

# Hands On— Photography

PART 3a



Article and Photos  
by Sue Sykes

## LIGHTING

**In the right light, at the right time, everything is extraordinary. ~Aaron Rose**

Just as “Location, location, location!” is the mantra of real estate agents, “Lighting, lighting, lighting!” is the mantra of professional photographers. They know that the WOW! factor in all of their extraordinary photos comes from the right lighting.

Over the next two issues, we will discuss the various aspects of both natural and artificial lighting, and how to use the different directional formats to your advantage. This issue will deal with natural lighting. Read this article for an overview, and then visit our blog at [www.canadianscrapbooker.ca/handson](http://www.canadianscrapbooker.ca/handson) for monthly detailed tutorials and assignments, with a chance to be entered into a random draw for some super prizes!

Lighting can touch your subject from various directions, but there are three common ones: from the front, when the light source is behind the photographer; from the side, when the light is perpendicular to the subject’s right or left; or from the back, directly behind the subject.

### Front Lighting

While this type of lighting is most commonly used for photos, it may not always produce pleasing results. Front lighting is quite easy to work with and often enhances the colour of an image, but subjects often squint with



Figure 1: Photo by Sue Sykes. (Taken with Nikon D70, 18.0-70.0 mm lens at 18.0 mm, f/3.5, 1/40 sec., no flash)

the light in their eyes and it can create unflattering shadows. It also causes a photo to lose texture and appear flat. In Figure 1, I took the photo while kneeling on the floor in front of patio doors, with my daughter Aili on the bed facing me. Note that, in spite of the overall satisfactory lighting of the subject, the photo lacks depth and perception—resulting from a lack of shadows. This outcome is usually beneficial for architectural photography, since it allows the photographer to capture all of the details, with few or no shadows.

### Side Lighting

Side lighting, on the other hand, is more dramatic and can give the photo three-dimensionality. For this reason, it is often used in many types of photography, including portrait and wedding photos. Consider Figure 2. In this case, I had shifted my position slightly to the right, which made my daughter turn toward me. The light was now striking her face from the side. Note the slight depth caused by the shadows, which resulted from this slight change in position.

Changing my position also eliminated the unsightly glare on the back wall from the patio doors, saving me post-production time.

Side lighting is particularly important in black-and-white photography, since it depends on the contrast between grey tones to render an effective image. Ordinary objects can become fascinating when exposed to side lighting.

### Backlighting

Backlighting can produce some of the most startling results. It is not more widely used because it is a difficult technique to master. By placing the sunlight behind your subject, you minimize any undesirable facial expressions, such as squinting or blinking. However, if you are shooting in Auto mode, your camera may get confused by the amount of light entering your lens (from the background light) and your subject will appear underexposed. If you are hoping to achieve a silhouette, then it's just a matter of metering for the bright background of your photo, as I did in Figure 3. In photographing my subject, I didn't want a complete silhouette. I wanted to capture her content smile, the sun glinting off her wedding rings, and her adorable little "outie" belly button. In this case, I metered for the sunlight streaming in through the windows, then opened my aperture a few f/stops to capture a hint of detail.

If you are hoping to capture detail in your image, but want to avoid using your flash, you can use a reflector to bounce your light source for fill-in light. As I have mentioned before, a reflector does not have to be anything fancy; I use a white piece of foam core. You can also use a white sheet, crumpled aluminum foil, or a metallic windshield sunscreen! Place your reflector near your feet—I usually prop mine up with my camera bag, or place it on a chair—and watch for the reflecting light on your subject's face. To avoid glare, be sure to take extra care when dealing with subjects with glasses or braces.

Another thing to watch for when dealing with backlighting is unsightly lens flares, resulting from strong directional light hitting your lens directly, such as in Figure 4. You can use a lens hood, if provided with your lens. If not, you can use your hand as a

Figure 2: Photo by Sue Sykes. (Taken with Nikon D70, 18.0-70.0 mm lens at 48.0 mm, f/4.5, 1/30 sec., no flash)



Figure 3: Photo by Sue Sykes. (Taken with Nikon D70, 18.0-70.0 mm lens at 44.0 mm, f/4.5, 1/160 sec., no flash)



Figure 4: Photo by Sue Sykes. (Taken with Nikon D70, 18.0-70.0 mm lens at 31.0 mm, f/5, 1/320 sec., no flash)

shield, taking care not to obstruct your view.

Lighting is certainly a major component in photography and I always maintain that the best way to learn is to do, so visit our blog and try out some of our assignments. You'll not only learn something new, but you may just win a prize! Happy clicking! 🌸



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