

Using the Nikon Creative Lighting System

A STEP BY STEP GUIDE TO USING THE SB-600 AND SB-800 FLASHES



Including real world examples, case studies and system setup.

Using the Nikon Creative Lighting System
A Step by Step Guide to Using the SB-600 and SB-800 Flashes

By Mike Hagen

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Post Office Box 1966
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Table of Contents

Dedications	6
Introduction	7
How to Use This Book	8
SB-600 Layout	11
SB-800 Layout	12
Chapter 1: CLS Background	17
What is CLS and iTTL?	17
What works with iTTL?	20
What doesn't work with iTTL?	20
Can I Use My SB-600 or SB-800 On My Old Camera Body?	21
What is D-TTL?	22
Capabilities of CLS	23
Chapter 2: Quick Start Guide (Just Show Me How To Set It Up!)	25
Using Your Flash (SB-600 or SB-800) On the Camera	25
Using Your Flash (SB-600 or SB-800) With A TTL Remote Cord (i.e. SC-28 or SC-29)	25
Using Your SB-600 Flash as a Wireless Remote (Slave)	25
Using Your SB-800 Flash as a Wireless Remote (Slave)	26
Using Your SB-800 Flash as a Wireless Commander (Master)	26
Using Your Nikon D70 as A Wireless Commander Flash	26
Using Your Nikon D200 as A Wireless Commander Flash	27
Using Your Nikon D2H, D2Hs, D2X or D2Xs as A Wireless Commander	27
Chapter 3: Flash Theory.....	28
Light	28
How a Flash "Fires"	29
Controlling the Power	29
Stops	31
Guide Number	34
Camera Sync Modes	35
Which Sync Mode Should You Use?	42
Making Good Use of Flash Power	43
Distance from the subject	43
Flash Zoom Setting	45
Camera ISO	48
Aperture	48
Chapter 4: SB-600 Buttons, Modes, Menus and Operation.....	50
SB-600 Buttons and Controls	50
Mode Button and Modes	55
TTL BL	55
TTL	56
Manual	56

Zoom Button	60
Two Button Controls	62
Flash Button	63
Ready Light	65
SB-600 Custom Menus	66
Using the SB-600 as a Dedicated Flash	70
Using the SB-600 as a Remote Flash	72
Chapter 5: SB-800 Buttons, Modes, Menus and Operation.....	74
SB-800 Buttons and Controls	74
Wide Angle Adapter and Bounce Card	75
Battery Chamber	80
Zoom Buttons	84
Diffusion Dome	86
Mode Button and Modes	87
TTL BL	88
TTL	89
AA	89
A	91
GN	92
Manual	93
RPT	95
SEL Button	98
Flash Button	99
Modeling Light	102
TTL Multiple Flash Terminal	103
PC Sync Terminal	103
Two-Button Controls	105
SB-800 Custom Menus	106
Using the SB-800 as a Dedicated Flash	112
Using the SB-800 as a Remote Flash	113
Using the SB-800 as a Commander Unit	115
Using the SB-800 as a Repeat Commander Unit	119
Using the SB-800 as a SU-4 Unit (Commander and Remote)	122
Chapter 6: Five Step Plan for Great Flash Photography.....	129
System Setup for Common Shooting Scenarios	133
Chapter 7: Wireless Flash Camera Capabilities.....	134
How Different Flashes Work With Wireless Flashes	134
Using the D70 as a Commander	134
Using the D200 as a Commander	135
Using the D50 as a Commander	137
Using the D2X/D2H as a Commander	137
Using the F6 as a Commander	137
Chapter 8: Flash Beeps.....	139
Chapter 9: White Balance and Gel Usage.....	142
Automatic WB	143
Factory Preset WB	144

