Newsletter
InFocus at DVCC

29th June 2025

Dearne Valley camera club
Learn, Develop, Share, Support

Portraits and the studio

Sometimes the thought of doing a portrait photograph and setting up all the equipment - backdrops, lights and camera settings can be very daunting, let alone talking to and directing a stranger - especially if this is new to you. So in this week's newsletter I've set out some information that will hopefully help you to understand how to set up "studio" equipment to and get the best out out of any portrait photoshoots you do. Sharing this information will enable all to give a hand at setting up the equipment, thus its not always a task undertaken by the small few.

Whilst the information here relates to our kit the concepts are the same regardless of what kit you are using. Often the hardest element is directing your model - but there are plenty of links to "posing" tutorials later in the newsletter.

Setting the stage: The backdrop

The backdrop can of course be anything, it can be a brick wall, it could be a fleece blanket or it could be specially designed backdrops from supplies like Kate backdrops or if you are shooting outdoors it can of course be anything that is behind your model - but take care to ensure that the backdrop does not distract from your subject - and of course: 'No telegraph poles coming out of peoples heads" :) The backdrop can help set your scene, but with use of tools in packages like photoshop you can change the backdrop and add in a new 'digital' backdrop.

Remember, the closer the subject to the background the more likely you are to have the subjects shadow in your shot.

For non-digital backdrops you have lots of choice, pop up backdrops that fold up, cloth (or variations) backdrops, paper rolls or vinyl rolls … With these latter ones, subject to their length, your can create what is referred to as an "infinity curve" which in addition to your backdrop will offer you a 'floor' for your sitter.

We have a very pale grey Kate backdrop which measure 2m x 3m   -its the one on the picture. At first might look this looks like its "lacking in character" but what it does offer - because of its colour - is a backdrop which can be easily selected in in packages like GIMP, Lightroom, Photoshop etc to enable you to change the colour and or replace it with a digital backdrop. Its non reflective and being light in colour makes you think about where you are positioning your lights to avoid (or include) shadows.

Setting the stage: The backdrop stand.

Having determined where you are going to set up your studio the next step is of course "building it".

If you a using a pop up backdrop you might be able to lean it against a wall and not need a stand to hold it. However the other backdrop media do need a stand to support it. The club's backdrop stand has a maximum height 9' 2" and a maximum with of 10 feet. (As a reference point, the ceiling in the small room at Wath rugby club - next to the toilets - is about 9'1" hight)

This links further down the newsletter will show you how to set it up - its not that hard. To create the 10' wide you will need to use all four of the sectional poles (two have holes in them for mounting to the uprights and there are held in place by two wing nuts - (don't loose them !). 10 feet is ever so sightly larger than 3m - the longest length of the backdrop).

This image above shows what we have. The bigger clips hold the backdrop to the cross bar, whereas the smaller clips faster around the uprights with a velcro strap and the crocodile clip fastens to the backdrop cloth to help pull it taut.

Some backdrop stands use a telescopic rather than sectional cross bar.

Hints and Tips:
✹ Put the backdrop on to the cross bar before you extend the cross bar to its full height, there is a pocket along one of the short sides of the Kate backdrop into which you can slot the cross bar. You'll realise why, once you do it the other way round!
✹ Make sure the distance between the uprights at the top is the same as its is at the bottom.
✹ If the backdrop is too long for you then roll it up over the cross bar and keep it in place with the large clamps
✹ To reduce shadows move your subject away from background and direct the light across the set and not directly at the backdrop.

Setting the stage: Dressing the set

Have you thought about dressing the set, with some props - a chair, a table, some artefacts pertinent to what you story you seek to tell in your image -maybe its medals, a cuddly toy, a rugby ball, a book: if your model is sat at a table then dress the table. But like the hints on telegraph poles in backgrounds make sure the objects you have included add to and don't detract form your image.   Sometimes having a prop for the model to play with can put them at ease.
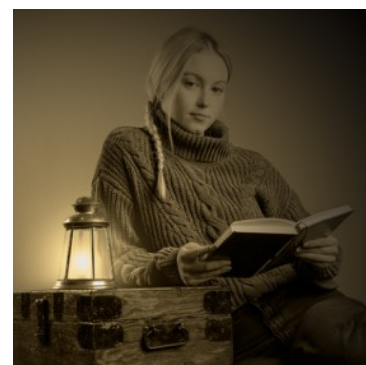
Setting the stage: The lights

At the moment we are discussing using artificial lights - which for the purposes of this newsletter I'll refer to a flash lights.

The club has 4 flash lights (Godox AD 200 pro - pixapro) which are battery powered and 1 continuous light (SL60IID Daylight COB LED Light) which is mains powered.

