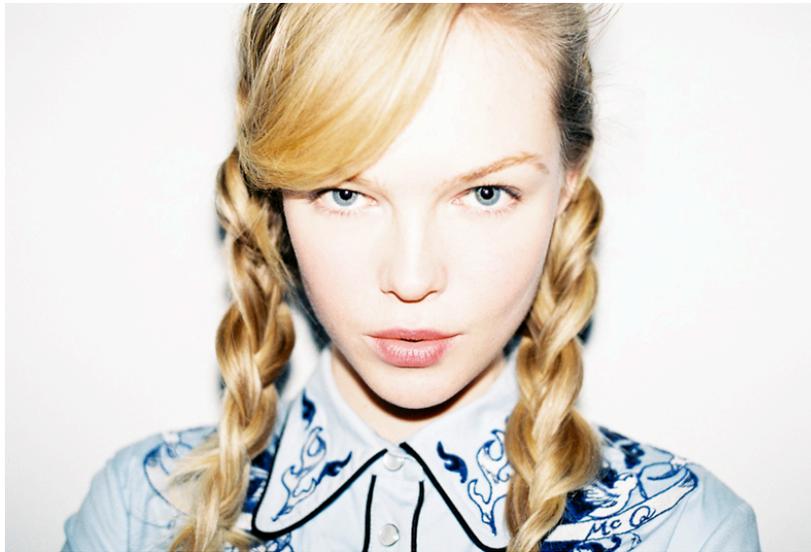


We will look at two different, yet very popular, lighting techniques: high key and low key. High key lighting is just what you would imagine - very bright, even light, whereas low key emphasizes midtones and shadows.



First, let's look at high
key:





Varying levels of light can be used in high key, ranging from just bright enough, to teetering on the edge of over-exposing your highlights, which is a completely stylistic choice.

High key is also used to separate the subject from the background, which is why a lot of magazine ads feature the product on a white, seamless background. This technique adds impact to the photo and makes the subject the focus.

If you want to make your subject stand out, or give your photos a bright, happy feel, high key is a great place to start.



Now, having several studio lights, flashes and reflectors is the ideal set-up to get even light, no shadows, and no over-exposed highlights, but not all of us have that much equipment on our hands. These are a few things that you can do, with limited equipment, that will allow you to achieve a high key look:

- Have a room with a lot of even, natural light. Bright windows can work wonders, because the light is diffused, eliminating harsh shadows, which is what you DON'T want with high key.
- If you have a reflector, position the reflector to bounce the light directly on the front of your subject, not from the side. If you have the reflector positioned on the side, you will create shadows, especially on faces.
- Preferably, you will need a white background. If you don't have a completely white background, shoot against the lightest color wall or backdrop you can find. White foam board works well, especially if you are doing product photography. Try to stay away from white sheets, unless the sheet is perfectly flat with no wrinkles – even the tiniest wrinkle will make a huge shadow in your background.

- If you are using a flash, try bouncing the light off the ceiling. Just like the reflector, this will distribute the light more evenly. If you aim the flash directly at your subject, you will end up with shadows on the background.
- Adjust your camera settings to create as much light as possible. For example, use a wide aperture and a slow shutter speed to let more light into your camera.
- Add any finishing touches in post-processing. If you are still seeing some shadows or over-exposed highlights, adjust your Brightness and Exposure to compensate, and get the lighting just how you like it.

The trick with high key is experimentation and practice, depending on your equipment, and your shooting environment. The best thing to keep in mind, though, is avoiding harsh shadows, and separating your subject from the background.

Now, on to low key:





Low key tends to be a bit more general of a term than high key. Low key photos can range from slightly darker than the perfect exposure, to almost completely black altogether. Low key lighting is great for conveying emotion and mood in your photos.

How you choose to expose your highlights and shadows is entirely up to you, though having a wide range of midtones can add more detail and visual interest to your photo. Here are a few things to keep in mind with low key:



- Your tripod is your best friend! You want to keep your ISO as low as possible, to avoid noise, so you will, most likely, have to compensate by using a slow enough shutter speed to capture the details in the midtones. If you are attempting low key hand-held, there is a great chance that you will have a blurry photo from camera shake.

- Make use of available light. While a flash can be very helpful, especially if you are shooting on a solid black backdrop, using the available light in your surroundings can also be a great way of creating a completely unique look in your photo.

Don't be afraid to experiment! Part of the beauty of low key is that is moody, emotional and can tell a story. Play around with letting the light fall directly on your subject, and placing your subject slightly out of the light, in the shadows. This is your moment to experiment and create something that might be slightly out of your comfort zone.