Custom Preset WB	146
Kelvin Values	148
Using Gels	149
Chapter 10: Batteries and Power Options.....	153
Battery Choices	153
When You Need More Capacity	153
Battery Management	154
Chapter 11: Camera Based Functions for Your Flash.....	155
FV Lock	155
Auto FP High Speed Sync	156
Flash Sync Speed	158
Flash Shutter Speed	158
Flash Off	159
Modeling Flash With FUNC Button	160
Flash Bracketing	161
Chapter 12: Case Studies And Examples.....	164
Event Photography: On Camera Flash Combined with Ambient Window Light	165
Event Photography: Single Flash on Flash Bracket in Dark Areas/Rooms	166
Travel Photography: Single Dedicated Flash on TTL Cable	167
Travel Photography: Single Dedicated Flash on TTL Cable	168
Travel Photography: D200 Commander and SB-800 Wireless Remote	169
Residential Scene: Commander and Remote	170
Outdoor Portrait: Popup Flash!	171
Outdoor Portrait: Single Flash as Remote. D200 as Commander	172
Outdoor Portrait: One Commander, Multiple Remotes	173
Indoor Portrait: Single Commander on Cable. Single Flash as Remote.	174
Indoor Portrait: Commander and Multiple Remotes.	175
Product Shot: Multiple Remote Flashes.	176
Macro Photography: Two Remotes. D200 as Commander.	177
Chapter 13: Lighting Kit Recommendations.....	178
Product Recommendations	179
Chapter 14: Common Questions and Answers.....	182
Glossary.....	185
Web Resources.....	190
About Mike.....	191
Order Page.....	193

Introduction

Using Nikon's new iTTL flash system is fun and amazing. The ease and speed at which we can set up complex lighting arrangements is simply incredible. Long gone are the days of manual flash setups, calculating guide numbers and setting the appropriate apertures on our cameras. Here are the days of "click and go" flash photography.

It is truly amazing to watch the Nikon wireless flash system work. Once you get the knack of setting up the flashes to the correct Channels and Groups, then just about anything is possible. I use the SB-600 and SB-800 flashes extensively in my professional work and have found them to excel at a wide variety of lighting tasks such as sports, portraits, product, macro and corporate photography.

As flexible as the SB-600 and SB-800 flashes are, please keep in mind they are still relatively small and will be hard-pressed to light up an entire building or illuminate a sweeping landscape. Like most things in photography, we need to use the right tool for the job. The Nikon SB-600 and SB-800 speedlights are perfectly suited to lighting up people, portraits, rooms and lots of industrial locations. However, if you need to light up large-scale commercial assignments, then it is still wise to use more powerful studio strobes from companies like Hensel, Profoto or Elinchrom.

Many photographers are intimidated by using a flash, and rightly so. There is a lot of technology involved with these units and initially, at least, our real-world results are much worse than we expected. Being able to produce consistently good results with the Nikon CLS (Creative Lighting System) takes practice and knowledge. My goal with this book is to fill your mind with knowledge about the flash system so you can go out and create stunning images. I want to give



Nikon D2X, SB-800 flash off-camera, Slow Rear sync

you a hands-on, practical guide that will help you learn the strobes. I want the flashes to become second nature to you in their operation and setup.

As with everything in photography, you need to practice in order to get better. During my digital photography workshops, I always teach with a hands-on approach that encourages participants to learn through *doing*. I encourage you to practice your flash photography in as many ways as possible. Get out and take photos every day. Use the photos and setups included in this book as inspiration to get out and learn!

