Street Photography

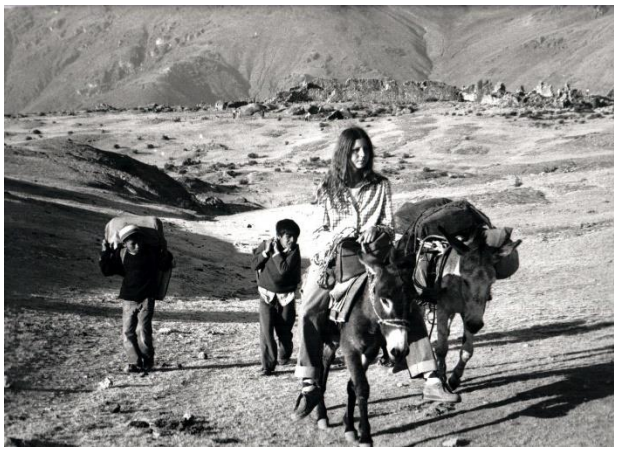
Photography is a thrilling event, you feel empowered, curious and excited about life.

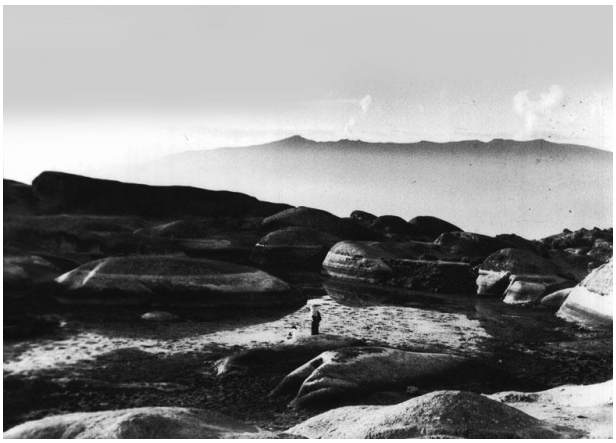
Photojournalist and street photographers are constantly journeying around the world, looking for visual stories of people in their natural habitats and the uniqueness of the places. A fast camera, wide-angle lens, and tripod, is all the gear you need for street photography.

Street photography is about being out—travel, going places, finding people, sharing moments and learning about the world.

As you settle down, breath the air, grab the camera, there is something in front of you waiting to frame the lens and capture the moment. For me photography started with black-and-white film, I can never forget my first 35mm film camera, there was something about holding it in my hands, go out, take long walks to the plazas near my neighborhood, the beaches and short trips to the villages near me. The day I climbed Marcahuasi, everything changed, the camera and I became one.

BELLOW the Marcahuasi plateau.





Looking back at the film era, I appreciate the artistry and the science of photography.

In the late 70' I moved to Los Angeles, California and my companion was a Canon AE1 35mm black body film camera. One morning walking, I found a color lab in Hollywood Boulevard that processed and sold cheap slide film. The color of the transparencies faded with time, but for me wasn't about quality or color, it was always about what the image that I would see later.

There is a unique positive energy when the photographer is outdoors in the streets, the ocean or in some distant village. The quality of natural light is subject to the brightness and position of the sun, the conditions of the sky and the relative position of the subject (Freeman, 1980).

BELOW My first days in Santa Monica and later at Venice Beach, California in the summer of 1978.

Cameras

The choice of camera is very personal; most travelers use smartphones and compact cameras, find one that hangs on your neck, easy to snap a shot instantly when you are out. Some street photographers carry color and black-and-white film rangefinder cameras, sport cameras, disposable underwater cameras, omnidirectional or Polaroid for immediate prints.

On my early days of digital photography, my concern was image definition, compact digital cameras in the early 90s were slow and of lack image resolution. When digital single-lens reflex (DSLR) 35mm cameras entered the market, photographers switch quicky, for good reasons: improved sensors, image quality and storage.

In 2012 Fuji launched the first non-rangefinder mirrorless interchangeable lens APS-C sensor camera with a built-in optical viewfinder. In the last decade the photographic industry has evolved to the third generation of 35mm full-frame, high resolution mirrorless digital cameras. Some are designed with sensors of 60 megapixels, AI image processors for autofocus that can track the movement of human bodies and accurately focus of the heads and eyes.

Fujifilm XPro-1 has a maximum shutter speed of 1/4000 second, creative controls such as film simulation modes, multiple exposure and programmable functions capabilities.

RIGHT Fujifilm XPro-1 rangefinder-style, just like a film camera.

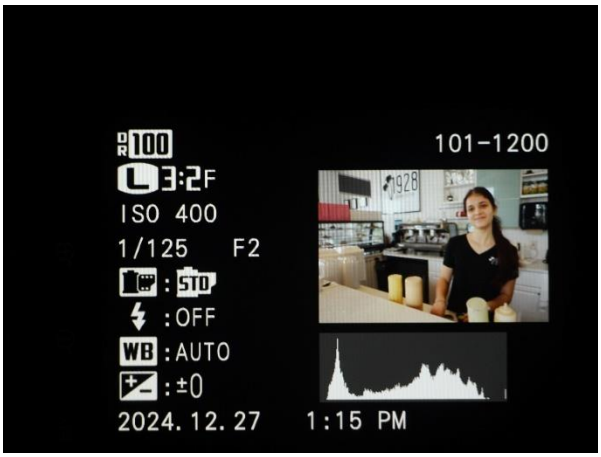
There are many portable and compact cameras suitable for the streets, it depends on the type of image you want to create. Today these pocket size cameras have a decent lens and render good quality images. The camera auto function determines the exposure settings.

INTOVA IC 14-megapixel compact camera with underwater housing. 5mm focal length lens (equivalent to a 26mm – 130mm on a 35mmm camera), 5X optical zoom with macro shooting and panoramic options.

The Lens

The lens is the most important component in a camera. A high-quality optical system contains special optical glasses that project precise focus to produce sharp images.

BELOW an image taken with Fujifilm X-Pro1 with an18mm wide-angle prime f2 lens (a prime lens is a lens of a fixed focal length.). The window light provides sufficient illumination inside a cafeteria; the large aperture of the lens allows plenty of light to shoot in low-light conditions and to isolate the subject from the background. Exposure of f2@ 1/125 second ISO 400 as shown on playback screen.



Focus

Single or continuous AF modes are usually the focus preference by most enthusiasts. With fast moving subjects, the AF is very likely to miss the target. You can select Continuous Shooting from the Drive mode option of the camera or try using the Sports mode in the Scene Selection options.

Street photographers prefer to use the Back Button Focus to capture a moving subject in manual mode. For this, the camera's AE/AF lock mode is set to ON when pressing, and the AE/AF Lock Button is set to AF lock only. By holding the Back Button Focus, it will stay there, and wait for someone to pass by and press the shutter.

IMPORTANT: You may need to experiment with different shutter speeds to get the desired effect. Depending on how fast your subject is moving and how far away it is, you may need to adjust the shutter speed higher or lower.

RIGHT The Sony &7III AF-A. The soft-focus of a passing skater despite that the shutter was set to 1/2000 second.

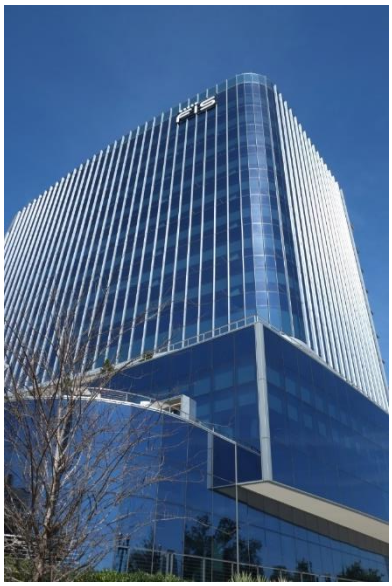
Size and Perspective

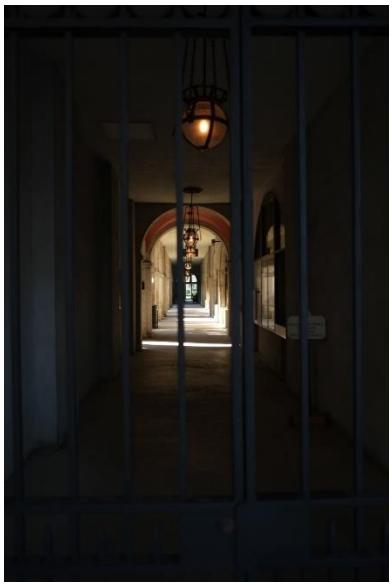
When shooting with a fixed wide-angle prime lens, the only way to get closer to a subject is by moving forward. As the camera gets closer to the subject the size and perspective changes. The closer is the camera to subject, the most obvious is the change of linear perspective. In the image below notice the relationship between the subject and the background. As the camera moves closer to the subject, all background elements change in size and position relative to the subject.

In tight spaces, the camera angle of view will affect the subject size and body proportions, the closer is the camera to the subject the linear distortion becomes more apparent. By adjusting the camera-to-

subject distance and angle of view the linear perspective can be corrected. Always start with a test shot, review the image with attention to size and perspective and reshoot.

When photographing buildings and structures, perspective is an issue; change the angle of view until you are satisfied with the perspective.





Normal Lens

In film photography a normal lens is defined as one whose focal length is equal to the diagonal length of the film format in use. The characteristic most common to normal-type lenses is an angular covering power of about 53° which is sufficient to cover the film when the focal length is equal to film diagonal (Stroebel-Zakia, 1993).

