

Get great detail  
in your subjects!

# Portrait Photography

From Snapshots to Great Shots

Learn the best ways  
to compose your  
pictures!

**Erik Valind**

Portrait Photography:  
From  
**Snapshots** to  
**Great Shots**

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**Peachpit  
Press**

## **Portrait Photography: From Snapshots to Great Shots**

Erik Valind

### **Peachpit Press**

www.peachpit.com

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## **Dedication**

To the muse; for when she resides in a person,  
we cannot help but to take up our cameras.

## Acknowledgements

I would like to sincerely thank all of my friends, family, and clients who have sat in front of my lens over the years. A real portrait is more about communication and trust than any combination of camera settings. Thank you for trusting me.

I want to thank the people who inspired me to pursue portrait photography in the beginning and who still inspire me to pick up the camera every day. Thank you, Danielle, for being my first muse, for drawing my gaze from action sports and the ocean to the people who actively pursue life instead. Thank you, Keely, for being my canvas and my mirror as I strove to learn how to shape light. You and so many others radiate beauty inside and out, and I hope that over the years I've managed to catch but a glimmer of that on film.

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Erik Valind  
New York, NY  
February, 2014

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# Introduction

Many photo books that you'll see on the shelf do a great job of delving into specific aspects of photography. Some books cover narrow subjects, like studio portrait lighting, or using only natural daylight. I wrote this book with a goal of combining all of the different pieces that work together to make a great portrait, with any subject, regardless of the lighting conditions. Yes, it was a lofty goal, but I guarantee after reading this book you'll approach your subject, your gear, and your locations differently. With this newfound awareness, you'll be creating incredible portraits in no time.

**Q: What can I expect to learn from this book?**

A: In this book, you'll get a well-rounded guide to taking better portraits—from the technical camera settings and lens selection, to the intangible communication and direction with your subjects, and finally, to specific tools and techniques for conquering a wide range of lighting environments to make people look their best.

**Q: What are the assignments all about?**

A: Don't worry, the assignments aren't meant to feel like high school math homework. Personally, I learn best by doing, so each assignment covers techniques that were discussed in the chapter, and they encourage you to go out and put them into practice as soon as possible. This way you can focus on your subject at the next photoshoot, and not on trying a new tip or technique for the first time. Practice makes perfect. Then make sure to share your results with other readers on the book's Flickr page.

**Q: Should I read the book straight through or can I skip around from chapter to chapter?**

A: Definitely begin with Chapter 1. It is designed to improve your portrait photography skills in a matter of minutes, helping you dial in key camera settings and important tips on composition. After that most of the book is broken up in such a way that each chapter covers a specific scenario or lighting environment. You can skip ahead to a problem that's vexing you at the moment, or more importantly, you can use these chapters as references to reread before future portrait shoots.

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ISO 200 • 1/800 sec. •  
f/2.8 • 70mm lens

# 4

## Working with Natural Light

### **Identify the quality and direction of natural light to capture great shots**

In this chapter, you'll be taking your portraiture outdoors. By understanding the quality and direction of natural light, you can then work to tame or redirect that natural light for better portraits.

Natural light, or more specifically sunlight, is the most plentiful and affordable light source photographers have. That doesn't mean it's always pretty light, though. Before you begin to blindly fight an uphill battle with a very bright opponent, you first need to learn to see light and the different characteristics of light you'll be dealing with. When you're looking at light, there are two specific characteristics you need to see, namely the quality of light and the direction of that light. Once you understand what you're looking at, it becomes very easy to compose your portraits to put your subjects in their best light.

## Poring Over the Picture

The existing sunlight is very harsh and direct, coming in from the side, which causes the quick transition to shadow on the hat.

Using the diffusion fabric on a reflector to filter the direct sunlight creates a much softer light with subtle shadows for the female subject.

Nikon D800 • ISO 80 •  
1/1250 sec. • f/1.4 •  
35mm lens

By taking a behind-the-scenes look at the cover photo, you can see what a difference a simple reflector makes in the final photo. Compare the quality of light on the exposed assistant to the final light on the model's face.



The silver material of a 5-in-1 Reflector can be used to bounce light back into the face for fill and an extra spark in the eyes.

Don't be afraid to ask your subject to get in on the action by helping to hold a reflector.

