

LIGHTING ESSENTIALS

tech sheet



You can see what I mean here when I say it is terribly difficult to shoot into the sun like this. The flare kills any detail and it is impossible to see the models expression. It is in those quiet, still moments of panic that one finds the need to trust the other members of ones team. The flash did not fire on this shot.



Here is the same shot, but she walked in front of the flare and tamed the wild light that was bouncing around and killing detail. The flash was fired on this one as well. Well balanced, the flash doesn't look too harsh or overbearing. I really like the modeling on the sidewalk under and behind her. And that little bit of flare under her arm is a wonderfully lucky little touch to the image.

BEATING THE SUN

WITH SPEEDLIGHTS

A very popular style these days is the look of strobe on location, specifically the 'beating the sun' look where the light that is provided is as powerful or more powerful than the sun and ambient light.

And while it isn't terribly difficult, it does have several different things to keep in mind. Ambient, shutter-speed, flash-sync, flash power, f-stop, and overall exposure.

First we have our tool list.

For these shots we used:

- 1 stand for speedlight.
- 1 speedlight - (I used a 430EX on most)
- Ambient meter
- Camera meter
- Wireless or off camera trigger

The first shot on the left was taken in Seattle last summer. The model is standing on a sidewalk near the water and the sun was setting behind her. I wanted to get a dramatic look with the sun and the deep color of the sky.

So I needed to know what the sky exposure was, within the range of my flash sync. The camera I am using here has a max flash sync of 1/250 of a second. Please keep in mind that we are using manual strobes here. We are not using E TTL or TTL with high speed flash sync.

So knowing what my sky was going to do within my flash sync range was paramount. I started with an f-stop of 16, and I knew the setting sun was low enough that the f-16 rule (1/ISO) would be a little less than the full midday sun. The first thing I did was take a shot of her with no flash. I wanted to see the effect of only the sky at my chosen exposure.

Camera was set to f-16 at 1/125 because I figured the sky was already one stop darker because of the position of the sun. I was right and it rendered a nice, deep blue. The setting was actually 1 stop under the ambient light setting for the sky. That would have been f-16 @ 1/60 at ISO 100.. The 'sunny 16' rule tells us that the correct exposure would have been f-16 @ 1/100 on a sunny day. Later in the day, the sun is weaker because it has more atmosphere to go through. So I left the exposure at f-16 @ 1/125 to darken the already darkening sky.

For the main shot I added a second flash to camera left, at the same power to match the main. I had my assistant point the flash at her legs. The matching light creates a nice, natural look. The second shot had the assistants walking along with her, keeping the light at the same distance from her.

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f-20 @ 1/100 at ISO 100

1. Take an ambient reading with your light meter or take a shot with AV or SP.
2. Evaluate the image to make sure that the background or ambient is what you wanted it to be.
3. Choose the f-stop / shutter speed combination that is within the sync range of your camera, and provides the darker background you want. It will probably be in the f-11 @ 1/125 to f-16@1/125.
4. Increasing the shutter speed 1 stop will further darken the ambient. Or use the f-stop to go to f-22 for a darker ambient.
5. Beat the sun.

I wanted to show how it works for me when shooting fairly fast. So I packed up my little one and headed for the park. It is a particularly unattractive park, so I thought it would be quite a challenge. Phoenix sun was bright and the sky was very clear... no cloud, no soft diffused light. I set the camera on Auto AV and started to get some position shots.

1. I took a shot of Alissa with the camera picking up only the shadow part of the scene. Since I had the camera on f-4, it rendered an exposure of f-4 at 1/200. Skin tones aren't too bad, but of course the shot is way too boring.

2. I added a bit more sky into the shot. Well, the sky had some color, but essentially it was blown way out. I wanted a much darker, moodier shot.

3. I turned the flash on and set it for 1/4 power at about 6ft from Alissa. It is on a boom to allow me to shoot under it and keep the sun behind her, essentially I am shooting in her shadow. 1/100 of a second syncs well and the exposure looks a little under for the grounds. That is called beating the sun.

4. Getting down in her shadow, I was able to take a shot of my daughter posing naturally, gameboy in hand... sheesh.

5. Going for a slightly more darker sky and background, I changed the shutter speed to 1/125. This lowered the ambient light another 1/3 stop. The flash was still at 1/4 power so it rendered the f-16 perfectly on her face.



f-4 @ 1/200



f-4 @ 1/400



f-16 @ 1/100



f-16 @ 1/125



f-16 @ 1/100