

FK MEDIA — LIGHTING EDUCATION SERIES

CHAPTER 02

2-Light Setups

Adding a second light doesn't just add more light — it gives you control over shadow. This is where mood becomes intentional.

● BEGINNER + INTERMEDIATE

● KEY + FILL CONCEPT

● 6 SETUPS COVERED

● FREE LIGHTING SHEET

BEFORE YOU START

In Chapter 1 you learned how one light and its position creates shadow. Chapter 2 is about learning to *control* that shadow with a second light. You're not just adding brightness — you're deciding how dark, how dramatic, and how dimensional your image feels.

Every 2-light setup has a **Key** and a **Fill**. The key is your main light. The fill is your control light. The relationship between them — called the **light ratio** — is what separates a flat image from a cinematic one.

THE FOUNDATION

Key vs. Fill

● KEY LIGHT

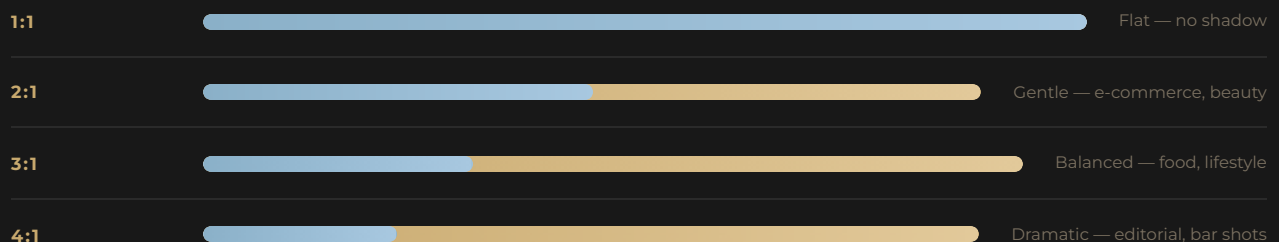
The Boss

Your dominant light. Sets the direction, mood, and shape of the image. Everything else responds to the key. Usually your strongest modifier — large softbox, beauty dish, or bare flash depending on the look.

● FILL LIGHT

The Shadow Controller

Not a second key — a shadow manager. It lifts the shadow side of your subject to the exact level you want. Usually softer and lower power than the key. Can be a strobe, reflector, or white card.

LIGHT RATIO — HOW DARK IS YOUR SHADOW?

REAL SHOT — GUESS HOW I LIT THIS

Maatay Kit — Can You Guess the Rig?

Study the photo first. Where's the shadow falling? Is the light hard or soft? Where did the key come from? Then check the clock diagram — this is exactly how it was lit.



REFERENCE PHOTO
MAATAY YERBA MATE KIT

Save as: maatay-reference.jpg



Overhead clock diagram — Maatay Kit 2-light setup: KEY (AD200 Pro bare flash) at 11 o'clock, FILL (stripbox) at 3 o'clock

OVERHEAD CLOCK DIAGRAM — EXACT RIG USED

STUDY THE SHADOW DIRECTION BEFORE YOU SCROLL

- Key (11 o'clock) — Godox AD200 Pro, bare flash. Hard light from back-left. Creates the crisp, dramatic shadow falling toward the lower-right. No diffusion = sharp shadow edges and specular highlights on the packaging surface.
- Fill (3 o'clock) — Rectangular softbox (stripbox): Placed on the right side, significantly lower power. Lifts the shadow side just enough to retain packaging detail without killing the drama. Soft output keeps the fill invisible — it reads as "shadow control," not a second light source.
- Ratio: Approx 6:1–8:1 — very dramatic. The key dominates; the fill is there to hold detail, not balance.
- Tell: The hard shadow edge and the bright specular highlight on the packaging edge confirm bare flash. If it were a softbox, the shadow would be gradual and the highlight would be a soft broad patch instead of a crisp edge.

01

THE FOUNDATION

Key + Fill — E-Commerce Standard

⚡ KEY — 7 OR 8 O'CLOCK — SOFTBOX

◦ FILL — 1 OR 2 O'CLOCK — UMBRELLA OR WHITE CARD

LIGHTING DIAGRAM
KEY + FILL — E-COMMERCE

Upload: Basic 2 Light - E Commerce .jpg

EXAMPLE SHOT
CLEAN PRODUCT ON WHITE

Upload: e-commerce result with key + fill

The key softbox sits at 7–8 o'clock — angled in front of the subject, off-axis enough to create dimension. The fill (umbrella or white card) goes on the opposite side at 1–2 o'clock. The fill doesn't create its own shadow — it simply reduces how dark the shadow from the key gets.