# Understanding Light

Light is something that you most likely take for granted in your day-to-day lives. But once you pick up a camera, you are literally painting with light, and much like there are many different kinds of paint, light is equally as dynamic. To really understand what's on your palette as a photographer, you need to understand light. To do so, let's look at the different properties of light: its intensity, its quality, and its direction.

## Quality of Light

The quality of light can be described as *hard light* or *soft light*. This is a very important differentiation that you need to make as portrait photographers, because soft light is often the most flattering light for peoples' faces. If you look closely at **Figure 4.1** and then at **Figure 4.2**, it's very easy to see a big difference in the quality of light. But do you know what you're looking at specifically in each image that defines the light as hard or soft? Seeing light is equally about seeing the highlights as it is seeing the shadows. To identify quality of light, you need only look at the *transition* between the two. In Figure 4.1, you see that the light *instantly* falls to shadow, whereas in Figure 4.2 the transition is more gradual, so much so that you can barely see where the highlight ends and the shadow begins. This is extremely soft light and is perfect for flattering a person's face. Hard light on the other hand is not so flattering because that quick transition to shadow will call attention to any wrinkles or blemishes on your subject's face.

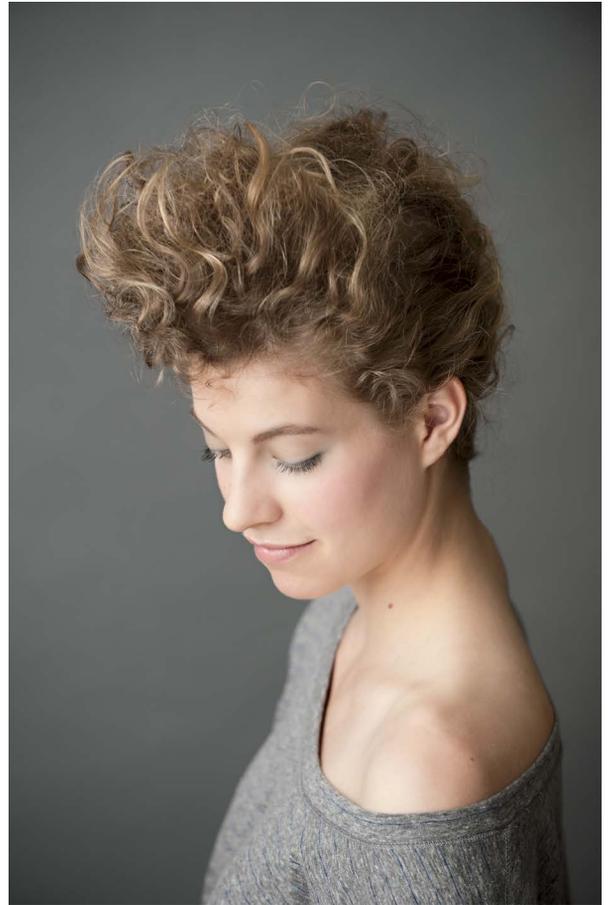
Fortunately, there aren't many rules that you need to follow as photographers, but there are two that you really should take to heart: To get that beautiful soft light, you need to make sure that the light source is as *large* and as *close* to your subject as possible. A large light source spreads light evenly everywhere, washing the subject in illumination. Also, by moving the light source closer to the subject, you increase its relative size to the subject. This *combination* is what produces the great portrait light you saw in Figure 4.2.

When you step outside and assess your light, the sun becomes your light source. You'd think that such a massive ball of fire would produce soft light, right? Well, not exactly, because it only adheres to the first rule, size. The fact that it is 92,960,000 miles away means that in relation to your subject it is actually quite small. This "small" and faraway light source creates very harsh shadows, which is why no one likes to photograph at high noon, because the direct light by itself is horribly hard and unforgiving. But have you noticed on cloudy days that the light is infinitely softer? This is because the clouds become the new light source, with the sun shining through them. Clouds are large and much closer than the bare sun.



**Figure 4.1** A portrait lit with hard light. The highlight-to-shadow transition is instant.

Nikon D800 • ISO 80 • 1/1250 sec. • f/1.4 • 35mm lens



**Figure 4.2** A portrait lit with soft light. The highlight-to-shadow transition is extremely gradual. You can hardly see where the highlights end and the shadows begin.

