

TABLE 5.1

**Approximate Kelvin Temperatures
of Selected Lighting
Conditions/Light Sources**

Clear blue sky	16,000
Lightly overcast sky	7,500
Heavily overcast sky	6,800
Bright, clear sunny day at noon, some white clouds	6,000
Light haze	5,800
Electronic flash	5,600
Quartz lamp	3,200
100-watt household bulb	2,860

creates neither a red nor blue cast. This Kelvin temperature also is close to that of the light produced by electronic flash.

Daylight film exposed at other times and under other lighting conditions will contain a cast, either red or blue; the lower the Kelvin temperature, the redder the cast; the higher the temperature, the bluer the cast. If a cast is deemed undesirable—some can be highly desirable such as the warm ambience of a late afternoon sun—using one or more filters will remove it.

Using Light

Whatever the situations being photographed, whether in color or black and white, the way photographers use light to a great extent sculpts the messages they convey to readers. Photographers have a much easier time controlling light when they are not covering breaking news events. But even in these situations photographers can partially control light—if by doing nothing more than using electronic flash to soften shadows created by a photographically unsympathetic sun.

Light and the way it strikes subjects—creating highlights and shadows, emphasizing or minimizing, creating an ambience of tenseness or relaxation—is an aspect of composition that every photojournalist must study at home, at work, at play. Heightened sensitivity to light

and its interaction with subjects comes with practice—looking for light and shadows and color.

Picture-Taking Considerations

Point Source Light

Light emanating from one primary source is termed *point source* light; Figure 5.5 illustrates point source light. Lighting of subjects by direct and relatively intense point source light—the sun, for example—can be described in relation to the position of the camera: front, side, back, and top.

Front Light Front light strikes the main aspect of the subject from in front of or from behind the photographer. Light coming from in front of the photographer probably will be from the photographer's electronic flash. Most likely light coming from behind the photographer will be from the sun.

Plain vanilla describes front light. It typically is not visually exciting, offering an untextured “flat” image where shadows, particularly on faces, are visually dull or largely non-existent because the straight-on light (in relation to the photographer) pushed them backwards into empty space (Figure 5.6). Any three dimensional aspect of the subject is de-emphasized.

Side Light Side light is created when light strikes the subject from only one side and at about 90 degrees to the camera, typically leaving the other side of the subject dark. Side light is visually intriguing, dramatic (Figure 5.7). It tends to create a sense of realness and mystery. Side light also brings out texture in a person's face as well as in other subjects such as a plastered wall.

Side lighted images created using photographer-supplied artificial light of course can be made anytime. Side lighted images created by the sun are most easily made in early-to-mid-morning and mid-to-late afternoon when the sun is relatively close to the horizon.



FIGURE 5.5

Winter point source light rivets on skaters in Boston like an arrow heading for its target. Had the photographer pictured the skaters with the sun at his back, this image would have conveyed a very different ambiance. How would you have approached the scene photographically?

STEVEN SENNE/AP/
WIDE WORLD PHOTOS

As a general rule, in a side lighted scene you should expose for the lighted—the “highlighted”—area of the subject. If you expose for the dark area the lighted area will lose most or all its detail—it will “wash out” in photographic parlance.

Back light Back light is the opposite of front light. It comes toward the photographer from behind the main subject. Properly exposed back light tends to create a sense of depth, and with subjects that lend themselves to it, a sense of beauty (Figure 5.8 and the first photo of this chapter).

Photographers commonly expose for the light area of the scene and then lighten with fill light—direct or reflected electronic flash or reflected natural light—what otherwise would be an unacceptably dark area of the subject facing the cameras—typically one or more faces.

Top Light Top light comes from above the main subject (and the photographer), striking it from its top down. Photojournalists regularly use top lighting, primarily from fluorescent lamps near or in a ceiling that illuminate large areas such as a room (Figure 5.9). Expect to find fluorescent lamps on almost every ceiling of every commercial building in the country. When this downward-directed light passes through a translucent medium—most likely a sheet attached to the light fixture—the light rightly can be described as diffused (see next section). Whether diffused or not, top light creates troublesome shadows on subjects’ faces, particularly their eyes. Adding a dab of fill light directly from an electronic flash or reflected from white or light-colored nearby walls often solves the problem. Photographers using color film should take care that the camera lens or flash

FIGURE 5.6

Front light comes straight in toward the subject from in front or behind the photographer. Front light is visually dull, because shadows on faces and contours are pushed straight back, thus de-emphasizing the three-dimensionality of the scene. Here, the front lighting comes from an electronic flash fired from the same position as the photographer.

