

A lens with a view to please (Vol 2)

*"It's not what you look at that matters, it's what you see."
Henry David Thoreau.*

We will continue from last month, and take more light readings to establish the correct exposure. The image we used in our illustrations last month was made too light, mea culpa; the grey area should actually look almost black.

We are still working with our centre-weighted light meter in our camera. We have established a tone in our image that we consider to be a grey tone (midvalue between black and white) of the area where we want to see detail in. Whatever you select with your centre weighted light meter; the area of the centre of your light meter will always be measured in such a way to return an average grey tone.

The contrast range of our film and digital capture is about the same, about six aperture stops difference is possible to be recorded. How do we know that we actually have an image that contains almost white and almost black in this situation? It is deceptively easy.

First of all, the reading of the area that we considered our mid tone, (see last issue) the grey tone that would give us detail in the area of interest, not too dark/light, was for instance 1/60th of a second at F.8. Keep that reading in mind, and now we measure the brightest parts, the lightest area of the torso. Take a reflected reading of this brightest spot.

In real life, you may have to bring your camera quite close to the skin, eliminate any other areas that may influence your light meter reading. A long lens will be helpful for the bashful... Your light meter reading might be in this area 1/125th at F 16. Silly Boy! This is very confusing.

You have selected a *different* shutter speed to take this reading! Do not do this, keep your shutter speed the same. Especially when working with flash, your shutter speeds are irrelevant, only the aperture is important to allow the amount of light falling onto your sensitive pixels/grain.

Remember, the volume of the flashlight is important; the flash duration has almost nothing to do (there is a correlation between flash duration and flash "volume" but that is getting too technical and here not relevant☺!) with the amount of light the flashtube produces.

We transfer our reading of 1/125th at F. 16 back to the shutter speed of 1/60th of a second; this will give us a reading of a 1/60th of a second at F. 22.

Observant readers will have noticed this is three apertures smaller than the original grey reading.

One smaller aperture will give you a lighter grey. Another smaller aperture will give you a lighter grey again, a very light grey. One smaller aperture, (a total of three now) will be such a light grey it will be like white.



So, if the skin reflects three apertures more light than you have set on your original light reading setting (1/60th of a second at F.8) to take the photograph with, the skin will be photographed like a white tone. **Q.E.D!** = Latin for **Q**uod **E**rat **D**emonstrandum = what had to be proven).

Follow the same procedure for the area that you consider is the darkest shadow. How do you know that this darkest shadow will be photographed as a black tone? Easy?

With the same light meter in camera, a centre weighted light meter, take a reflected light reading of the darkest area in the middle of your viewfinder. Eliminate any other surfaces that might distract/influence from this. It does not matter if it is not in focus, an out of focus area reflects the same amount of light as a focussed area, and this is valid for flat and matte surfaces, not mirrors or highly reflective surfaces.

If your camera had the facility of taking light meter readings in the spot mode, the procedure would be the same, but a lot faster because you can accurately point the little spot inside your viewfinder on the area where you want to take your light reading.

It is a lot more accurate and there is less fussing around to get only the correct tonal value in the centre of your light meter. A multizone metering mode would be fairly adequate to give you accurate light readings of specific areas in your viewfinder.

I believe the multizone metering mode is good for average conditions, average subject matter, not in high contrast light conditions or with still life set-ups (studio).

Many believe incident light metering is the best way to meter light. You need a hand-held light meter, and if you are going to buy one make sure that it can take flash readings as well.

So, why did I not take an incident light meter reading of this subject matter? I could have done it, if I held the incident light meter reading with the white dome facing the camera lens (not facing the light source) just in front of the breast I could have measured the light falling onto the torso.

It will give me a light reading for the correct exposure for the area just behind the light meter. But it would not have informed me how much light there was in the lightest area of the torso.

OK, I could have held the incident light meter with the white dome faced at the camera lens in the area where I think is the brightest part of the body. I will get a reading indicating there is more light falling in that area. Exactly that.

But I do not know how much light will reflect from the skin, it will be likely to be close to three more apertures, but I do not know for sure. I do not know how much the skin reflects the light.

In contrast readings this is one of the most important issues.

We all assumed from the beginning that the person in the photograph is of Caucasian origin. Not necessarily so. Think about it, my first original reflected light meter reading established of "my area of interest" a grey reading, irrelevant of the original colour to start with. European or African, I turned them both into the same ethnic origin - grey!

My incident light meter reading would have left the origin of the person intact. If the person had a dark skin colour, it would stay dark. You do not need to type in your light meter what and who is behind your light meter! The original light values are kept.

Therefore, with my incident light meter reading, reading only the amount of light falling onto the torso, not reflected from the skin, a darker skin would reflect less than a white skin. That is that is why a darker skin is darker, it reflects less light. Put some suntan oil on the dark brown skin, the light may reflect like hell on the skin but your incident light meter does not know anything about the suntan oil!

My reflected light readings will accurately tell me in relation to my original light meter reading of my grey tone which parts of the skin will be photographed like white, black, or grey. An incident light meter reading will give me only one reference point, that of a mid grey for some parts of my photographs but without any indications of the limits of highlights and shadows.

Next month we will take it one step further. Comments to hotshot@ihug.co.nz! Meanwhile, incidentally, viewing you reflectively, I hope I made this clear enough for you to see my point.

Cheers

© Robert van de Voort 2004.

Reproduction of this article is permitted with name reference and link to my website www.AlbanyStudios.co.nz