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Flash Photography on Location

Using one Speedlight to create great images

Featuring **NIKON AMBASSADOR AMI VITALE**

Great photography is all about finding unique moments and beautiful light. The reality is that 99% of the time, natural light can be harsh and unflattering. This is where the artistry comes in. Photographers are really like painters, and we need to be able to mold light in simple ways. I like to think of these light “problems” as advantages. Some photographers use studios—banks of soft boxes and expensive lighting equipment to create solutions. I’m a travel photographer and have to work in remote places so I often take just a few simple tools. Usually I’m working with just one camera body, one lens and one flash.

In this article, I’m going to teach you simple methods to create beautiful images anywhere, anytime and without a huge truckload of gear. Remember not to let these technical issues overwhelm you, so that you forget to shoot with your heart. Great technology should never get in the way of great art. It should enhance it and that is what Nikon gear does for me.

Spot Metering



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D2X, AF-S NIKKOR 24-70mm f/2.8G ED, 1/60 second, f/2.8, ISO 800, manual exposure. Off camera flash. A Kashmiri woman prays inside Jamia Masjid mosque during afternoon prayers in Srinagar, the summer capital of the Indian held state of Jammu and Kashmir.

The very first thing is to change the way you see light. Rather than looking at harsh light as a problem, I look at the strong light as an opportunity. If I get into a situation where the light seems too bright and the dynamic range too high, I will spot meter for just the highlights and let everything else in the image go into a dramatic dark black. It's a huge advantage that the cameras don't see everything our eyes see, because it allows me to make more complex, dramatic images by simply exposing for the highlights. I like to find dark spaces where strong light streams in. Rather than metering for everything in a high contrast scene, I find one highlight and spot meter for it, and let the rest of the image go into deep black [shadows]. If I had exposed for the highlights and shadows in the whole scene, the highlights would have been blown out and there would be no deep blacks or drama in the image.

Off-Camera Flash



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D4, AF-S NIKKOR 24-70mm f/2.8G ED, 1/50 second, f/2.8, ISO 200, manual exposure, Matrix metering. Off camera flash adds to this image.

Another simple technique I often use is off camera flash. I rarely leave my flash on the camera because I find it destroys the mood and blasts away context by overpowering existing lighting. So often, just a kiss of light from the side tells the story better. This works well for portraits and I usually do this with just one off-camera SB-910 Speedlight. I used to use a flash cord to trigger the off camera flash, but these days, I either use the SU-800 commander unit or radio controlled triggers.

Sunset portraits are a great way to learn this technique. Since your subject will always be back lit, a little off camera fill flash will make a huge difference between an underexposed portrait or a stunning, “National Geographic”-looking portrait. You must first meter for the ambient light. In this case, (Image of african man) there is a brighter sky area, and then the less bright trees in the background. You have to decide what your background is, and then decide how you want to expose for it. I like to create drama by under exposing the sky. Metering was simply done by framing the bright sky areas and getting my settings in manual exposure mode. I purposely under-exposed this image, taking the exposure 2/3 of a stop down from the zero of my camera’s built-in meter. This gives it a rich color pop in the background.



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D200, AF-S Zoom-Nikkor 17-35mm f/2.8D IF-ED, 1/40 second, f/10, ISO 400, manual exposure, center weighted metering. Off camera flash.

The next question is: how do I meter for the flash? I recommend relying on the incredible technology that is available to us. The beauty of using TTL flash is that the camera and flash will figure out how much light to add to the final exposure. You can preview your camera's LCD to see whether you like the exposure, and then dial the power of your Speedlight up or down. I cannot overemphasize how easy TTL flash is to use. It allows us to stop agonizing over correct exposures and instead, focus on connecting with what's in front of us. Seize the moment and experiment using one Speedlight to help set your work apart. The right flash plus some experimentation are guaranteed to elevate your storytelling to art.

To see more of Ami's work, go to her website at www.amivitale.com.



Featuring

AMI VITALE



NIKON AMBASSADOR
UNITED STATES

Photojournalist, filmmaker and *National Geographic* magazine contract photographer Ami Vitale has traveled to more than 90 countries to document civil unrest and violence as well as surreal beauty and the enduring power of the human spirit. Her images are exhibited around the world in museums and galleries and are part of numerous private collections.

Visit her website www.amivitale.com and go to her [ambassador page](#).

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