



WHEN THERE ISN'T ENOUGH LIGHT

Shooting film with strobes

Why I love shooting with strobes

If there's something I appreciate, as I live in dark Sweden, it's studio lighting. I know a lot of photographers who claim they only use natural light, but for me that is very limiting. Partly because the dark seasons do not offer enough hours of daylight, but also because even during summer, my studio does not offer enough daylight to photograph in. I don't want to give up shooting with film, so I choose to shoot with strobes. Shooting with strobes only have one disadvantage in my opinion: it can be a big investment. If you are just starting out, try to find second hand strobes or not so expensive brands to start with.

Flash and strobes - consistent light

When you photograph in daylight, the conditions can constantly change while strobes is a consistent source of light. Shooting with strobes will get you a consistent look and if you don't change

your setup, you don't need to meter the light several times. A lot of people think it's difficult to photograph with strobes, but it doesn't have to be. I recommend you to start with one strobe and one light shaper. Once you know them well and are happy with the result, you can add on more light sources and additional light shapers to try out new looks.

What kind of look do you prefer?

With different light shapers you can choose the appearance you want and what the result will be, based on your preferences. Do you want it to feel like daylight? Choose a large, transparent or white light shaper that will give you a soft light and work with it as you would with the light from a window. For the children- and boudoir photoshoots in the studio, I only use one strobe with a 165 cm large umbrella, aimed 45 degrees from the top and 45 degrees from the side of my models. The closer the model the strobe is placed, the softer the light will look.

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How to start photographing with strobes

Find out what sync speed your camera uses. Sync speed is your camera's fastest shutter speed when using a strobe. If you do not have access to a manual, try to search on Google for it. Many of them are available online. If you're still not sure, work on 1/60 second.

My cameras have the following sync time:

Mamiya 645Pro: 1/60 second

Nikon F55: 1/125 second

Nikon F100: 1/250 second

Metering light

I meter light when shooting with strobes the same way I meter light in daylight: for the shadows, but with other settings on the light meter. As always when shooting film, it is important to meter the light properly to get the photographs that you want. I strongly recommend you to use a handheld meter. The camera's built-in light meter (if it has one) measures reflected light. Reflective light is the light that bounces back on the camera from the motif. This method can be unreliable since different colors and materials reflect different amounts of light. An external light meter meters the incident light (the light that lands on the motif).

The settings on the light meter

Depending if you are shooting in existing light (daylight) or artificial light (strobes and flash), you configure different settings on your light meter.

When I photograph in daylight, I configure the light meter by the following order of parameters:

1. ISO
2. Aperture
3. Shutter speed*

When I photograph in artificial light (strobes) I configure the light meter by the following order of parameters:

1. ISO
2. Shutter speed
3. Aperture*

Be smart: cheat

If your strobe has a model light: turn it on. That way you can see how the light will look on your model. I usually try out the setup on my digital SLR as well, since the model light isn't strong enough for me to really see the outcome. This way I can try my settings and how I should angle my strobe without risking a poor outcome. Once I'm happy with the result on my LCD screen, I simply put the transmitter on my film camera, take a reading with my light meter and I'm good to go.

* The light meter gives me this value



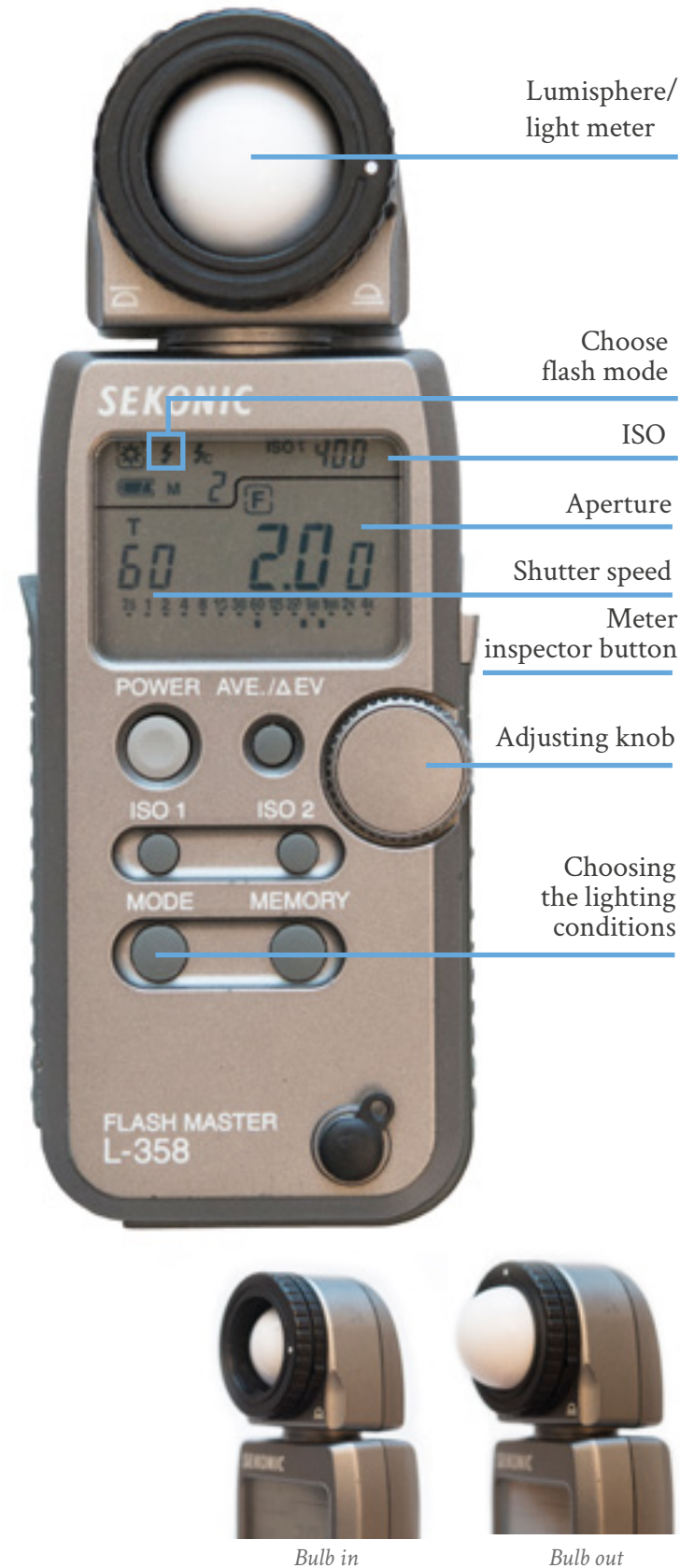
Mamiya 645Pro on Fuji 400H, Profoto B1 with Umbrella Deep Translucent Umbrella XL
ISO 200, 1/60 s and f2,8.

