

FREE
PULLOUT!

Your PhotoPlus guide to... **Home studios**

How to **Master lighting**

Simple step-by-step studio light
setups for taking better portraits

Home studio setup

Learn easy ways to set up your Canon D-SLR for top studio portraits



Investing in an affordable set of home studio flash lights is a great way to take your photography to the next level. The major benefit of using lights is that you're in complete control of your light source and will be able to achieve consistent, high-quality portraits every time – unlike shooting outdoors where you're reliant on unpredictable weather and only really able to shoot during the day. Find out the best ways to set up your camera before you get started...



Manual control

First up, it's best to set your Canon D-SLR to Manual shooting mode. We like to shoot around 1/60-1/100 sec at f/11-f/16, and ISO100. By fixing your exposure you'll obtain consistent results, and around f/11-f/16 you'll be getting best quality and overall sharpness from your lens.

Whiter than white

In order to set your White Balance (WB) so as to ensure accurate whites and consistent image results, use the Custom WB setting to manually set the WB. Take a photo of a grey card, then register the image under the Custom WB setting in your EOS menu.

HOME STUDIO LIGHTING TIP #1

Mid-range zoom lens

For most home studio portraiture, you'll want a good mid-range zoom lens, such as Canon's kit lenses EF-S 17-85mm f/4-5.6 IS USM or 15-85mm f/3.5-5.6 IS USM. We used Canon's L-series EF 24-105mm f/4L IS USM – it's super-sharp with a bit more telephoto reach for tighter crops while maintaining our distance. Always use a lens hood when using studio lights to reduce unwanted light flare.



Use your histograms

Rather than adjusting the aperture and shutter speed on your D-SLR to get a good exposure, when shooting with home studio lights you simply increase or decrease each light's power to get brighter or darker images. It's best to refer to your histogram when reviewing your shots. If the majority of the pixel data on the histogram graph is clumped to the left or clipped off to the left edge, your shots are underexposed. If the majority of the pixel data on the histogram graph is clumped to the right or clipped off to the right edge, your shots are overexposed. Adjust your lights so the majority of the pixel data is in middle, and not clipped off either end of the graph.

TOO DARK



TOO BRIGHT



CORRECTLY EXPOSED



With your Canon D-SLR set to go, you can concentrate on your studio lighting and portrait shots

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Single-light setup

Start off by using one light to warm up your home studio skills

WITHOUT SOFTBOX



WITH SOFTBOX



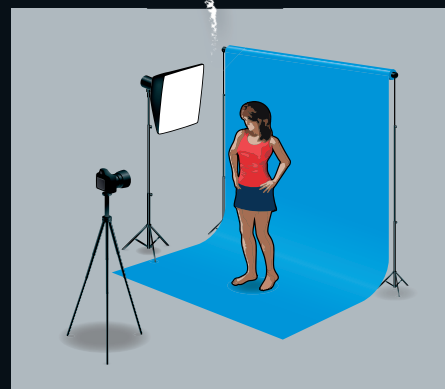
You can still get striking

results by shooting without a softbox, but the light will be more harsh, the shadows stronger, and that may not be complimentary to your subjects. Skin can appear shinier and blemishes more apparent. By adding a softbox (or umbrella) you're increasing the spread of the light by diffusing and softening it, which also softens the shadows. The bigger the light source the better, as it's softer and more flattering for your portrait shots.



Light settings

Experiment and get to know your lighting heads and all their settings, so you know your way around them before you bring people in to photograph. Find out which power settings work well from which distances, and which buttons are for the modelling lamps, to test flashes, and for switching on the 'charge ready' beep that tells you when the flash unit has recycled and the light is ready to fire again.



Wireless triggers

A PC Sync cable, from your Canon camera, can be used to fire lights, but not all EOS D-SLRs have a PC Sync slot (models such as the 1100D, 550D, 600D and 60D make do without). It's also worth remembering that cables can get in the way and become a restriction when shooting portraits. Some studio kits come with wireless triggers, or you can buy a set – you only need one pair as the flash head that the receiver's linked to automatically fires any additional flash heads via their light-sensitive cells. See our Super Test for more on triggers, page 114.

HOME STUDIO LIGHTING TIP #2

Modelling light

Use the secondary modelling lamp light option on your flash head when setting up your shots so you can see how each light is falling onto your subject. You can then reposition and adjust the power before shooting. ►

Single-light options

Experiment with different lighting positions for variety in your results



A lot of different portrait looks can be achieved with a single-light setup. It all depends where you position the light in relation to your subject, as our six examples show...

Learn how your light positions cast shadows for different portrait styles

THREE-QUARTERS LEFT



FULL LEFT



FROM HIGH



THREE-QUARTERS RIGHT



FULL RIGHT



FROM LOWDOWN



HOME STUDIO LIGHTING TIP #3

IS off

Remember to switch off your lens's Image Stabilizer (IS) when using studio lights – you won't need it. Any potential camera shake or subject movement will be overpowered by the speed of the lights firing. It's important to switch IS off when using a tripod, too – the rock-solid setup can actually fool the IS mechanism into producing unwanted camera blur.



HOME STUDIO LIGHTING TIP #4

Focus points

All EOS D-SLRs have multiple AF points to choose from – ranging from 9 to 19 points, depending on which model you own. Use them to ensure you're focusing on the right part of your subject. If you're shooting full-length portraits it's best to focus on the person's head, while the eyes are the place to go for tighter compositions. Making use of different AF points will also help improve your composition.



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Two-light setups

Find out what can be achieved with a pair of flash heads!



Most home studio kits come equipped with two flash heads with diffusers, such as umbrellas or softboxes. Learn how they can create more flattering results...