PHOTOGRAPH BY THOMAS GRAVES

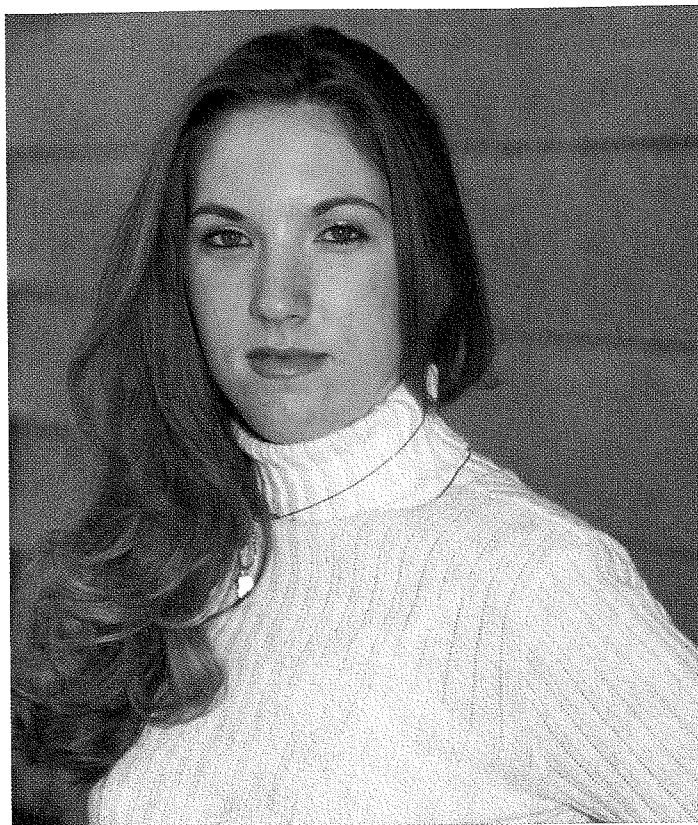


FIGURE 5.7

When light strikes a subject from one side only, the effect produced is to leave that one side lit and the other in shadow. Side light is usually considered more dramatic and interesting than front light, because it brings out texture and contours in faces and objects. Here, an electronic flash was positioned outside the window to create this natural-looking side light, a technique sometimes used by photographers on assignment.

