

INTRODUCTION TO



EXTERNAL FLASH

Tip #1: Do NOT blast it directly into your face!

Using Off-Camera Flash

There are a ton of things you can do with external flashes. I'm only going to go show a couple of applications (the basics) so you can get an understanding on why using them can make a huge difference in your photos.

Why use an off-camera flash when you could simply use the on-camera pop-up flash that already comes with your DSLR? The reason is simply because on-camera flashes looks horrible in 95% of all circumstances. Here's why:

The on camera flash is a very small light source, meaning that the light will look very harsh on the subject you are photographing (whether it be a person or object) and will create annoying harsh shadows. The on camera flash is too bright in most circumstances and looks completely unprofessional. The on camera flash points *directly* at the subject you are photographing, which looks ugly and amateurish.

The *external* flash, however, cranks up the quality a few hundred notches. First of all, the light is not coming directly from the camera, but rather at an angle. This makes things look more natural and enables you to direct the shadows how you want them.

Second of all, you can point the external flash to the ceiling or the wall, and the light will bounce off that surface and then hit your subject. This makes it so that the light is very soft and diffused, meaning that the harsh shadows will be completely eliminated, making your subject much more flattering!

Third, you can put use large diffusion material over your external flash, weather it be outside or inside, and it will get rid of the harsh shadows. Doing these things will definitely get your photos looking much more pro.

You can use brand new flashes if you want to, but I like the simple ones with old school manual controls (as do many others). The reason why is that it gives *you* the control of how much or how little light you want to add to a subject, and really isn't difficult to understand in a short period of time. Personally, I find that the using a camera or a flash on automatic mode is more complicated than manual.



Pop-up Flash



External Flash

Using External Flashes Indoors

Using an external flash is just as useful indoors too. Usually the light that is available indoors is simply not bright enough to take a high quality photo. You would have to increase your shutter speed or ISO, and that would in turn would cause motion blur or noise; not good.

Using an external flash unit will fix that problem by giving you lots of light, plus a prettier light.



This is a super quick example to demonstrate the power of using flash. In the first photograph, I was holding the camera in my right hand with the flash in my left. The flash was pointing towards the wall.

In the second photo, I was holding the flash out in front of me just like in the first one, only this time it was directed toward the ceiling. Normally results would be better because if you were photographing a model or object, you would be able to be further away from the subject. In this case however, I was both the model and also the photographer, so the light source had to be pretty close to me.

The third photo is obviously horrendous. Look how ugly it makes people look! It's not just me, the light is harsh and direct! Yuck!



This shot could have been taken indoors or outdoors, it doesn't really matter. This photograph was taken with a simple Nikon SB-24 external flash. The brightness level was set to 1/16th power, which isn't that bright. The flash was placed below the model's face and was shot through an umbrella.

EXIF:

Exposure 0.005 sec (1/200)

Aperture f/2.8

Focal Length 50 mm

ISO Speed 100

Why External Flashes Make Your Photos Look Awesome Outside

When you use an external flash outside, you will be able to get both your subject and background exposed correctly.

In this photograph, there was a bare flash high above the right of the camera (you can tell by looking at the shadows on his inner shirt and neck). The photographer first adjusted the settings on his camera to take a photo of the background correctly exposed, then he simply closed the aperture a few stops to make the background darker. After that, he adjusted his flash power so that it would illuminate his subject properly.

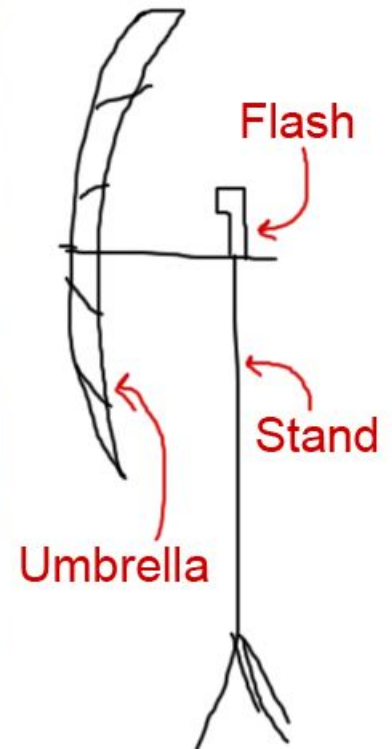
Why make the background darker than what your meter says? Because it looks great! It makes the model pop and also makes it so the highlights in the clouds are actually visible and not blown out white. This shot **WOULD NOT** be possible without an external flash. It would look very different and wouldn't look *nearly* as cool.



