

HANDHELD LONG EXPOSURE WITH FLASH

Slow Sync Exposure

Typical use of flash employs the camera in Automatic mode that allows the camera to fire the flash. This technique usually calls for mounting the camera on a tripod because it assumes a clear photograph is desired. But this is art school and we try to do things wrong for better (and maybe more unique) effect.

Flash Sync Speed

Many cameras use 1/250th of a second or higher for 'Flash Sync' speed. Older film cameras may use a shutter speed of 1/125th or 1/60th. This means the shutter will remain open during the shot only long enough to ensure that the shutter will be fully open when the flash goes off. There can be a very short lag when firing a flash. The intent is to limit any light other than the flash to illuminate the subject. [If you ever get a frame where half of the image is lit and the other half is dark, that is because the shutter speed was too fast for flash sync.]

Rear Curtain Sync

A camera in Automatic mode fires the flash at the end of the exposure, when the shutter is about to close. This means a moving object will leave a trail with the final position being clearly defined by the flash.

Front Curtain Sync

A camera in Automatic mode will fire the flash right at the beginning of the exposure, then collect the ambient light afterwards. This completely flips the timing of a moving object.

Exposure Settings

Smaller apertures will create finer lines of light and more detail overall. Lower ISO settings will provide more control. Start with ISO 200 or 100.

Hand Held Long Exposure w/ Manual Sync

If the camera is hand-held during a long exposure there will be some inherent blur. When a flash is fired, the subject close to the camera will be very clear to the point of being frozen. If a flash is used with a hand-held long exposure the sharp image of the flash is overlaid with the soft image of the long exposure. If a very long exposure of a couple or seconds or more is used the effect is more pronounced.

Off-Camera Flash

The worst place to have a flash is mounted on top of the camera. This means the direction of the light will be in line with the lens. This will generate very flat lighting. Flash brackets attempt to offset the flash unit a little bit but it is not enough. Flash units have the ability to angle up so they can be bounced off a ceiling, or twist to bounce off some adjacent surface. This will soften and redirect the light for a softer look.

Holding the flash unit out at arm's length puts even more distance between the camera and the flash. This also has the ability to create shadows when there is no surface upon which the shadow would be made, so it is eerie. If there is no cord connecting the flash unit to the camera then the 'test' button on the back of the flash can be used to trigger the flash.

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Starting Suggestion: Shoot 3 shots of each situation; 2 seconds, 5 seconds and 15 seconds. This provides a reasonable bracket of shots to choose from. This will change depending on the time of day (dusk vs. evening vs. night) and the amount of ambient light from whatever light sources are available. Immediate feedback is available when shooting with a digital camera making the selection of the best shutter duration and timing of the flash easy to figure out.



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