WEEK TWO – ESSENTIALS For Photographers

lighting-essentials.com/one-big-light-week-two

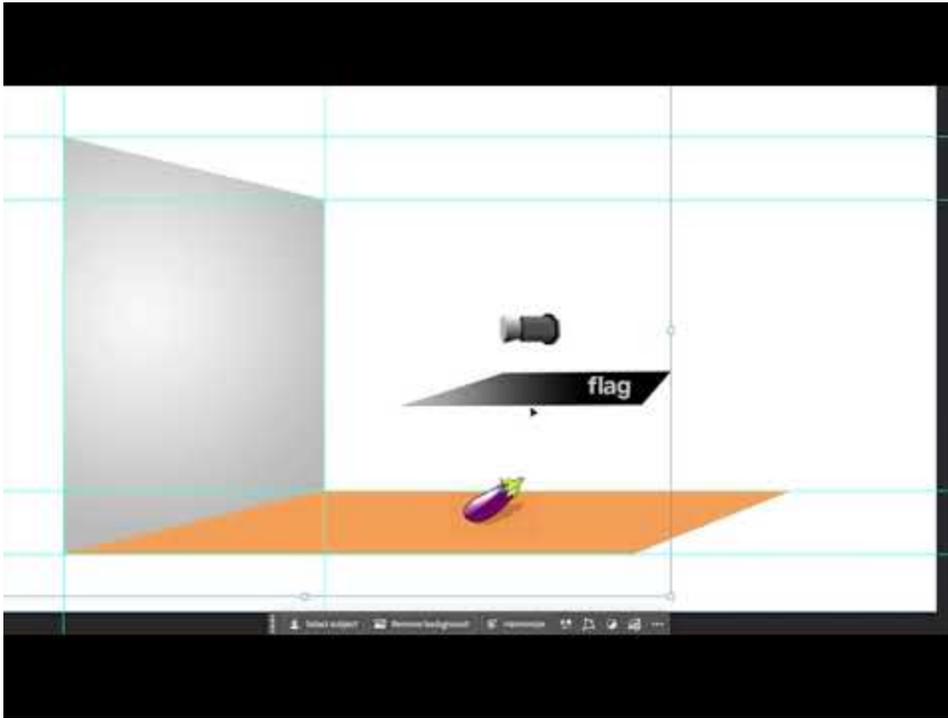## 8 WEEK CLASS: NOVEMBER 2025

One Big Beautiful Light: Week Two

[WEBINAR LINK](#)
[BACK TO HOME](#)

Using a white bounce card as the *primary* light source is absolutely workable, and in many situations it can look better and more natural than a softbox, especially for tabletop and food.

Concept: bounce card as key

- When you aim a bare light (strobe, LED, speedlight, or even a window) into a large white card and let the **reflected light** hit the subject, the card effectively *becomes* a big, soft key. The apparent source size is now the dimensions of the card instead of the lamp head, which gives you softer, more gradual shadows.

- This is essentially the same idea as using a white wall or ceiling as a key, just scaled down and positioned precisely around your tabletop set. For small products and food, a 24×24 in or larger foam-core board works well.

Book light variant (extra soft)

- A popular refinement is the **book light**: you fire the lamp into a white card, then pass the bounced light through diffusion before it hits the subject. The bounce plus diffusion yields extremely soft, low-contrast light with very gentle speculars, which is terrific for reflective packaging or glossy food.

- The setup typically forms a "V" or open-book shape: a light white card diffusion frame subject, with the subject close to the diffusion so the diffused surface acts as a huge key.

Practical pros and cons for tabletop

Advantages

- Very natural, "window-like" quality of light that avoids the sometimes "boxed-in" look of small softboxes on shiny surfaces.

- Easy to scale and shape: bigger card = softer; moving the card closer to the subject increases intensity and wrap.

- Cheap and modular: foam core, bead board, or white showcard on clamps and C-stands can be reangled in seconds to fine-tune gradients on bottles or ceramics

Trade-offs

- Less efficient than a softbox: you lose output in the bounce, so you may need more watt-seconds or higher ISO for the same exposure.