The diagonal length of a 35mm film plane is approximately 53mm. In digital photography the image sensor format determines the angle of view of the lens.

50mm normal lens @f 11, scanned negative film, Palatka Florida.

Wide-Angle Lenses

A short fast prime lens is a wide-angle lens that allows large apertures. Digital cameras mounted with short focal length lenses are ideal for long shots at near distance photography, which are commonly used to introduce a scene and establish the location.

Fisheye Lenses

Wide-angle lenses of the fisheye type can cover angles up to 180° recording off-axis straight subject lines as curves. A short wide-angle focal length of 8mm takes the widest view.

Alice Town Bimini, Bahamas and Saint Augustine Florida with Nikon Fisheye Converter FC-E8 0.21X placed over a compact Nikon digital Coolpix 950.

Nikon Fisheye Converter FC-E8 0.21X placed over a compact Nikon digital Coolpix 950.

180° angle of view Sigma 8mm f/3.5 EX DG Circular Fisheye Lens for Canon EOS. BELOW ground-level wide view inside a wine distillery.

Behind me, geoglyphs made in the soil of the Nazca Desert in southern Peru.

Panoramic Lenses

Most digital cameras have a function to take panoramic views like the one below at the Miami airport.

Omnidirectional cameras of the 360 types like the 360 ONE X, have two lenses of 7.2mm focal length (a 35mm equivalent) at f2.0 maximum aperture, captures a field of view of 360 degrees in a single shot.

BELOW students at the Florida School of the Arts, having fun with optics.

Travelling with a 360 camera gives the full view of the location.

Telephoto Lenses

Photographers usually change the focal length to capture street scenes and action. Telephoto lenses are specially designed lenses for shooting portraits, and close up shots. The image size of a distant object is directly proportional to the focal length, thus, the image of an object taken with a 50mm lens is half the size of one taken with a 100mmm telephoto lens.

Zoom Lenses

Most DSLR or mirrorless cameras are normally bundle with a zoom lens. A zoom lens gets closer to the subject from a distance, without moving the camera, making it ideal for various shooting situations. Zoom lenses have adjustable focal length typically ranges from 28mm and 300mm.

Medium and close up shots at near distance reveal the details; in portraits, mood and personality. To move closer to the subject without moving the camera, adjust the zoom ring on the lens barrel to change the focal length.

They have several disadvantages when compared with a prime lens: more moving parts than a wide-angle prime lens, causing some slight loss in optical quality, the weight makes the camera system heavy with DSLR cameras (a high shutter speed is recommended when taking actions shots.

NOTE Consider doubling the shutter speed with telephoto lenses) and the maximum aperture of a zoom lens is no greater than f/3.5 which is not ideal to isolate the subject.

28mm focal length

47mm focal length

24mm focal length.

35mm focal length.

BELOW Travelling with a digital compact camera, the fits in your pocket.

Nikon Coolpix E8700 zoom digital camera. Iquitos, Perú.

27mm focal length. f5@1/60 second ISO 50.

The Nanay river in the Amazonas. 9mm-27mm focal length. f5@1/60 second ISO 50.

BELOW Street shots in Lima's Chinatown.

KODAK DX7630 zoom digital camera.

Working with Subjects

While travelling most people recognizes you are a photographer when they see you with a camera. In the country side and small villages, people are relaxed and welcome visitors.

I'm cautious in the cities, or in many public places, where there are some people that don't like to be photographed. In my experience when I'm out and find a subject to photograph, I communicate and ask for permission. Most of the time, if you ask, it is very likely that most people will consent.

Abaco island, Bahamas.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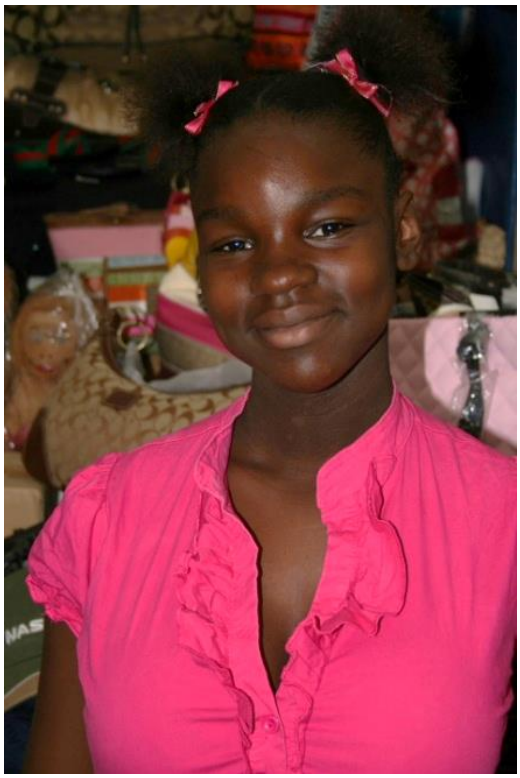

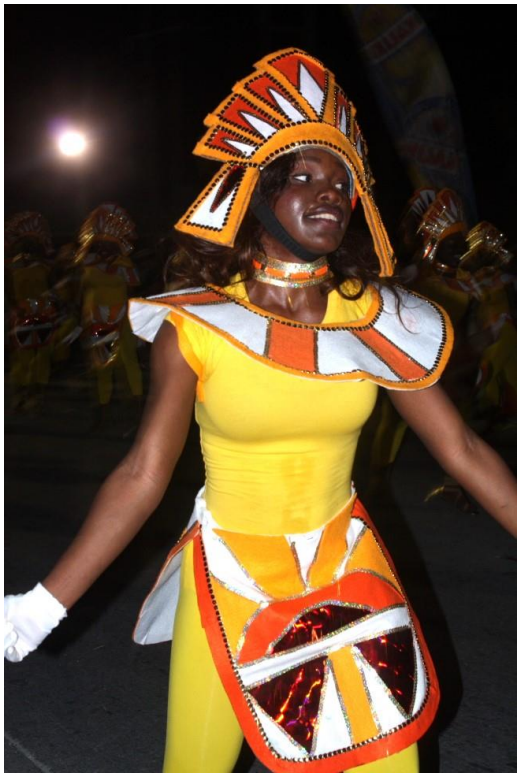

Shooting Film

Light-weight rangefinder and SLR film cameras are suitable for street photography. They take rolls of film (color, black-and-white, infrared). After processing the film, they can be scanned or printed. Rolls of film allow a maximum of 36 exposures; somehow, one becomes more careful in planning and executing each frame.

BELOW scanned images taken in Palatka and Saint Augustine, Florida.

Ilford 100 panchromatic film. Canon AE-1 Manual 35mm SLR.

Arista 200 panchromatic film.

Fujifilm 200. Nikon N-75 Autofocus 35mm SLR.

Arista 100 panchromatic film. Nikon N-75 Autofocus 35mm SLR.

Composition

In the street while traveling, always pre adjust the camera mode focus and exposure, in case something or someone gets your attention, turn on the camera and point towards the target. The zoom lens assists the photographer to adjust the composition by zooming-in or moving the camera closer towards the target. For the final composition, move forward or laterally.

Sony 28mm to 135mm zoom lens.

At Night

Night photography requires long camera exposures for astrophotography or street photography. Available light and indoors photography can be captured with a fast lens in combination with high ISO settings. A light tripod can fit in a camera bag for exposures longer than 1/60 second.

1minute exposure of the Southern constellation taken from the Andes.


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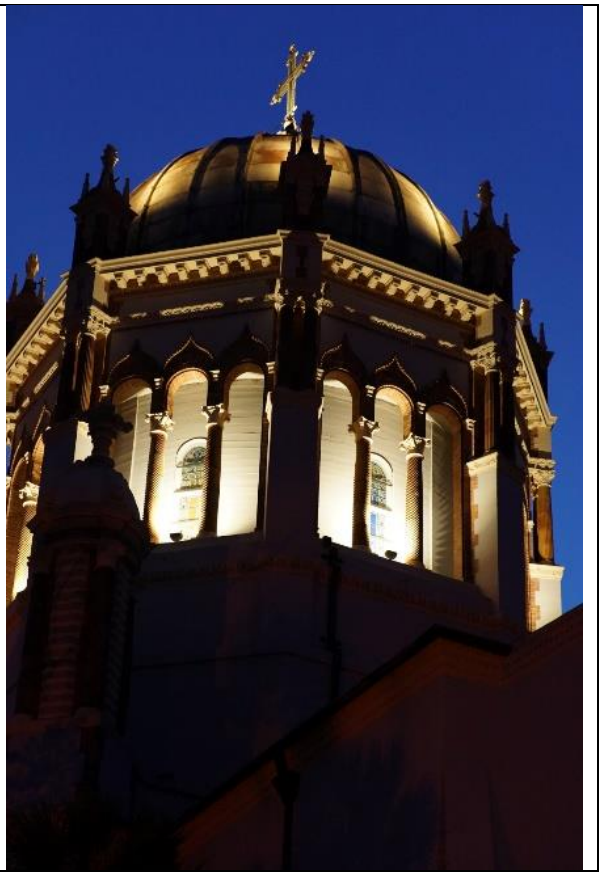


Street Portraits

Most portraits are taken at eye level angle. A consideration of form is also important in terms of the representation of a head-on portrait, for this type of shot does not always correspond to the contemporary idea of beauty (Schottle, 1979).

