



LIGHTING: WHAT TO USE IN A PINCH

Suggestions for DIY photographic lighting, when professional lighting is not available

Lighting Accessories: [White Shower Curtains to Diffuse Light](#)

These will not be perfectly balanced to make clear light, but they will help to soften a light source. It also helps if you stretch them with some PVC piping. You can easily create a make-shift diffusion flat with a staple gun and the right tubing. Be sure that you do not get the curtain too close to a light source, or it will melt! Some have used metal screens to avoid melting, (like those on your windows), but I have never done that before. I'm not sure how diffused the light would be.

Lighting Accessories: [Rip-stop or Sports Nylon](#)

These can be purchased by the yard at most fabric stores, and are far more durable than shower curtains, however they still pollute the light! You can use the same PVC method mentioned above with these clothes for a more permanent diffusion flat.

Lighting Accessories: [Clamp Lights](#)

These inexpensive tin lamps are usually found in hardware stores for very little money. You can use these as cheap fill lights when you don't have the proper equipment.

Lighting Alternatives: [Lizard Lights / Full Spectrum Lights](#)

People with seasonal affective disorder use these to help elevate their mood in winter. While they are pricier than some of our home-made options, they will cast a more clear light for day balanced cameras. Use these with your clamp lights!

Backdrops: [Black/Grey Sheets, Black Muslin, Black Terry Cloth or Velvet](#)

Black is a very common backdrop for many shoots, and having a large piece of cloth is a good fall back to expensive photo-studio choices. Terry cloth does not reflect or wrinkle as easily as cotton sheets do, so it creates a richer look on film. Muslin takes away any reflective distractions. Velvet adds a luminous sheen to backdrops, while a standard grey flat sheet can really do the trick when taking an in-home portrait. Grey is also good for helping bring out detail in those with darker hair. Be sure to include **heavy-duty clamps** that you can buy at any hardware store to hang and arrange your backdrops. I also would consider whether or not you want to iron the backdrop.

Reflectors or Backdrops: Large, Thick Sheets of White Paper

These sheets can be used as backdrops, and have been staple parts of photography studios since studios had white paper. **These are great for product shots!** Be sure to find 100% white, if possible, so that it will be easier to work with. Typical “white” paper is not usually 100% white (it ranges, but hangs out at about 80%). Also, balancing your camera by using the white paper you buy can help ensure better truer color. See your manual for information about adjusting white balance.

Reflectors: Cardboard, Aluminum Foil & White Board

Use these items to create a reflective surface that helps illuminate darkened areas. When light hits this flat, light area, the light will then bounce off at any angle you adjust it to. Even a piece of foam core can help take away a little edge and fill in shadows with light when you have a direct light situation.

Reflectors: Silver Reflectors on the Cheap

While we mentioned Aluminum Foil earlier, some people just can't work with something so disposable. If you want something that is easier to keep and carry, try one of those car wind-shield sun screens that is silver-metallic. These are usually stiff, and can be used with a clamp and a stand to create a cheap make-shift reflector rig. Also, in camping or outdoor sections of most retail stores, you can buy silver “emergency blankets” that are flexible and light weight. These can be hung for large reflective areas.

Lighting & Backdrops: Stands, Tripods, Hanging Racks & Curtain Rods

These items are useful when creating both a backdrop rung and a stationary lighting set up. You can use these not only to hang clamp lights, but also to hang the backdrops from. These items also act as “third hands” when you need to adjust as you go.

Quartz Halogen Lights

These are slightly more expensive than the other options, but provide clearer lighting. They can be purchased for as little as \$15, but should be diffused for use.

Work Lamps

Not just confined to garages and construction sites, these make excellent options for those who need simple solutions for lighting. You can buy them pre-made on swiveling stands, which makes them very, very versatile.

Remote Flash

Some nifty things have been happening with mid-higher end digital camera accessories. While these have been around for a while with many higher range film cameras, these remote flashes are now widely available for digital cameras as well. If you sync up the flash to the hot-foot of your camera, you can fire a remote flash while also firing an on camera flash.

Good-old-fashioned Fill Flashes

Use an on camera flash to fill in subjects when you are using natural direct lighting. You may notice that faces and eyes become shaded in some natural lighting conditions. This helps to fill in those darkened areas, more directly than reflection. This light, however, typically not diffused.