



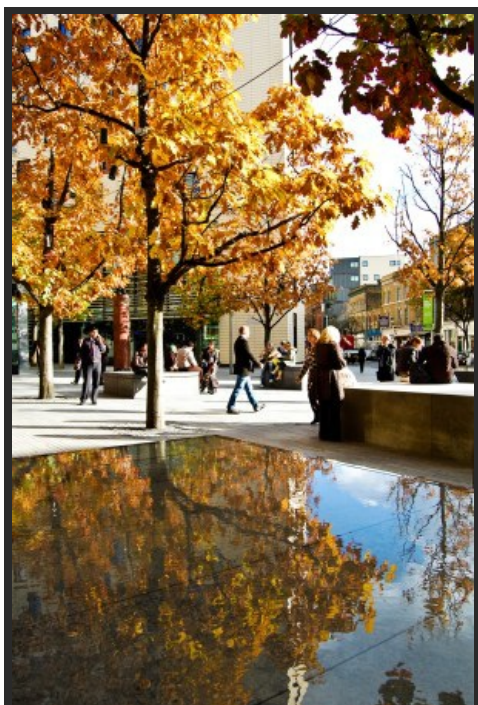
Perfecting and Playing with White Balance

A Post By: **Natalie Denton (nee Johnson)**

As photographers we often question the strength, type and direction of light, but because most of today's cameras' auto-functions are greatly enhanced, it can be easy to forget about the colour of light.

Seasoned shooters will undoubtedly be aware of the importance of white balance, but for those new to photography or for photographers looking to go 'off piste' and take a more manual approach to image-capture then this whistle stop guide might be able to help. In this handy tutorial, we'll explain not only the importance of controlling white-balance, but how it's done and what effects can be achieved.

Why bother with white-balance?



In this image we wanted to exaggerate the warmth in the light hitting the leaves in the trees, so we used a 'Cloudy' present in the White-Balance options.



By controlling the colour of light photographers are able to shoot with a balance that is as neutral as possible, replicating the colour of natural daylight whilst resolving issues with colour casts. Alternatively shooters can manipulate white-balance values for creative effect.

What is the problem with using auto-white balance?

Most contemporary cameras do a solid job at rectifying 'problems' with colour casts in the light, and so when a scene is put in front of the camera it will attempt to compensate for any shift in values to make the scene look as close as possible to natural daylight as possible. So say you were using an auto-white balance setting to shoot a scene flooded with a rich amber afternoon light, you may be disappointed to find the camera diluted the richness of the hue as it has attempted to cool down the scene by using a blue cast to pull back the colour balance to replicate that of natural daylight. Conversely, when you shoot with flash a cool tone is usually projected from the bulb, as such cameras set to auto-white balance will warm the picture up in-camera using an orange/amber cast. Another issue is night photography, as the colour of neon signs or street lights can often affect the camera's reading and results in confused colour-cast frames. By setting the white balance manually you'll find a more realistic result is attained.

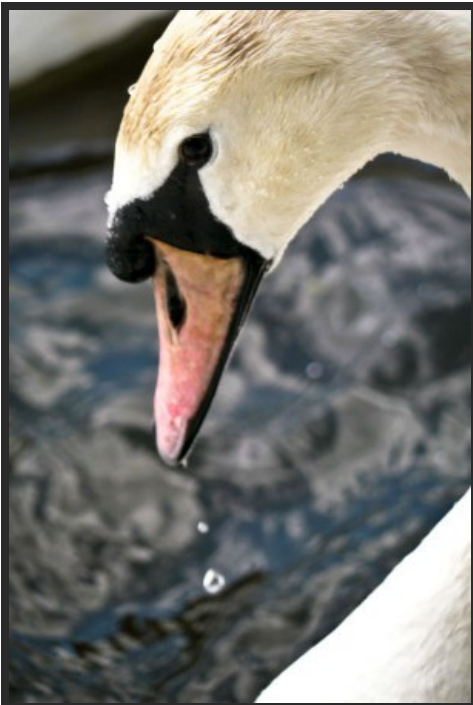
How can I control white balance?

1. Use Presets

Within your camera's settings menu you should find a section labelled 'White-Balance'. Here various presets are offered, each with an icon clarifying in what light the option should be used, for example; flash, cloudy, fluorescent, ambient, indoor, outdoor, sunset etc.

By telling the camera what conditions you are shooting in, it can more accurately and consistently apply values to compensate. It is especially wise to use this mode if you feel the auto white-balance isn't on point.

2. Use Custom



By taking a white-balance reading from the swan's white feathers we were able to get a more realistic and natural result

Whilst presets have their place, they can sometimes be a little wide of the mark, so to influence greater control find 'Custom' within the White Balance settings. This option allows you to take a reading by photographing an area of white or natural grey so your camera recognises and understands the exact lighting conditions you are working in.

If this is the approach you want to go with, it can be a good idea to carry a piece of white or grey paper, card or plastic to take readings from when you're out and about.

3. Post-Production

Should you return home to discover your images carry an unsightly colour cast, all is not lost. Almost all contemporary photo-editing software allows users to correct colour balance issues with a touch of an 'auto colour balance' button or slight incremental change with a slider, but by far the best option is to use a white balance Colour Picker or White Balance Tool to select a part of the image you know to be white or grey. What is more, most of these software products offer options to apply values to batches of images instantaneously, potentially saving you hours! To do this most effectively it's best to shoot in RAW so you can have a wider scope of flexibility to resolve colour balance issue.

What if I don't want a neutral balance?

