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Flash or No Flash



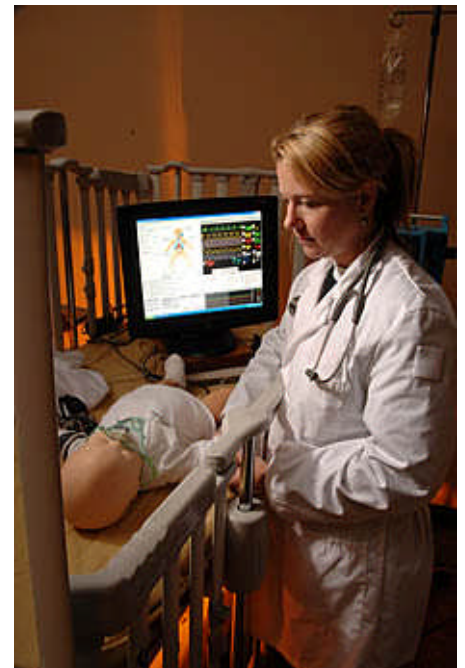
Flash used outside to create motion yet freeze the subject.

To flash or not to flash, that is the question - at least for this article. There are two primary issues which are the ying and yang of answering this question - the Technical and the Aesthetic.

At times there just isn't enough light to make a picture and you need to use flash. At other times the use of flash is not necessary but can improve a photo. In an earlier article I discussed one of those times. The article was about using fill-flash with sunlight and you can find it at <http://www.stanleyleary.com/Newsletters/Vacation-Photo-Tips-2005.htm>.

There are a lot of situations that, even from a purely technical standpoint are borderline and hard to call. Here it is necessary to consider the end use of the picture. If the photo is for a computer screen poor light is not so

Here again it can be hard to decide what to do. If you make photos of people without a flash and the expression is caught just right, even if the light is poor, it is often better than a well-lit but posed photo. However, if you can't see the expressions or if the photo will be in a newspaper and their faces lose too much due to the printing process then a flash is called for.



Flash used inside to help highlight the technology in the teaching nursing lab at Clayton State University.

Not sure of the use? Want to be able to use the photo in many ways? Then you need to be sure the quality will work anywhere it may appear.

If you use available light you will need to use a high ISO (800 or 1600), but the photo may be pixilated. If the photo will be printed large for use in a display booth or if it will be in a really slick magazine then you need to shoot at a lower ISO and use flash.

Georgia Tech
 Georgia Trial Lawyers Association
 GTP Enterprises Inc
 Hoffman York
 Hollywood Reporter
 Home Channel News
 Impact 360
 International Mission Board, SBC
 It's for Vets
 Journal of Accountancy
 J. M. Huber Corporation
 Kennesaw State University
 Kenyon College
 Ladder to the Moon
 Landmark Christian School
 Lifeway Christian Resources
 Lind-Bergeron
 Marist Catholic School
 Media2K
 Medical Association of Atlanta
 Medical Economics Magazine
 Merial Ltd.
 Merchandise Mart
 Mississippi State University
 Molloy Communications
 Morning Glory Farms
 MSI International
 National Education Association
 National Basketball Association
 North American Mission Board
 North Carolina State University
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 Old Dominion University
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 Presbyterian Today
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 Roni Hicks & Associates
 Russell Athletic
 Sears & Roebuck
 St. John & Partners
 St. Joseph Catholic School
 St. Martin's Episcopal School
 Southern Catholic College
 Southern Methodist University
 Southern Seminary
 Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary
 Southern Polytechnic State University
 SouthTrust Bank
 Sports Illustrated
 Stetson University
 Summit National Bank
 Sunny Crest Publishing
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 University Of Michigan
 University of Nations, Kona, Hawaii
 University of South Carolina Upstate
 University Of Tennessee At Martin
 University of Virginia
 Upper Deck
 USC Upstate Spartans
 Vindigo
 Virginia Commonwealth University
 Volleyball Magazine

important because light is projected through the photo. If the picture will be printed in black and white in a newspaper or if copies will be made on plain paper flash can be a lifesaver. The newsprint isn't a bright paper and the ink is absorbed into the paper so much that what looks a little dark on a computer screen will be solid black in a newspaper.



Without Flash



With Flash

When photographing people with extremely dark skin tones flash will open up shadows and give modeling and definition to face.

Picture (if you will) a shaft of light streaming through a window onto someone's hair creating a hallow effect. Even though the face isn't all that distinguishable using flash here will destroy the mood. Sometimes the aesthetic rules over a technically correct rendition.



Flash was used so the numbers on the display could be highlighted.



No Flash used, but the photo is properly exposed and white balanced.

Photography is always a trade-off, a compromise.

At times flash is not permitted. Museums often don't allow flash since it can fade the colors in prints or fabrics.

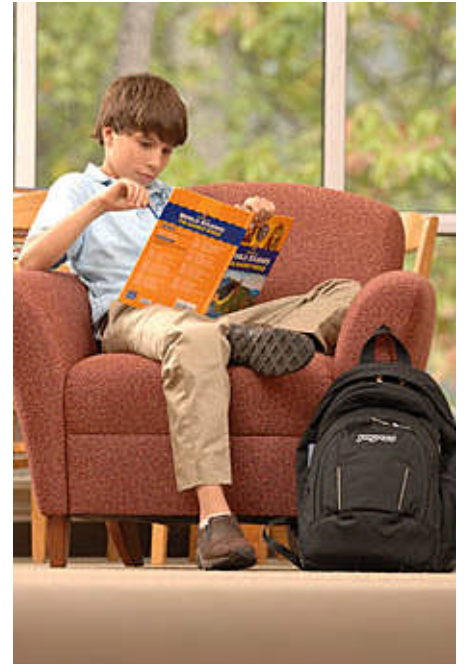


Flash used to stop the action of this volleyball player.

Surprisingly, the rule of thumb most people apply to the use of flash is the reverse of what it should be. They don't use flash outside when it would help open up shadows and they use it inside where it can destroy mood and restrain naturalness.

Wake Forest University
Whitfield Academy
WireImage
Woodward Academy
World Council Of Churches
World Journalism Institute
Yamacraw

Another aesthetic reason not to use a flash... once a flash is fired people are aware pictures are being made and their expressions may change from natural to posed. You may get one shot that is natural, but you'll rarely get others.



Flash is used so the inside light can be balanced with the outside light which can be seen through the large window behind the subject.

By reversing the normal rule of thumb and using flash outside and not using it inside a whole new way of seeing the light will be discovered.

With digital the results can be seen immediately. Why not shoot these tricky choices both ways and compare the outcome.

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