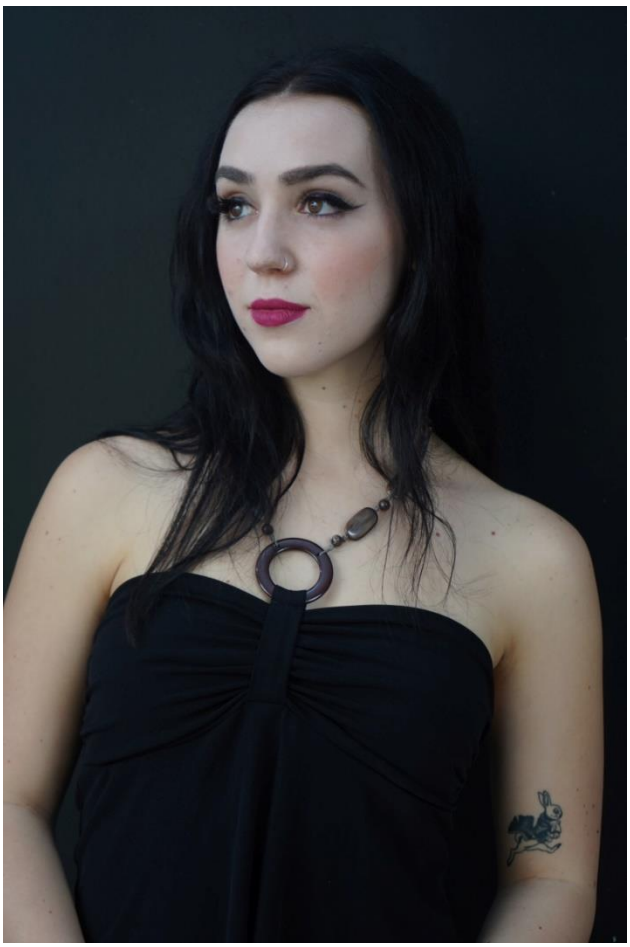
In portrait photography the photographer changes to a larger focal length and move the camera farther from the subject to obtain same image size and weaker perspective. A person head and shoulder portrait with an 85mm focal length, requires approximately twice the distance relative to a 55mm normal lens.

A fast lens isolates the subject from the background. The camera AF Eye tracking operates in continuous mode.

Good illumination/exposure and linear perspective is of concern.

NOTE portraits are easy to execute with any lens.

Head-on



1/2000 sec. @ f 1.8 ISO 100.

Lighting

Daylight changes with the clouds.

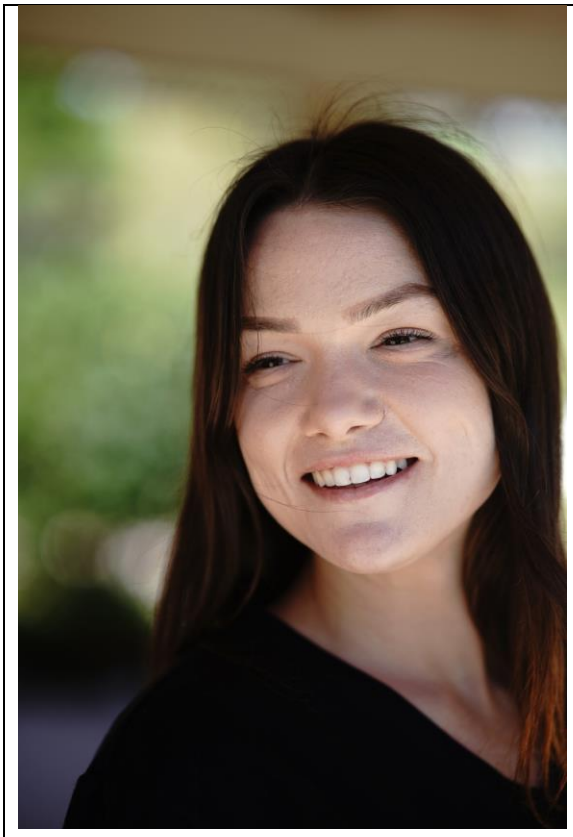
The person's eyes are sensitive the bright skylight. The young lady facing a bright sky.		

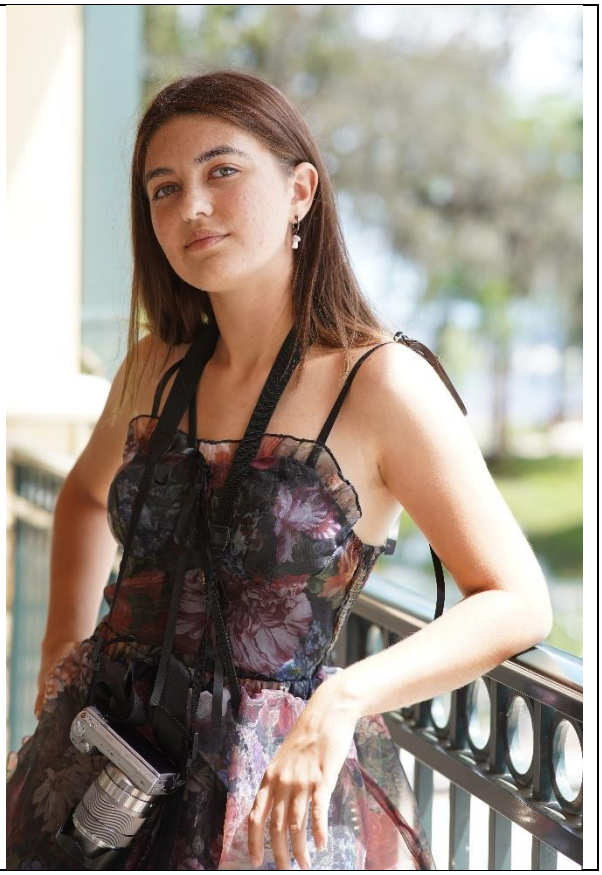
BELOW at sunset with a fast lens against a bright sky. Natural and calm.

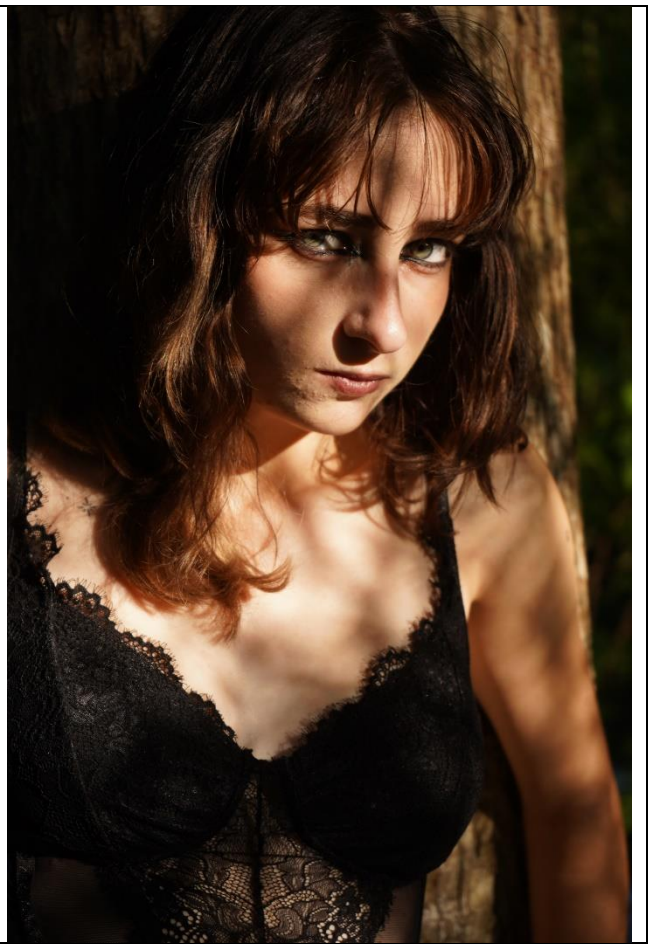
Profile Lighting

When the angle between the camera and the subject's face changes to a half or full profile —the portrait shows form and symmetry of the face and body.

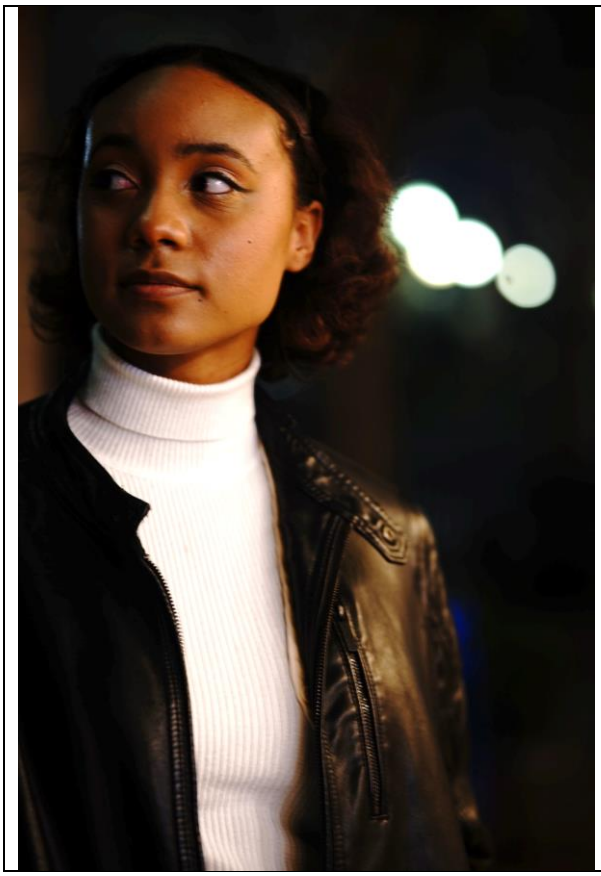
In shade under a canopy. The body and head are in similar posture position. The soft lighting accentuates the lines on the chin, jaw and neck.

