

Flash Tutorial II (part three, Bounce Flash) (Rev. 1)

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It is idiomatic that no matter what your light source, the bigger the reflective surface the softer the light effect will be. So for a soft lighting effect, using any reflector or umbrella, bigger is always better.

Direct light from an electronic flash can be very harsh because the full intensity of the light is concentrated on the subject.

Bounce flash is one way to achieve soft natural looking light without having to resort to umbrellas or flash diffusers.

When you use bounce flash, the ceiling or wall that you bounce your flash off will in effect become a very large reflector so it is an excellent way to achieve soft natural looking light.

A bounce flash photo will always require a larger aperture than a direct flash photo because much of the light is scattered and lost.

For bounce flash the walls or ceilings should ideally be white. Most ceilings are white but you can usually get away with light pastel coloured ceilings or walls if you have your camera set for auto white balance.

The direction of the built in flash on your camera cannot be changed from straight ahead so it is not suitable for bounce flash.

You will need a speedlight with a moveable head. (some small shoe mounted auxiliary electronic flashes are not speedlights and do not have a moveable head).

All modern electronic flashes will operate by automatically measuring the light reflected off the subject whether it be direct light or bounced light, TTL, and cutting off the duration to give a properly exposed picture.

For those who like to do things manually, the following will show you how to do it.

I previously mentioned that in manual flash photography, the aperture is determined by dividing the GN by the distance from the flash to the subject. It still holds true for bounced light (but with a twist).

Suppose you want to take a bounce flash picture of a group of people sixteen feet away using a speedlight with a GN of 110.

You should angle the flash head of the speedlight up so that the light will be aimed at the ceiling halfway between the flash and the subject.

The effective distance from the flash to the subject will be the distance from the flash to that point on the ceiling plus the distance from that point on the ceiling to the subject.

So the operating distance will obviously be more than sixteen feet.

Depending on the height of the ceiling It may be in the order of 24 ft. or so. Your aperture will therefore have to be set at:

$$\text{GN/distance} = f/ \quad 110/24 = f/4.6.$$

Set the aperture to f/4.6 and take the picture.

You can also point your speedlight strait up and bounce the flash off the ceiling so the entire ceiling becomes a large soft light source but more light will be scattered and lost, and the exposure will require a larger aperture than if you pointed the light halfway between you and the subject.

If you point the flash straight up it is recommended that you use TTL automatic exposure mode. as guide numbers can become unreliable due to the variables in the room.

Note: If you use a zoom lens and your speedlight has a zoom feature it can change the light intensity and could affect the results in manual bounce flash.

Very large rooms such as banquet halls do not make good places to take bounce flash pictures because so much light is lost due to the greater distances. The JCC has a low ceiling and everything is white so it is OK.

Most speedlights have a white bounce card which can be popped out from the flash head.

This bounce card will face the subject when the flash head is positioned for bouncing the light off the ceiling.

Ordinary bounce lighting will not give a catch-light to the eyes but if you use the bounce card it will capture just enough light and direct it straight at the subject, providing a very desirable catch-light to the eyes.

You should avoid bouncing the light off the ceiling if you are very close to the person for a head & shoulders shot. The result will be undesirable shadows directly under the eyebrows and nose. Get further away and zoom your lens to get the head & shoulders shot.

The "diffuser" that can be pulled out of some speedlights is not intended for softening the light. It is optically designed to spread the light for use when the camera has a wide angle lens attached. (You will find that your GN should be lower when using this feature.)

The white dome shaped diffuser which snaps onto the front of the speedlight will also soften the light.

It can be used for softer lighting when bounce flash is not appropriate like in a large hall or when the walls and ceilings are a strong colour.

You will want to use TTL exposure when using the diffuser as your guide number will not apply.

My favourite bounce technique for pictures of people in the average home sized room is to set the speedlight to TTL and adjust the head 45 degrees up and 45 degrees over my left shoulder.

This will give very soft natural looking light on the subject. It won't look like flash at all.

All modern consumer speedlights will operate by automatically measuring the light reflected off the subject TTL and cutting off the duration to give a properly exposed picture. So using this feature can eliminate all the calculations in bounce flash.

Now that you know how easy it is, get yourself a speedlight and go out and do it.

Oh, and did I mention that all photographers should have a speedlight?

Assignment - Note: you cannot do bounce flash without a speedlight.

1. In your home setting, take a flash picture of a person or people showing their full body length.
- 2 Using manual method (flash head aimed at ceiling halfway to subject) and your flash's GN take a bounce flash picture of the same subject.
3. Set your camera and flash to TTL automatic, pivot the flash head up 45 degrees and 45 degrees over your left shoulder and retake the picture.
4. Take a head and shoulders picture of a person standing about 6 ft. beside a light coloured wall. Swivel the speedlight head to face the wall. You can use the manual bounce method or the automatic TTL method whatever you wish and take the picture.

The person's face should be nicely illuminated on the wall side and the other side of the face should be in shadow.

This can make a very desirable portrait but the shaded side might be too dark depending on how much light is bounced off the other room surfaces.

A reflector can be held close to the shaded side (but not showing in the picture) to soften the shadow and give the desired result.

Submit all four pictures to the Feb. month end slide show.

Note:

This entire **FlashTutorial II** will be available for you to review on the club's website under Links and Resources and for a more extensive study of Flash Photography I have one there titled **Flash Tutorial I**.