How to use Off-Camera Speedlights

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On-camera flash is on the same axis as the lens, which can flatten your subject's features – not a good look. Instead, add more dimension by keeping your main flash off-camera, using a Speedlight.



• Start with the background first, choosing something colourful and clean that doesn't detract from the subject. Next place the subject in the scene, being careful that there is nothing distracting behind their head, and avoid reflective surfaces – like windows and mirrors –

behind them, as these bounce the flash straight back to the camera, resulting in messy images.

• Move the off-camera Speedlight as close to the subject as possible without it being in your frame and angle the flash head to point toward their face. With some Speedlights you can also manually zoom the head in and out to control the area of light the flash projects.

• Next, take a test shot. If the subject looks overexposed, turn down the power on the off-camera Speedlight to something like 1/32 power; if the subject is too dark, turn it up to 1/4 or 1/8 power. Take another test and repeat until you have the desired effect. If you're shooting a moving subject such as a cyclist, have the subject stand on a mark to shoot the test shot and then have them hit that mark every time they go by so you know when to fire.

• There is a minimum distance for which you can successfully use flash. As your subject gets closer and closer, the flash duration gets shorter and shorter. Eventually, you reach the limit of how quick the flash can be, which translates into a minimum flash distance with your camera. For example, have you ever seen pictures of people taken with flash where their faces are bleached out? This happens when your subject is too close to your flash, so ensure there is nothing in the foreground of your shot that is significantly closer to the camera than your subject. Generally, the subject of your photograph should be between 2-4m away from the camera (your camera manual will give you the minimum flash distance for your camera).

• You may have taken a flash picture of someone in a very large room and been surprised to find the background is much darker than it looked in real life. This is the effect of relative distance. If the background is a long way behind your subject, then it won't receive much light from the flash. The opposite is also true: if you take a flash photograph of someone standing right against a wall, then the wall will get the same amount of light as the subject. This can be distracting, especially if the wall has interesting features. It's usually better if the background is slightly darker than the subject of the photograph.

• Some Nikon D-SLRs enable you to fire your Speedlights via infrared. In the custom-setting menu, select bracketing/flash > Flash control for built-in flash, followed by the commander mode, and your pop-up flash will then fire another, off-camera Speedlight in remote mode

using an infrared signal.

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