To activate the flashlights you need a trigger of some sort to sit on your camera - we use a wireless trigger. We have three Godox xt16 universal triggers and 1 Godox x2T C (for canon trigger). The later is for use with canon camera and allows a few more functions not available with the universal trigger. How to set up the triggers can be found in the links further on.

The trigger is a remote control for the light settings and firing the lights. Now, the issue to bear in mind here is that the trigger needs to "speak" to the camera and to the lights and most importantly note that "godox lights talk godox"; "elinchrom lights talk elinchrom" and"neweer lights talk neweer". All of which means a godox trigger will only fire godox lights.

To add to the understanding, some Godox triggers are classed as "universal" in so much as they will "speak" to any camera with a hot shoe that has a centre pin. On some cameras you might have to deactivate the pop up flash to enable you to use the trigger, and on some cameras you can turn on or off the ability to fire a flash unit, and on some mirrorless cameras if you are in 'silent mode' the flash is disabled, and you need to set the 'live view monitor' to disable "show settings in live view".

Setting the stage: The lighting modifiers

The lighting modifiers help shape and diffuse the light - there are a myriad of lighting modifiers but the principles are all the same.

You use the position of the lighting modifier to illuminate and place shadow on your subject. The bigger the modifier the more light that can wrap around your subject, the close the light to your subject the more light falls on your subject and what is called softer light. Twist the light slightly away from the subject and less light falls on them and on the background - experiment to see what happens

If the light is somewhere in front of the model, them light will fall on some part of their face, if the light is behind the model … well you can get some nice effects / silhouettes. Look on the links for more info but first check this out - Lindsay Adler

How to Avoid Shadows on the Background

The handle to the left has a push button to release the handle which is used to lock the tilt angle of the bracket. The screw on the right needs to be opened to allow the bracket to slot onto the light stand, then tightened up.

Here are a few links to help you:

Setting up the soft box	Setting up the bracket to hold the soft box and light	Setting up the backdrop stands (select the video)
setting up the light	Setting up the trigger	Where to position the lights
Shooting portraits, setting up a studio	One light studio set up	Simple light set up
Timeless portraits minimal kit	How to Set-Up a Home Photo Studio on a Budget!	The Easiest One-Light Setup for Professional Headshots
Directing the model	How To Pose People Who Are NOT MODELS	Directing & Posing for Headshots

Setting up the soft box and the bracket: some extra notes
* Assemble it on the floor facing upwards - its a lot easier
* when assembled turn it over and fix the mounting bracket
* twist the bracket clockwise / anticlockwise slightly until it locks
* (to remove it there is a little 'switch' to push to the side on the rear of the bracket)
* Place soft box and its bracket on to the light stand before you put the light in!
  in the video he takes the soft box to the bracket on the light stand - which is easy with a small softbox but not when using a large soft box!
* To change the angle release the locking lever - (push the little button in to let you disengage the lever form the gears to let you rotate the lever to an easier position to move it) When packing up - release the bracket from the stand using the knob on the bracket (not the one on the light stand)
* For help setting up the trigger, see notes on last page of newsletter, but remember the information screen faces you so you can see whats going on.
* Camera settings: ISO 100, shutter speed 125th, aperture f8. To dark try a smaller aperture or increase the power of the light. With the flash turned off, adjust your camera settings to get a totally black photo - now when the flash is on the only light in your photo is that from the flash and that is under your control.
* Try the lights on a power setting of 1/16th power then move up or down accordingly

The power on/off switch

Mode Button:
use this to change from Manual to
TTL to Strobe (Multi)

The chosen Channel - needs to match that on the trigger

1: Long Press to change channel
2: Move wheel left / right to select a channel
Press Set to fix the channel

The Group
To change the group
1: short press the GR/CH button
2: Move Wheel to select
3: Press set to fix

1: The Power setting for that Group.
2: To change the power setting use the wheel button
3: Confirm power by pressing SET

Test fire button

Setting the channel on the trigger
(The trigger is the same as a Godox XT 16)

- To select a Group of lights (which might be one light) you wish to control, move the rotary switch to the group (ABC etc)
- Make sure the light is on the same group
- Adjust power as required <> keys
- If you want a second light in a different group move the rotary dial to that marker (ABC etc), set power accordingly, make sure that light is on same channel and make sure its now on a different group.

