

Metering and using fill flash for outdoor portraits



When the lighting is perfect you can use a 5:1 or no flash at all. Note the sun direction because even in open shade the light will have a directional quality and you need to have the model turn towards the light source.



In bright sunlight, use a 3:1 fill flash lighting ratio to keep detail in shadows.

While working outdoors be sure to meter your scene using a shutter speed that will sync with your flash.

If you are photographing a person with the sun at their back set your camera for BDE (Sunny 16 rule) and ignore the meter.

If the sun is coming from behind you and striking your model more like a studio main light, you can take a meter reading off of your own hand or their face and open up 1 stop.

Once you have your exposure set for the ambient daylight it's time to set your flash. Our goal is to use the flash to "fill" the dark shadow areas of your models face. We don't want to overpower the daylight because this creates an artificial look to your image. An easy way to set your camera is to set the ISO rating on the flash to 1 stop MORE than the actual film in your camera. By doing this you are telling the flash to think there is more light than there actually is and it will keep the exposure 1 stop underexposed for the film you are using. By setting your camera for the actual daylight exposure, and setting your flash for a 1 stop lower exposure, the flash is filling in shadow detail without overpowering it.

If you observe really beautiful natural daylight where the shadows are illuminated already you should set your flash for two stops underexposure or a 5:1 ratio. This will preserve the beauty of the natural daylight and yet will add the sparkle of a catch light to the eyes because their glassy surface will reflect a specular light source.

When the sun is hidden under partly cloudy conditions, you can use a 4:1 fill flash lighting ratio to keep the lighting looking more natural.