1 flash on the right (tripod held)



Reflector



This time the photographer decided to expose for the land and not the sky (as you can see, the sky is blown out white, while the land is pretty much properly exposed). After he got the background looking properly exposed, all he did was throw in a flash somewhat to the right side and adjusted the power until it looked good.

See the little bit of light on the left (his right) side of his forehead? That little bit of light was caused by a [reflector](#) that was located to the left (his right) side. All it did was bounce back the light coming from the flash back onto the left (his right) side of his head. Boom! Instant fill light.

The umbrella is used for diffusing the light coming from the flash. It is much more flattering to use diffusion material (like an umbrella) in front of your flash because it softens and spreads out the light, making it more natural looking and flattering.

Let's go over **the equipment** you need for your DSLR to start taking shots like this.

The Flash

The first row of products below this paragraph are the essentials. You get a flash, a hot-shoe adapter for your camera, and a sync cord so you can plug in your flash to the adapter. With these three things you will be able to start using your flash right away. Total price? \$177.88 plus shipping. If you want to know a little bit more about how all these things work together, read [this short blog post](#) before you buy.



= \$159.95

[LumoPro LP160 Manual Flash](#)



= \$15.99

[Hot Shoe Universal Translator](#)



= \$1.94

[Sync cord](#)

Light Stand and Diffusion Kit

With this kit, you get a stand, some diffusion material (a shoot through umbrella), and a mount, so you can mount your flash on the stand. Having the stand will eliminate the need for someone else to hold the flash for you. This kit is only \$30.99!



[CowboyStudio Strobist Kit. Stand + Umbrella + Mount](#)

RF-602

This is an optional accessory but it makes things a hundred times easier. Instead of using the hot-shoe adapter and sync cord to sync your flash up with your camera, you can do it **wirelessly** with this unit.



= \$44.99

The [RF-602](#) comes with a transmitter and a receiver. The transmitter attaches to your camera's hot-shoe mount, and the receiver attaches to the bottom of your external flash.

[RF-602 Wireless Flash Trigger](#)

Whenever you push the shutter button, your flash will fire at the exact time you take the picture, *wirelessly!* No more tripping over cords and knocking down your light stand! The wireless signals go through walls and have a very wide range up to 100 meters as well. It does cost a little bit more than the cord, but I highly recommend it.

Another cool thing about the RF-602 is that it can also be used as a wireless remote for your camera! It is basically a 2-in-1 product.

There are several [video demonstrations](#) of the product if you want to get a closer glimpse before you buy it.

Reflector

And finally, you can get a [reflector](#). You can use these things in any situation, not just when working with flash. When lights hit the reflector, it does just that: reflects it back onto your subject.

5-in-1



= \$18.09

It comes with diffusion material with a metal ring around it so it acts like a solid “wall” that you can easily hold. You can use the bare diffusion material between the sun and your subject if you want to remove harsh shadows. You can also just place it in front of any light and it will instantly make the light more flattering.

+ BAG

The “big circle” of diffusion material also comes with a zip-up covering. The covering has a reflective gold side, a silver side, and can be turned inside out to reveal a half-white-half-silver side, and a black side. Pretty awesome stuff, and a lot of bang for the buck!

If off-camera flash is something you end up being interested in, check out the [Strobist blog](#). It's a blog solely dedicated to off-camera lighting and has a big how-to section for both beginners and advanced "Strobists". Lots of free information available on that site.

There is also an online course called [EZ Flash Photography Workshop](#) by Joe Marshall. It's all in video format and you can get ask questions to both other members and the teachers, so it's well worth the money. If you were to take the course at a college, it would probably cost much more. Plus, colleges don't come with a "no questions asked money back guarantee", so this is a no brainer.