Nikon D800 • ISO 80 • 1/1250 sec. • f/1.4 • 35mm lens

### Rules for Soft Light

Keep these two lighting rules in mind when you want to create soft light:

- The larger the light source, the softer the light.
- The closer the light source, the softer the light.

Soft light = bigger source + closer to the subject.

## Direction of Light

The second characteristic of light that you need to keep in mind is the direction of light. Depending on where the light is coming from, the amount of shadow on your subject's face can change dramatically. Shadow is necessary to create depth in a portrait, making a person look more three dimensional, but deep shadows don't look good at every angle. In direct sunlight you now know you'll be dealing with very hard light, but even on over-cast days with soft light there is still a direction to the light if you look closely.

Two common directions of light that you'll run into when shooting portraits outdoors are direct overhead sunlight and side lighting in direct sun.

### Overhead light

On days when the sun is shining brightly and directly overhead, you have plenty of light to work with. However, the sun in that position usually produces those dreaded raccoon eye shadows, and under those deep shadows your poor subjects are usually squinting pretty hard. Shooting in direct overhead sunlight is uncomfortable for them and uncomfortable for anyone who has to look at a bad portrait, like the one in **Figure 4.3**. Images like this have scared photographers away from shooting in midday light for ages.

### Side light

Conventional wisdom tells you not to shoot at noon and to just wait until the sun starts its descent. **Figure 4.4** was taken later in the afternoon when the sun was lower in the sky, so I was able to avoid that nasty direct overhead light. But because of the harsh side lighting, now half of the model's face is covered in shadow. On their own, neither direction scenario—direct overhead nor side lighting—will yield a great portrait. For this reason, as portrait photographers, you need to have a few tricks up your sleeve to produce flattering photos no matter which direction the light is coming from, which I'll talk about next.



**Figure 4.3**  
Harsh direct overhead sunlight produces unflattering light and deep eye shadows.

.....  
Nikon D800 •  
ISO 100 • 1/2500 sec. •  
f/2.8 • 85mm lens



**Figure 4.4**  
Direct sunlight coming in from the side produces unflattering light and deep shadows on half of the model's face.

.....  
Nikon D800 •  
ISO 100 • 1/1000 sec. •  
f/2.8 • 85mm lens

## Overcoming Difficult Lighting Scenarios

Now that you know how to identify and analyze the characteristics of light—its quality and direction—let’s explore some common scenarios that you’ll run into when you’re wandering outdoors to take some portraits. Most often you’ll get stuck taking shots in broad daylight, but if you’re lucky, you may have access to some shade. Or, you might be shooting on an overcast day with softer light, which has its own host of challenges.



### General Quick Fixes—No Kit Required

Whether the sun is high in the sky or on its way to sunset, there is a definite direction to the light, and now that you know to look for it you can begin working to overcome it. In either case there are two simple solutions that require no extra equipment at all.

#### Turn your subject into the sun

One simple solution is rather than fighting with the sun, embrace it. When the sun lights only part of your subject’s face, harsh shadows immediately crop up on the opposite side. To get rid of shadows, you simply put *your* back to the sun, which will cause your subject to turn into the light, producing an even wash of light across her face. When the subject is side lit, reducing shadows is simply a matter of turning your subject into the light. When the light is directly overhead, you can eliminate shadows by getting slightly higher than your subject and having the person look up into the light. For elevation, look for existing structures like park benches or low walls. If those aren’t available, bring a lightweight step stool on location with you. **Figure 4.5** shows that by turning the subject’s face slightly upward and completely into the sun there are no shadows.

**Figure 4.5** A portrait shot with the subject facing into the direction of the sun for even lighting on the face and minimal shadows.

Nikon D800 • ISO 100 • 1/2500 sec. • f/2.8 • 85mm lens

## Turn your subject's back to the sun

The second solution for overcoming direct harsh light is equally simple; just turn your *subject's* back to the sun! This will throw the subject's entire face into the shadow. When you readjust your exposure for this type of shot, the result will be even lighting on the face and nice, bright backlighting, which works nicely as both hair light and rim lighting (I'll cover the various types of lighting—key light, hair light, and rim lighting—in Chapters 7 and 8). Notice the difference between the direct side-lighting scenario in **Figure 4.6** and the completely backlit scenario in **Figure 4.7**. Now, there is that heavenly glow and nice lighting on the face that you want!



