

Studio Lighting Setup Guide

A beginner-friendly PDF for building repeatable one-light, two-light, white background, and small product lighting setups.

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START HERE

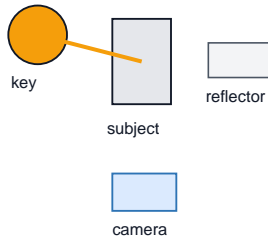
Build the key light first, make a test frame, and change one variable at a time. Add fill, rim, or background lights only after the main light looks right.

1. Beginner lighting vocabulary

Term	What it means	Beginner note
Key light	The main light shaping the subject.	Place this first and judge everything from it.
Fill light	A weaker light or reflector that opens shadows.	Use less fill than key for natural depth.
Rim light	A light behind or beside the subject for separation.	Watch for flare and bright ears or shoulders.
Background light	A light aimed at the backdrop.	Keep it from spilling back onto the subject.
Negative fill	A black flag or V-flat that darkens one side.	Useful when a small room is too bright or flat.

2. Setup recipes

one-light portrait

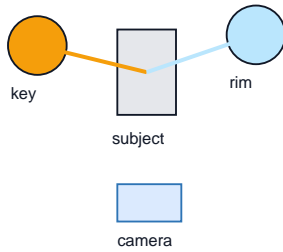


One-light soft portrait

Best for headshots, clean portraits, and first studio practice.

- Key at 45 degrees, slightly above eye level.
- Start around f/5.6, ISO 100, sync speed.
- Move light closer for softer shadows; farther for more contrast.

two-light portrait



Two-light portrait

Best when you need controlled shadows plus subject separation.

- Set key first, then add rim at lower power.
- Aim rim at hair/shoulder, not directly into lens.
- Use flags if the rim light hits the face too strongly.

3. Clean background setups

white background

White background portrait
Best for headshots, simple catalog portraits, and clean team photos.

- Keep subject several feet from the background.
- Background lights are often 1/2 to 1 stop brighter than subject exposure.
- Check edges for spill, haze, and loss of detail.

tabletop product

Small product tabletop
Best for simple product, packaging, detail, and e-commerce practice.

- Use diffusion between light and glossy products.
- Move white cards and black cards to control reflections.
- Lock camera position and keep exposure consistent across the set.

4. Starter ratios and settings

Goal	Starting point	Adjust if needed
Soft portrait	Large modifier close to subject, fill card opposite key.	If flat, reduce fill or add negative fill.
Dramatic portrait	Key at side angle with little or no fill.	If shadows are too deep, add low fill.
White background	Expose subject first, then raise background lights.	If edges glow, lower background power or increase distance.
Product detail	Diffuse key, use cards to shape reflections.	If glare appears, change angle before changing power.

5. Gear checklist

Check	Item
<input type="checkbox"/>	One main light: strobe, speedlight, or continuous light.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Large modifier: softbox, umbrella, diffusion panel, or scrim.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Light stand, sandbag, extension cord, trigger, and spare batteries.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Reflector, white card, black card, V-flat, or foam board.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Gray card or color checker for repeatable color.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Tethering cable, laptop, memory cards, and backup drive if needed.

6. Troubleshooting checklist

Problem	Likely cause	Fix
Harsh shadows	Small or far modifier.	Move the light closer or use a larger modifier.
Flat face	Too much fill or front light.	Reduce fill, move key to the side, or add negative fill.
Background too gray	Backdrop not lit enough.	Add background light or move subject farther away.
Background too hot	Background light spills or overexposes.	Lower power, flag spill, or increase subject distance.
Color mismatch	Mixed light sources.	Turn off ambient light or match color temperature.
Glare on product	Light reflects into lens.	Change light angle, add diffusion, or use black cards.

Related resources: vtpotoworkplace.com/learn/studio-lighting-guide and vtpotoworkplace.com/studio-guides/studio-lighting-equipment-checklist