PHOTOGRAPH BY THOMAS GRAVES

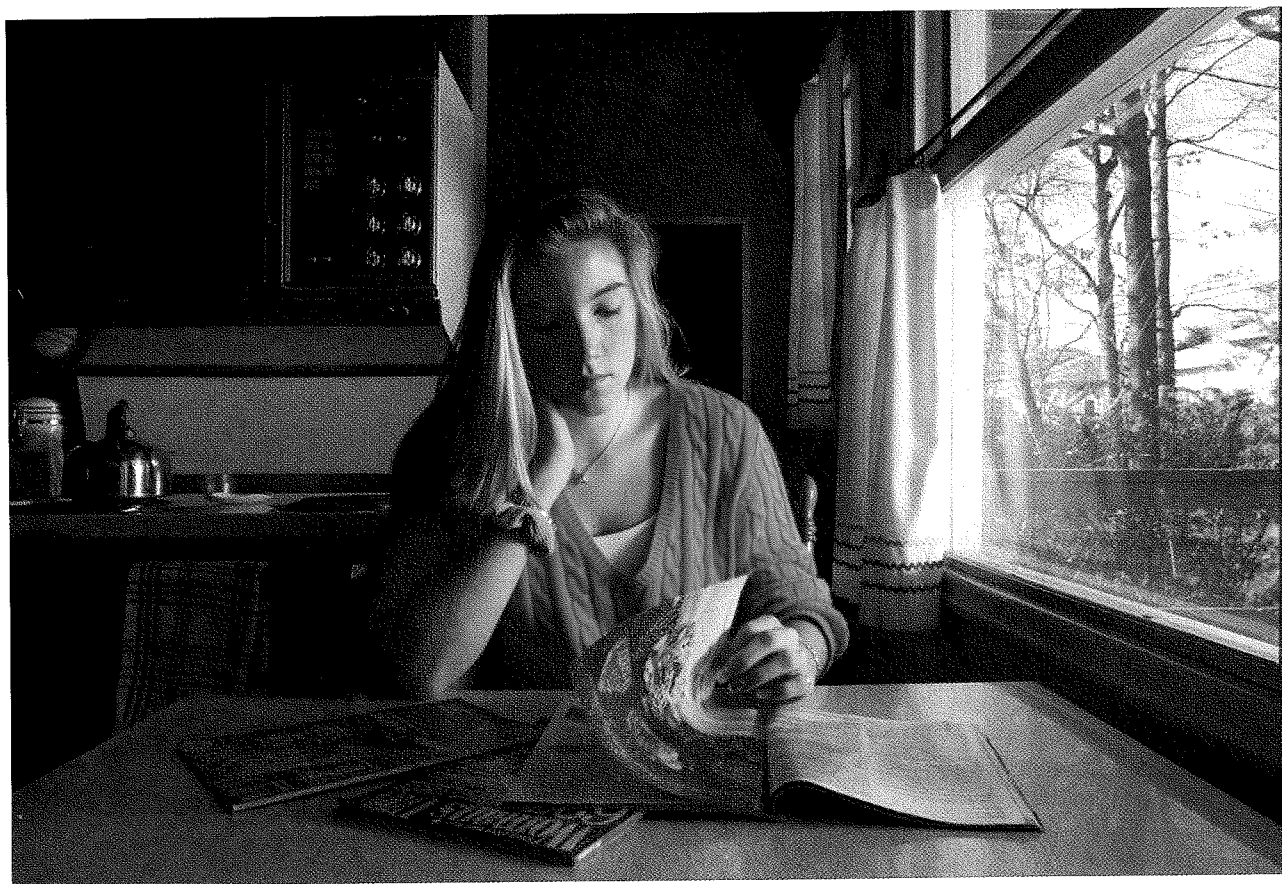




FIGURE 5.8

When using backlighting, photographers must decide whether subjects are to be silhouetted as in Figure 5.12 or are to show detail, as in this image of people at a wine and food festival in Vermont. Skillful use of a light meter is helpful in obtaining detail. Take care to measure only the important area of the main subject that is not directly lit. If time or circumstances do not permit you to use a light meter, the general rule is to increase your exposure by two stops more than what you would need for main subject areas hit directly by point source light. When they want detail in both highlight and darker areas, photographers often expose for the highlight area and lighten the darker area—backlit faces, for example—with fill light from an electronic flash, sunlight, or other existing light reflected from a permanent surface or from one provided by the photographer.

PAUL O. BOISVERT/THE NEW YORK TIMES PICTURES

lens, or both, have appropriate filtration to ensure that the subject is not bathed with one or more undesirable casts. Top light also can be specialty direction lighting, such as light illuminating a pool table (Figure 5.10). Rarely do photographers create top light, except when they are bouncing electronic flash off ceilings to simulate and intensify existing room light.