**Figure 4.6**

The subject is side lit by direct sunlight, causing half of the face to plunge into shadows.

Nikon D800 • ISO 100 •  
1/2500 sec. • f/2.8 •  
85mm lens



**Figure 4.7**

By turning the subject's back to the sun and exposing for her face, you get even lighting and a beautiful glow around her.

Nikon D800 • ISO 100 •  
1/2500 sec. • f/2.8 •  
85mm lens

Aside from the nice lighting that a backlit scenario offers, your subjects are not looking directly into the sun anymore, which makes this approach preferable to directing your subjects into the light, because it is much easier on your subjects' eyes. The easiest solutions are usually the best ones, and by just keeping these strategies in mind on your next shoot you'll have nice even lighting on your subject's face. And your subject will thank you too! It's tough to force a smile through squinting watery eyes as you're grimacing into the sun.

### Use Spot Metering

Remember to use spot metering in high-contrast lighting situations where there's a large exposure difference between your subject and the background. This is to ensure that your camera properly exposes for the subjects and doesn't turn them into silhouettes against the bright backlighting. Refer to Chapter 2 for a refresher on metering modes.

## Direct Sunlight—No Shade

All summer long you hope for bright sunny days. The only problem is you can't really adjust the direction of the sun at will. This is the reason you should direct your subject to change the position of her face instead. With direction taken care of, you're still left with a poor quality of light, as you saw in Figures 4.3 and 4.4. One option is to avoid the direct sunlight altogether by finding shade, which I'll discuss shortly. If shade is not available, you can use some affordable tools to tame that direct sunlight by creating your own shade or reflecting light back into the shadows. A versatile tool that allows you to do both is a 5-in-1 Reflector. It has multiple reflective surfaces to bounce light, and it also breaks down to a frame with diffusion material that you can use to filter light.

### 5-in-1 Reflector Surfaces

These five surfaces allow you to diffuse or reflect light quickly, easily, and affordably:

- **White.** Reflective surface for soft fill light
- **Silver.** Reflective surface with higher output and more direct light
- **Gold.** Reflective surface similar to silver but also warms the light temperature
- **Black.** Used to completely block light or build contrast through subtractive lighting
- **Translucent.** Used to diffuse light, much like the front of a softbox does

## Filling in backlight with a reflector

Starting with the nasty light in Figure 4.3 you can easily establish the foundations of a well-lit portrait by again simply turning the subject's back to the sun, like I did in **Figures 4.8** and **4.9**. This approach works for headshots and full body shots too! Simply turning your subject away from the sun not only removes the bad shadows, it removes *all* of the defining shadows on her face.



**Figure 4.8 (above)** By turning the subject's back to the sun and exposing for her face, you get beautiful even lighting and a nice rim of light around her head.

Nikon D800 • ISO 100 • 1/640 sec. •  
f/2.0 • 85mm lens



**Figure 4.9 (right)** By turning the subject's back to the sun and exposing for the shadowed side, you get beautiful even lighting from head to toe.

Nikon D800 • ISO 100 • 1/1600 sec. •  
f/1.4 • 85mm lens

Here's why I recommend taking it a step further and where a reflector with a high-output silver surface comes in handy: **Figure 4.10** shows my assistant holding a reflector up high to catch that direct sunlight to bounce it back into the subject's face. The result is the final shot in **Figure 4.11** with great backlighting, an evenly lit and exposed subject, and a kiss of light on the model's face to illuminate it and lend some sculpting shadow that I can now control.



**Figure 4.10 (above)** My assistant uses a high-output silver reflector to bounce light into the model's face.

Nikon D800 • ISO 100 • 1/1600 sec. • f/1.4 • 85mm lens

**Figure 4.11 (right)** The bounce light from the silver reflector adds controlled highlights and shadow to the model's face, while the direct sunlight backlights her hair and body.

ISO 100 • 1/1600 sec. • f/1.4 • 85mm lens



## Using a Bounce Reflector

When you're using a bounce reflector, keep in mind the direction of the light that you cast, just as you would when analyzing the sun's light. By reflecting the light from above the subject's eye line, the light appears natural. If you hold the reflector below the subject's eye line and bounce light up, you'll create odd and unflattering shadows. The sun shines down, so your reflected sunlight should too.