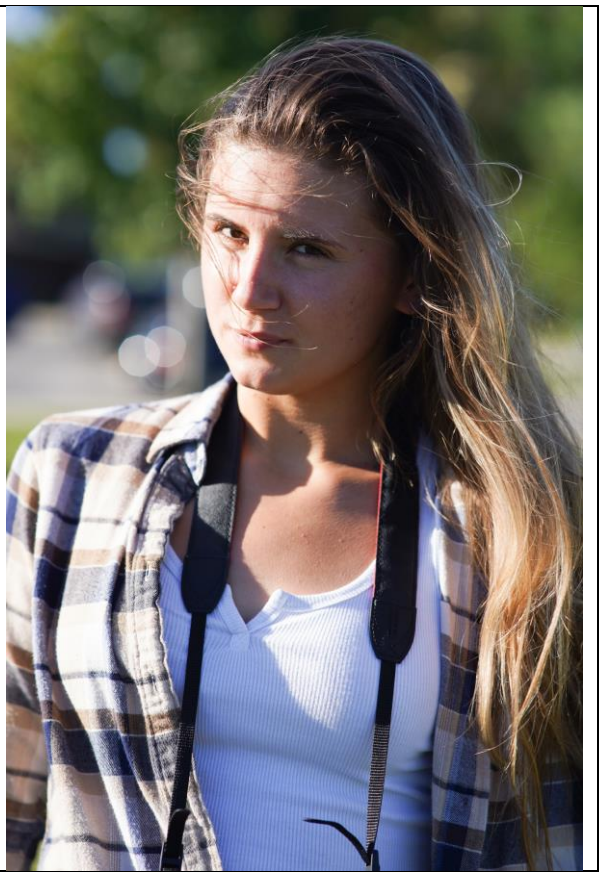




In the afternoon portrait, the sun is setting.		

BELOW In the half profile position, the highlights on the broad side of the face make clean lines on the nose, chin and jaw.





Posture

In the full profile position, the head and body are aligned together.

The body and head in contra posture position.

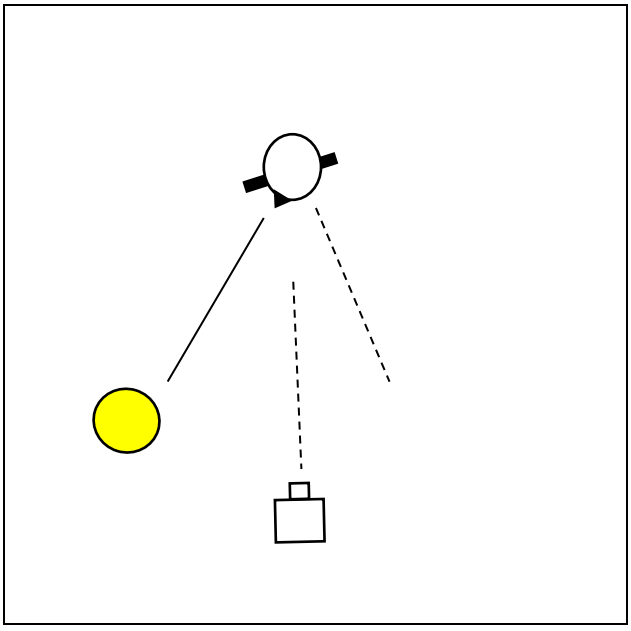


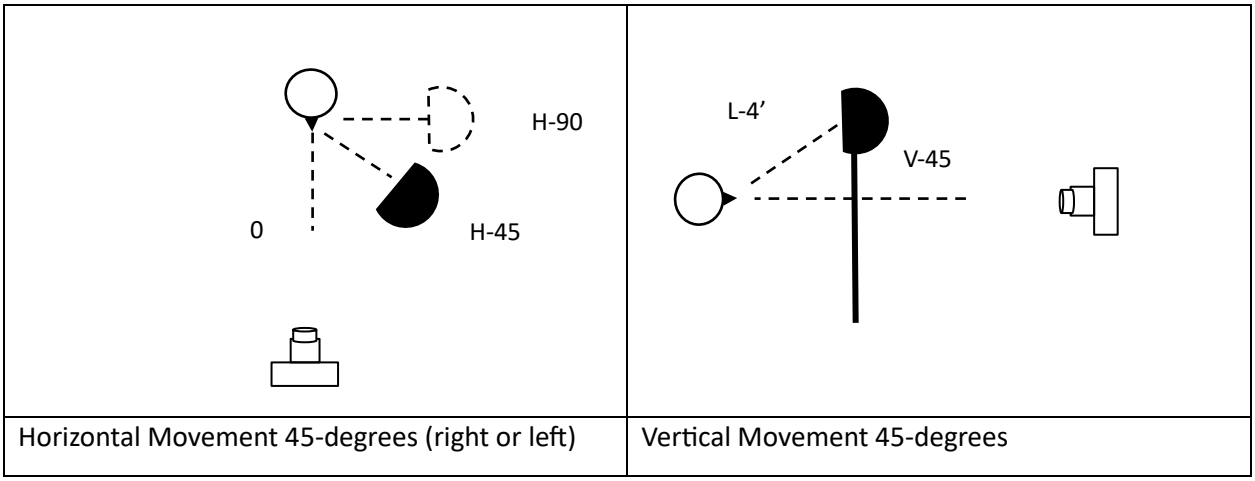
Diagram 12. 2 shows the body in contra posture position.

Key Relationships in Portraiture

To understand the light movements, consider the position of the head in relation to the body, the camera, and the light falling on the face. Also, the position of the body as it relates to the light.

Use the nose axis and light axis as the main points of reference. By keeping the camera fixed in from of the subject, it makes it easier to manage the position of the Main light and the subject.

In the studio the starting point of the light is at 45 High, which is raising the light at an angle of 45° degrees from the nose axis and 45° to the left or right of the subject.



Horizontal Movement 45-degrees (right or left)	Vertical Movement 45-degrees

Diagram 5.4. Horizontal and vertical light movements.

The vertical movement of the light effects vertical shadows and lines.

Notice the shadows in the eyes' sockets, nose and chin. Move the light horizontally 90°—and notice the lines formed by the shadows— The horizontal movement of the light changes the lines horizontally.

Lateral Movement is one of the most challenging in the studio. It affects form and intensity.

There is an exception, when the light is at zero degrees to the nose axis. As long as the angle remains constant, the form of the face will remain constant (Nicastro, Basic Lighting Study Book, 1973).

Head-to-camera relationships

Consider the following positions of the subject's head in relation to the camera.

- Profile

- Frontal
- Three-quarter head position.

In profile position, the head is at 90° degrees.

In the frontal position, the head is at zero degrees and the subject is in three-quarter head position, when the nose axis is a few degrees to approximately 45° from the camera axis.

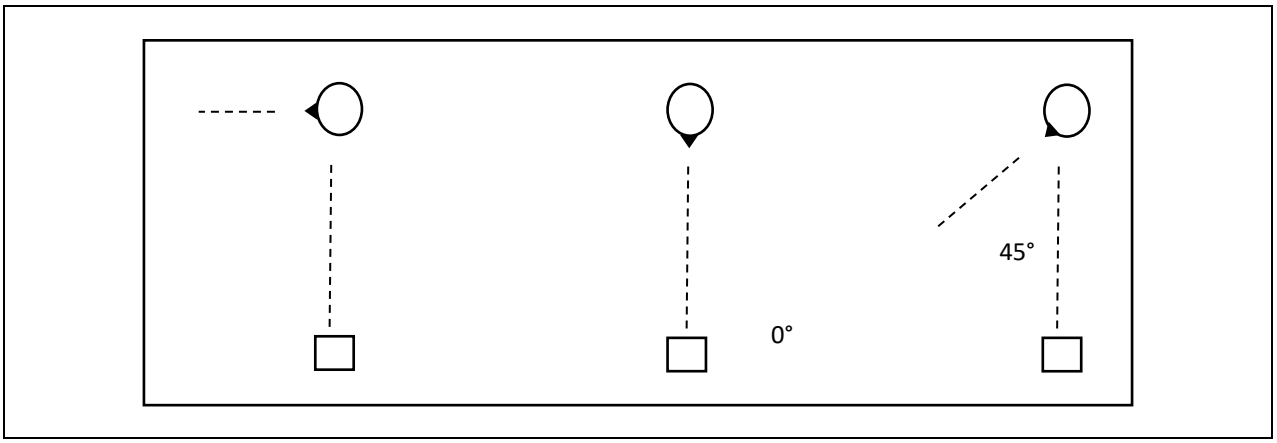


Diagram 5.5. Head to camera relationships.

Head-to-light relationships

Consider the following lighting situations.

- Profile
- Frontal
- Short and Broad

When the head is in the Profile position, the Profile lighting can come from behind the subject or from the side.

When the head is facing the light is referred as Frontal lighting.

Short and Broad lighting. For this lighting, the body is in three-quarter head position. SHORT or BROAD, tells the position of the head and the side of the face the light is striking.

