

## HANDOUT: The Illustrated Stages of Three-Point and Set Lighting

**Three-Point Lighting** refers to the classic use of at least three lighting elements to light a subject in a scene.

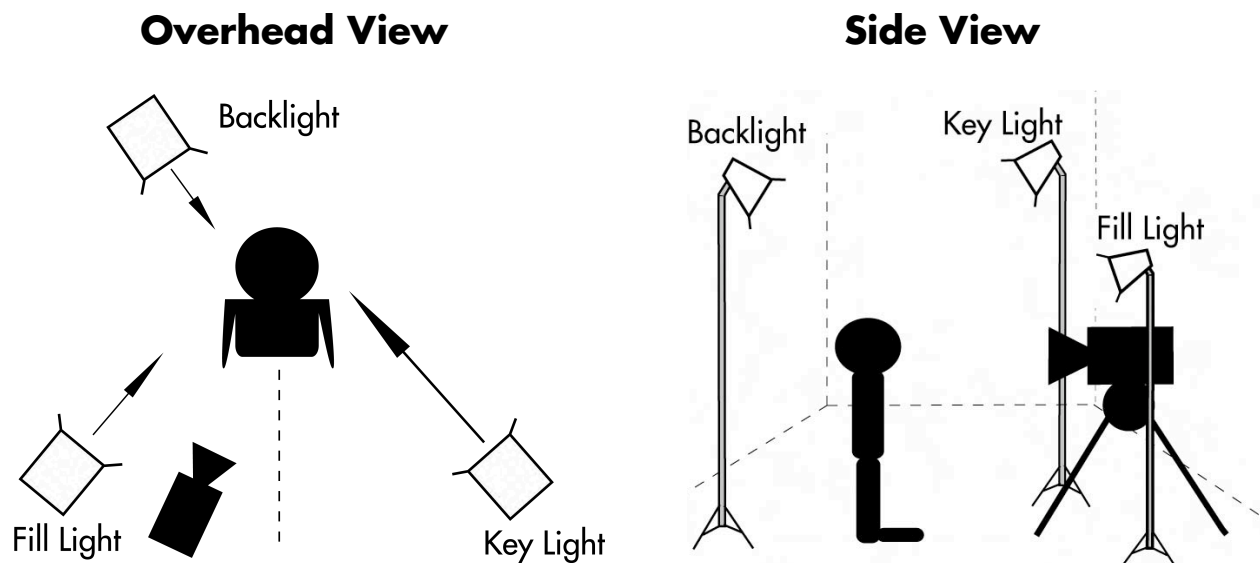
Each lighting element fulfills a different purpose – acting as the Key Light, the Fill Light or the Back Light.

**The Key Light** is a lighting element that acts as the main light illuminating the subject. It can also be thought of as the brightest light on the subject.

**The Fill Light** is a second lighting element that illuminates the subject and “fills in” the shadows on the subject created by the key light. The amount of fill light used on the subject can create a more dramatic or a softer, more romantic effect on the subject.

**The Back Light** is a third lighting element that is aimed at the subject from behind them (thus the name). It casts a light on the subjects hair and shoulder in order to keep the subject from blending into the background.

Below are diagrams of a typical **Three-Point Lighting Set-Up** for a subject:



**TIP: The Back Light**  
The back light does not need to come from above the subject, but can also come from the side or below.

Here is what our subject looks like with only the lights in the room.

- Notice how the face just blends into the background.
- Also notice how it is difficult to determine what time of day the shot is supposed to represent.
- Also see how the lighting gives no indication of the mood of the scene (other than bland.)



**UNLIT: AREA LIGHTS ONLY**

The **KEY LIGHT** is the main light on the subject.

- Because the key light is so bright in our picture, we are able to change the exposure, making make the background go black, thus changing the mood and time of day.
- The key light placement is not a predetermined position. It's position can change to fit mood, time of day and story.
- Usually the subject will be best lit if the subject is looking off somewhere between the camera and key light. Though this is not a fixed rule



**KEY LIGHT ONLY**

The **FILL LIGHT** is the light that brings out details that would otherwise be lost in the shadows that are created by the Key Light. It is less bright than the Key and often has a “softer” look.

- The more fill light is used the “softer” the subject will appear to be. The less, the more dramatic.



**FILL LIGHT ONLY**

Here is an example of the subject lit by both a Key and Fill Light.

- Notice how the Key Light is stronger than the Fill.
- Notice how we are now able to see the left side of the face due to the addition of the Fill Light.



**FILL & KEY LIGHTS ONLY**

**BACK LIGHT** is cast on the subject from behind and creates an edge of light that separates the subject from the background.

- Back Light is usually aimed at the hair and shoulder of the subject in order to light up the edges of the subject only.
- Be careful that the Back Light does not hit the background.



**BACK LIGHT ONLY**

And here is the final product of the **Three-Point Lighting** on the Subject using the Key, Fill and Back Light.

- Note that in this example there is no set light and therefore the location and time of day cannot be determined.



**COMPLETE  
THREE-POINT LIGHTING SET-UP:  
KEY, FILL & BACK LIGHT**

Now let's look at **Set Lights**: In your future videos/films you will not only have a subject, but a set. So after the subject is lit with three-point lighting, additional lighting elements will be needed to illuminate the set, key props and to further separate the subject from blending into the background. These lights are called **Set Lights**.

Here is an example of a set that is illuminated with one Set Light. The light is placed behind a "frame" in order to look like light coming into a room through the window.

- Notice how the light coming through the window is on the same side as the Key Light. This will make it appear that the Key Light is actually coming from the light outside the window.



**SET LIGHT ONLY**

Here is the **final product** of Three-Point Lighting on the Subject with a Set Light.

- Note how the subject stands out from his background.
- Note how the Set Lights bring attention to a part of the background that clearly is important to the mood and story.
- Also note how set lighting changes a scene and successfully gives a strong feeling of place (a dark interior room), time (night) and mood (dramatic).



**THREE-POINT LIGHTING WITH SET LIGHT**