### Diffusing side light with a reflector

To change the hard light in Figure 4.4 into a soft pleasing light, you would need to enlarge the light source and bring it closer to the subject. Obviously, you still can't move the sun, but if you put something between the sun and your subject, you can get the same effect, which is a lot like a cloud softening the sun on an overcast day. Instead of a cloud, you simply need some sort of diffusion material. In **Figure 4.12**, the reflector is placed between the sun and the subject, and is brought in as close as possible. The results are easy to see in **Figure 4.13**. The highlight-to-shadow transition is very smooth, producing a much softer quality of light, and the model is squinting less too.



**Figure 4.12 (above)** Placing the diffusion panel of the reflector between the sun and the subject acts like a cloud by enlarging the light source and allowing it to be brought in close to the subject for softer light.

Nikon D800 • ISO 100 • 1/1250 sec. • f/2.8 • 85mm lens



**Figure 4.13 (left)** A beautifully soft, side-lit portrait is created by using the diffusion panel of a reflector to modify the sunlight.

Nikon D800 • ISO 100 • 1/500 sec. • f/2.8 • 85mm lens

## Working with Shade

Shade is your friend. It protects you from the heat and unsightly camera strap tan lines. It also offers a variety of photographic opportunities without needing to hold a big diffusion panel or reflector overhead. However, not all shade is created equal, and some shaded areas offer up natural reflectors to really make your images sing. Let's run through a few opportunities you'll have when you have shade on hand.

### Covered shade

One flavor of shade is covered shade. This is the kind of shade that you should first look for because it's the most obvious. Covered shade is created by something overhead, like an overhang or thick tree branches. Not only is covered shade easy to identify, it's also easier to anticipate what the light underneath will look like. Because the overhead covering blocks all the light from that direction, you know that the only place left for it to sneak in is from the side. **Figure 4.14** is a great example of thick overhead tree branches creating covered shade. If you look at the direction of the highlights to shadows on the subject's face, you'll see the soft side lighting.

**Figure 4.14**

**Example of covered shade. The trees overhead block the harsh direct light, so now light is bouncing in from the side with a much softer quality and pleasing direction.**

.....  
Fuji X100s • ISO 400 •  
1/600 sec. • f/2.0 •  
35mm lens



If you wanted less shadow, all you have to do is turn your subject's face out toward where the overhang ends. In **Figure 4.15**, I did just that. The model was standing under a small overhang blocking the sun from coming straight down and forcing it to bend and bounce in from the side. Only this time rather than shooting from the side, I stood looking directly at the shaded area with the light washing in from my direction, which created a soft, flat-looking light.



**Figure 4.15**  
Another example  
of covered shade;  
this time the model  
is facing out from  
under the shade into  
the sunlight for an  
even wash of light  
on her face.

.....  
Nikon D800 • ISO  
100 • 1/1250 sec. •  
f/2.8 • 85mm lens

## Open shade

Open shade is often overlooked and incredibly plentiful in urban areas. Open shade is cast by something like a tall building but has nothing directly overhead and still casts a long shadow. In **Figure 4.16**, the subject is standing in the sun right next to a large area of open shade.

**Figure 4.16**

You can see the model standing just outside of a patch of open shade cast by a nearby building.

Nikon D800 •  
ISO 500 • 1/250 sec. •  
f/16 • 35mm lens



In **Figure 4.17**, you again see how bad direct sunlight is without finessing it a bit. But after asking the model to take a few steps forward into the open shade, the result is a much better quality of light on her face, although it is underexposed in the next shot in **Figure 4.18**.



**Figure 4.17**  
A close-up portrait of the harsh light and shadow cast by direct light without using the nearby shade.

Nikon D800 •  
ISO 100 • 1/4000 sec. •  
f/2.8 • 85mm lens



**Figure 4.18**  
By having the model step forward into the open shade the quality of light greatly improves, although the intensity or brightness has decreased and left the photo underexposed.

