 105mm, 1/60 sec, f/5.0 and ISO 200, in Manual exposure mode.*

Figure 1-1 was taken with one Canon 580EX II flash, off-camera from the top center pointing towards the lens to create the shadow of the heart in the crease of the book. The flash was set to E-TTL II mode and was triggered via a Canon Speedlite Transmitter ST-E2.

It is perfectly possible to take amazing photographs with a very simple camera - as long as the lighting is good – like in **Figure 1-1**. The corollary is that the opposite is true as well: If you are taking photos in a situation where the lighting is truly appalling, having the fanciest, most expensive camera in the world isn't going to help you capture the photographs you want.

Figure 1-2: *Look how natural this photo looks! — The swimming coach stands out, slightly brighter than the rest of the scene, as if a separate beam of light is highlighting him! Photo was taken with a Canon EOS 5D, 24-70mm lens at 24mm, 1/60 sec, f/3.5 and ISO 250, in Manual exposure mode.*

Light, like the finest Italian ice cream, comes in many flavors. But, like ice cream, not all flavors play well together. One of the things you'll learn in this book is how to train your eye and also the way you 'see' light. Does that sound difficult? I won't lie to you; it can be a little bit tricky at first, but stick with it. Few things are as satisfying as taking in a location and automatically assessing the scene in your mind.

For example, while on a shoot, you may think, "We can create a dramatic effect by adding a little bit of side-light just over there. And if we take this photo from below, the model will

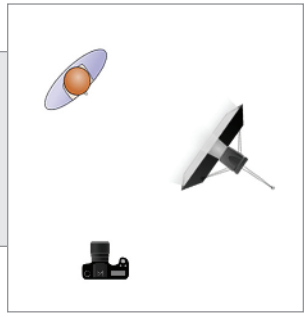
look like a god among men." See how this thought process was applied to the swimming coach in **Figure 1-2.**

At first, it'll be conscious. Then, eventually, you'll find yourself making adjustments to your flashes without knowing why — just because you intuitively feel that if you nudge that soft box just a little bit to the left (see **Figure 1-3**), the image will come to life.

One day, you'll take a step back and think, "Wow, this photo came out amazing, and I'm not even sure why." You'll feel like superman, superwoman, or, at least, a super-photographer.

Figure 1-3: *The photo looks natural, but the lighting got a little bit of help. Here, you can see how the equipment was set up. Compare this photo with the lighting diagram to start getting a taste for how the diagrams can help you improve your photography.*

Figure 1-2 was not particularly complicated from a lighting standpoint. You can see what it looks like in **Figure 1-3. Figure 1-2** was taken with a Canon 580EX II flash set to E-TTL II mode, fired through a soft-box to the right of the coach, and triggered using a Canon Speedlite Transmitter ST-E2.



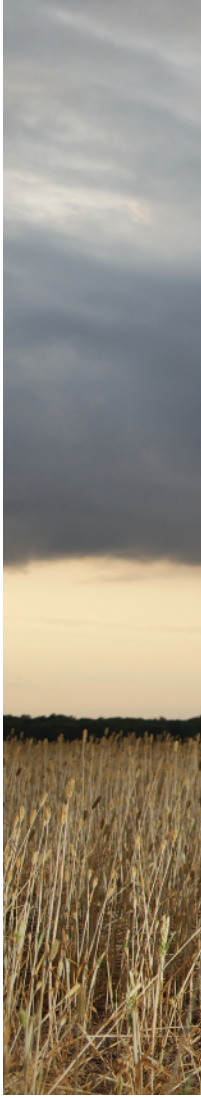
The 'flavors of light' is something we'll get back to extensively in the rest of the book — especially in Chapter 2, "Understanding Light".

Triggering flashes

You will notice that throughout the book we are talking about a variety of ways of triggering flashes. The details can be found in Chapter 4: "Lighting Equipment", but your basic options are this:

- Physical connection between your camera and a flash connected directly to the camera via the hot-shoe or a cable
- Slave flashes which fire optically in response to a blink of light

Become a seeker of light



To become photographic superheroes, the most important thing we have to do is to learn how to "see the light".

The color of light is essential — and some of the biggest challenges you'll meet in photography are the issues that arise when you start mixing different light sources. Sunlight, for example, has a drastically different color from the light that comes from your flash, the light that comes from car headlights, or the light in your house. While it can be incredibly difficult to get your photos to look "right", light sources of different colors offer an opportunity too. With the right mixture of types and colors of light, you can achieve some beautiful creative effects that will make your photos really 'pop'.