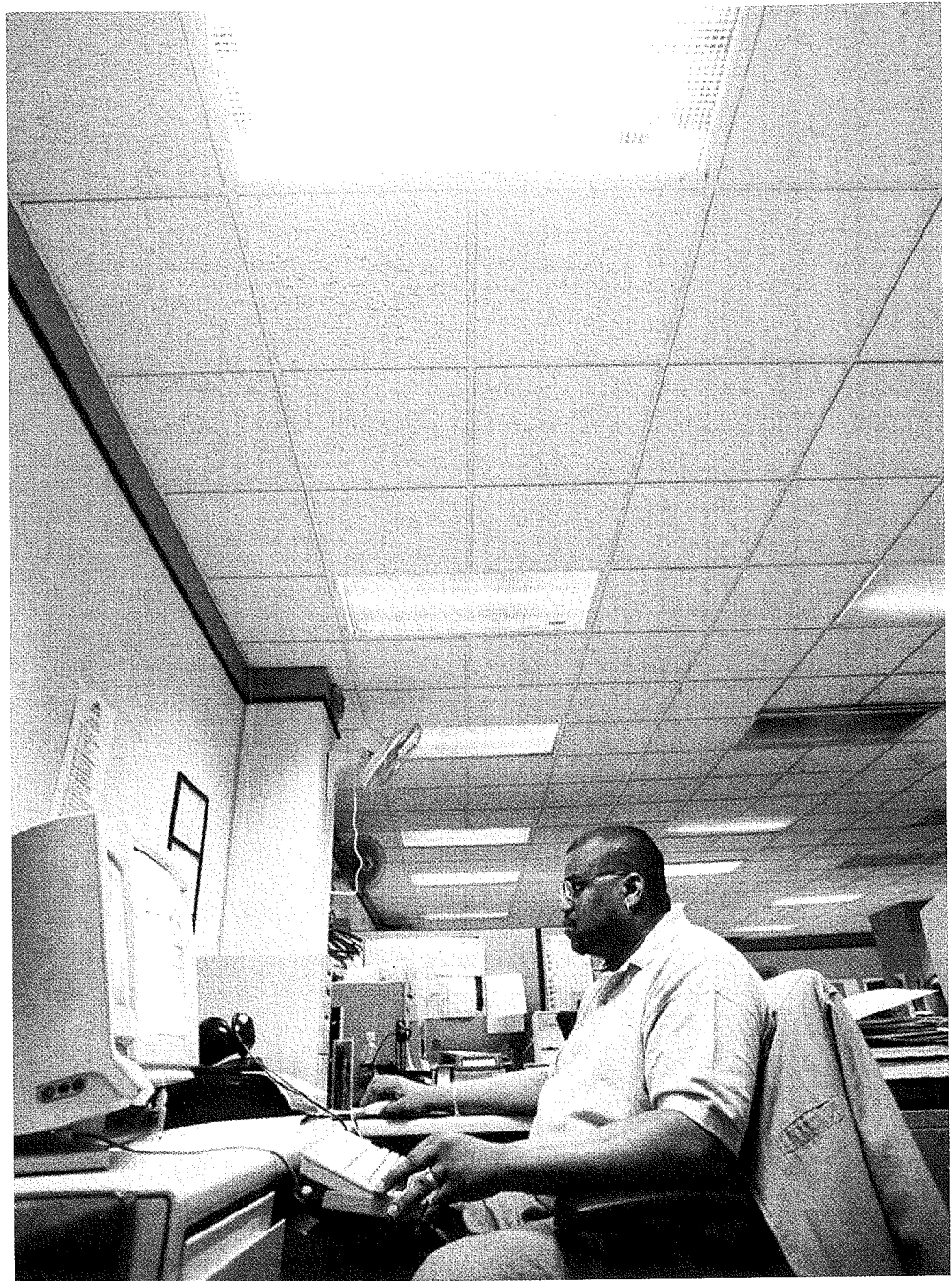
Diffused Light

Photographers refer to light that reflects off one or more secondary objects or passes through a material that diverts and scatters it before it strikes the main subject as diffused; diffused light typically yields an overall soft lighting ambiance. (Figure 5.11). Although this lighting lacks the cutting edge of side lighting and the visual

FIGURE 5.9

In the typical office building most light comes from fluorescent lamps set in ceiling fixtures. While these provide uniformity of light over a given area, their top-down direction can be unflattering and uninteresting.

PHOTOGRAPH BY THOMAS GRAVES



separation of backlighting, it creates a mood of its own—peaceful and non-confrontational. It can be an effective composition tool, both in black and white and color.

Silhouettes and Shadows

Photographers use directional light from point sources with great effect in two other ways: silhouettes and shadows.

Silhouettes (Figure 5.12) are the epitome of understated main subject lighting. They emphasize form rather than detail. They often interact with well-lit backgrounds that support and embellish their messages.

Shadows (Figure 5.13) convey messages in a clear and eye-catching way. They are representations of subjects that block light rays; these rays strike