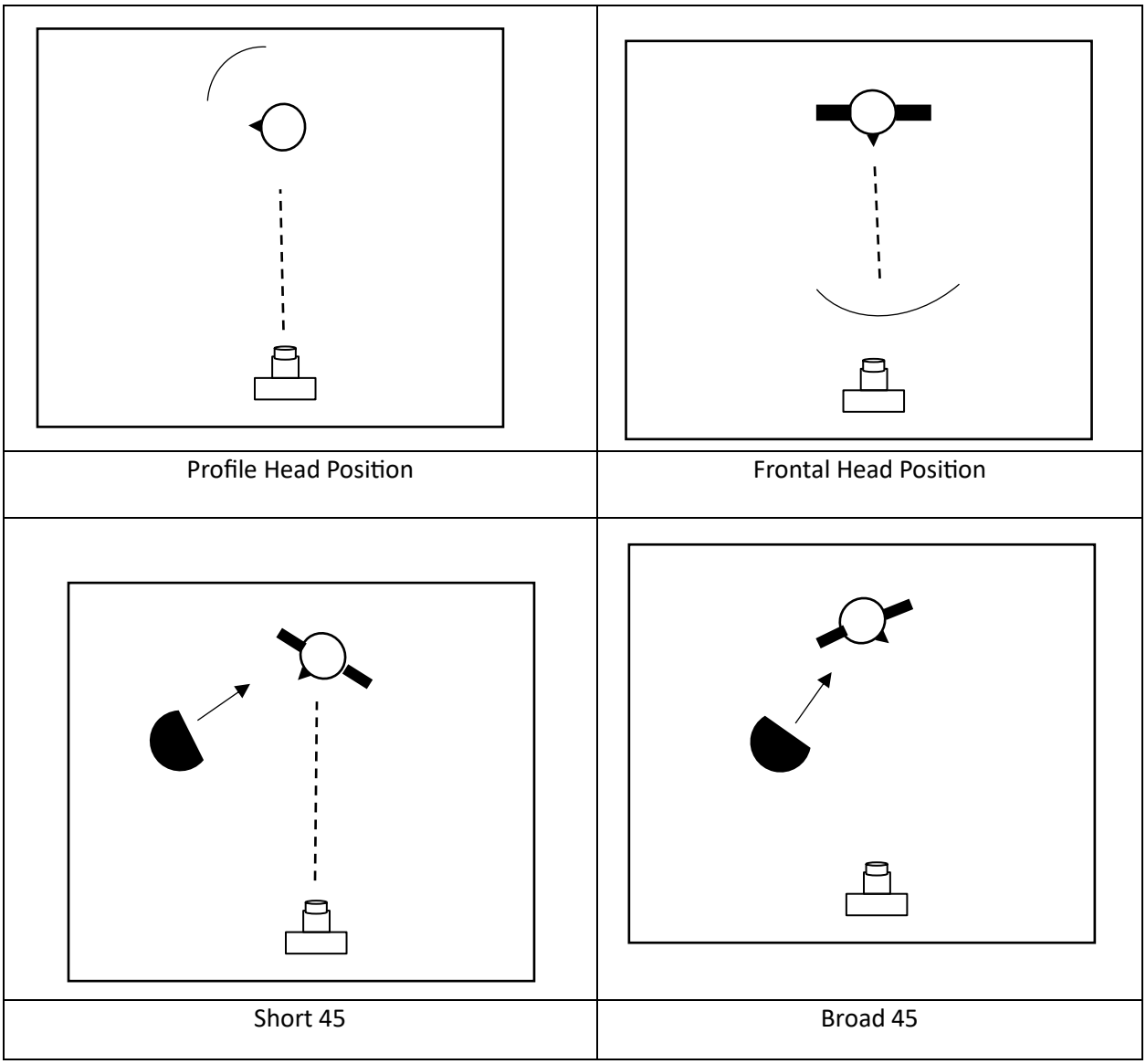


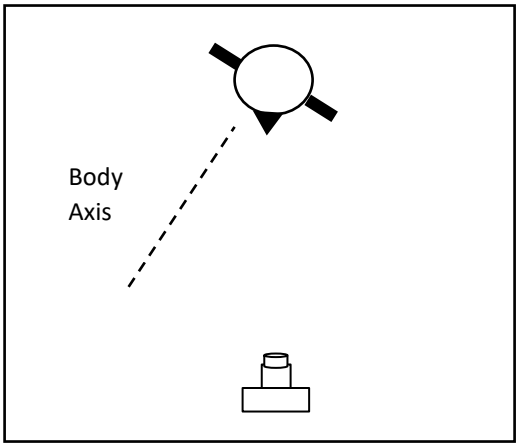
Diagram 5.6. Head-to-light relationships.

Head-to-body Postures

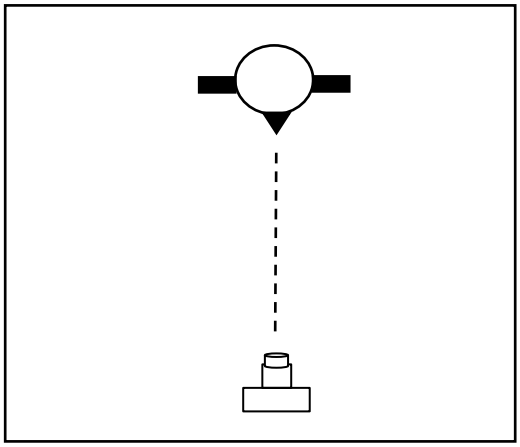
The position of the body as it relates to the head and nose.

- Similar posture position. The subject position is in similar posture, when the body lies in the same side of the lens axis as the head.
- Frontal posture position. The subject is directly in front of the camera.
- Contra Posture position. The body axis falls on one side of the lens axis while the nose axis falls on the opposite side.

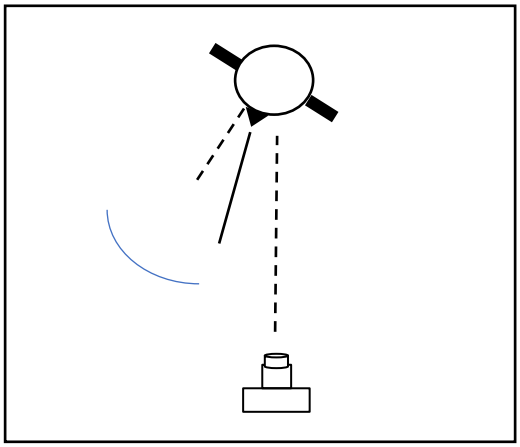
First identify the body axis from the chest outward, the axis is an imaginary line (Diagram 5.7).



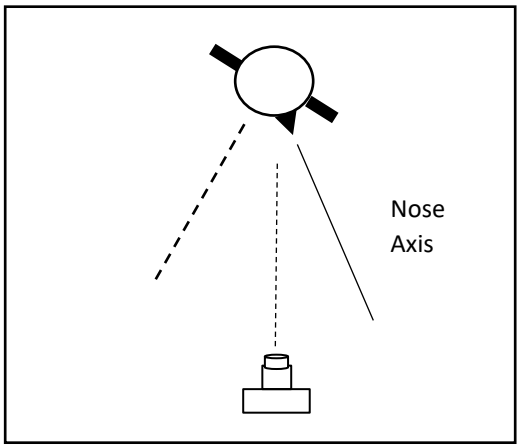
Body axis imaginary line



Frontal Posture. Nose-body-lens axis are aligned.



Similar Posture



Contra Posture

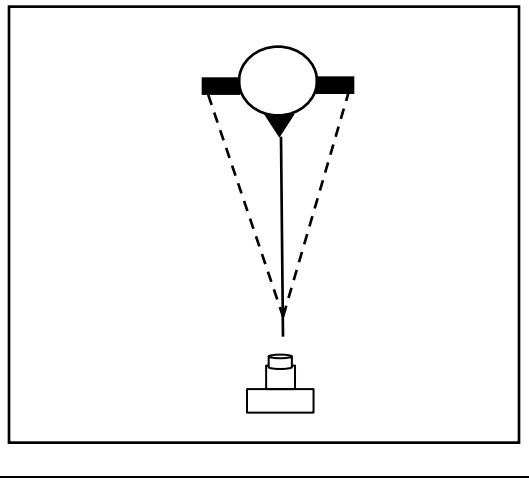
Diagram 5.7. Head-to-body postures

Figure 5.4. Frontal and Contra-Posture positions.

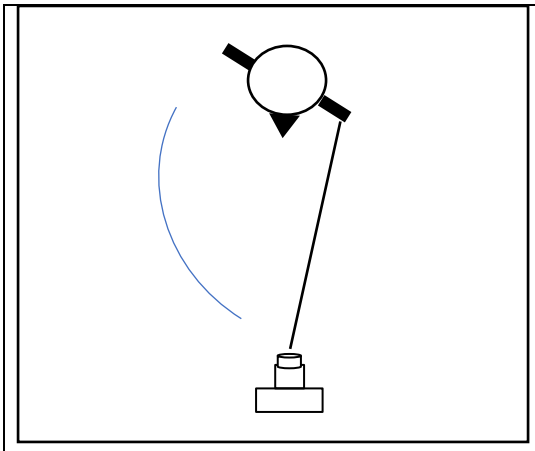
Body-to-light relationships

Here we are only concerned with the body not the face.

