



TWOPEAS/NABUCKET.COM PHOTOGRAPHY COURSE: 12 WEEKS TO BETTER PHOTOS

By Mark & Joanna Bolick

LESSON SIX: Shooting Indoors

This week and next week we're going to concentrate on pulling together what we've already learned in weeks 1-5 and applying it effectively in our day-to-day lives. After all, we want you to be comfortable using your cameras in a variety of settings & situations.

Making Compromises

Indoor photography (and by "indoor" we're initially referring to photography that takes place in our homes) is often about making compromises. As we discovered through the weekly challenges there isn't always enough light indoors to achieve the settings we would like to use, and due to that lack of light we're forced to sacrifice some of our ideals in order to still get the photos, or results, that we want.

-- Sometimes that sacrifice is ISO, and with a high ISO our images are grainy. One way to combat digital noise after the fact is by using a software tool (such as *Noiseware*) to eliminate or reduce the digital noise, and another way (either in-camera or in post-processing) is to simply turn the photo to black & white, where an element of graininess is expected in the photo.

-- At other times the sacrifice is depth of field. If you're continually frustrated with your indoor photos it might be time to consider a lens with a lower f/stop (for example, a 50mm f/1.8 is very much affordable, and, as an added bonus, very lightweight.)

-- Most often, we'd wager, the sacrifice is shutter speed. As discovered through the challenges a flash will help to "freeze" the action, but a flash also comes with its own limitations and/or complications. A tripod can be helpful, though sometimes hard to reposition quickly.

-- Also to consider is the color of the light - you can create a custom white balance (and remember to change it for your next scenario) or make the most of the yellow glow of tungsten lighting that lends a cozy feel to photos.

Thankfully, we do get one big boost of light during the day thanks to mother nature (dependent on the day's weather, of course - *a compromise in itself*) with the addition of natural light.

Making the Most of Natural Light

1. Find it

To make the most of natural light, it's very important to be aware of where the natural light is in your home as well as when it's available. For instance, in our previous house, our children's bedrooms faced the east and would be well-lit in the mornings on sunny days. By late afternoon the sun was setting in the west and was visible outside our sunroom, which was at the back of the house.

2. Indirect light vs. Direct light

Perhaps the BEST aspect of natural light indoors occurs when the sun isn't shining directly in the windows, but is instead providing indirect natural light. Indirect natural light provides you with a well-lit area that doesn't have the strong shadows, or contrast, of direct light. (You can use lightweight or sheer curtains or blinds to help filter direct light to achieve the same effect.)

Here is an example of direct light vs. indirect light, taken in a hospital room. In the photo on the left the subjects are facing a window. Note the cast of the shadow to the left of the baby as well as the yellow light beaming down on their faces. The second photo was also taken near the window, but with the blinds closed to eliminate the harsh glare of the sun.



***This is not to say, however, that direct light is necessarily a bad thing! You can definitely use it to your advantage when lighting your subjects. Particularly if you're looking for more contrast in your black & white photos, direct light on your subjects can be a great thing.



This photo is an example of using direct light to your advantage. Although the baby's body is in shadows, his face, and his eyelashes in particular, are illuminated by the light streaming through the window.

3. Use Natural Light Sources to your Advantage

Windows and doors (storm doors or French doors, for instance) are great sources of natural light. Your position and the placement of your subjects in relation to the natural light source makes a big difference as well. For example, both photos below were taken when the subject was parallel to the window. Notice how well the light illuminates the subject's face and features in both photos.



The subject is parallel to the window and the photographer is perpendicular to the window.

In these photos, the subject is facing the window while the photographer is sitting with his/her back to the window.) Take note of the catchlights in the subject's eyes. Catchlights are highlights in the eyes of a subject, and in this case the catchlights will look like windows because that is what the eyes are reflecting.

