Video Lighting

The key to great looking video is using light effectively. Natural light, sunlight, is the best light source. It is what the human eye has evolved to see. The color of sunlight changes through the day as the sun moves across the sky.

When it is a clear sunny day, there is a high contrast between light and dark. On cloudy days, the color of sunlight is different. There are no shadows, and there is less contrast between light and dark.

When working with sunlight, keep the sun behind you. You probably need to move the camera when shooting outside as the sun moves across the sky each day.

When shooting inside, we usually do not have enough windows to let us rely on sunlight. Inside, we probably use artificial light. There are different types of artificial lights and each has different color range, which is called "color temperature".

Sunlight has a wide spectrum. Incandescent light bulbs have little of the blue spectrum and is much redder than sunlight. Fluorescent lights have an odd broken spectrum of colors. Fluorescent lights are not good choices for video production unless you use fluorescent lights balanced like sunlight. Fluorescent "grow lights" bulbs work well for video.

Halogen lights, like incandescent, are too red and unbalanced for most video productions, though good video cameras let you set the you can set "white balance" so any light looks true white.

When setting up artificial lights, they must be positioned carefully. The main lighting on your subject is called the key light. Fill lights, also called "kickers", balance the key light and eliminate dark shadows on faces or across the scene. Backlights are behind your subject. They provide an outline of light around your subject's head, neck, and shoulders.

Using key, fill, and backlighting looks professional and is called 3-point lighting or "rim" lighting. Using 3 light sources makes your subject "pop", standing out against the background.

When chromakeying or shooting directly against a background, it is important to us "wash lights" to light your background. This reduces the contrast between your subject and background. They can be used to evenly light a background so that it has no shadows and appears as 1 color.

Lights can be controlled with barn doors, scrims, and reflectors. Barn doors are flaps on a ring that fit around a light's lens. Scrims are small

pieces of screen mounted to fit over the lens, softening strong shadows. Professional lighting systems can also be dimmed and colored with gels over the lights.

And don’t forget to use reflectors to bound light back towards your subject for more-even lighting. White foam core board works great for reflectors.