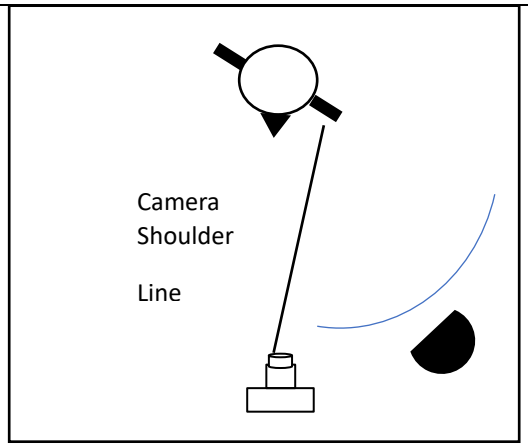
- Frontal body light
- Far-side body light
- Near-side body light



Frontal Body Light.



Far Side Light Placement



Near Side Light Placement

Diagram 5.8. Body-to-light postures

The Basic Light Forms

One of the greatest challenges in portrait photography is understanding lighting. This chapter addresses light ratio and the basic light forms in portraiture.

The characteristics of light, direction, contrast, intensity and the quality of light; the key reference points, the nose, eye sockets, and chin and jaw, and the light movements are important in the understanding of light forms.

As in most lighting settings, we assume the main light to be the primary light source in the system; any supporting lights of less power can be considered secondary, and unseen secondary.

There are three basic facial lighting forms as the primary light moves horizontally (light movements chapter 3)

- Split
- 45
- Butterfly

Note: aside from the three basic facial forms, we encounter some unclean facial forms such as loop, back-light, or variation of the basic light forms.

Diagram 6.1 shows the horizontal placement of the lights, frontal view.

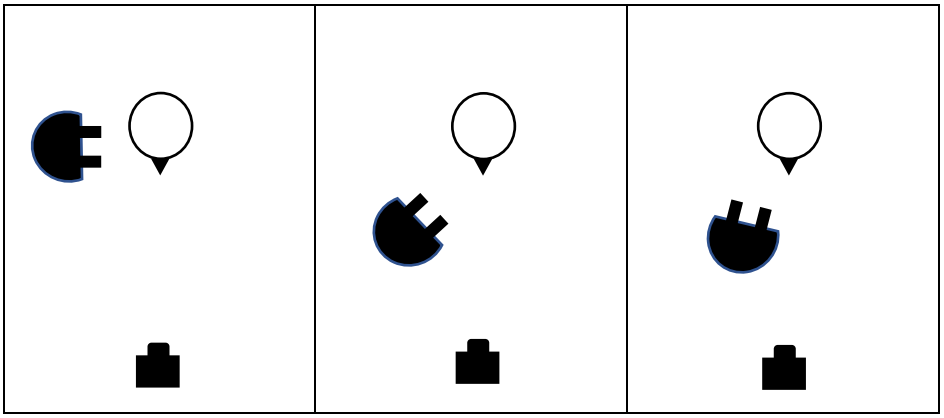


Diagram 6.1. Frontal Lighting of the basic facial lighting forms: split, 45 and butterfly.

Diagram 6.2 shows the Profile Lighting in Horizontal Position. The head is in profile position as the light moves from 90° to 45° and 0° degrees.

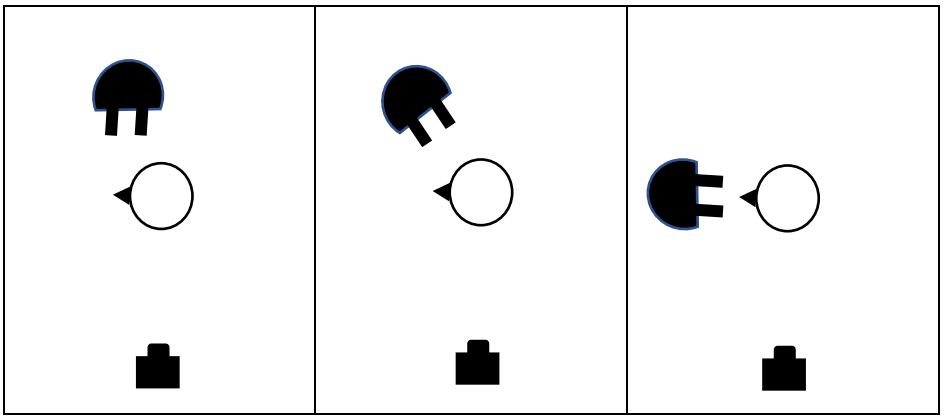


Diagram 6-2. Overhead view of basic facial lighting forms: split, 45 and butterfly.

Split

A window light can be considered a Split. Split lighting creates drama in portrait photography as the quality of the side light creates texture and pronounced the skin details. It splits the face in half, producing a high lighting ratio between main and fill lights as shown in diagram 6.2.

Split lighting strikes the face horizontally 90 degrees to the left or to the right of the nose axis. The camera position is at 0° degrees eye level.

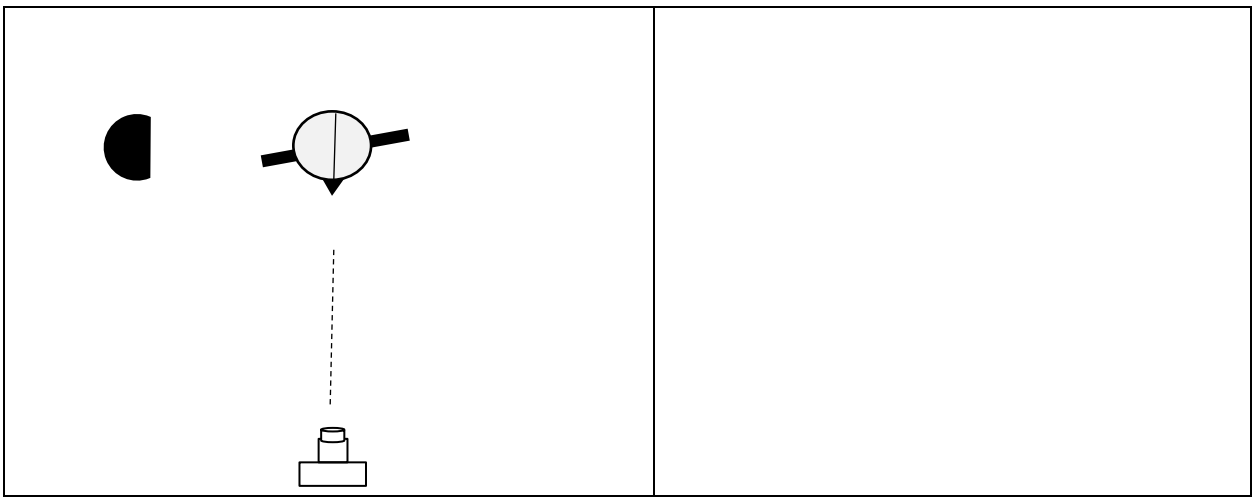


Diagram 6.3. Classic Split lighting in frontal form.

In the profile position, the main light is in the split position (Diagram 6.4).

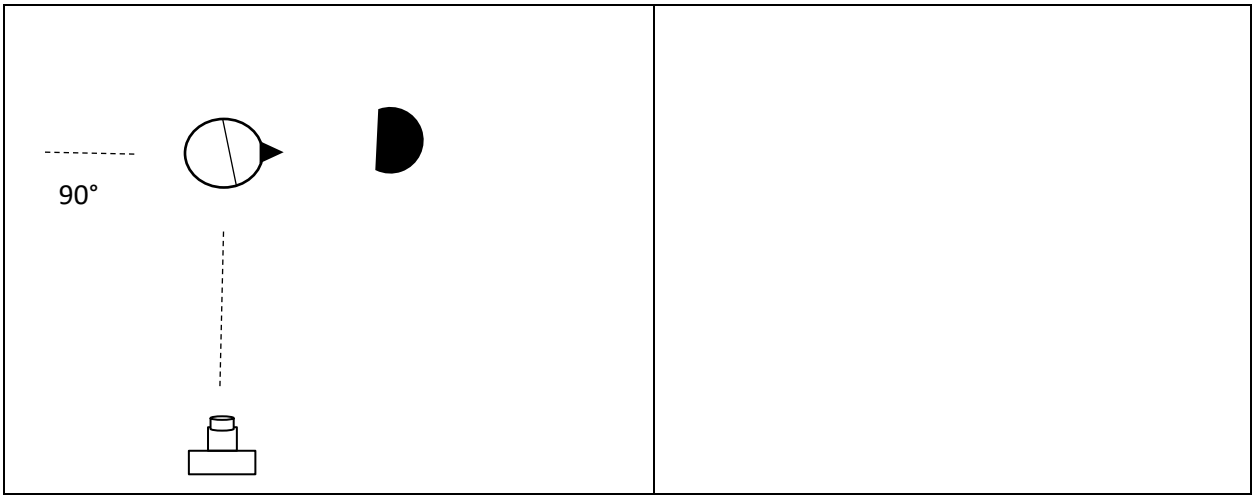


Diagram 6.4. Profile Split Form.

45-degree Form

This is a popular portrait lighting popularized by the 17th century Dutch painter Rembrandt. The painter used the sunlight coming from the window and positioned the subject's face to illuminate the pupil of the opposite eye and forming a triangle shape of light on the opposite cheek. The main light source is positioned vertically, 45° degrees above the nose axis and horizontally at 45° degrees to the left or right of the nose axis.

One must examine the key areas of the nose shadow, chin and jaw and eye sockets. With most faces it is possible to create a clean 45 lighting, many facial characteristics differ from person to person (Nicastro, Basic Lighting Study Book, 1973).

