

# LOW KEY LIGHTING

## BLUEPRINT

Low key lighting creates mood and mystery and it is an invigorating challenge for both novice and professional photographers. Low key lighting doesn't require any special gear. In fact, you'll only need the following:



- Camera
- Tripod
- Light source (natural or artificial)
- Black or dark grey background
- Editing software

Low key lighting, unlike traditional three-point lighting, uses only a key light which is optionally modified with a fill light or a simple reflector. This means that shadows remain in the dark and only your subject is highlighted.



## EXAMPLES OF IMAGES WITH LOW KEY LIGHTING

## 1 CAMERA SETTINGS

When it comes to ideal camera settings for low key photography, you should try to keep your ISO low and aperture wide open. You can start by setting your ISO to 100 or as low as possible on your camera.



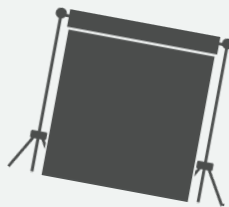
This is quite important because low ISO will make your image dark and noise-free. Once you're satisfied with your choice of ISO, you can adjust your shutter speed and aperture and achieve the desired effect for the light you've chosen. You can set the aperture by starting with the smallest f-number, such as f/1.4 or f/1.8.

### TIP:

You can use a fast shutter speed if you stick to the widest aperture, but you will have to adjust your shutter speed depending on the light source.

## 2 LIGHTING SETUP

A choice of light and its strength and direction is up to the photographer. The only rule you should follow when shooting low key is to never allow light to reach your background.



If you have a studio, you can use a butterfly or Rembrandt lighting pattern in your low key portraits. These two types of lighting are often used in studio portrait photography and it's not complicated to achieve them – you need just a light and a reflector, or perhaps two lights.

### TIP:

Most photographers try to avoid casting dark shadows on the faces of their subjects. Even though low key portraiture is dramatic, it should be flattering too.

## 3 THE ESSENTIALS

## 3 EDITING

You can do wonders for your low key images if you know how to edit them properly. The most important edits should include brightening your subject, adjusting white balance and reducing noise.



If your image contains both cool and warm tones, you can play with the colors by using the HSL panel in Lightroom. Feel free to shift the colors and create a bold and playful contrast.

### TIP:

Low key photographs, especially portraits, are ideal for experimenting with vignettes. You can use the radial filter in Lightroom to create vignettes.