

## Still Life Tips

Still life photography is generally a small grouping of inanimate subjects. A classic in art, a Still Life gives you a lot of creative control over your subject. You have time to set it up in a pleasing composition and plan for lighting, two very important aspects of this type of photography. Learning to create a good still life can be useful by many different types of photographers. Wedding, stock, and food stylists all rely on the ability to compose this type of shot.

### Keep a few things in mind:

**Composition:** The rule of thirds is a good idea to keep in mind when you are arranging your subjects. Groups of three or other odd numbers are also pleasing to the eye. Try to arrange your objects in such a way that the eyes flows from one to another. It's also a good idea to have them related to each other in some way that makes sense to the viewer or gives a visual story. Arrange and rearrange as many times as necessary. Experiment!

**Lighting:** Soft natural window light works, as well as stronger lights and shadows for a more dramatic effect. Consider your subject and decide what works best. Lighting is the single most important element of “Still Life” photography. The way a photographer uses light for still life will add mood, give context, provide interest, and ultimately, create a dynamic still life photograph. Lighting for still life is not complicated. In fact, stick to these 5 tips, and you will nail your still life shots every time.

**1. Use a simple backdrop:** Wrinkles and ridges in a still life photograph – unless a part of the setting will be distracting to your main subject. Be vigilant about keeping your backdrops smooth and simple.

**2. Make your lighting interesting:** Whether you are using strobes, speedlights, or LED's, it's important that your “ratio” from one light to the next is varied. The main light should be strongest, and the second light should simply provide a nice fill.

**3. Light directionally:** Side light is always most effective for bringing out texture and creating dynamic variation between the highlights and shadows. Whether rings, or florals, side light will enable you to give dimension and depth to your still life imagery.

**4. Pay attention to your angles:** Two things to think about when faced with a studio lighting scenario.

a). The position of the lights to your subject

b). the position of your subject to the camera. Side light will give dimension, but so also will the angle at which you take your shot [ie. side, above, below, etc.]. Don't be afraid to experiment and change up angles. A photo is most interesting when you give a new perspective to something that is ordinary.

**5. Light for shape:** We see life 3 dimensionally. For this reason, the most dynamic photographs are the ones in which the audience could walk into the scene, or reach out and touch the subject. Lighting for shape will be most emphasized by side light, when your highlights spread along the edge of your subject and add that 3rd dimension.

Whether or not commercial Still Life is an area you want to enter professionally, practicing in a still life context will give you a better understanding of directing light for maximum photographic impact.