- This is the bread-and-butter commercial setup — clean, bright, readable
- Keep the fill 1–2 stops below the key (2:1 or 3:1 ratio) for natural dimension
- The closer the fill to the subject, the brighter and flatter the shadow gets
- An umbrella as fill gives wider, softer bounce than a white card



The tell: When guessing this setup, look at the shadow side of the subject. If it's dark but still has visible detail and texture, that's a 2:1 or 3:1 key/fill ratio. A flat, even image with almost no shadow is 1:1 — two lights at equal power.

LIGHTING SHEET — SETUP 01

KEY

FILL

KEY LIGHT

POSITION 7–8 O'Clock — $\frac{3}{4}$ front, slightly above subject

MODIFIER Large softbox (60×90cm) — soft, wrapping light

POWER [INSERT — e.g. 1/4 at 2.5ft]

FILL LIGHT

POSITION 1–2 O'Clock — opposite the key

MODIFIER Shoot-through umbrella or white card stock

POWER [INSERT — 1 stop below key]

CAMERA

SETTINGS [INSERT — Aperture / ISO / Shutter]

RATIO 2:1 or 3:1 — key brighter than fill

BEST FOR E-commerce, menus, bright product, food on white

02 THE SEPARATION SHOT

Key + Rim Light

⚡ KEY — 7 O'CLOCK — SOFTBOX

◦ RIM — 11 O'CLOCK — BARE FLASH OR GRID



LIGHTING DIAGRAM KEY + RIM — BAR SETUP

Upload: 2 Light Bar Setup.jpg



EXAMPLE SHOT KEY + RIM ON SPIRITS/COCKTAIL

Upload: bar or cocktail shot with visible rim glow

WHAT'S HAPPENING

The key lights the front of the subject. The rim (second flash, usually gridded or bare) is placed behind the subject at 11 o'clock — angled so it catches the back edge and creates a bright outline rim. The rim separates the subject from the background and adds depth you simply can't get from one light.

- Rim light doesn't fill the shadow — it wraps the subject's back edge
- A grid on the rim keeps the beam tight so it doesn't spill onto the background
- For cocktails and bottles: aim the rim slightly downward into the liquid — it glows from inside
- Don't overpower the rim — 1 stop above the key creates a halo, 1 stop below is subtle separation



Bar photography tell: When you see a cocktail with a glowing rim on one back edge and a lit label, that's almost always a key + rim setup. The key reads the label, the rim makes it look like it's glowing from within. This is the go-to 2-light for dark bar environments.

KEY LIGHT

POSITION 7–8 O’Clock — $\frac{3}{4}$ front left, above subject height

MODIFIER Medium softbox (60×60cm) — controlled spread

POWER [INSERT — e.g. 1/4 at 2ft]

RIM LIGHT

POSITION 10–11 O’Clock — behind subject, aimed slightly down

MODIFIER Grid (tight beam) or bare flash — keeps rim off background

POWER [INSERT — match or 1 stop below key]

CAMERA

SETTINGS [INSERT — Aperture / ISO / Shutter]

BEST FOR Cocktails, spirits, bar photography, product on dark background

MOOD Premium · Glowing · Dimensional · Bar-ready

03

THE ACCENT SETUP

Key + Snoot Accent

⚡ KEY — 8 O’CLOCK — SOFTBOX

◉ SNOOT — 10 OR 2 O’CLOCK — SNOOT/GRID

LIGHTING DIAGRAM
KEY + SNOOT ACCENT

Upload: 2 Light Setups w Snoot.jpg

EXAMPLE SHOT
SNOOT ACCENT RESULT

Upload: shot showing a focused accent light on a hero element

WHAT'S HAPPENING

The key handles the main light on the subject. The snoot is a focused, narrow tube modifier that creates a tight circle of light — you aim it at a specific element of the scene. A topping, a garnish, a cocktail glass — the snoot makes that exact thing pop without spilling onto the rest of the frame.

- A snoot is essentially a spotlight — you control exactly what gets hit
- Aim it at a garnish, a sauce drizzle, or a glass rim for an editorial accent
- The transition between the snoot's light and the dark surroundings is abrupt and dramatic
- Try a slightly warm gel on the snoot for a candle-lit feel against a cooler key light



No snoot? Roll a piece of black foil (Cinefoil) into a cone and tape it to the flash head. It's not perfect but it works. You can also use a gridded beauty dish aimed far off to approximate a narrow spot. The principle is the same — narrow the beam, control the spill.