TWO LIGHTS WITH SOFTBOXES

Here's a simple way to light your subject for a clean and striking portrait

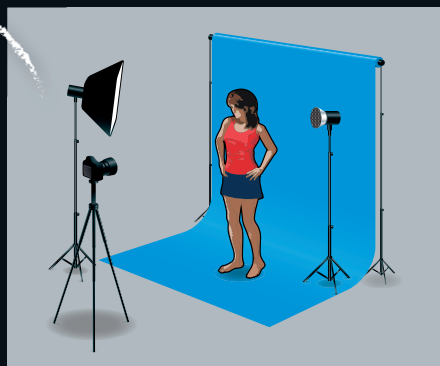


For our studio portrait shot we've positioned one softbox at three-quarters to our model's right, then used a grid on our second head as a back light. It's lighting our model's hair from over her left shoulder – this is also known as a 'hair light', and helps to lift your subjects out from the backdrops by creating an outline.

WITHOUT REFLECTOR



WITH REFLECTOR



Using a reflector

Alternatively, you can also use one light and a full-length reflector or reflective board in your home studio setup. Try positioning one light to your subject's right, and a reflector to their left to bounce light and subtly fill in the shadowy areas.

HOME STUDIO LIGHTING TIP #5

Sensor sensitivity

When shooting big groups or full-length portraits, you may find your lights aren't brighten enough to light them properly – simply increase your ISO (to ISO 200 or 320 should be enough) to lighten up your results.

HOME STUDIO LIGHTING TIP #6

You have the power

If you want to brighten your subjects (whether from one or both sides), simply turn that light's power up by a stop or two on the flash head control – or move the light closer. Conversely, if you wish to darken your subjects, or darken that side of the frame, just turn that light's power down by a stop or two on the flash head control – or move it further away. ▶

Creative lighting

Discover two striking portrait styles when using twin flash heads



Try out our suggestions for two captivating – yet different – portrait styles by using two lights in different ways. For both shots, subjects with strong faces work best, with hair tied back to reveal facial features with your lights.

TWO-GRID SETUP #1



For this dynamic two-light studio portrait we've used honeycomb grids on the flash heads, one light pointing down at our model's face, and one behind her, pointing at the blue backdrop to create a pleasing halo. This approach works well with slicked back hair and minimal clothes for cleaner lines, and the direct eye contact really draws you into this shot.

TWO-GRID SETUP #2



For this powerful portrait style we've again used two lighting heads with grids on, this time positioned either side of our model. In Photoshop, when processing the RAW file in Adobe Camera Raw, we reduced the colour temperature to cool it down, desaturated the image and accentuated the vignette created by the lights, all of which emphasise the moody look.

HOME STUDIO LIGHTING TIP #7

Backdrops choice

When shooting portraits in your home studio, ideally you'll need a paper roll backdrop, plus two stands and telescopic crossbar to hang it on. Choose backdrop width size depending on studio space. Whether you go for simple white or black or opt for a few colours will depend on your budget, but having a choice naturally provides you with more options when capturing your portraits. Remember you can point lights at backdrops to change the strength of their colour and to enhance your compositions.



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Three-light setup

Add a third flash light for professional-level studio portraits



For our three-light setup we used two flash heads with grids, one on each side of our model, then added a light with a softbox to brighten up her face from the front. Beware though – this is a technique best suited to people with good skin as this lighting is pretty unforgiving! However, with the right model, it's a highly effective way to get professional-looking, high-class results.

Introducing a third light into your studio setup puts you in total control of light direction



HOME STUDIO LIGHTING TIP #8

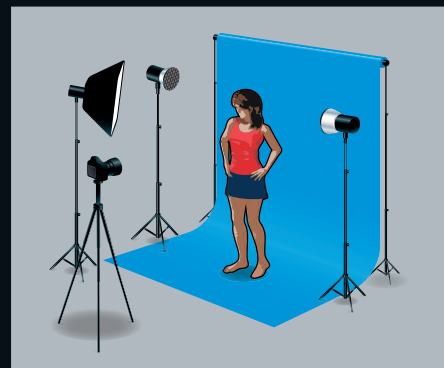
Studio space

You can set up your home studio in any place there's space, such as a spare room or your garage – and we know pros who've converted their sheds. You only need enough room for two lights and a backdrop roll to fit around your model. High ceilings enable you to put softboxes up far enough to light subjects from above, and give you space for backdrops when you want to shoot up from low down.

HOME STUDIO LIGHTING TIP #9

Studio flash speeds

You may only be shooting at 1/60 or 1/160 sec when using studio lights (the maximum flash sync speed your EOS can shoot at will be 1/200 or 1/250 sec), but that doesn't mean movement by your subjects will cause blur. Your flash light duration is far faster, between 1/1000 and 1/3000 sec, which will freeze motion and negate camera-shake – meaning pin-sharp results every time. ►



Four-light setup

Discover the possibilities when shooting with four flash heads



As in our previous three-light setup, we used two flash heads with grids from each side of our model, and a light with a softbox to brighten her face from the front – but now we've added the all-important fourth light with a grid to highlight the backdrop. The halo really helps to lift your subjects from the background and make them stand out.

Position a studio light to brighten up your backdrops for a different look

HOME STUDIO LIGHTING TIP #10

Choosing studio kits

To find out what to look for when shopping around for your home studio flash lights, and for more tips for using them, turn to page 114 and check out our Super Test verdicts on eight home studio lighting kits, starting at just £220. ■

Next issue!

We bring you three easy-to-follow indoor photography projects you can all try from the comfort of your home. Learn all about smoke trails, self-family portraits, and creative macro photo techniques.



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