TWO LIGHT FASHION PHOTOGRAPHY SETUP

Creating depth, controlled shadows and subtle subject separation

The objective

The idea behind this setup was to create a moody fashion portrait with soft but directional lighting. I wanted the model to stand out from the background while retaining the shadows and contrast that give the photographs their character. Rather than lighting the entire scene evenly, I used two lights with clearly defined purposes: one to shape the subject and another to create subtle separation.



1. Key Light — Rectangular Softbox with Grid

Placement: Camera left, positioned above the model and tilted downwards.
Modifier: Rectangular softbox with grid.

The key light is the primary source of illumination in this setup. I placed it above the model and angled it downwards to create a natural direction of light, similar to how light would fall on a subject from an elevated source.

This placement helps define the facial structure, creates natural shadows beneath the chin and gives dimension to the body. It also allows the light to fall across the model rather than illuminating her completely flat from the front.

I chose a rectangular softbox because it provides a relatively controlled and directional source while still producing soft transitions between highlights and shadows.

The grid plays an equally important role. It restricts unwanted light spill, helping me maintain control over the background and prevent the key light from spreading across the entire set.

Why this placement?

A light placed too close to the camera axis can make portraits look flat. By moving the key to camera left and raising it, I introduce direction, shape and depth into the photograph.



2. Rim Light — Octabox with Diffuser

Placement: Behind the model, on camera left.
Modifier: Octabox with diffuser.
The second light is positioned behind the model to create a soft rim or edge highlight.
The purpose of this light is to separate the model from the background, particularly around the hair and shoulders. Without some separation, darker areas of the subject can visually merge into the background.
I used an octabox with a diffuser because I didn't want a sharp, aggressive rim light. A hard source could create bright outlines around the model and distract from the overall mood.
The diffused octabox creates a softer highlight with a smoother transition. It gives the subject just enough separation while keeping the edges natural and understated.
Why place it behind the model?
A front-facing light would simply add more illumination to the subject. By positioning this light behind the model, I can selectively create an edge highlight that adds depth without competing with the key light.
The objective is not to make the rim light obvious. It should be noticeable through the separation it creates, not through an overpowering bright outline.



3. How the Two Lights Work Together

Each light has a separate responsibility:

- **Key light:** Creates shape, direction, facial definition and the overall exposure.
- **Rim light:** Adds depth and separates the model from the background.

I intentionally avoided adding unnecessary fill light. Retaining the shadows helps preserve the contrast and atmosphere of the photographs.

The key light establishes the visual character of the image, while the rim light supports it without changing that character.

This is a good example of how a simple two-light setup can produce a controlled, professional-looking fashion portrait. The result comes from the placement, direction and quality of light rather than the number of lights used.



4. Camera Settings

Equipment	Settings
Camera	Canon R6 Mark II
Lens	24–105mm f/4
Shutter Speed	1/160 sec
Aperture	f/9
ISO	100

Why these settings?

- **1/160 sec:** Provides a controlled shutter speed for studio flash photography while staying within the camera's normal flash-sync range.
- **f/9:** Gives a deeper depth of field, helping maintain sharpness and detail across the subject.
- **ISO 100:** Keeps the camera's sensitivity low, helping preserve clean image quality and giving better control over exposure.

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SetMyLight
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Final Takeaway

A good lighting setup is not about using more lights. It is about understanding what the photograph needs.

Here, the key light creates the shape, the rim light creates separation, and the shadows preserve the mood.

Sometimes two lights, placed with intention, are all you need.