There are other factors that come in to play as well. The distance between light source and your subject affects the final results in ways that can be a little counter-intuitive. The size of a light source is an important factor. A big light source can give beautiful, even illumination, for example. The direction of light - where does it come from, where is it going — and the resulting shadows will also impact your photos. We will discuss these factors more in depth in Chapter 2, "Understanding Light".

Figure 1-4: *Here I'm fooling around in a wheat field – as I say practice, practice, practice! The picture is a great example of how different light sources (in this case, the setting sun and the flashes) can work together to make an appealing photo. Photo was taken with a Canon EOS 5D Mark II, 24-70mm lens at 34mm, 1/320th sec, f/5.0 and ISO 160, in Manual exposure mode.*

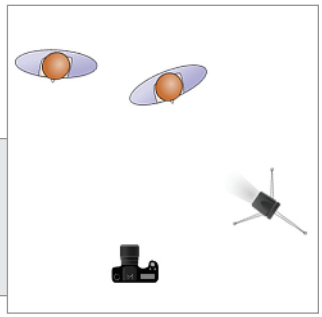
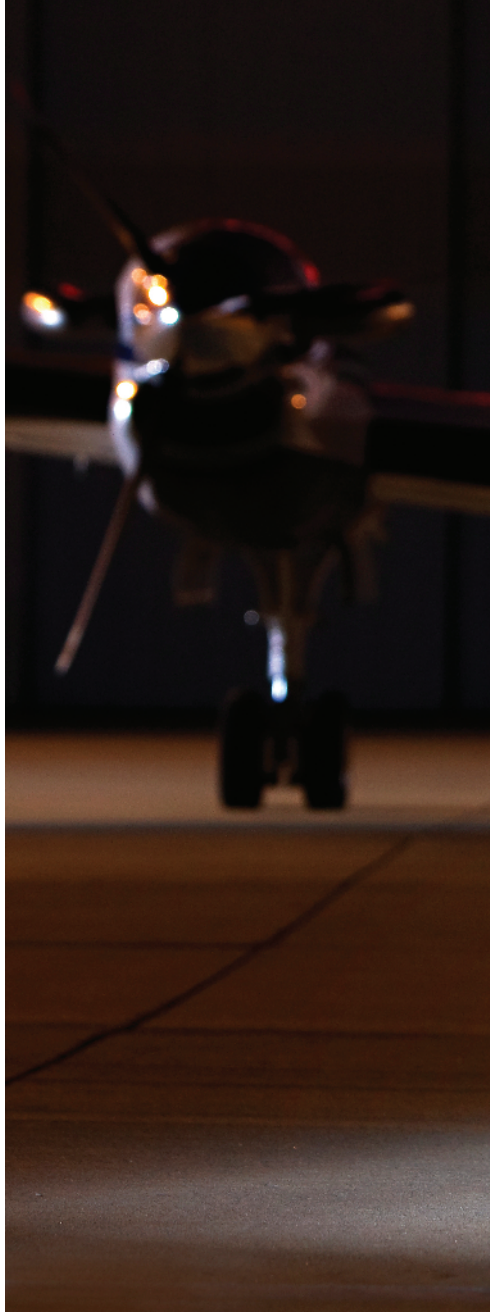


Figure 1-4 lighting included one off-camera Canon 580EX II flash set to E-TTL II mode triggered using a Canon Speedlite Transmitter ST-E2. Attached to the flash was a Gary Fong Lightsphere.

Reading lighting diagrams



Where possible, I'm including lighting diagrams showing how the lights were set up for each photo. To get full benefit from this book, I would recommend you spend a bit of time with each photo, and compare it to the lighting diagrams.

The diagrams are relatively straight forward, and should include all the information you need to recreate the photos. They show the position and direction of the light sources I've used.

While the diagrams will come in very handy in visualizing how I've set up the lights, it is also quite important to keep in mind that not everything is shown in the lighting diagrams. Because they are overhead views, you can't see how high each light is, and in addition you can't see how bright each of the lights is – that's why there are more in-depth descriptions with each of the lighting diagrams. To help you along, I am including as much information as possible about the shutter time, aperture, ISO, camera mode, and flash settings.

