

Demonstration of Outdoor Portraiture with Strobe

*by Jim DeLuco
August 2008*

The purpose of this seminar is to demonstrate the benefits and effects of strobe in an outdoor portrait setting.

Setup and Scene Selection:

Whenever possible I shoot in the direction of the sun, when the sun is lower in the sky. This is done in order to avoid unwanted sunlight on the subjects faces, maintain control over the lighting patterns, and also to use the sun as an accent on the subjects backs and hair. I shoot when the sun is lower in the sky because the light gets much softer and easier to control. I am mostly shooting in the shadows with a tripod because of the slow shutter speeds I tend to use.

I select my scene (background) in order to enhance the portrait. Placement of the subject in the scene is also very important, such that you may want to use the background to frame the subject and to avoid distracting elements coming out of the subjects' head.

Clothing:

I ask my clients to wear long sleeves, earth tones and for people who are concerned about looking heavy, I recommend that they wear casual clothes and dark slacks or jeans. In this demonstration, Jennifer wore stripes and a skirt. This is because I did not instruct her...not her fault, but mine. For the most part, this demonstration is about lighting and not the full range of other portraiture elements. However, I thought that clothing was worth mentioning.

Equipment:

For the purpose of this demonstration, and because most people in camera club have a camera strobe, we are using camera strobe to start out...then we are adding a relatively inexpensive diffuser, called a brolly softbox. I am also using a tripod, the reasoning for which should be apparent as we go through the demonstration. A set of Pocket Wizard radio slaves fire the strobes. There are less expensive slaves available and some of your camera's include infrared slave features that you can use to fire your matched strobes. I've included an image of the digital target that I use to set the exposure and the white balance. There will be a full reference later in the document for equipment and where to buy it.



*Demonstration of
Outdoor Portraiture with Strobe*

*by Jim DeLuco
August 2008*

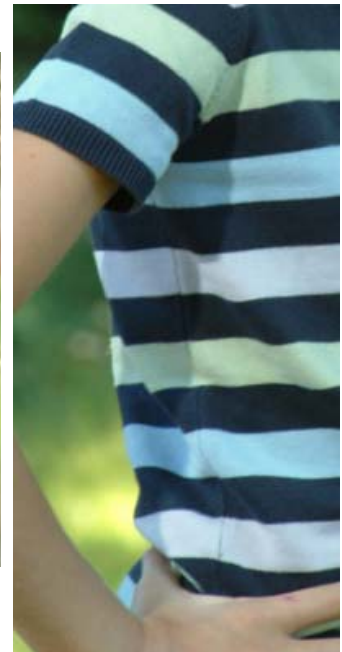
Camera Settings:

Take a reading of the background and set your camera about one stop darker. If the background is F4 at 1/20th set your camera to F5.6 at 1/20th. Set your camera strobe on the light stand to provide an attractive lighting pattern (classical) and set your strobe on Manual to provide F4 to the subject. This will give you f5.6 on the highlight and f4 in the shadows, assuming that your subject is in the same light as your background. Set your camera to F5.6 at 1/20th. Now your highlights should be properly exposed and your shadows and background should be about one stop under exposed. You can use a digital target to set your exposure, or a grey card, or an 18% grey portion of the subject's clothing. You can also use a lighter or darker portion of the subject's clothing, as long as you compensate appropriately. Use your histogram to confirm the settings. You can also use the same method to set a custom white balance setting. If you prefer, you should be able to set your white balance to the daylight setting. Since you are using strobe, this will get your skin tones very close.

Lighting Pattern:

A short lighting pattern is generally considered pleasing. This would produce light coming into the side of the face that is facing away from the camera.

The following image and it's crops demonstrate a feminine pose with the subject leaning to her left and turning her head to her right, back into the light. This is approximately a 2-1 lighting pattern produced by the strobe. Note the small loop under her nose and the shadow line under her chin and under her arm in the closeup. Because the strobe lighting source is relatively small, it produces hard transition lines from highlight to shadow. This is why you should try to balance the strobe with ambient light.



*Demonstration of
Outdoor Portraiture with Strobe*

*by Jim DeLuco
August 2008*



This image was captured with the same settings of F5.6 1/20th second at 400 ISO. I moved the light into a fill flash position, on the right almost in line with the camera. This maintains the same lighting pattern as the ambient light, however you can still see the harsh shadow under her chin from the fill.

While this lighting pattern is a bit more "flat", there is still some attractive shadow detail in the face. The ambient light was providing a small lighting ratio...probably about 2 to 1. The fill only provided a bit more light across the whole face which decreased the lighting ratio to about 1.5 to 1.



Now with the same settings, I move the strobe over to the right and add to the already existing ambient lighting pattern. This is now approximately a 3-1 lighting ratio. You can see the deeper shadows and again the sharp transition of from highlight to shadow

*Demonstration of
Outdoor Portraiture with Strobe*

*by Jim DeLuco
August 2008*



Now I've installed the brolly softbox over the camera strobe. This increases the size of the light source dramatically and therefore the softness of the light, as indicated by the soft transition from highlight to shadow...even though we have the same camera settings, F4 at 1/20th.



Now I've moved the light in closer to Jennifer and changed the aperture to F8 while keeping the shutter speed at 1/20th. This has the effect of increasing the lighting ratio even more and the shadows get deeper as does the background. However the transition lines from highlight to shadow remain soft, as noted under Jennifer's chin and nose.

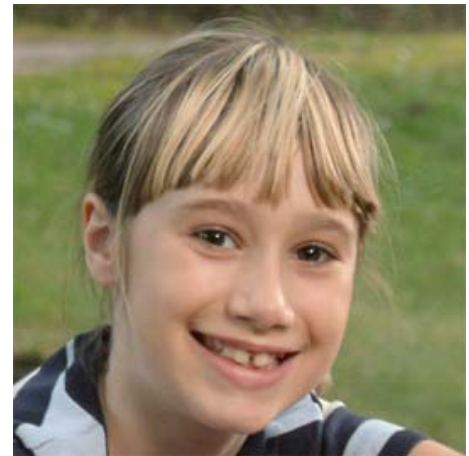
*Demonstration of
Outdoor Portraiture with Strobe*

*by Jim DeLuco
August 2008*

We again turn off the strobe. We change the settings to F5.6 1/10th and kick in a bit of light from below with a reflector. Even with the reflector we can see the eye sockets starting to go a bit dark.



Now we remove the reflector and introduce the broolly softbox again to put more light into the face and create a pleasing lighting pattern. Settings are now F5.6 at 1/15th. Again, because of the large light source, the transitions are relatively soft.



*Demonstration of
Outdoor Portraiture with Strobe*

*by Jim DeLuco
August 2008*

Equipment Sources:

Radio Slaves: Try www.Alienbees.com for their new radio slaves. The cost is about half the Pocket Wizards (\$160). Pocket Wizards can be found at www.pocketwizard.com

Brolly Softbox: Again, www.Alienbees.com has some very reasonably priced softboxes...especially the Brolly softbox. You can also try amazon.com for umbrella softboxes at very reasonable prices.

Brackets and Accessories: Try B&H Photo and Video at <http://www.bhphotovideo.com> as they have the most extensive selection of umbrella light stand brackets, light stands, hot shoes, cold shoes, cables, tripods, heads, etc.

Digital Calibration Target: I purchased mine from Ed Pierce at a seminar, however you can purchase this at his web site at Photovision at <http://www.photovisionvideo.com/store>
There are several versions of this out there by different people.