

"A picture is a secret about a secret, the more it tells  
you the less you know."

Diane Arbus

# Photography Tutorials

*by Cornelius Matteo*



**R**ECENTLY I WAS asked to photograph local organic farmers and medical professionals who were supporting a new initiative to prevent GMO seeds from being used in Jackson County, Oregon. The photos are to be used for social media as well as for print and billboards. In terms of quality of image, that pretty much runs the gamut: small Facebook photos all the way up to large billboards. So I needed to make sure that the photos had no noise and were sharp. Since I was shooting them in my studio, I knew I could control the lighting and keep the ISO very low.

### Setting up the Studio

While this may be a more advanced tutorial, if you stick with it, you may pick up some lighting techniques that will come in handy when you are faced with shooting indoors.

My goal was to get clean photos of everyone against a neutral grey background. My backdrop is Thunder Grey, one of my favorite colors, since I can choose to keep it grey or turn it black or even white depending on the lighting setup. For this project, I wanted to keep it grey although shift the hue towards blue a bit to make a nice contrast with the warmer colors of the people standing in front of it. Cool colors like blue make the viewer's eye recede while warmer colors, such as the people's skin (a mixture of red, yellow and even a bit of green) pull the viewer's eye forward.

### The lighting Diagram

This diagram may seem overwhelming, but like anything in life, take a deep breath and take in one section at a time to understand what is happening. So let's deconstruct this lighting setup, one light at a time, and see how each component helps to build the final images.

**A** I USE A Nikon D800 with approximately 110mm lens for portraits. For this setup, I shot at F8 aperture and 1/160th second shutter (since people move, even tiny amounts, which causes blurring, it's important to use a shutter speed number greater than the lens distance). To trigger the lights I used a Pocket Wizard mounted on my camera's hot shoe.

**B** MAIN LIGHT: A large 50" soft box diffuses the light coming from my Qflash Strobe, which also has a Pocket Wizard (PW) attached, and fires when I take a photo. The PW on my camera talks directly to this PW on the light.

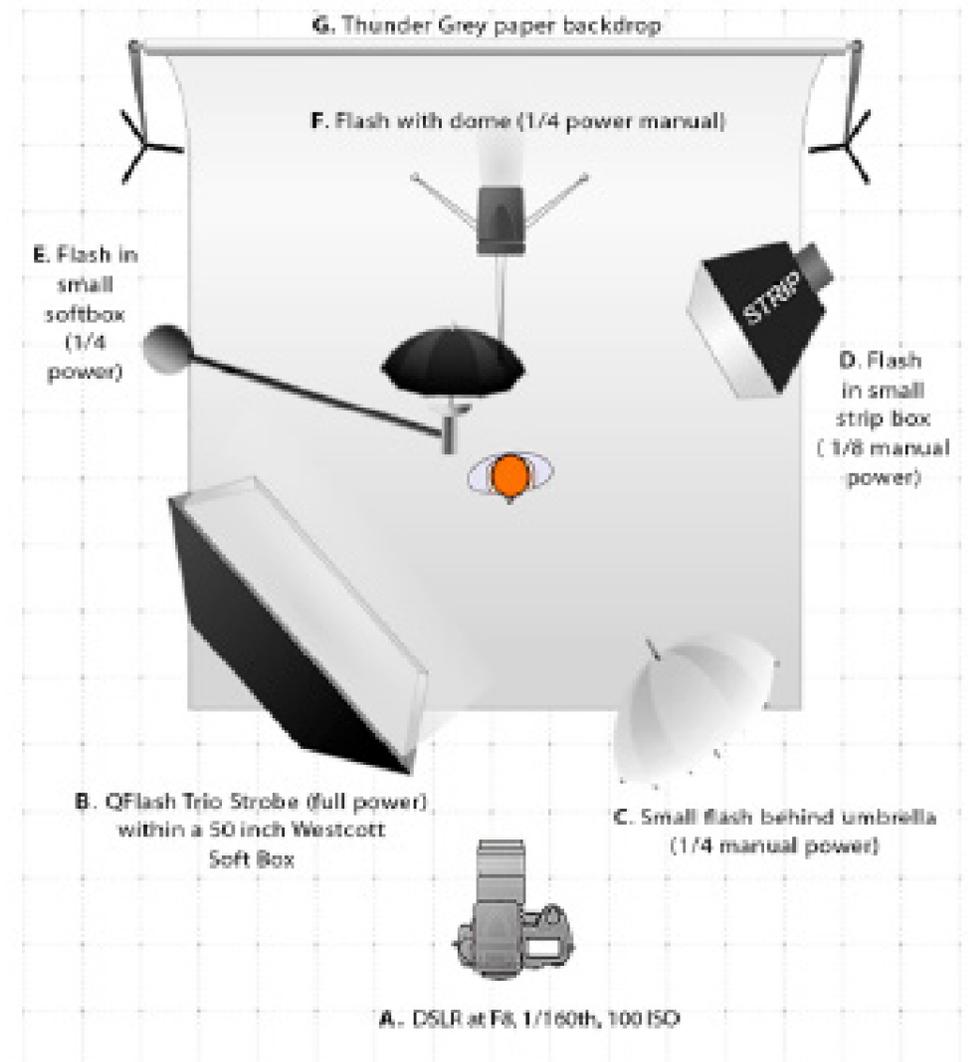
An important rule of thumb: The larger the light source when placed close to the model(s), the softer the light. I like to place this 50" soft box as close as possible. (If you read last month's tutorial, we discussed how the Sun, while a large light source, is far away so that it creates a harsh light. Shooting at midday on a sun-drenched day rarely produces flattering photos.)

This light creates the opposite result of a harsh sunlight: a soft, flattering light wrapping around the models.

**C** FILL LIGHT: A 28" umbrella diffuses the light from this strobe (1/4 power), and serves to fill in any shadows that may not have been lit by the mainlight. Notice that the main light is at full power and this fill light is 1/4 power.

**D** ACCENT LIGHT: A strobe in a small stripbox at low power to the model's left side. This can also be called a sidelight, since it shines from the side with just enough light to kiss the model's hair and shoulder, separating them from the grey background.

## Studio Portrait Lighting



**E** HAIR LIGHT: A strobe in a small soft box, several feet about the model(s) at low power. This light just kisses the top of the model(s) hair and shoulders, separating them from the grey background.

**F** BACKLIGHT: A STROBE at low power, placed directly behind the model(s), that faces the grey backdrop. This creates a spotlight effect behind the model(s), making them stand out even more against the backdrop. (Often I place a blue gel over the strobe so the effect creates a cool, blue hue. See photo 1 and 3 to see results of this effect.)

In summary, this portrait lighting setup uses one strong, main light in a large soft box to create soft lighting on the model(s) faces, who in turn, were surrounded by fill, accent, hair and backlights – all to create a soft, flattering lighting to separate them from the grey background.

I do apologize for the fuzziness of the diagram. I am trying new software and it creates rather small images.



“I believe in equality for everyone, except reporters and photographers”

— Mahatma Gandhi

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