Setting Up Professional Lights

This guide demonstrates how to set up lights appropriately to achieve a high-quality image that requires minimal editing.

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INTRODUCTION

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Proper lighting is the most important element of a photograph. After all, the word "photograph" means "light picture." No professional photo studio is complete without a clean background and proper lighting. Use this guide to select the right lighting equipment and set it up to create outstanding guide images.

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Step 1 — Selecting Light Fixtures



- Proper lighting is key in creating high-quality guide photos. The better your lighting, the less work you have to do in post-processing later on.
- A standard household lamp on a table provides light. However, it is weak, and you cannot adjust which way it points. You need something a little more heavy duty.

Step 2





- A proper photographic light fixture should house three or four individual light bulbs. To reduce harsh glare, each fixture should have a diffuser that slips on over the front of it. The fixture should be adjustable, both in terms of height and light angle.
- To achieve proper lighting, you need to be sure that both your subject and your background are sufficiently lighted. By using four light fixtures, you can place two on either side of the camera and two more along the sides of the table towards the back.

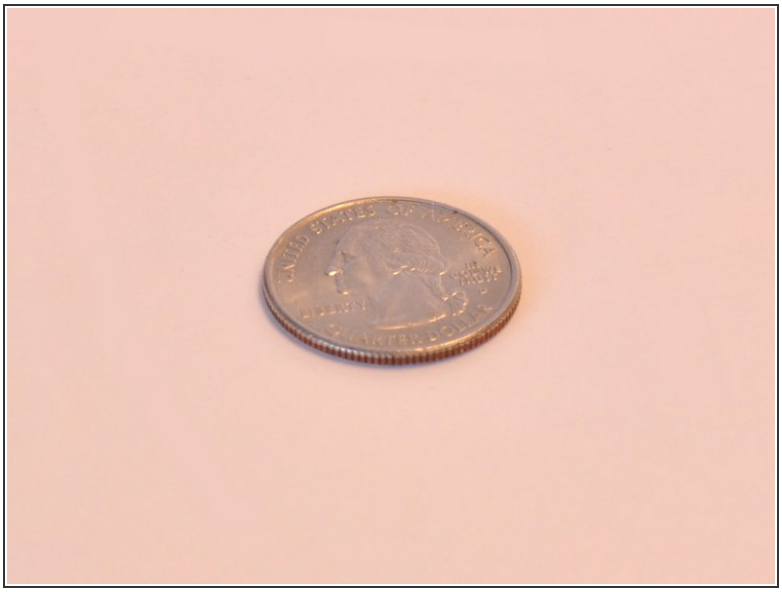
Step 3 — Selecting Light Bulbs



- Selecting the proper light bulbs is just as important as selecting the correct light fixtures.
- Aside from the correct output rating, the most important aspect of your light bulbs to consider is the light temperature, usually stated in thousands of Kelvin (K).
- For guide photos, use 5000K or 5500K "daylight" bulbs for a bright white light.

Step 4





- Before we take a look at correct lighting, let's look at some not-so-good lighting.
- This household lamp has a 2700K "soft white" compact fluorescent (CFL) bulb in it, just like you would use in your home.
- These bulbs create a comfortable atmosphere for watching television or reading a magazine, but they create an orange hue. This creates added work in the post-processing of photos.

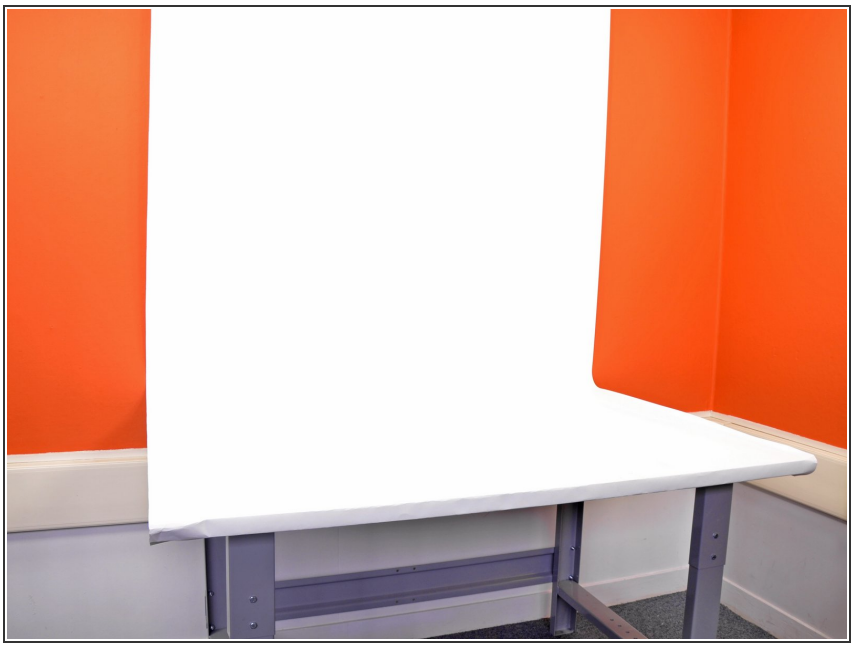
Step 5





- Replacing the weak CFL with a 5000k bulb produces a much brighter and whiter light.
- This light results in a much more effective stock photo, and the lighting reduces the amount of work required in the post-processing of photos.

Step 6



- You do not have to be picky about what kind of table you use, but you should be mindful of the material that you place on top of the table to use as a backdrop.
- A clean white working surface is ideal for taking photos. Colored backgrounds often distract and detract from the photograph's subject. Also, be aware that any colored surfaces around your photo studio may reflect their colors onto your subject.
  - The table shown here has a large roll of white construction paper laid on top of it and taped in place. It does not have to be fancy. It just has to work!
- In addition to covering the table, be sure to cover the surface behind the table. This is important since, in all likelihood, you likely will not be taking every single shot with the camera pointed straight at the table.

Step 7



- And there you have it! You have a professional quality lighting setup. You are ready to start taking great guide photos.
- Light housings vary in quality and price, but they do not have to cost thousands of dollars. These Flashpoint FPCL4K2 units on Amazon or Adorama retail for under $200, and they include two lights, light stands, and eight daylight bulbs.