

Shadow Contrast

When setting up a picture, you have to decide what direction you want the light to come from. In this series of images, the light is coming from the right. This is evident by the shadow of the tomato appearing on the left.



No Fill

Notice how the shadow on the tomato is pretty dark and heavy. This is neither right nor wrong, but say that you want the shadow to be lighter and have less contrast. Right now the image has a very high contrast. If we wanted to decrease this contrast we would have to fill in the shadow. You can do this very easily and inexpensively. All you need is a piece of white foam board, or a white reflector or white poster board. I prefer white foam board because it is cheap, light weight, and I can cut it to any size I need.



Fill 24 inches away

You can see here that with the foam board 24 inches away there is a decrease in shadow contrast. You can see more detail in the tomato's shadows. Now watch as I move the board closer to the set.



Fill 12 inches away



Fill 6 inches away



Fill 0 inches away

Now the foam board is as close to the subject as possible. Notice there is still faint shadow present to show the direction of the light. There is no right nor wrong answer to how much contrast you should have. It all depends on what you want your image to say.

Quality of Light

To describe the quality of light, I am going to use the terms diffused and specular. Diffused light is soft and characterized by very soft shadow edges. Specular light is hard and characterized by very sharp shadow edges. A shadow's

edge is the outline of the shadow that you see. Here is a [cupcake I had in Boulder at Tee and Cakes](#) that illustrates this point.



Diffused- soft transfer

Specular- hard transfer

Notice where I have circled in red. You can see the soft line present in diffused light and a hard line in the specular. There are times when you want a hard shadow line caused by specular light, while there are times when you want a soft shadow line caused by diffused light. Personally, I think the soft diffused light looks best.

To diffuse the light you can use any white translucent fabric. In this example I am using a bed sheet.

Here is our tomato with just window light.



Window Light

Now I add the bed sheet to diffuse the light.



Large Diffusion

Notice how the shadow line on the left side of the tomato has become softer. The bed sheet diffuses the light coming

in from the window creating a nice soft shadow line on the tomato.

By learning when to add fill to a scene and what type of light you want, you can start to make great photos. I hope this was helpful! If you have any questions let me know and I will try to answer them.

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