

LIGHTING



In order to shoot any video, you need light - either natural or artificial light. The quality of the image largely depends on the intensity, angle, and color of the light that is projected on the subject or objects being filmed.

Camera records images with much higher contrast than what our eyes see. That is why something that looks good to our eyes may not look good to the camera. It is important to understand these differences in order to learn how to use light in your favor.

When you film, you never record "reality", but a part of it in a certain tone. Just as camera framing focuses our gaze on a part of reality, lighting focuses our gaze on the elements that are most important in the image.

Use the solar light in exteriors as much as you can. The best moments to shoot with natural light are the first two hours after sunrise and the two hours before sunset. In that timeframe the light is smoother and has a beautiful orange color. All kinds of films use that "magic hour".

Be aware of your environment since this can change. In the forest sometimes the best light comes at noon when the sun is above the trees and the leaves filter that light. Before the actual shooting, first try different options with your camera and learn how the light behaves in the place you are going to film.

At night, even if your eyes can see the moonlight, most cameras can't shoot with so little light, so you'll need an extra light source (either a spotlight or a torch). Nights are more complex to light in that sense, but at the same time, they produce some of the most powerful and beautiful images.

Lights

Lights (depending on their type) generate different colors. Fluorescent bulbs in houses and lamps generally generate a yellow tone, while cold lights or LEDs generate a blue tone. Try not to mix lights of different tones, unless you want to obtain a specific aesthetic with color mixing.

You can always correct the color, brightness and contrast of an image a little in post-production, but the rule will always be to try to get the best possible image at the time of shooting.

Lights generate a softer light if you put some translucent material in front of the focus that slightly filters the light. This avoids generating a very strong light on the person. You can use a semi-transparent white cloth or translucent paper. Be careful not to stick it or bring it too close to the spotlight to avoid the risk of fire. If you don't have anything to filter the light, the best option is to bounce the light off a wall instead of directing it directly at the person you are filming.

Soft lighting: those images shot in the shade, an overcast day, soft window light, this lighting can be more flattering on our subjects, and feel less abrasive.

Hard lighting is generally less flattering and can evoke other varied emotions depending on its angle of use. On those days when lighting is particularly hard, the position you take up as a cinematographer can be all the more important, so carefully finding your best angle when using available light in these circumstances is an additional factor to consider.

Where to place the lights

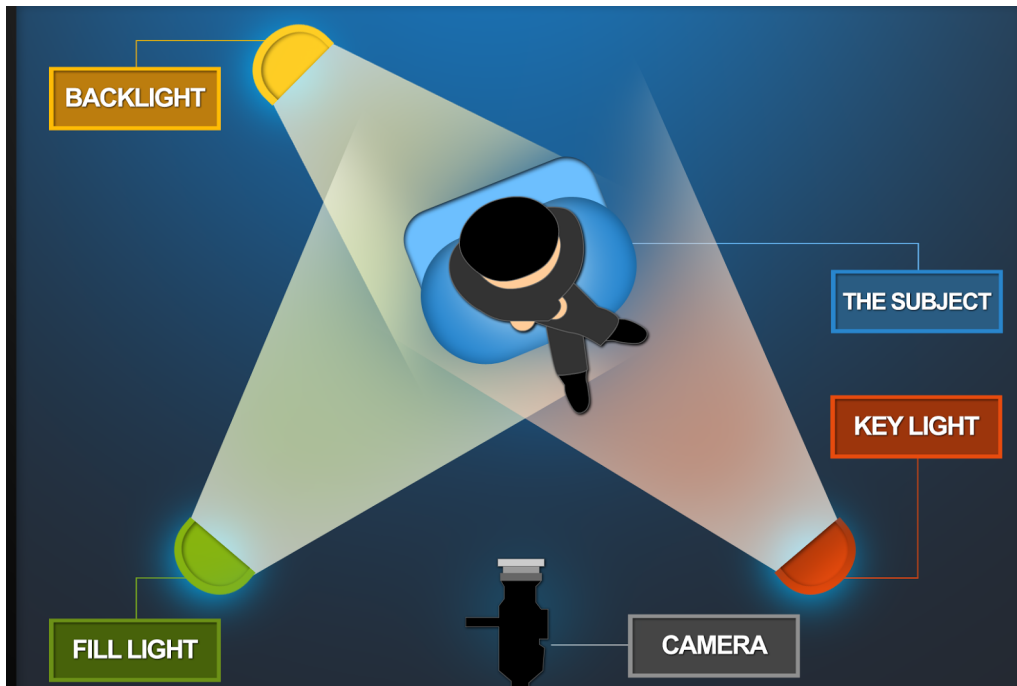
If you only have one light (either artificial or sunlight), then your best option is to aim it at the main element of the image and use a bouncer to eliminate harsh shadows.

If you have more than one light, one will always be the main light towards the subject (usually the strongest light), and the other light or lights will help you generate other effects, such as softening shadows or separating the subject from the background.

The key is to play with two lights so that one light illuminates the shadows created by the other. And if possible, use other lights to highlight the background and the subject.

Remember that what you are looking for when lighting is that there should not be too extreme differences between the darkest and lightest areas of your image. You are looking for something uniform to the eye, because the camera will always add more contrast. How close the lights are to the subject depends on their intensity.

Let's look at some ways to place the lights, looking for a standard effect (the one usually used in interviews). This type of placement is called the three-point light design or basic lighting triangle:



Final Tips

Avoid overexposed areas (too much light in one part of the image). To do so, it is advisable to avoid shooting in the midday hours when the sun is most intense.

Avoid underexposed areas (too little light in parts of the image). Generally, the most important element in the image should be the most illuminated, either the face of the person you are filming or the main object you want to highlight.

For lighting at night or in dark interiors use homemade light sources (lamps, simple spotlights).

Indoors during the day, use the light coming through the windows, bring the subject you are going to film or interview close to the window so that the light illuminates their face well.

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Photos: Joel Redman / If Not Us Then Who.