



How to get the white balance right

PUBLISHED - 25 JAN 2016

Colour is affected by the lighting conditions it's viewed under. Our eyes compensate automatically for different types of light, seeing a white object as white no matter whether it's viewed in sunlight, under overcast skies or under incandescent light. But, clever as modern digital cameras are, they need a bit of help to do this – and that's where the white balance setting comes in.

With the default auto white balance, your camera determines the colour temperature of the light and selects the most appropriate pre-programmed setting to create natural-looking colours in the captured image. This works well when the lighting is more or less one type (such as sunlight) and the main subject is neutral or white, but there are plenty of situations where you'll want to be the one making the choices, and that's where manual white-balance settings come in.

Manual white-balance options include:

Incandescent or fluorescent

Best for household bulbs (in auto white balance, you might end up with a slight yellow or green colour cast).



FLUORESCENT

Shade

Introduces a slight pink tone to eliminate the blue cast that shadows take on in open shade.



SHADE

Cloudy

Adds a bit of warmth to the light.



CLOUDY

Flash

Brings a touch of warmth to take the edge off the bright light of a flash.



FLASH

Direct sunlight

Sets the colour temperature to 5000K, which is typical of midday sun.



DIRECT SUNLIGHT

PRE (preset manual)

This is the 'white card' setting. With it selected, hold a white card in front of the lens and press the shutter button. The camera will lock in the colour temperature of the light reflected from the card to create a new white balance setting. PRE is ideal for scenes with mixed lighting – such as a room with daylight streaming through a window and fluorescent lighting in the ceiling – and it's quite easy to use (your camera's manual will have full details).

Quick tips

- Choose the 'wrong' white balance setting to play with tone and mood e.g. incandescent creates a blue cast that can work beautifully for early morning shots or in rain or snow.
- Use Live View to check the effect of your choice in real time, before you capture the image.