Nikon D800 •  
ISO 100 • 1/6400 sec. •  
f/2.8 • 85mm lens

If you're using Manual mode on your camera, all you need to do is slow down your shutter speed to allow more light into the exposure. If you're more comfortable in Aperture Priority mode, just make sure you spot meter on the subject's face and your very next shot will look like **Figure 4.19**. It's pretty incredible how a little open shade makes such a big difference on your portraits.



**Figure 4.19** Here is a properly exposed, beautiful portrait using just open shade. You can achieve the right exposure by slowing down the shutter speed in Manual mode or by using Aperture Priority mode and spot metering for the model's face.

---

Nikon D800 • ISO 100 • 1/1000 sec. • f/2.8 • 85mm lens

## Open shade + natural reflectors

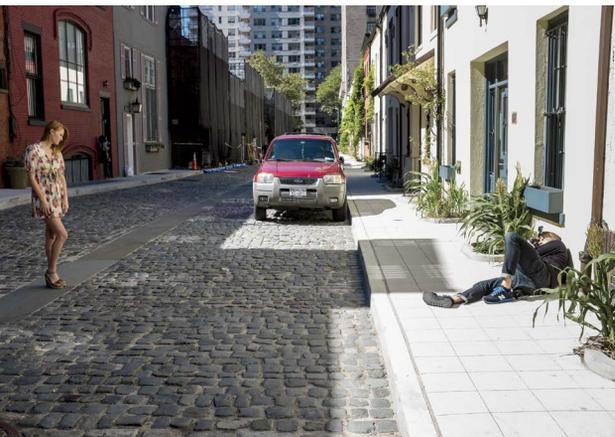
Look at the background of the photo in Figure 4.19 again. It's pretty bright, right? This should set off some MacGyver-style bells in a photographer's mind. If the background is that bright, then that wall back there must be bouncing a serious amount of light, which makes it one massive natural reflector! Rather than shooting into the bright light source, for my next shot, I walked around and placed the bright wall at my back, capturing **Figure 4.20**. With the wall directly at my back, all of the bounced light was coming from the same direction as my camera was aiming. This on-camera axis direction is what creates such shadowless beauty lighting.



**Figure 4.20** The subject is still standing in open shade, but now I used the bright wall behind me as a natural reflector to bounce the direct sunlight back onto the model.

Nikon D800 • ISO 100 • 1/250 sec. • f/2.8 • 85mm lens

The combination of open shade and a *huge* natural reflector, the bright wall, can be easily seen in **Figure 4.21**. With the big wall now effectively becoming my main light source, I was working with a light source bigger than anything I've ever seen available in a commercial photo studio, and it was free, just waiting for me on the street. With such a massive size (it was bouncing back two stories' worth of light) it's easy to get full-length portraits, like the one in **Figure 4.22**, as well as full group photos if everyone faces the wall.



**Figure 4.21 (above)** A behind-the-scenes view of the model standing in open shade while being illuminated by the light bouncing off the bright wall being used as a natural reflector.

Fuji X100s • ISO 400 • 1/250 sec. • f/4.5 • 35mm lens

**Figure 4.22 (right)** Using a giant natural reflector like a wall is a great way to evenly light full-body portraits like this, or even whole groups of people.

Nikon D800 • ISO 200 • 1/2500 sec. • f/2.2 • 85mm lens



To add a little more depth and shadow to the next photo, I walked away from the wall and shot parallel to it. This produced the same effect as moving a studio softbox from behind me and over about 45 degrees to the side of the model. The result shown in **Figure 4.23** is a beautiful portrait with classical lighting patterns and extremely soft light.



**Figure 4.23** A portrait with classical, soft portrait lighting and shadow on the model's face was created by turning her so that the wall bounced light in from the side like a giant studio softbox.

Nikon D800 • ISO 200 • 1/2500 sec. •  
f/2.2 • 85mm lens

If you really want to get fancy, you can just place half of the model's body in the open shade, lighting her face with the natural wall bounce and letting the sun act as a hair light, as in **Figure 4.24**.



**Figure 4.24** A model standing partially in open shade to allow the direct sunlight to accent her hair, while leaving the rest of her face in even shadow to then be filled by light from the wall being bounced back as a natural reflector.