LIGHTING SHEET — SETUP 03

KEY

SNOOT

KEY LIGHT

POSITION 7–8 O'Clock — main subject illumination

MODIFIER Softbox — broad, even key coverage

POWER [INSERT]

SNOOT / ACCENT

POSITION 10 or 2 O'Clock — aimed at hero element specifically

MODIFIER Snoot or rolled black foil cone — narrow beam

POWER [INSERT — usually 1 stop above key for drama]

CAMERA

SETTINGS [INSERT — Aperture / ISO / Shutter]

BEST FOR Editorial food, hero garnish, fine dining, cocktail detail

04

MIXED MODIFIER SETUP

1 Hard + 1 Soft

⚡ KEY — 9 O'CLOCK — BARE FLASH (HARD)

◉ FILL — 6 O'CLOCK — SOFTBOX (SOFT)



LIGHTING DIAGRAM

1 HARD + 1 SOFT — COFFEE SPLASH

Upload: 2 Light 1 Hard + 1 Soft - Coffee Splash.jpg



EXAMPLE SHOT

COFFEE SPLASH — MIXED MODIFIERS

Upload: coffee splash or high-speed action shot

WHAT'S HAPPENING

A bare flash from the side creates hard, dramatic texture — every droplet, every grain, every surface detail is razor sharp on the lit side. A softbox in front fills the scene with a softer ambient base, so the image doesn't go pitch black where the hard light doesn't reach. The two modifiers fight each other just enough to create something neither could do alone.

- Hard light from side = maximum texture and drama
- Soft light from front = readable shadows, ambient fill
- Great for action shots, splashes, steam, food texture details
- Raise the power on the hard light relative to the soft for more drama; equalize for balance

FK MEDIA Flash photography: Hard light from **CH. 01** softbox at 6 o'clock gives you texture and a clean, readable background on the front face. Freeze the splash with a high shutter speed or use manual flash duration for crisp edges at any shutter speed.

DOWNLOAD SHEET

LIGHTING SHEET — SETUP 04

HARD KEY

SOFT FILL

KEY LIGHT (HARD)

POSITION 9 O'Clock — direct side, 90° to subject

MODIFIER Bare flash or small reflector — no diffusion

POWER [INSERT — higher than fill for drama]

FILL LIGHT (SOFT)

POSITION 5–6 O'Clock — near camera, softening ambient

MODIFIER Large softbox — wide, even coverage

POWER [INSERT — 1–2 stops below key]

CAMERA

SETTINGS [INSERT — Aperture / ISO / Shutter]

BEST FOR Splashes, steam, texture shots, action food photography

MOOD Dynamic · Textured · Dramatic · Editorial

05

THE BAR SETUP

Dual Back Lights

⚡ KEY — 10 O'CLOCK — SOFTBOX

◉ FILL — 2 O'CLOCK — SOFTBOX OR BARE FLASH

LIGHTING DIAGRAM
DUAL BACK LIGHTS — BAR SETUP

Upload: Back Lighting - Light Block 420 Bar- 2 Lights .jpg

EXAMPLE SHOT
DUAL BACK-LIT COCKTAIL

Upload: 2 Light Bar Setup.jpg result or 420 Bar shot

WHAT'S HAPPENING

Both lights are placed behind the subject — one at 10 o'clock, one at 2 o'clock. Neither is in front. The entire front face of the subject is in shadow, but two rim lines wrap both back edges simultaneously. Any liquid, glass, or translucent element between the two lights glows from within. A white card or reflector at 6 o'clock provides just enough fill to recover front label or surface detail.

- Both back lights should be roughly equal power for symmetrical rim glow
- Lower one slightly to make the setup more directional (dominant + accent)
- A white card at 6 o'clock fills the front — move it closer/further to dial in fill
- Block any direct lens flare with a black flag between the lights and the camera



The bar photography standard: This setup is why bar shots look the way they do. Two lights behind, white card in front. The only thing different between a \$500 shot and a \$5,000 shot is the precision of the flag placement and how well you control the spill hitting the background.

