



Portraits part 2

Mrs. Bible Digital Photography

High Key & Low Key Portraits

A large majority of photographs contain a wide mix of tones from shadows to highlights and, primarily, everything in between.

That means that a high contrast image has the greatest difference between the blacks and white and is often more dramatic and powerful.

An image with mostly darker value (*shadows and dark tones with minimal highlights*) is called a **low key** image. An image made up of mostly lighter values (*mostly light tones with fewer shadows*) is called a **high key** image.

These high key and low key looks make for interesting photographs, especially when it comes to portraits.





High Key Images

Whether the aim is a high key or low key photograph, the process begins with the actual tones or values in the scene.

In practice, this means that for a high key photograph, it's best to start with a subject wearing light-colored clothing, in light-colored surroundings, with bright, even light. Harsh light creates more pronounced shadows, and that hampers the high key effect.

For soft, even lighting, consider working outdoors in lightly overcast skies or using a large soft-box or bounced light indoors.



Low Key Images

Start with a subject in dark clothing and dark surroundings, the process of creating a shadow-rich photograph is simplified. Instead of the broad, even lighting useful for high key images, try using a smaller source—like a small soft-box or even a bare bulb—in order to create dark, dramatic shadows.

Even the unfiltered sun can produce a low key image if the subject is positioned correctly. Whether working with artificial light or sun, try positioning the subject such that the light comes from the side or even from behind them in order to create the kind of edge lighting that reveals a preponderance of dark tones to the camera.





Use context



Show us
something about
the subject



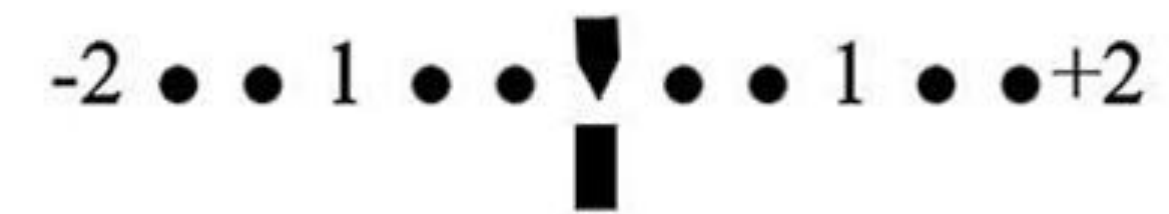
Try lots of poses

Adjusting your Camera

When lighting control is limited or when the shoot is happening outdoors, consider using the camera controls to help shift the key of the image.

When working with the sun, for instance, underexposing enough can actually make daytime look like night.

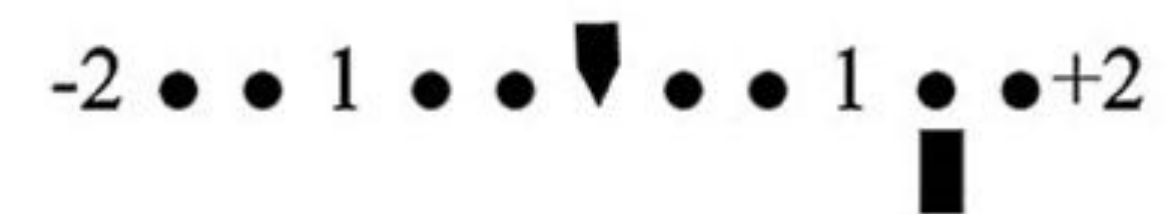
Slightly overexposing a light-colored subject can shift the key upward, which often has the additional benefit of hiding skin texture and blemishes.



Correctly Exposed Meter



Under Exposed Meter



Over Exposed Meter

It's all about the highlights and the shadows

Surprisingly, though, it's the shadows in the high key image and the highlights in the low key shots.

Because in a **low-key** image *made up predominantly of shadows*, a small amount of highlight takes on paramount importance.

Conversely, the few shadows in a **high key** image had better be carefully placed. A single light source makes this simplification not only easier but also more effective, and fine-tuning in the computer is also immensely helpful. Something as simple as adjusting the sliders for shadows and highlights in the Lightroom filter, or levels or curves in Photoshop.

With high key shots, ensure shadows aren't too heavy, and with low-key images, ensure the highlights are bright enough to provide the necessary contrast.





Key Terms

- **Low Key** An image with mostly darker value (*shadows and dark tones with minimal highlights*).
- **High Key** An image made up of mostly lighter values (*mostly light tones with fewer shadows*).



To Do:

- Take Google Quiz.
- **Assignment:** Craft 3 images. You may shoot high key or low key, or a combination of both. Crop the images. Adjust them with the tutorial from next class.
- **Titled:** *High Key/Low Key portraits*

