

Expert Lighting Tips for Wedding Reception

Hey everyone this is Shivani and Michelle here. We've been getting pretty commonly asked questions in our wedding photography community about lighting wedding receptions. What lights to use, what modifiers to use, where to place your off-camera flashes, and what are our favorite lighting setups.

Today we are here to answer all these questions and give you some basic tips about lighting weddings. We are going to walk you through our process - everything from walking into the scene to assessing the wedding venue and then deciding where to place the lights. We will show you what we are going to do with those lights and then how to adjust the settings.

All this stuff is going to be fun and helpful, and you should gain some knowledge about the basics of wedding lighting.

Okay so what's the first thing that we do when we walk into the wedding reception room? First we'll assess the situation in terms of highlights and shadows. We want to take a look at the placement of everything - the dance floor, the sweetheart table and where all the light is coming from, and what are the light sources.

Once we evaluate the existing light sources we have to decide on placement for all of our lights. So when you're thinking about placing your lights you want to decide where you want to have your fill flash and your key light(s). You want your backlights to work as a separation between the backdrop that the wedding couple, so that's another thing to consider. We use a fill light to add just a little bit of light into whole room to brighten things up.

We usually place our flashes in the corners of the wedding reception hall. It is best to put them a little bit further away from people so that they're not actually lighting wedding guests. I prefer to put them on the farthest corners as long as it's not an extremely large room.

Any normal sized wedding reception room should be OK with far corners setup. You want to keep your light stands away from a lot of activities and other structures like the DJ's light stands. If you put them next to light colored objects you're going to light them up even more, so I tend to look for a darker corner and then have them face 45 degrees.

In most situations you want to aim your lights towards the dance floor. Place your lights in the corners and then face them towards the center of the wedding hall. In most cases the dance floor is in the center so have the lights face into the center of the room.

If a sweetheart table is located on a stage, the lights can be facing in to provide the key light. If the dance floor is in the center and a wedding couple is watching let's say a performance you should have your lights at the side of the stage. At that point would act as a fill and having them on the side of the sweetheart table facing the performance or the stage and at that point that would work as a backlight. It all depends on which angle you're shooting from.

You also have to pay attention when you're placing your flashes to other things light the DJ's lights, any wedding venue's spots lights and videographer's lights. If the wedding videographer is using any stationary lights you might be able to use their lights as your light source.

Next you want to match your flashes' color temperature with the existing light color temperature. Most of the older wedding reception ballrooms have that weird tungsten nasty-looking yellow glow. You want to match your light with the existing color temperature so you're not mixing lights, which make almost impossible to color correct in post.

The easiest way to do this is to add a CTO gel to your lights sources like your on-camera flashes and to all other flashes in the room. The CTO gels come in full, $\frac{3}{4}$, $\frac{1}{2}$, and $\frac{1}{4}$ strength. There is no rule which to use so just start with full CTO gel and see how to works. If it's too strong just go with less powerful gel.

There are some rare situations of where the wedding venue has some windows and then some tungsten lights so you won't be able to 100% color correct your lights. You might have to decide which light sources is the strongest and match the color temperature accordingly. Some newer wedding venues have LED light which are usually day-light color balanced to 5500K. The only issue with LED's is that they flicker and sometimes produced color temperature banding on your camera sensor.

Once we we've placed our flashes and we color balanced them with existing light we move on the how me modify the lights. Some wedding photographers like to put either a diffuser or a bounce card on their on-camera flashes. Depending on the situation, but most of the time you don't really need a diffuser on you flashes. They're so far in these corners that the light should diffuse and bounce on its own.

If you wanted a little bit of control and less spill then you could grid these flashes and this is just a preference and not something you have to do. It's going to help you a lot with whitewash and it is also really good for directional control and creating more moody lighting setup.

Our next step is finding the right power output for mixing all your light sources. It's a trial and error phase and it's a balancing act. We usually have our camera shutter speed set to 1/200 or lower and my off-camera flashes set to 1/32 of power and our on-camera flash set between 1/16 or 1/32 of power.

This is always based on after you've assessed your situation and after seeing what kind of ceilings you have or what available light there is in the wedding hall. But most of the time you're going to be shooting in low light situations, whether it is outdoors or indoors wedding receptions and pretty much at night. When you're shooting inside a darker wedding ballroom and it's low light you want to bump your ISO up to around anywhere from 800 to 3200.

Basically assess if that's enough light for you for what you want to achieve in terms of your creative ideas for the wedding. If you've done this several times you'll probably have a common recipe that you're familiar with. In the long run it'll be a lot easier but there's definitely a trial and error periods, and you need some experience and practice.

Speaking of ceilings and walls you want to use ceilings and walls to bounce light off them because they're going to be a really large light source, which make a nice soft light. Just make sure the walls and your bouncing off are white, otherwise you will end up with color cast.

Our next tip is to always talk to the DJ about his light setup before the reception starts. Especially if they are going to use any hot spotlights or even worse lasers. You want to avoid any surprises such as that little like green dots running all over people's faces. Make sure that you talk to them and understand their light schemes and prep for when there's a grand entrance or when there are speeches.

Some wedding venues have those really powerful spotlights following your wedding couple during the first dance so the fastest and easiest way to solve this problem is to bump up your flash power your on-camera flash and lower your ISO so you're cutting down the ambient light. You're adding in white flash basically bouncing off of wherever you're bouncing. Check your overall exposure and make sure you are not blowing highlights.

Our next wedding lighting tip is you should invest some money into proper wireless flash trigger that offer full control of their power output. You need to be able to control all your lights from your camera. Sometimes you want a particular light to act as backlight and sometimes act as a fill light, depending on where you're standing.

Before we wrap this up there's one thing that we kind of forgot to cover. We always use all our flash in manual mode where we can control power output and all ratios. We don't use ETTL in our wedding receptions light setups. The choice between ETTL and manual setting is a large enough topic that we're going to have to cover that in another article.

For now we recommend to practice your lighting skills because your experience will guide you how to properly light any wedding venue. Don't be afraid to experiment with different ideas because that's where fun begins. We hope this article will give you some inspiration how to become an expert in creative wedding venue lighting.

Source. YouTube