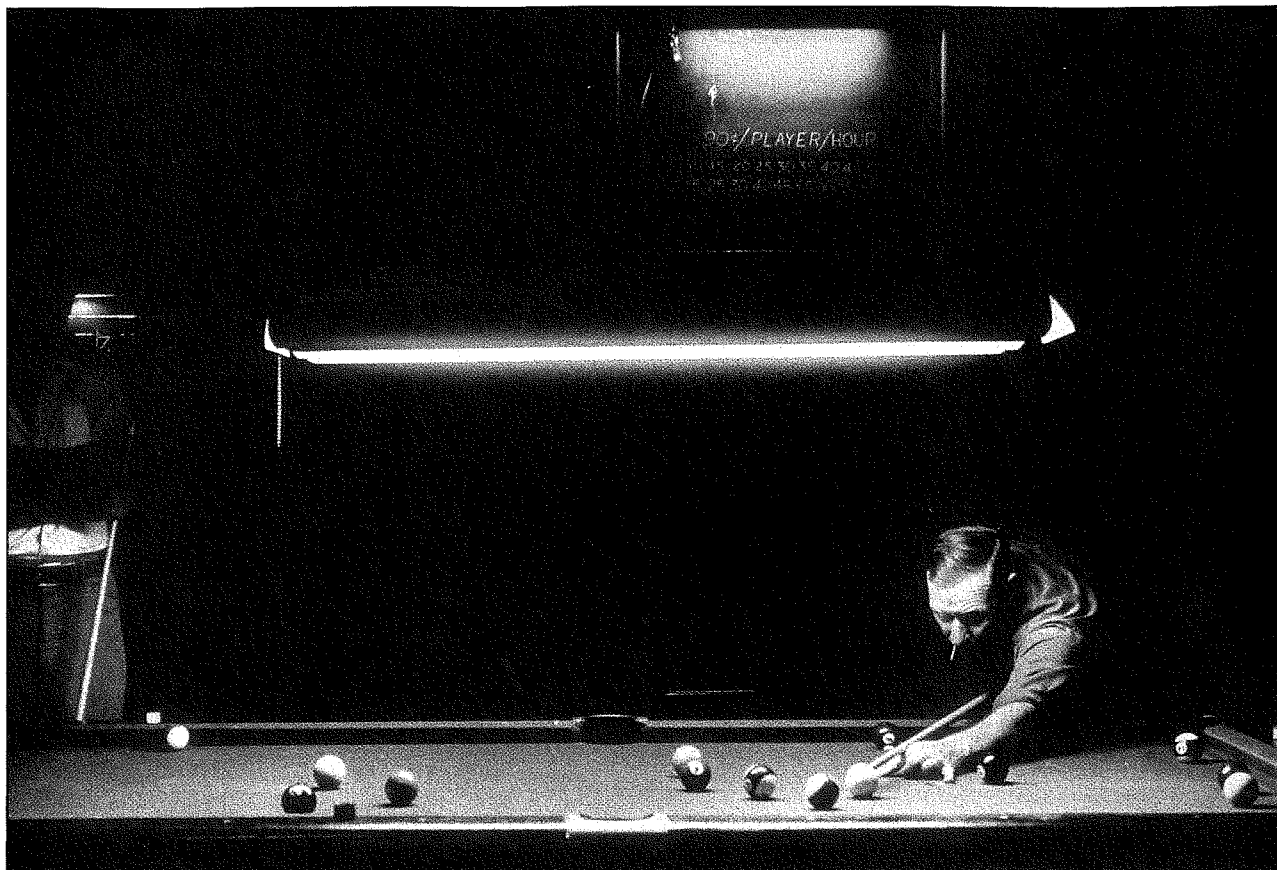


FIGURE 5.10

Preserving the lighting ambiance of an indoor scene has long been a popular approach in photojournalism. Sometimes the existing light is a particularly strong composition aspect of the scene, as here. Imagine what a single electronic flash, straight on and near the camera, would have done to the pool hall ambiance.

THOMAS J. ONDREY/*THE TIMES*, KETTERING AND OAKWOOD, OHIO

the side of a subject that is opposite its shadow. Much as black-and-white photography can eliminate distracting color, shadows can eliminate distracting whites and shades of gray from black-and-white images. Shadows also can effectively communicate in color. Areas in color surrounding the shadow are particularly important when shadows are recorded on color film.

Intensity

Until 1988, when exceptionally light-sensitive films—one black and white and one color—became available, light intensity was a particularly important concern to photojournalists. These films also changed the composition as-

pects of coverage; for example, photojournalists can shoot moderately lit night high school football games with existing light rather than with photographer-imported light. This changed the ambiance of pictures that fans see and allowed photojournalists to record more telling aspects. The limitations of electronic flash often no longer are deciding factors in covering the games.

Photojournalism has no generally accepted photojournalistic definitions of high- and low-light intensity. The practical definition used here is based on shutter speeds, aperture size (f-stops), and film speed. When photojournalists need a shutter speed and f-stop combination of 1/60 or longer at f/8 (or its