

Natural Versus Artificial Light: Which Do You Prefer Working With?

Many photographers at one point or another are faced with this question; is it better to use natural or artificial light when taking photos? There is definitely not a right or wrong answer, although as a photographer, you're sure to have your own strong opinions. In this article, we'll review the key differences between natural and artificial lighting sources, as well as the pros and cons of using them.

Defining Natural and Artificial Light

To begin, let's clarify the definitions of natural and artificial lighting. To keep things simple, natural lighting can also be thought of as available light, such as that produced by the sun or the moon. Artificial lighting is produced via another source, such as a studio strobe, speedlight, LED light, your camera's pop-up flash, or even a streetlight or lamp.



Benefits of Using Natural Light

The biggest benefits of using natural lighting is that it is free, abundant, and very easy to find. There's no need to make huge investments in lighting equipment to find gorgeous natural light to pull off brilliant shots. All you need is a camera and some sun or moonlight, and you can begin shooting immediately! If you ever choose to

upgrade your natural lighting approach, the tools of the trade are also very cheap, consisting mainly of [reflectors](#) and diffusers to bounce or manipulate the available light. Due to the ease of use and acquisition of natural lighting, it's generally recommended that beginning photographers start experimenting with natural light before introducing artificial light to help [understand how light works](#).

Cons of Using Natural Light

While natural lighting is abundant and easy to incorporate into photography, [it can be challenging](#) for the simple fact that sunlight varies greatly. Depending on location, season, weather, and time of the day, natural lighting can produce differing colors and contrast in your images. For example, midday sun tends to produce neutral white colors and extremely high contrast, while golden hours of sunrise and sunset have very warm colors and medium contrast. Thus, the look you're going for will determine the time and location of your photo shoot, unless you harness additional tools such as reflectors, diffusers, and lens filters.



Benefits of Using Artificial Light

If you're a fan of being able to manipulate and control every aspect of your photo shoot, artificial light will better suit your needs. Since artificial lighting has little to do with natural sources, it is a ceaseless light source that is available at any time of the day, meaning you don't necessarily have to plan your photo shoot around the weather, or availability of sunlight. Depending on the artificial light source you choose, sunlight or even moonlight can be replicated, creating images that appear to have been shot with natural light, but at a time of your choosing.

While artificial light may have a reputation for sounding complicated and expensive, there's a wide range of lighting gadgets available for photographers;

ranging from [cheap DIY solutions](#) to top-of-the-line professional grade strobes, and lots of options in between. Some lights can have tricky settings, but many are relatively straightforward, especially continuous lighting sources such as LED lights that have simple dimming switches.



Off-camera flash portrait photography

Cons of Using Artificial Light

Even though artificial light sources offer you more control over photo shoots, it comes with the burden of needing more gear, and time to set it all up. Unlike the sun, artificial lighting costs money, even if you opt for DIY solutions such as candles or desk lamps. Professional grade artificial lighting sources will also need to be held in place with light stands, and possibly even [modified with umbrellas](#), beauty dishes, and soft boxes.

Depending on the photo you have in mind, you may need multiple artificial light sources to balance your image out. There are also other accessories needed such as batteries or power cables and plugs, and you'll need a dedicated studio or space to set your lights up. Long story short, artificial lighting can [adds lots of extra moving parts](#) to your photo shoot, that cost additional time and money, not to mention require lots of practice.

When to use Natural or Artificial Lighting?

What type of lighting you use will ultimately come down to your personal preference and experience as a photographer, as well as your budget and the ideal image you're trying to create. Artificial lighting typically takes some time and practice to begin using properly; whereas natural lighting is much easier to get started with from the get-go. There are of course exceptions to these rules, but generally natural lighting is usually easiest to use for documentary, street, or run-and-gun photography when you don't have a lot of time to set up a controlled photo shoot. On the flip side, artificial lighting is usually preferred for commercial, product, and fashion photography when there's both a budget, and ample resources to create the photo.



Which do You Prefer?

As noted earlier, there are very strong opinions for and against using natural and artificial lighting for photography. Which camp do you fall into, and why?

Reference

<https://digital-photography-school.com/>