- Takes up a bit more physical space around the set, especially in the book light configurations, which can be tight in a small tabletop corner.

How to try it on a tabletop set

- Place your bare strobe/LED a couple of feet from a large white card at roughly a 45° angle to the subject so the *card* faces the product like a softbox would.

- Block the light from the subject with a flag. Do not let any direct light spill onto your subject/surface/background.

- Adjust distance and angle until you see the card's reflection and shadow quality you like on the subject; then add a black card on the opposite side for shape or a second white card for more wrap.

Situations where bounce wins

- **You want ultra-soft, natural light**
  Bouncing a small light into a big white card or wall effectively turns the card into a huge source, often softer and more "room-like" than a modest 2×3 softbox. This is ideal for food and tabletop sets where you want a window light feel rather than a clearly directional box look.

- **You need a bigger source than your softbox**
  A 4×8 ft foamcore or V-flat used as a bounce can create a key much larger than most softboxes regular shooters own, giving very gradual falloff and smoother gradients on reflective objects. This is useful for bottles, cookware, or glossy packaging that shows every shape of the source.

- **You want fast, flexible placement in small sets**
  A bounce board is light, cheap, and easy to clamp or lean right where you need it, including low angles or odd positions where a C-stand plus softbox would be clumsy. On a crowded tabletop, that can be the difference between getting the card edge exactly where you want it on a label versus fighting hardware.

Aesthetic and control trade-offs

- **More "open" light, less edge control**
  Bounce tends to spill more and feel more enveloping, which is beautiful for open, airy looks but less surgical than a gridded softbox when you need tight pools of light or crisp falloff. For moody, controlled food sets, many photographers go back to softboxes or scrims plus flags.

- **Needs more power, but can look more organic**
  You lose output when you bounce, so a given exposure often demands more watt-seconds or higher ISO than shooting through a softbox. In return, many shooters feel bounced light reads more like a real window or skylight, especially in "book-light" style setups.

Quick rule of thumb for your work

- Favor a **bounce card as key** when you're seeking natural window light for tabletop/food, want very large and forgiving speculars, or need fast, cheap, repositionable big sources around a small set.

- Favor a **softbox as key** when you need efficiency, precise beam control, or repeatable, tightly shaped light, such as moody hero shots or situations where you must keep light off the background.

How to set exposure when using a bounce card as key light

How to set exposure when using a bounce card as key light

Set exposure for a bounce?card key the same way you would for any soft source: meter or test off the *light that's actually hitting the subject*, then adjust light power and distance until your key and ratios look right.?

Core approach

- **Meter the bounced light at the subject**
  With a handheld incident meter, place the dome at the subject and point it toward the bounce card (the effective source), then adjust flash/LED power until the meter gives your target f?stop at your chosen ISO and shutter. This automatically accounts for all losses in the bounce and gives you a reliable baseline exposure.?

- **If you don't have a meter: bracket from a test frame**
  Start from a "normal" studio baseline (for flash, e.g. ISO 100, 1/160–1/200, f/8) and take a test shot, then adjust **light power first**, not camera settings, until the histogram and highlights look right. If it is too dark, raise power or move the lamp closer to the card; if it is too bright, lower power or back the lamp off.?

Practical tabletop workflow

- **Lock camera settings, tune the light:**
  For product/food, pick your working aperture (for DOF), shutter (for ambient control), and ISO, then leave them fixed and only ride light power and card distance/angle to hit exposure.?

- **Meter for the key, then check ratios:**
  Once the bounce key is set, add any fill/negative fill and quickly re?meter or test to ensure you're not lifting shadows more than you want; large white cards can easily creep from subtle fill into "flat" if they get too close.??

Bounce?specific considerations

- **Expect to lose 1–3 stops in the bounce**
  Compared to pointing the light straight into a softbox, bouncing into a card costs output, so you'll often run higher power or ISO for the same f?stop.?

