

Classic Portrait Lighting

3 keys to good portrait lighting

- Light Source
- Light Pattern
- Light Ratio

Light Source

Main (or Key) light ~establishes a lighting pattern with the shadows formed off the nose. Brightest intensity light

Fill light ~establishes a lighting ratio on the face from one side to the other

Background light ~provides depth and gives some tonal variation between the subject and the background

Separation/ Hair light ~gives separation between subjects hair and background. (think of someone with dark hair on a dark background)

Light Pattern

Loop ~most used in traditional portraits. Gives nice curve to cheekbone. Shadow is a small loop to the side & bottom of nose.

Butterfly ~used for glamour portraits. Very good for minimizing facial texture, large nose or narrow face. Shadow is directly under nose in shape of butterfly.

Rembrandt ~dramatic classic lighting. Great for creating mood or masculine lighting. Shadow is to the side of the nose creating a triangle on cheekbone under eye.

Split ~ face half lit with key light, half in shadow.

Rim / Profile ~ backlit so slight outline highlights subject

Light Ratio = Main : Fill

1 : 1 flat lighting ~ no shadows. Flattens facial texture and features. High Key lighting **M** f11 **F** f11

2 : 1 flat to traditional ~ a touch of shadow to show some definition **M** f11 **F** f8

3 : 1 traditional to dramatic ~ nice shadow to show facial curvature. Good for slimming face. **M** f11 **F** f5.6

4 : 1 dramatic ~ also good for hiding facial flaws. Low Key lighting **M** f11 **F** f4

*another technique to figure ratios is **Ratio = Fill + Main : Fill only**. (This just seems like more math)

Lighting Terms

Short lighting -fill light side is more towards camera. Good for fuller face

Broad lighting -main light side is more towards camera. Good for narrow face.

Hard lighting -spectral /smaller light source. More dramatic

Soft lighting -diffused /larger light source. More forgiving