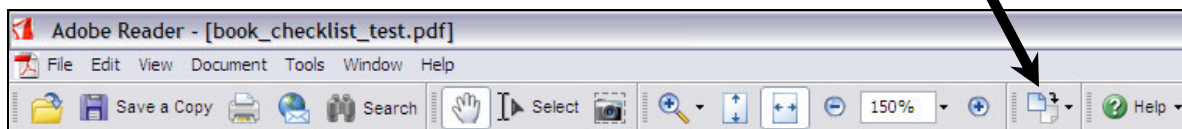
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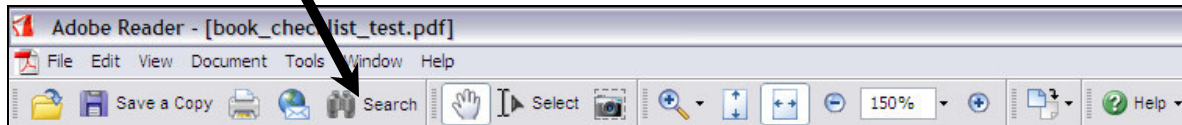
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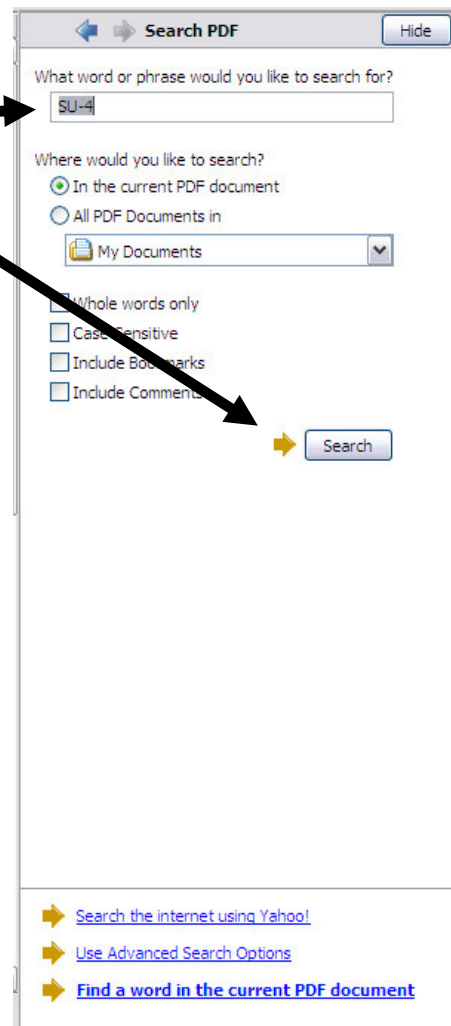
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Example Page from Chapter 5

Bounce Card

Nikon included a small built-in bounce card on the SB-800. To access it, pull out the Wide Angle Adapter, and the card will automatically extend (**Figure 5.8**). The purpose of a bounce card is to reflect some of the light forward to the subject while still allowing some of the light to bounce off a ceiling. Doing this will (hopefully) create a nice catch light in the subject's eyes. It also serves to lighten up some of the dark shadows which frequently appear under the eye sockets.

In reality, this bounce card is too small to really be effective. A *real* bounce card should be at least 4"x6" or larger (**Figure 5.9**). Bigger is better when it comes to light diffusion and bounce cards are no different. Most photographers who use bounce cards end up taping a large card to the back of the flash. These provide much better results!

If you to want to use the bounce card, you should set up the flash head to about 45 degrees. At this setting, some of the light will bounce off the ceiling (assuming you are inside) and some of the light will be reflected off the card towards the subject. I like to extend the Wide Angle Adapter out when using the card, but if you want, you can push the diffusion panel back into the flash head.



Figure 5.8
When using the Bounce Card, deploy the Wide Angle Adapter for better results. Also, point the flash head upwards at 45 degrees.



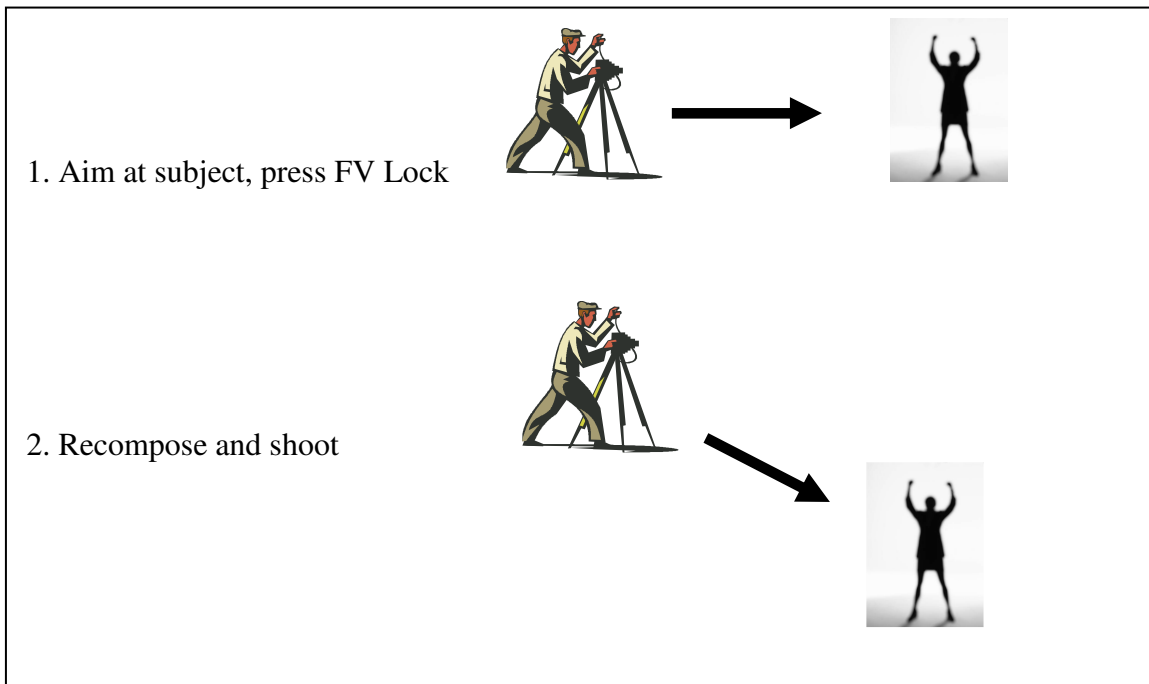
Figure 5.9
This is a "real" bounce card that actually has some useable surface area. It is 5" x 8". The bigger your bounce card the better your flash results! Attach it with Velcro® or Gaffer tape.