- To select a Channel, move the 'dip' switches as shown in the chart below
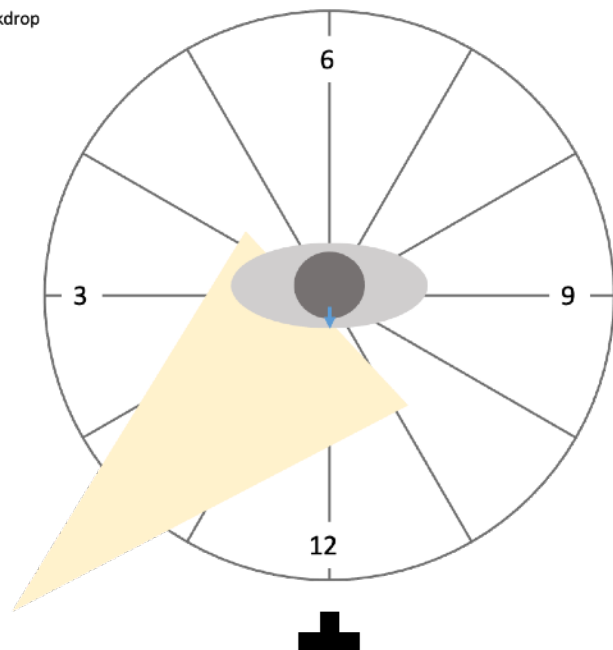- Make sure the light is on the same channel

Flash power down / up

PRO AC/ST-I (Code Switch)								
	CH01	CH02	CH03	CH04	CH05	CH06	CH07	CH08
PRO AC/ST-I (Code Switch)								
	CH09	CH10	CH11	CH12	CH13	CH14	CH15	CH16

Learn: Lighting basics - where to put the light

Part 1. Angle of light

backdrop

We want to illuminate the subject and seek to move the light to add "atmosphere" to the subject by adding light and shadow, so where do we put the lights.
For now we are working with one light.
This simple model is an adaptation of the tutorials from Mark Cleghorrn from the Photography Academy entitled "The Clock and Compass" search YouTube.

He has the clock the right way round, but I think its easier for a model to think of 12 o'clock being straigt ahead. so I've turned it around.

- Imagine the subject is in the middle of a clock face and looking to the camera.
- The photographer / camera is at the subject's 12 o'clock.
- If the light is positioned between 9 and 3 o'clock the light will fall on the subject - the yellow triangle
- If the light is behind the subject (say 4,5,6,7,8 o'clock) the light falls on to the back of the subject. If the light is at 6 o'clock you can create a silhouette or add "rim "lighting.
- Where the light is positioned is determined by what effect you seek

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backdrop
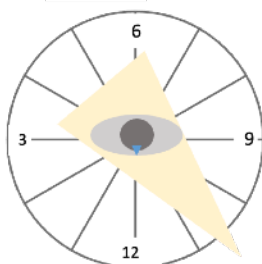
Learn: Lighting basics - where to put the light -
Part 2: Distance from the subject

- The closer the light to the subject the more the light is said to wrap around the subject and create softer shadows - this is often called soft light
- Conversely the further away from the light is from subject the harsher the shadow.
- The closer the light is to the backdrop the more light will fall on to the backdrop - this is referred to as "fall off"
- Off course, you can turn the power of the light up to get more light on the background and conversely turn it down it its too bright for your liking.
- Talking of distances, the closer the subject to the backdrop the more likely you are to have shaddows on the backdrop, and because of depth of field (focus zone back to front - another Learn topic) the more in focus the backdrop will be - creases and all!
- As a set of very very simple *rules of thumb to get you started*
  - put the front of the softbox about an arms length away from the model's face
  - put the middle of the light source in an imaginary line whereby the "clock face" would be on the subject's eye. Draw a line between 10 and 11 or 1 and 2 and the model's eye and put your softbox / light source on that line.
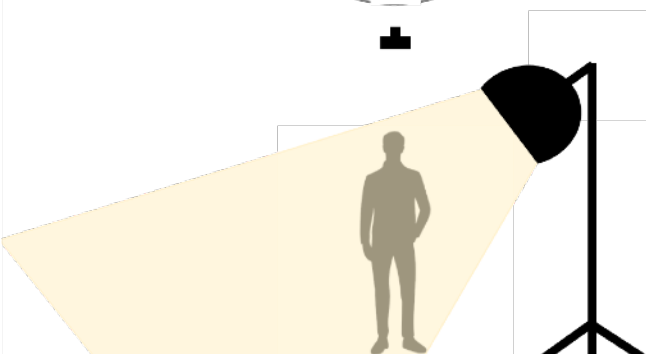
Don't be afraid to move the soft box front really really close the the subject - so close perhaps that its just outside of your frame. The closer the subject to the light the more intense the light that falls on it, conversely the light only travels so far, and the further away the surface the light hits from the source of the light the weaker (darker) the light is.