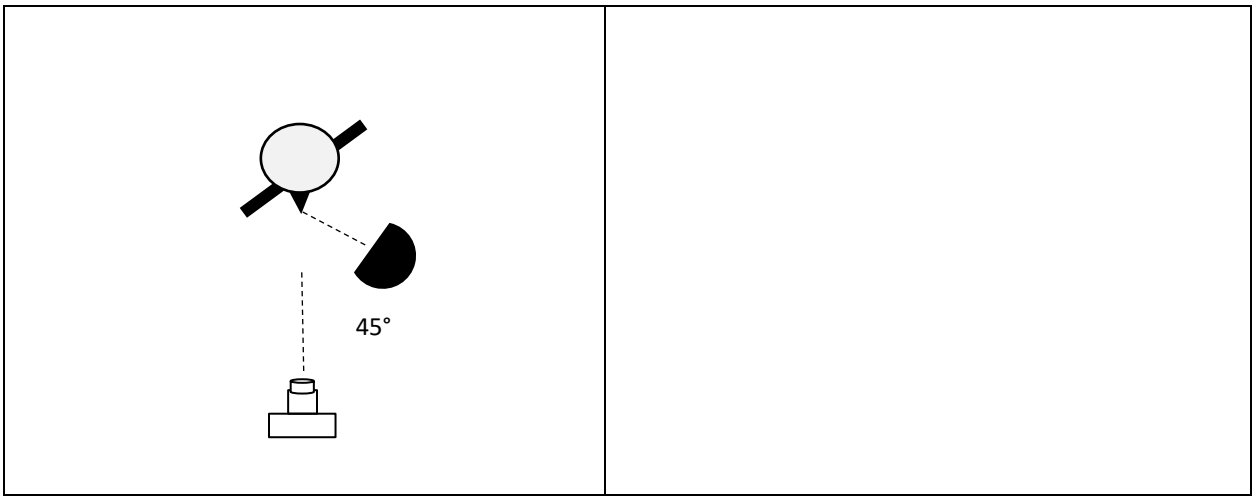


Diagram 6.5. 45 or 45 high, the body is at three-quarter position.

Short and Broad

When the subject is looking at the camera (frontal position), turn the body towards the Main light or away, For short 45° or broad 45° lighting respectively.

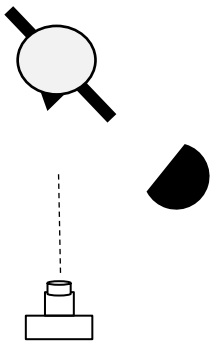
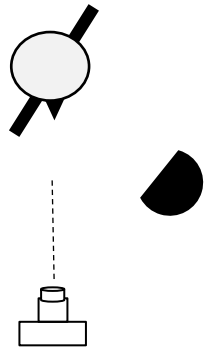
	
45 Horizontal Position Broad 45	Horizontal Position Short 45

Diagram 6.6. Broad 45 and Short 45 lighting.

Unclean 45

An unclean 45 and butterfly lighting is one that loops over the nose between 25° and 40° degrees. Loop lighting is very popular among wedding photographers. It is achieved by moving the main light horizontally until a shadow appears on the opposite side of the nose. This lighting in the profile position, bring soft lines on the cheek and chin.

Butterfly

Butterfly lighting was a very popular lighting style during the glamorous days of Hollywood in the 1930s and ‘40s. At the Paramount studios, the lights were positioned directly above the actors, thus casting a butterfly shaped shadow under the nose. Celebrities like Marlene Dietrich insisted in a lighting that gave her the delicate cheekbones and large eyes (Kobal, The Art of the Great Hollywood Portrait Photographers, 1980).

A butterfly light is the easier to define since only depends on the nose. The high and even positions demonstrate the outlining of the nose line by the creation of a shadow alongside the nose (Nicastro, Basic Lighting Study Book, 1973).

Figure 6.7 shows the classic butterfly lighting caused by the sun directly above the subject.

Figure 6.2. **B**utterfly lighting.

In the profile position, the horizontal placement of the light can be at 0° to 25° degrees from the nose axis and vertically 10°-70° above the nose axis.

Diagram 6.7

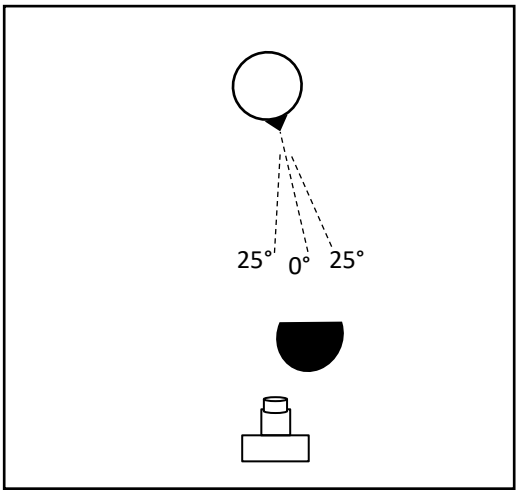


Diagram 6.8. Half profile position Butterfly lighting.

On-Camera Flash

Most digital cameras have a built-in flash that activates in low-light conditions. A flash can be used as a primary light source or as a tool to paint with light.

Direct lighting has a particularly intense look and is very desirable; in portraiture, it has the ability to fill the eyes and shape the face and body. Flash is sometimes necessary when the light source is behind or above the subject.

Speedlights and strobes are often use in the field or on-location. Speedlights are small light-weight flash unit that mount onto a camera shoe; they are triggered off-camera with an electronic transmitter device. For consistency and power, a strobe is a better choice.

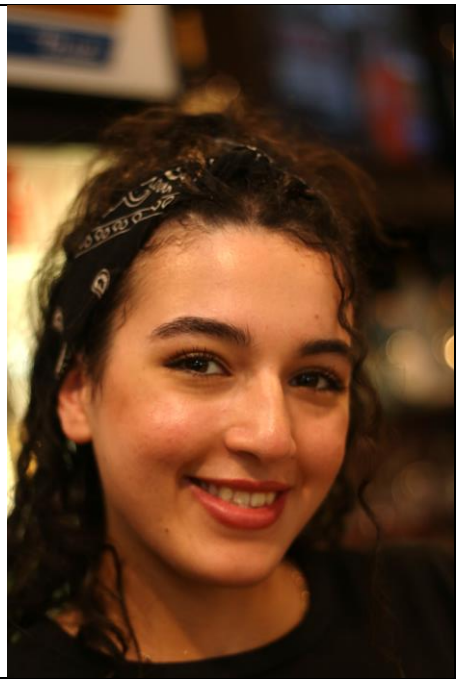
A light source is less intense when is farther away from the subject. As it gets closer, the subject becomes brighter, shadows are more pronounced and the shapes formed are more defined. The flash falls-off after it reaches the subject (inverse square law of physics).

BELOW a small speedlight on-camera shoe provides frontal illumination.

Below, direct flash on-camera in the studio(left), by moving the subject to an open space, the shadows dissipate (right).

Direct flash on camera causes a ring of light directly on the subject. A white diffuser over the flash head helps to spread the light.

On-Camera flash with diffuser eliminates the ring around the face.



Off-Camera Flash

Off-camera flash frees the flash unit away from the camera, and renders itself to creative lighting. There are two types of off-camera flash: speedlights and portable strobes. The latter are more reliable and consistent in the field.

The flash is triggered off camera with an electronic transmitter device connected to the camera. I recommend a light-stand with a flash S-type bracket to hold a small speedlight and a 7-inch reflector to increase the size of the beam. The photographer controls the direction of the light as desired.

Mix Lighting

Outdoors, the electronic flash can help to fill the shadow areas, and lower the contrast. Think of bright daylight when the subject position is opposite to the sun, a sunset where the subject's face is in shade, or at night on the streets.

BELOW Inside a tunnel in broad daylight. The speedlight was placed on the ground pointing upwards towards the subject and the wall, causing the light to bounce all around the tunnel. To balance the flash with the ambient light, the camera's shutter speed is adjusted until the contrast is reduced.

BELOW Two images taken a minute apart. After the flash is turned on, it illuminated the foreground.

Two speedlights place on each side of the camera to provide a 3:1 light ratio.	

Outdoors portrait with two speedlight.
The main light source is positioned at 45° from the camera, the other speedlight is pointed towards a high white ceiling (it acts as an unseen secondary).

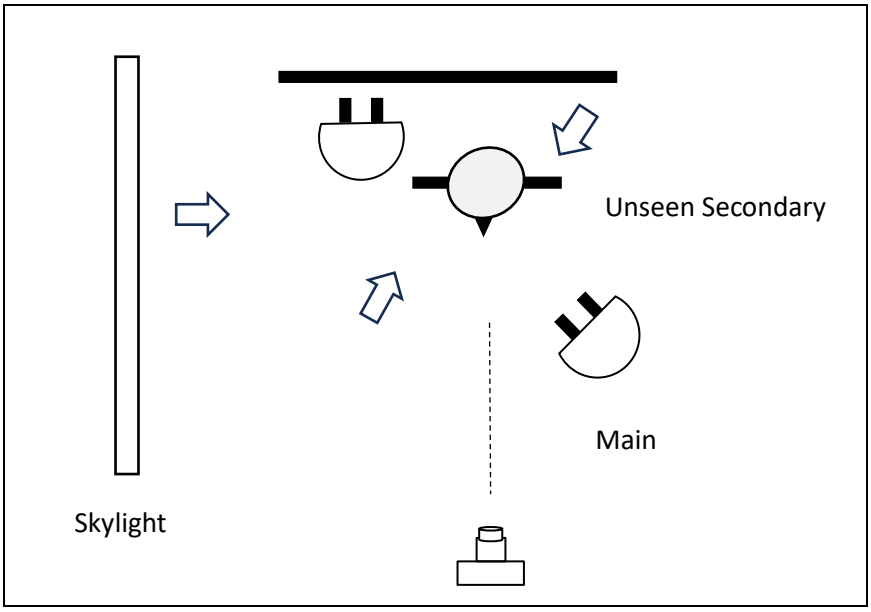


Diagram. Field setup with two light sources of equal power.

