

Quality Of Light In Photographs: Hard Light vs. Soft Light



Hard Light: Image taken at 10 am with direct sunlight through the window. The sun is on the same side of the house as the window. This results in direct transmission of intense light.



Soft Light: Image taken at 3pm with indirect diffused sunlight. The sun is on the opposite side of the house, so it has time to be diffused and is bouncing in through the shade outside the window.

My last blog post was about various ways photography can be used to entertain the kids at home while staying at home - [CHECK IT OUT HERE!](#) Today's blog, is an example of one of my Compare and Contrast photography activities I suggest in the previous blog. Have your kids try the above task to experiment with the qualities of light. Read below to learn how I set up the two different lighting situations.

For this compare and contrast task, two different lighting conditions need to be created. You can do this by setting up a spot in one room in your home. Have your child take a picture in the morning and then another one in the afternoon. Alternatively, you can have your child take one picture an hour to illustrate the gradual change in quality of light throughout the day.

The above two images were taken in the same room, in front of the same window and my daughter was in the same position. The pictures were illuminated with sunlight only, but as you can see, the two images have very different lighting conditions. One was taken in the morning when the sun enters the living room directly, the second image was taken in the afternoon. In the afternoon, the sun is on the opposite of the house and therefore there is shade directly outside this window. The light entering the window has bounced off the outdoor surrounding environment, so it is no longer direct hard light, but soft and diffused. Understanding light and its attributes is essential so you control and manipulate it to suit your needs and create your vision. Even if you are taking a picture with your

smartphone or point and shoot camera, you can intentionally create images with a better understanding of the quality of light

Light can be either hard or soft. How can you determine the difference between the two? Look to the edges of shadows on your subject. Are the shadows defined with strong hard lines? Or soft, subtle lines?

HARD LIGHT - This type of light is created with a small light source (small relative to the person or subject being illuminated). Hard light will have hard crisp shadow lines, and is indicated by an abrupt transition from highlights to shadows. This type of light will create a lot of contrast and strong shadows. It can be very useful when trying to create a moody and dramatic image. What are some examples of a small light source? The flash on your camera, a flashlight, the light from a lightbulb, and the sun, just to name a few. I know the sun is huge, but relative to us and its distance from the earth, it is considered a small light source and creates hard light when it directly illuminates a subject.



SOFT LIGHT - Soft light is created with a large or diffuse light source. Soft light shadow lines will be very subtle and the transition from highlights to shadows will be very gradual. This type of light will have less contrast and shadows. The light may look flat without a lot of dimension. Soft light is created with a large light source. If you are indoors, find a large window or an open door on the side of the house opposite to the sun. Finding a location on the side of the house opposite of the sun is important, so the sun is not direct. If you cannot avoid the hard direct light of the sun, hang a white sheet or sheer curtains to diffuse the light and make it soft. Soft light is created on a cloudy day because the clouds in the sky diffuse the sun and spread it out.



Walk around your home and pay attention to how the light is illuminating the various rooms. Check out the shadows and highlights falling on the floor, are they defined and crisp? Look at how the quality of light changes in a room throughout the day. Grab your camera, or smart phone and experiment with the light in your home!

<https://www.nicolalevine.com/blog/quality-of-light-in-photographs-hard-vs-soft>