LIGHTING SHEET — SETUP 05

BACK L

BACK R

LIGHT 1 — BACK LEFT**POSITION** 10–11 O'Clock — behind left, aimed down into subject**MODIFIER** Small softbox or bare flash — depends on rim width desired**POWER** [INSERT]**LIGHT 2 — BACK RIGHT****POSITION** 1–2 O'Clock — behind right, mirroring light 1**MODIFIER** Match light 1 for symmetrical rim, or differ for drama

REFLECTOR White card at 6 O'Clock — recovers front label and surface

SETTINGS [INSERT — Aperture / ISO / Shutter]

BEST FOR Bar photography, spirits, cocktails, translucent subjects

MOOD Cinematic · Glowing · Symmetrical · Premium Bar

06

THE HERO SHOT

Back Key + Front Fill

⚡ KEY — 12 O'CLOCK — LARGE SOFTBOX

◉ FILL — 6 O'CLOCK — WHITE CARD OR SOFTBOX



LIGHTING DIAGRAM
BACK KEY + FRONT FILL — HERO SETUP

Upload: 2 Light Setup.png or Slappin Chick Diagram.jpg



EXAMPLE SHOT
HERO SHOT RESULT

Upload: 2 Light Pistakio.jpg or Slappin Chick hero result

WHAT'S HAPPENING

A large softbox directly behind the subject at 12 o'clock creates a glowing halo and bold rim outline. A second, softer light (or white card) from 6 o'clock brings detail back to the front face. This is the classic hero food shot — the burger that looks like it jumped off the page. The key creates the drama, the fill makes it readable.

- Use a large softbox as the back key — the bigger it is, the more wrap you get
- The front fill should be 2–3 stops below the key for a dramatic yet detailed look
- This setup is especially powerful on food with height: burgers, stacked plates, tall cocktails

- Add a white card to the left or right for a subtle side catch light on the subject's edge



The trick with this setup: The fill power is everything. Too bright = kills the drama. Too dark = front face goes muddy. Start at 3:1 (fill at 2 stops below key) and adjust from there. A 5:1 ratio gives you cinematic hero energy. 2:1 gives you the bright editorial food look.

LIGHTING SHEET — SETUP 06

BACK KEY

FRONT FILL

KEY LIGHT (BACK)

POSITION 12 O'Clock — directly behind subject, above and behind

MODIFIER Large softbox (90×120cm or larger) — maximize halo and rim wrap

POWER [INSERT — dominant light in the setup]

FILL LIGHT (FRONT)

POSITION 6 O'Clock — near camera, aimed directly at subject front

MODIFIER White card stock or medium softbox — soft, even fill

POWER [INSERT — 2–3 stops below key]

CAMERA

SETTINGS [INSERT — Aperture / ISO / Shutter]

RATIO 3:1 to 5:1 — back key dominant

BEST FOR Hero food shots, burgers, stacked plates, flagship menu items

MOOD Cinematic · Bold · Hero · High-Impact

TEST YOURSELF

Guess How I Lit This

3 setups. 10 seconds. How many lights, what positions, what modifiers?

QUESTION 01 OF 03

The subject has two bright rim lines — one on each back edge. The front face has some detail but is mostly in shadow. What 2-light setup is this?



QUIZ IMAGE 01 — DUAL RIM SHOT

Upload: dual back-lit cocktail or bar shot

☐ A — Key + Fill at 7 + 1 O'Clock

☐ B — Dual Back Lights at 10 + 2 O'Clock

☐ C — Key + Rim at 8 + 11 O'Clock

☐ D — 1 Light + Reflector at 12 O'Clock

QUESTION 02 OF 03

The subject is well-lit on the front. The shadow side is visible but not dark — you can see detail and texture in the shadow. There's no rim glow on the back edge. What's the most likely setup?



☐ A — 1 Light + White Card (1 light)☐ B — Key + Fill at 7 + 1 O'Clock (2 lights)☐ C — Dual Back Lights☐ D — Key + Rim (visible rim edge)

QUESTION 03 OF 03

The image has hard shadows from one side, but the front of the subject is still readable — not fully dark. There's a sharp shadow on the table. One side is dramatically lit, the other is softly filled. What modifier combination is this?



QUIZ IMAGE 03 — MIXED MODIFIER SHOT

Upload: 2 Light 1 Hard + 1 Soft result or coffee splash

☐ A — Softbox + Softbox (two soft)☐ B — Bare Flash + Softbox (hard side + soft fill)☐ C — Umbrella + Grid☐ D — Snoot + White Card

Download the Chapter 2 Lighting Sheet

← CH. 01

DOWNLOAD SHEET

All 6 setups. Key positions, fill positions, ratios, and modifiers — one printable reference card.

DOWNLOAD PDF — CHAPTER 2

RETAKE THE QUIZ

← BACK TO

Chapter 01 — 1-Light Setups



COMING NEXT

Chapter 03 — 3-Light Setups



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