How to meter light for strobes

Step by step

Set your light meter to flash

1. Press the "MODE" button and use the knob to get to the middle mode, illustrated by a flash, for wireless communication. The mode at the bottom right, a flash with a C, is used with a sync cord.
2. Set the film roll's ISO by holding the button "ISO 1" and adjust with the knob.
3. Set your shutter speed.
4. Bulb in – make sure the lumisphere (the white bulb) is completely retracted so that the light meter only reads the incident light and not the side light if you want soft and airy photographs.
5. Place the light meter on the shadow side (if there is one), by the model's chin, 45 degrees downward.
6. Remember not to block the read of the flash with your body. Stand on the side when you read the light.
7. Press the button on the side. The light meter now awaits the flash before it reads the lighting. Trigger the flash to get the settings, on my Profoto I have a "test" button.
8. Set the camera to the aperture value the light meter gives you, and then you can get started.



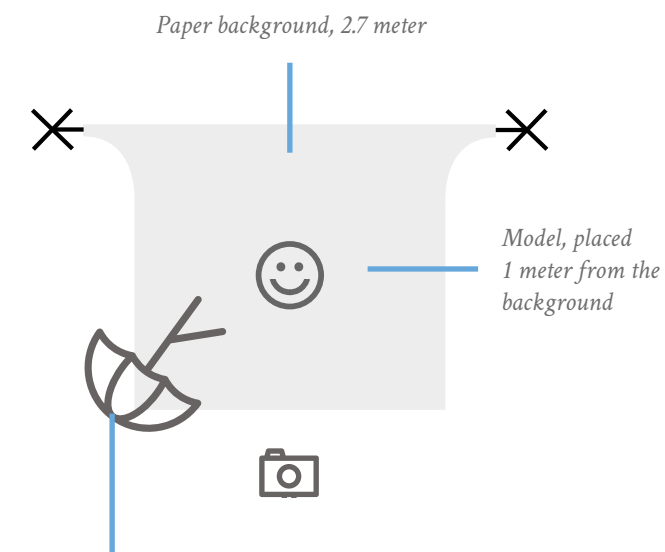
My favorite strobe setup for soft photos

On the photos you can see the setup that I use 99% of the time, to get a soft and airy feeling with few shadows, trying to simulate daylight coming through a window. I place my model around 1 meter from the background and the strobe around 1 meter from the model, in a 45 degree angle from the side. The umbrella is also angled 45 degree, facing downwards. I use a 165 centimeter transparent, deep umbrella that my strobes is shooting through and bounces back. My studio has white ceiling with a height of 2,4 meters and white walls, that helps reflecting and soften the light.

By using this big umbrella with bouncing light, it not only gives me window like light, it also gives me the benefit that both I and the person that I am photographing can move around as I like. If I would use a light shaper with more forming light with harder shadows, I would be forced to fine tune the light to get the shadows correctly shaped on the face. This light setup is perfect when shooting kids that doesn't always sit where you ask them to.



Place the light meter on the shadow side, by the person's chin, 45 degrees downward



Strobe with light shaper, here placed around 1 meter from the model to get a soft light



Make sure you stand on the side when doing the read so that your body does not block the strobe. On this photo, the light source (the strobe) is placed on the model's left side.



*Mamiya 645Pro on Fuji 400H, Profoto B1 with Umbrella Deep Translucent Umbrella XL
ISO 200, 1/60 s and f2,8.*

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My favorite setup for a soft, airy look when working with strobes in my studio that doesn't have any daylight: Using one light source with a large (165 cm) umbrella as light shaper. The white ceiling and the white walls also work as a diffuser spreading the light. By placing the strobe near the object, also contributes to creating a soft light that helps me create the daylight feel I am striving to get.

Mamiya 645Pro on Fuji 400H, Profoto B1 with Umbrella Deep Translucent Umbrella XL. ISO 200, 1/60 s and f2,8.

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