



# PRODUCTION

## 1. LIGHT A FILM SET

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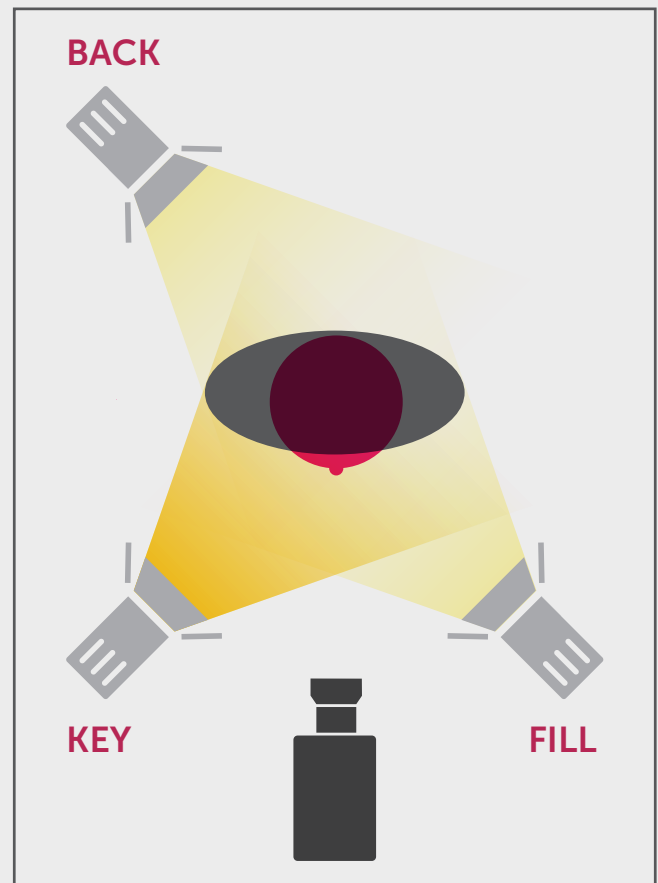
## Light a film set

Lighting is used in filmmaking to set a mood, create an atmosphere and to illuminate your actors.

### Using electric lights

When working in dark indoor spaces, on film sets or filming outside at night, professional filmmakers use three light sources:

- The **key light** is the brightest light and the main source of illumination. This is the light that creates shadow and detail in the subject. The key light is placed to the side of the camera, pointing in the direction of where the camera is shooting.
- The **fill light** is placed opposite the key light so its beam crosses the key light at about sixty degrees to the left or right. The fill light controls contrast between key-lit and darker unlit areas. This is your secondary source of light, which brightens the shadowy parts of the subject.
- The **back light** is set almost facing the key light, up high and not in direct vision of the camera. The back light separates the subject from the background. The result gives depth to the picture and makes the shot look more three-dimensional.



If you have access to professional lights, then this is the set-up you should replicate for the best results. NB: Some professional lights can get very hot. Take care not to burn yourself by letting them cool down before you pack them away. New LED lights are a much safer option. They are also very powerful and affordable.

If you don't have professional lights, don't worry; here are some suggestions for other lighting solutions you can use:

- Desk lamps or high-powered torches, one or more, can be used as key lights. If you find this light is too harsh, you can soften it by bouncing it off a wall or ceiling.
- You can replace a fill light with a reflector. This works by bouncing light produced by the key light back onto the shadowy side of your subject. Reflectors can be made from a large piece of white paper, a section of polystyrene board, or by gluing foil to a large piece of card. You can buy 5-in-1 folding reflectors inexpensively too.



- If you don't need to create a special lighting effect, you can just film in a room well-lit by an ordinary overhead ceiling light. Use high-powered bulbs and, if their light is too harsh, a lampshade to diffuse and soften the light. Paper lampshades are cheap and work particularly well.

## Activity: Experimenting with lighting effects

The best way to understand how lighting effects work is to create them for yourself.

- Why not have a go at recreating the three light set up? Try removing lights and changing their position in relation to the camera. What works best?
- Can you use lighting to create menace? (Remove the fill light or reflector. Experiment by placing a desk lamp or torch to the far side or below your subject to create stronger shadows.)

## Using natural light

When filming outdoors during the day, you shouldn't need to use electric lights – you will need to think carefully about where and when you film however. It's easier to film in flat light (light from a cloudy sky) than fragmented light, such as low sunlight.

When you are shooting on location, look around and find your main light source – this is likely to be the sun. From which direction is it shining? Position your subject facing the sun but do not face them head on. An angle of about thirty degrees is best. This will give some detail to their features. If there is any unwanted shadow on your subject's face, use a reflector to bounce more light in their direction. (NB: You should never encourage actors to look directly into bright sunlight as this could damage their vision.) The magic (or golden) hour is a period shortly after sunrise or before sunset when daylight is softer. The conditions for filming are much better at these times as the sun is not as high in the sky.





## Reducing unwanted reflections

Whether filming indoors or out, light sources bouncing off shiny surfaces can create problems. To avoid light being reflected off an actor's glasses, do not shine lights into their face; adjust their position until the light reflected in the glasses disappears. Cover any shiny surfaces with tablecloths or curtains and don't film somewhere with lots of mirrors. If you find you have lots of reflections, experiment by raising or lowering the lights to reduce reflections. You can also move your subject into a different position.

In all situations, whatever lighting equipment you are using, getting the best lighting set-up is achieved through a lot of repositioning, trial and error.

The lighting effects discussed here are demonstrated in the Into Film short *How to Light a Film* at <http://bit.ly/HowToLightAFilm>.