Finally, remember that the diagrams and technical information are there to help you get a deeper understanding. I'm not encouraging you to make exact duplicates of the photos in this book. That might be fun as an exercise, but even if you are creating a perfect copy of a photo, you still haven't created anything new.

Being a seeker of light is to learn to compose images in your mind's eye. Creating these before setting out to take the picture is part of the fun. The lighting diagrams are a tool you can use to help develop that 'eye' for photography!

Figure 1-5: *As your lighting techniques become more advanced, you can start pushing the envelope to take some truly astonishing photos. Rest assured, by the time you're finished with this book, you'll be able to shoot scenes like this with your eyes closed! Well, almost… Photo was taken with a Canon EOS 1D Mark III 70-200mm IS lens at 110mm, 1/30th sec, f/4 and ISO 800, in Manual exposure mode.*

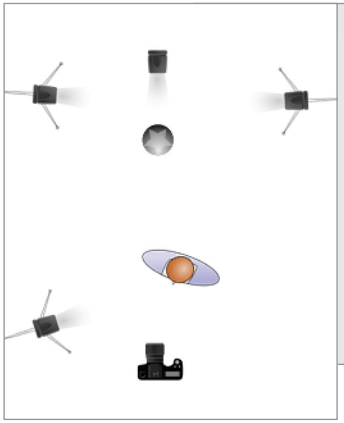


Figure 1-5 looks like a simple shot, but it's anything but I used four strobes to accomplish it. The lighting for **1-5** was with off-camera strobes: a Canon 580EX II inside the cockpit of the airplane in group C, E-TTL II mode, triggered via RadioPopper; two Quantum Q flashes in group B, E-TTL mode, triggered via Radio Popper to light the sides of the aircraft; and one Canon 580EX II Speedlite up high and to the left of the model in group A, E-TTL II mode. All the flashes were triggered via a Canon 580EX II Speedlite on-camera set as the Master flash. The Speedlite only acted as a trigger and did not contribute light to the scene. Note the circle in this diagram represents the airplane.

Quality over Quantity

A lot of this book will be talking about the concept of quality over quantity. In most of my work, I only use relatively inexpensive, highly portable light sources, like the flashes you can buy which will fit into the hot-shoe of your camera.

Don't get me wrong, you can see the benefits of working in a studio environment where you are in full command of every single photon of light, with controllable studio strobes that have a light output that would make the sun blush in embarrassment. Having said that, I have to admit that's simply not my shooting style — when you look at the photos in this book, I'm sure you'll agree that the results are an excellent illustration of why.

I'm a firm believer of quality over quantity — it is much nicer to have half a scoop of absolutely divine ice-cream than a bucket of extra value frozen goop from your local supermarket. Or, to skip the ever-so-slightly convoluted comparison: it is more important how strong the light sources are in relation to each other.

Remember that you have control over the exposure of a photograph in your hands. Adjust the ISO, shutter speed and aperture, and you can change your exposure. If you have one light source at full output and one at half output, your photo will have a particular look. However, the quality of your picture could be improved if you have the same scene with lights that are twice as bright. In this scenario your photo will look the same from a lighting perspective, and you will have the luxury of shooting at a lower ISO value, slower shutter speed, or smaller aperture.

This book is all about how you can use relatively simple lighting equipment to create absolutely gorgeous scenes. Your photos will leap out at the observer because they have a show-stopping, jaw-dropping quality to them. Your models will look alive, intense, and at the center of their universe.

Your viewers will never believe you when you tell them how you did it, but that doesn't matter: You're now a photographic superhero, looking for your next maiden in distress and a scoop of mango gelato.

Figure 1-6: *The same setting as in* ***Figure 1-4****, this image is another example of combining different light sources (once again the setting sun and flashes). The flashes provided an appealing glow on the subjects' skin. Photo was taken with a Canon EOS 5D Mark II, 24-70mm lens at 50mm, 1/160th sec, f/5.6 and ISO 320, in Manual exposure mode.*

Figure 1-7: *Sometimes, you can spend all day trying to get the photo that really hits the spot, and then it happens, as one of the last photos you were planning to take. In this photo, you can just tell how much they are in love — a perfect illustration of the perfect day. This photo was taken with a Canon EOS 1D Mark III, 70-200mm IS lens at 130mm, 1/30 sec, f/2.8 and ISO 1000, in Manual mode. Two Canon 580EX II Speedlites off-camera were triggered by a Canon Speedlite Transmitter ST-E2 with RadioPopper transmitter and receiver.*