

Types of Natural Light

Photography is defined as the art of producing images by the action of light on a surface (such as a DSLR sensor). While interesting subject matter and unique compositions are vital, the quality of light hitting the thing which you are photographing is paramount. A beautiful subject can be made to look either attractive or menacing depending on the brightness of the highlights and darkness of the shadows.

Softer light causes a lower contrast image, which means that there is less of a difference between highlight values and shadow values as opposed to harsher light which causes a higher contrast image and features larger differences between highlights and shadows. This dramatically affects not just the mood of your image but more importantly the amount of detail rendered.

A good of thumb is to make sure your subject is facing the light source (ie, looking toward the sun) and your shadow should be in front of you (but not casting itself in the scene).

Types of light are:

- **Direct Light/Specular Light** – in broad open area with bright daylight, no haze or cloud cover. Causes harsh shadows, and makes your negative contrasty. Medium contrast that means some details will be rendered in both highlight and shadow areas but the extreme ends of the spectrum will be lost.
- **Directional Light** – daylight that comes in through a window, causes shadows to be made at a distinct angle. Contrasty light that implicates detail will only be available in the highlights (leaving the shadows underexposed) or in the shadows (leaving the highlights overexposed)
- **Back Light** – when the light comes from directly behind the subject, causing the subject to appear in full shadow. Very contrasty; details are rendered only in the highlights while shadows are left underexposed.
- **Diffused Light** – A cloudy day. Allows for very soft shadows, which means a low amount of contrast in your image and a greater range of visible details.
- **Butter Light/Golden Hour** – the diffused golden light you see just after sunrise or just before sunset. With low contrast, more details are visible in both highlight and shadow areas.