

LIGHTING YOUR VIDEOS

Lighting often takes a backseat to camera and audio equipment for the beginning filmmaker. On a field shoot, you might think a light kit is just another box of gear to lug around and most likely you won't be using it anyway. In the studio it is not uncommon to see producers turning on every single light hanging from the grid and then just reusing the last lighting setup from the previous shoot. Maybe you are worried about all the other responsibilities with video production and adding the task of lighting is too much. This is understandable but not the best approach.

Once you have had a few shoots under your belt, consider improving the lighting in your videos as the next challenge. We also encourage you to work on other people's shoots as lighting director or gaffer. This gives you the opportunity to concentrate on lighting without the additional tasks that come with producing a video. Allow yourself enough time to develop a lighting plan and setup. For an elaborate studio shoot you might spend up to an hour or more; and for a simple two-person interview it might only require about 15-minutes.

When setting up lights you need to see it on a video screen, whether it is on a studio monitor or the LCD screen on your studio camera. Our eyes and camera lenses perceive light very differently, so seeing it on a screen is a must. Once you have lights in place, it is easy to make adjustments as most of our lights have dimmers and you can raise or lower their brightness with a turn of a knob.

Another important thing to remember is you want to light for people, not objects. When watching video our attention often goes to the brightest object on screen, so we want that to be our main subject. Some beginning gaffers light the background picture really well, but not the person speaking. Or in the studio, flats or set furniture are well lit, but the actors walking around are not. Again this is understandable. You could be lighting the set well before the talent arrives. Because of this, it might be helpful to have stand-ins so you can see what the set looks like with people in it, especially if they are moving around.

Good luck with your lighting setups!