---

Nikon D800 • ISO 100 • 1/2500 sec. • f/1.4 • 85mm lens

## Diffused Sunlight—Overcast Days

Overcast days are great for portrait photographers! The low cloud cover diffuses that hard sunlight like a giant overhead softbox. This cuts down the contrast on everything underneath the cloud cover, landscape and portrait subject alike. Some photographers run outdoors on a cloudy day and just start firing away, thinking the light is just right no matter which way they point their cameras. Although the *quality* of light is much softer on cloudy days, the *direction* of light still needs to be taken into account.

### Side light

Side lighting on an overcast day is *much* less severe than you saw in the sunny examples. Because the clouds soften the light for you, you usually don't need to break out the diffusion panels or reflectors. However, you do have to take notice of the more subtle, but still present, direction of the light.

In **Figure 4.25**, the model was freely posing on an overcast day in the afternoon with the sun setting to the side. Not knowing what to look for in the light, she turned her face into the shadow. I noticed this and directed her to face the other way.



**Figure 4.25**  
The model incorrectly turns her face into the shadow.  
.....  
Nikon D800 •  
ISO 80 • 1/1250 sec. •  
f/1.4 • 35mm lens

In the very next shot (**Figure 4.26**), it looked like someone had aimed a big, beautiful soft-box at her face. To add a final bit of icing to the image, I held a silver reflector below her face. With no direct light hitting the reflector, it didn't bounce much light back, but it did create that catchlight in the bottom of the eye. That catchlight sparks the eyes and brings them to life (**Figure 4.27**).



**Figure 4.26** By giving the model proper direction, she is now turned into the beautifully soft overcast light for a nice portrait.

---

Nikon D800 • ISO 80 • 1/1250 sec. • f/1.4 • 35mm lens



**Figure 4.27** On overcast days there isn't much spark to the subject's eyes. By adding a silver reflector slightly below her face, the reflection creates a catchlight and brings the eyes to life.

Nikon D800 • ISO 80 • 1/1250 sec. • f/1.4 • 35mm lens

## Overhead light

As mentioned earlier, most photographers are hesitant to shoot at high noon on a clear day, but when the clouds come out, everyone grabs their camera to go play! Whether the light is diffused or not, when it's directly overhead, the shadows cast by the subject's eyebrows still go straight down and create that unflattering raccoon-eyed look. To avoid this problem, your subjects just need to turn up their faces into the light. While it may occasionally be too bright to have them do this on a sunny day, it's no trouble at all under overcast conditions. As the photographer, find a way to elevate yourself to shoot down on them, so every photo isn't looking directly up their upturned noses. In **Figure 4.28** (on the following page), I simply had the model sit down and then look up at the camera with the cloudy skies behind me, evenly illuminating her face. To get that elevated position, find something safe to stand on or bring a small step stool to the shoot.

Once you understand the quality and direction of light, you'll be able to assess any outdoor lighting condition. Then, with the techniques I covered in this chapter and some simple tools, you and your subject can conquer natural light to produce amazing portraits in all kinds of weather and at any time of day.



**Figure 4.28**  
By standing above the model, I was able to shoot down on her while she raised her face up into the overhead cloudy light. This negated any shadows while softly and evenly illuminating her face.

.....  
Nikon D800 •  
ISO 400 • 1/160 sec. •  
f/2.8 • 120mm lens

# Chapter 4 Assignments

## Analyzing hard versus soft light

Make a game of analyzing the light you see on an everyday basis. Determine if it is hard light or soft light. Then take note of the light source's size and distance from the people it's illuminating. With a little practice you'll be able to identify different qualities of light automatically.

## Exposing for high-contrast lighting

Work with your different camera modes to properly expose a person who is heavily backlit. Turning your subject's back to the sun is an easy way to get even lighting but is difficult for your camera to calculate. Set your camera to Spot Meter, and then place the spot sensor on your subject's face to get a proper meter reading.

## Working with a silver reflector

Practice working with a silver reflector on your own. On a sunny day use a silver reflector to paint light onto a wall. Hold the reflector up high and use the bottom edge of the reflector to aim the light. Now practice doing this at different distances from the wall. Bouncing light is just like practicing your bank shot on a pool table.

*Share your results with the book's Flickr group!*

*Join the group here: [flickr.com/groups/portraitsfromsnapshotstogreatshots](https://www.flickr.com/groups/portraitsfromsnapshotstogreatshots)*

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