



# How to take Great Photos at Christmas Parties

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## **Go for variety**

Vary your subjects to create an interesting range of images. Focus in on details such as the decorations or food laid out beautifully, photograph people as they arrive, and then go for more candid shots as the night unfolds (if you last the course, try shooting again when it's all over, to capture the contrast!). Try different shooting angles, too – standing on a chair to look down at the guests raising their glasses is a classic, or angle the camera to create a more dynamic effect.

## **Get the white balance right**

Artificial lighting can present problems, so check your white balance: auto white balance is very reliable in mixed lighting situations, but if you're shooting under mainly fluorescent light, switch to fluorescent white balance, and if it's incandescent light, go for incandescent white balance for a warmer, more flattering result. You can also fine-tune the white balance by increasing the green, blue, amber, magenta using the multi-selector button. Remember that if you shoot in RAW (NEF) you can easily correct for white balance, contrast and other exposure issues after the event.

## **Reduce red-eye**

Boosting your ISO will let you shoot with a faster shutter speed if the ambient light is very low, but you might still need a burst of flash. But do watch out for it giving your subjects red-eye – where the flash burst lights up blood vessels at the back of the eye. You can edit this out on your computer, or if your camera has the facility, set the red-eye fix function, which will scan for and correct any red-eye before saving the image.

## **Set the scene modes**

If your camera has a 'Party/Indoor' setting in the Scene modes menu, this will create a good balance between the room lighting and your flash's output. It will also automatically set a

longer exposure to allow more of the ambient light to be captured, reducing the risk of background underexposure so you capture more of the scene's detail. This mode is also ideal for recording candlelight and other indoor background lighting. Night-portrait mode or night scene mode can also be helpful, automatically setting a slower shutter speed with a burst of flash.

### **Bounce flash**

Built-in flash may cast deep, unflattering shadows – get round this by popping on a Nikon Speedlight and tilting the head towards the ceiling or some other neutral-coloured surface, which transforms the light source from a small, harsh one to a large, soft light that eliminates harsh shadows and creates a much more flattering effect – and, as an added bonus, it prevents red-eye, too. For the best results, set your Speedlight to TTL (through-the-lens) metering, and check your exposure on the LCD screen; as a rule of thumb, if the ambient light in the room is very bright, the TTL flash could overexpose, so turn it down to around -1 EV, check your results, and adjust again if necessary; and vice versa if the room is fairly dark.

### **Focus on faces**

If you have face-detection mode on your camera, this actively selects faces and will set the exposure for them instead of the surrounds, again reducing the risk of poor exposure. You can do this for yourself on your DSLR by focus locking on your subject – choose single-shot AF (from the AF menu), composing for the face(s) you want to capture, half-depress the shutter button, then recompose the shot to include whatever else you want in the frame, and depress the shutter button all the way down.

Another option is to use continuous shooting mode – switch off the flash, bump up the ISO to cope with the ambient light levels, then select continuous/burst mode. Lock the focus in the same way as above, then press the shutter button down and keep it down, capturing a series of images – out of one of them you're likely to get something you like! A Nikon 1 camera can take up to a blistering 60fps, and it will even select the best shot from a sequence for you using its Smart Photo Selector system.