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DIY Studio Lighting Set Up

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Want to set up a small photo studio in the garage or spare room, but don't want to spend thousands of dollars on lighting equipment? A trip to the hardware store can provide you with most of the items you need to set up a studio for portraits and inanimate objects.

Basic tungsten shop lights with reflectors and clamps can be positioned in traditional lighting setups and yield good photographs. Here's a quick overview.

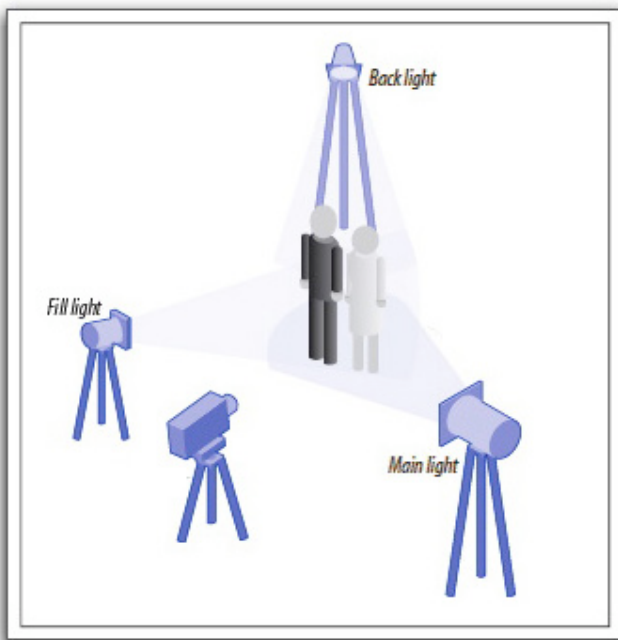
Setting Up Your Lights

You can use regular shop lights from the hardware store for your DIY studio. Use a minimum output of 150 Watts for your bulbs and be sure to leave the reflectors attached to the bulb sockets for maximum luminance.

Sheets of white cardboard or foamcore can be used as reflectors to fill in shadow areas. You may want to pick up a half dozen or so of A-Clamps that come in handy for attaching backgrounds and other items in your studio. Gaffer's tape is another accessory that always comes in handy.

You can diffuse the harshness of the direct light by suspending thin, white fabric next to the subject and shining the light through it. Always be careful that you don't create a fire hazard by letting the fabric touch hot surfaces.

Typical lighting schemes for portraits use three lights: two lights directed at the subject from the front, and the third light shining on the background or illuminating the subject's hair from behind.



3-Point Lighting Set Up

Place the lights as close to the subject as comfortably tolerable. The closer the lights, the more illumination you get on the subject, and the better the quality of the light.

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Camera Settings for DIY Lighting

You can use a compact digital camera or a digital SLR in your new studio. Here are the settings you should use.

1. **Turn off your flash.** Find the flash menu on your camera and disable the flash so it does not fire when you press the shutter.
2. **Set your White Balance to "Tungsten."** Light bulbs have a different color temperature than normal outside light. By changing your White Balance setting to "Tungsten" (look for the light bulb icon), the colors in your pictures will look more natural.
3. **Increase your ISO setting to 400.** Shop lights and other rigs using artificial lighting are not as bright as the sun. By increasing your ISO to 400, your camera will be more sensitive to the lower amount of light.
4. **Turn on the lights, point your camera at the subject, and squeeze the shutter slowly.** You don't want to jar the camera during exposure. And if you want to be extra careful, use a tripod to help you steady the shot.

There are many variations on these techniques. For example, if you use halogen shop lights, you may want to use the Custom White Balance setting on your camera for best results. You can have lots of fun and take great pictures with simple lighting from your local hardware store.

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