

Alternative Lighting Project

Table lamps, Christmas tree lights, lasers, flashlights, neon, headlights, streetlights, candle light...



Objective:

To adjust the camera setting to capture quality images in low light situations.

Tips:

Set your ISO speed, put it on a higher speed, such as 800 or 1600. Higher speed means higher sensitivity to light; however, higher speed also means more digital “noise” which can impact the quality of your image by causing graininess. For best results, try bracketing. Take several photos at different ISO speeds in order to choose the image that worked out best. It’s always better to bracket and have a selection to choose from than to find that your one shot came out poorly.

Open up the aperture, which controls the amount of light coming through your lens. Think of it like the pupil of your eye: the more open it is, the more light it is letting in. To change your aperture, set your f-stop on a lower number, such as 2.8 or 4. The lower the f-stop, the larger the aperture, the more light that reaches your image sensor. Again, bracketing will benefit you.

When all else fails, and if your camera offers you the option, change to a lower exposure speed. The exposure speed is the speed at which your camera exposes your digital imaging chip to light. While during a normal, sunlit day, you might take photos at 1/500 of a second, but for low light photography, especially at night, you might want to try to lower it to ½ second, 1 full second, or several seconds. Never attempt to lower your shutter speed below 1/250 without using a tri-pod, or without setting your camera on something steady, or you will end up with a blur. Never use such low exposure sections on subjects that have even the slightest chance of even the most subtle movement, such as humans, or objects that can blow in a breeze. Low exposure should be reserved for stable, inanimate objects; reserve it for capturing something fixed, such as starry night landscapes or lightning storms. Of course, sometimes streaks and blurs are desirable, such as the streaking of car headlights across a bridge.

Ideas:

Skylines & Cityscapes

- Add pizzazz to the clichéd image of a city skyline set against the twilight sky.
- Shoot compelling café and street scenes.
- Use streetlights and storefront lights as your "natural" lighting.
- Learn the best times and weather conditions. (Hint: A cloudy sky can be a GOOD thing. So can rain.)
- Isolate architectural and lighting elements.
- Use people for seasoning.



Light Painting (Illuminating an object with light)

- Investigate the numerous devices you can use for light painting. (Hint: You already have a very expensive light-painting device parked in your driveway and a very cheap one in your kitchen drawer.)
- Use light painting to illuminate everything from mushrooms to waterfalls to your lawn mower.
- Control the color of the light with inexpensive gels.



Light Streaks (Using moving light as the subject)

- Accentuate your compositions with the moving lights from planes, trains, and automobiles (and boats, bicycles, and boomerangs!)
- Be the star of your creations by strapping lights to your body and "writing" your own compositions.
- Create a "light-painting announcement" by shining lights into the camera and spelling out a message.
- Take a trip on the wild side with "drive-by shootings."