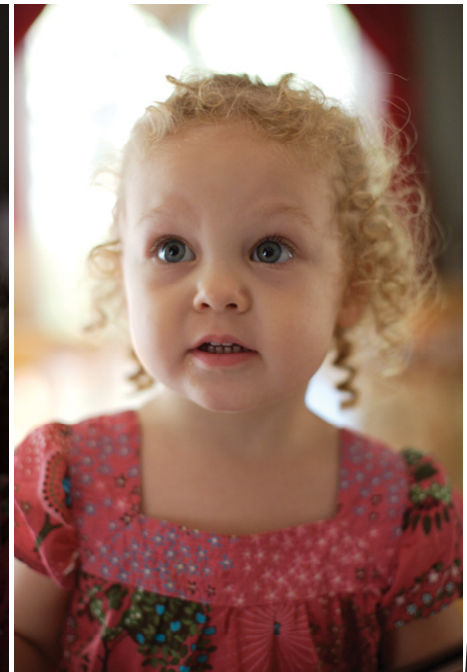


The reflection of the window brings highlights to the subject's eyes.



One final thing - when taking photos of subjects in front of a natural light source it's very important to pay attention to your exposure metering. Remember in week 4 how we metered on the bright areas of the photo to properly expose the background while using the fill flash?

You can employ the same strategy indoors with the flash OR you can meter on your subjects to properly expose them while overexposing the bright background light.



This example shows the difference between metering on the background window vs. metering on the subject

WEEKLY CHALLENGE: Using windows as a light source

So here's the question we want to focus on this week:
How can I take advantage of natural light indoors?

We want you to take advantage of your windows this week!

To consider: You can use any type of camera this week, but please try to take these photos without a flash.

Choose one or all of the following options for taking your photos:

1. Position your subject in direct light and then reposition your subject in indirect, or filtered, light.
2. Capture catchlights - have your subject face the window while you're sitting or standing with your back to the window.
3. Position your subject so that he/she/it is parallel to the window, while you are perpendicular to the window.
4. For those with SLRs or digiSLRs: If you can adjust the exposure meter on your camera, try metering on the background light vs. metering on your subject and setting the exposure for your subject. Also note that you could use a wall in the room or the floor to set your exposure meter.

Please remember to post your favorite photos from the week in the photo gallery!

Thank you for your participation!

Q & A: Indoors

Q: IrishSheila asked: I've heard all over that it's recommended NOT to use flash if you can avoid it. But in my experience, a lot of times this makes for blurry photos indoors, even if me and my subject are completely still and there seems to be sufficient light.

A: As stated in the article, indoor photography is often about compromises. In low light situations we're often pushing our cameras to the max to achieve correct exposure by using either a slow shutter speed or a low f/stop in combination with a high ISO to take our pictures. In these situations there is plenty of opportunity for blurriness. For example, if our f/stop is really low, our photos will have a very shallow depth of field, and most of the photo can be out of focus. A slow shutter speed makes it very hard to hand-hold your camera and still take the photo, and can also result in blurriness even if your subjects are sitting still.

Q: Milkcan asked: Capturing action shots indoors without a flash - is this even possible?

A: Taking action shots indoors is really its own special subject, and we're going to address it in depth in week 8: On the Go. We'll be featuring a special guest (and fellow pea) who makes a living in sports photography and has offered to share her tips & tricks for taking action shots both indoors and outside. Not only that, but she's going to answer YOUR specific questions as well in a special message board chat during week 8! Look for her feature as well as others to come in weeks 8-11. (Just a little something special to spice up the second half of the course.)

Q: TrinaRN asked: What kind of indoor lights can you buy and where should they be positioned? What are the different suggested studio setups, what do they look like?

A: Unfortunately, we're not going to be talking about lighting setups in this course. It's not that we don't think those questions are important, but rather that we don't feel that studio setups are necessarily a beginning photography topic. However, it is relevant to point out that an additional way to enhance your indoor light is by using studio lighting, umbrellas, softboxes, etc.

** In addition, one affordable way to help redirect light to your subject's face is by using a reflector. Although there are professional photography reflectors, you can also simply use a 2' x 3' piece of white foamcore (foam board) to help light to your subject. The subject can hold the board just outside the frame of your shot to bring light to his or her face, or you can ask another family member to help reflect light onto the subject by holding the board in a certain position.