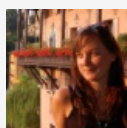
Using a manual white balance will allow you resolve colour cast issues in-camera, but just as it is possible to neutralise the colour of light, it is also possible to manipulate values to create colour-thrown captures. For example, to exaggerate the rich red hues of a sunset force the camera to pump up the colour even further by

using the Custom option or use a Preset such as Daylight or Cloudy to make the camera ‘think’ it is shooting a dreary scene and as such will add a warming cast. The result will be a vivacious and colour-striking sunset. There are dozens of situations when using the ‘wrong’ white balance can enhance or exaggerate the colour values of an image, it just takes a little imagination and practice. Good luck!



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Some Older Comments

Abhay

February 23, 2013 10:57 pm

Very important tips for me as I have been using only auto white balance but I will try and use those preset and custom WB for practice and will try and improve my photography.
The last example of using wrong preset will be very usefull to me. Thanks a lot.

ArturoMM

February 21, 2013 11:01 am

@Barbara Watson, I agree with you 100%.

sanjay

February 20, 2013 12:19 am

thanx for tips can u give me some tips with my canon 1100 D with out flash in night

Barbara Watson

February 19, 2013 08:38 am

In my opinion, aperture, shutter speed, f-stop and composition is all that really matter, especially if you shoot in raw. Fiddling with limited, preset white balance settings while shooting adds one more thing to think about and adjust in the moment, and may lose you your shot. I always just leave the white balance in auto, then decide, as I process, if any adjustments to the white balance are needed.(Once you learn how to process your own photos in raw instead of letting the camera do it entirely for you with a jpg, you will never go back.)

Mircea

February 16, 2013 02:21 am

I love using auto WB. 80% of time it gives great results. Thats also because i use a Canon :-) *showoff*
..but anyways, i find myself in a lot of situations where auto WB is just not what i am looking for. So then i turn to manual WB, meaning i adjust the color settings according to the room temperature..
That gives a wide area of creativity:-)
Great article!

Kathy

February 15, 2013 12:15 pm

I love shooting wildlife photos and have been improving. I am having trouble capturing birds in flight, the sky and trees are great but the birds are just a black blob, no definition and no color what do I need to do?

Hugh Arndt

February 15, 2013 08:33 am

Great article, thank you. I think I understand 'White Bance' to some degree. However, my problem is retaining shadow detail when photographing my oil paintings, also eliminating glare after the canvas has been varnished.

Maybe I have missed it but I can not remember if any pros. have tackled these problems on this platform.

Any help would be appreciated.

Thanking you in-advance.

Regards

HA

Jeff

February 15, 2013 07:50 am

This is for Ranjith,

I took a look at your photo Ranjith, your issue is not white balance. AWB works fine in outdoor daylight blue sky scenario.

Your problem is the dynamic range is too wide, you have blown out exposure spots in your sky. If you search in this site under wide dynamic range/ exposure you will get several different solutions to fix that problem.

Nice reflection shot by the way!

Ranjith

February 13, 2013 08:11 pm

Its pretty uneasy with this white balance, especially when its during the brightest hour of the day and you want to get the reflections of the image as well..

This shot i tried to use cloudy preset in the camera. But it works only with the reflections.. the camera could not handle the extremes of light! Can anyone help me with how to improve upon?

<http://www.flickr.com/photos/msranjith/8469495913/in/photostream>

Audrey

February 12, 2013 09:16 pm

I always seem to struggle with white balance, if i have the time to use a grey card this seems to work out the best - fixing it in post production is probably one of the things I do most!

Piotrek Ziolkowski

February 10, 2013 09:01 pm

Nice shot Satesh, I am not a big fan of landscapes but I like your shot. I am a people photographer as I call myself so I stick with auto mode- I can always change it in post if it's off but I can't do anything about a missed shot. If I have time to stop and think than why not but I find myself often in situations where the timing is more important then white balance. Some of my people shots

<http://www.piotrekziolkowski.com/portraits>

Scottc

February 10, 2013 08:32 am

I'd be willing to bet that white balance is one of the most oft-changed settings in post production, a little "warm-up" usually does a photo good.

Nice article.

<http://www.flickr.com/photos/lendog64/5820896216/>

Barry E. Warren

February 10, 2013 05:44 am

White Balance, I will have to start doing manually. always used auto. Thanks for the tips .

satesh r

February 10, 2013 03:35 am

White balance is always tricky for me. This shot was a bit on the blue side but warmed it up in Lightroom.

<http://www.flickr.com/photos/satesh/8442884974/>

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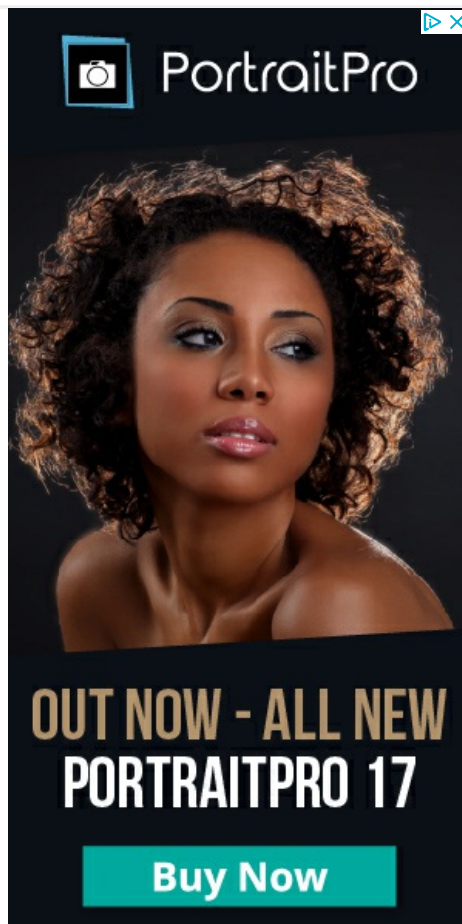
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