- **Watch working distance**
  Because the bounce surface and subject are usually fairly close, the inverse?square falloff is gentle, and small distance tweaks of the card can visibly change exposure and contrast; re?meter or re?test whenever you move the card significantly.

ASSIGNMENT

Do the exercise and show four images from it.

Portfolio Work 1:

Use a collection of salad ingredients in a bowl or on a plate. Shoot both obliquely, and "naturally." The surface should be a natural one (wood, tile, brick…).

Portfolio Work 2:

A large vegetable like an eggplant or Leek. Preferably in a bowl. Make the light soft and dreamy, and a second shot with the subject emitting more drama (using negative bounce),

ASSIGNMENT UPLOAD

1. Must not be larger than 1200 pixels on the longest side.
2. Must be .jpg format
3. Include BTS shots
4. File naming: first-last-assignnumber-1.jpg (don-giannatti-1-a.jpg, don-giannatti-1-b.jpg, etc…
5. Be sure to resize phone shots.

Upload files

What you will need:

- Large White Board (or two taped together)
- Alternate: White Wall
- One or Two lights
- Tabletop
- Vegetable (Like eggplant, Leek, or Cabbage)
- Small 12″x12″ V-card (total 12×24)
- Flag (black card)
- Stand for light and stand for flag.

Resources:

AI TOOLS I USE:

Open AI [ChatGPT](#)
[Gemini](#)
[Claude](#)
[GenSpark](#)
[Grok](#)

The Ultimate Guide to Starting Your Creative Business

[The Ultimate Guide to Starting Your Creative Business (PDF)](#)

Class One

[Class Link](#)

Class Five

Class Two

[Class Link](#)

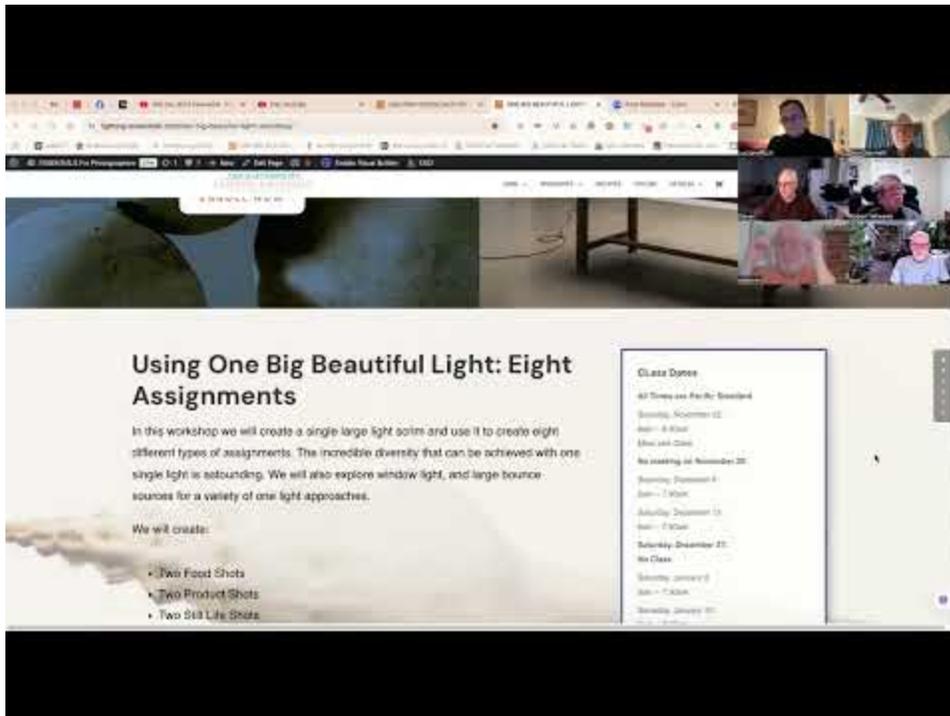## Class Six

Class Three

Class Seven

Class Four

Class Eight

This is where the video will be after our meeting.

Meeting Notes

Watch Video At: https://youtu.be/OuSHqS3gnRc