BELOW a photoshoot in a garden at midday. The strobe provides frontal illumination to match the scene's daylight exposure.

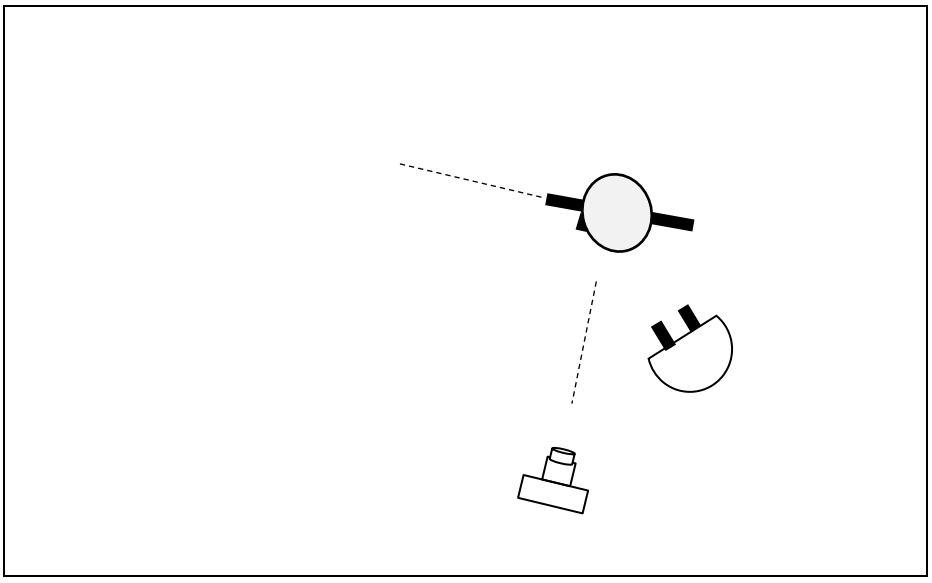


Diagram 11.5. Newer Vision 4 strobe set at ½ power.

At Night with Flash

At night flash can be a creative tool to paint with light.

BELOW Off-camera flash position behind the subject for a silhouette effect to emphasize shape and form.

Two off-camera speedlights of equal power set at ½ power, positioned at twice the distance for low-contrast lighting ratio. The main light source is the closest to the group.

Figure. 3:1 lighting ratio. Sony & 7 50mm f8 @ 1/125 sec. ISO 100.

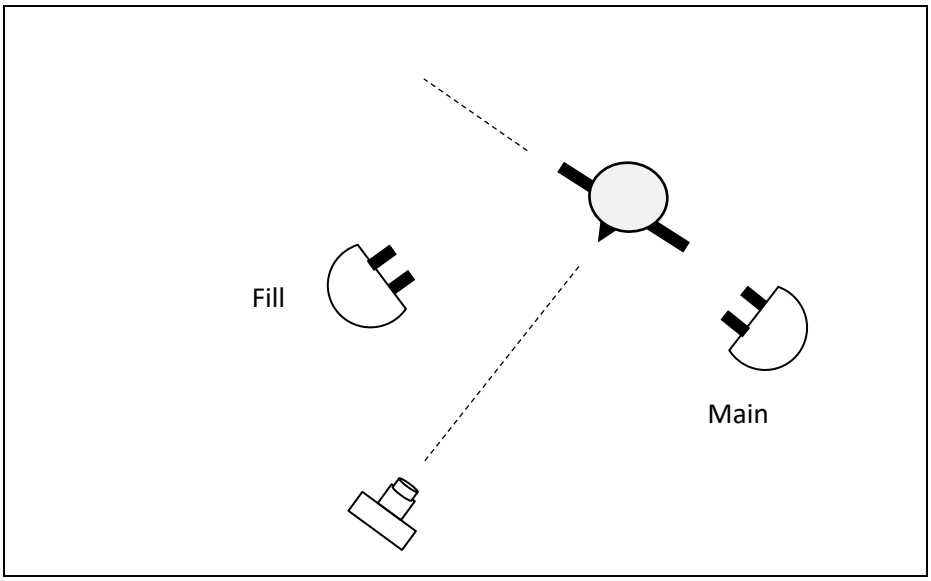


Diagram 11.3. 90°-degree lighting configuration.

Portable Strobes

Potrtable strobes are more powerful and reliable than speedlights. They are large and heavy units which require a steady tripod to support them.

BELOW. The cinematic night lighting was achieved with a portable strobe placed to the left of the camera at approximately 45-degree angle during the sunset.

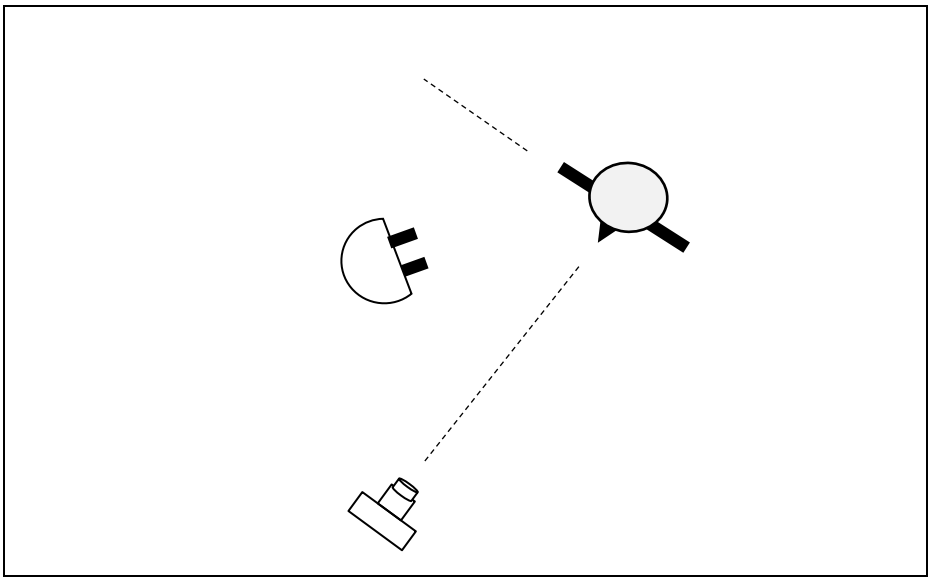


Diagram. Newer Vision 4 strobe set at ½ power.

Figure 11.8b. Off-camera flash. Sony &7 70mm f8 @ 1/00 sec. ISO 80.

Matching Daylight with Flash at Large Apertures

DSLR and mirrorless cameras have a limited flash sync speed. They use a focal plane shutter (camera shutter is in front of the focus plane) it requires a synch speed in order to work with flashes, typically 1/250 seconds or less (depending on the camera). Faster shutter settings will cause the light to illuminate the frame partially, as shown in figure below.

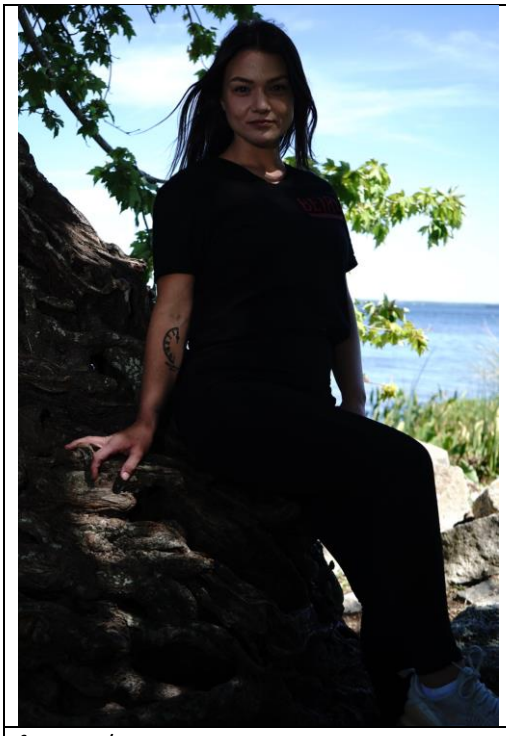
Flash synch speed. f5.6@1/400 sec.

High-speed synch mode. f5.6@1/1000 second.

Synch Flash

High-speed synchronization (HSS) is a function that allows the camera to use fast shutter speeds with an external flash. High-speed synch flashes are not subject to shutter restrictions; therefore, they can work outdoors as fill lights and allow low apertures for shallow depth of field.

If the subject is in shade in broad daylight, exposing for the subjects' face will over-exposed the background. To correct this, a high-speed synch flash can fill the shadow areas with a large aperture for a shallow depth of field.

	
f4.5@ 1/320 sec.	High-speed synch mode. f 4.5 1/640 sec.

High-Speed Sync flash. 44mm lens, f 4.5 at 1/400 sec., ISO 100