Example Page from Chapter 11

Chapter 11: Camera-Based Functions for Your Flash

FV Lock

FV Lock stands for “Flash Value Lock”. It is a special feature that allows you to set the flash output value once, then shoot a bunch of other shots retaining the same flash output. Nikon bills it as a way to set the exposure with the subject in the center of the frame, then recompose the picture so the lighting is accurate when the person is off-center (see graphic below).



I've found a different use for FV Lock that is very helpful in preventing people's eyes from closing from the normal iTTL pre-flash. As I mentioned before in the book, sometimes the pre-flashes cause people to close their eyes before the *real* flash. In many shots, this results in a photograph with the person's eyes closed (**Figure 11.1**)! The FV Lock function is activated when you press the FV Lock button on your camera (**Figures 11.2, 11.3, 11.4**). Once you push this, the flash fires a pre-flash which the camera remembers. Then, you can continue shooting *without* the pre-flashes.



Figure 11.1
Sometimes the Nikon pre-flashes cause your subject to close their eyes. Use FV Lock to prevent this problem!

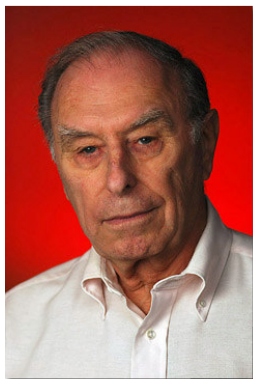
Example Page from Chapter 12

Chapter 12: Case Studies and Examples

The goal of this chapter is to help you understand how to put everything together for some common shooting scenarios.

From a philosophical standpoint, you should *generally* endeavor to make your flash photography subtle, soft and gentle. Lots of new photographers get immediately turned off from flash photography because it is frequently harsh and obnoxious. At least once a week a photographer will make a comment to me such as, “I don’t like to use flash photography because it washes out my daughter’s face” or “I get a shadow behind Grandma’s head”. The truth is there are good ways to use flash and bad ways to use flash. Most of the bad ways involve on-camera flash. Most of the good ways involve diffusing the light somehow and getting the flash off the camera.

This chapter is dedicated to showing you a number of real-world examples using flash photography. I’ll show the picture and then describe how it was taken. The purpose is to break down the shot to its individual elements so you can understand everything that went into it. I’ll cover on-camera, off-camera, remote and even pop-up flash. Here goes ...



Example Page from Chapter 12

Outdoor Portrait: One Commander, Multiple Remotes

Comments

The great thing about Nikon's Creative Lighting System is how easy it is to quickly set up a photograph. The image at right was taken outdoors with three Remote speedlights. A key light on the right, a fill light on the left and a hair light in the background.

This image was taken with a D2X, a SB-800 Commander and three wireless Remote flashes. I used Manual exposure and set my ambient light exposure to $1/125^{\text{th}}$ @ f8. This effectively darkened the background trees so they were about 1.3 stops below a medium exposure (0.0). I did this to make the subject have good separation from the background.

Then, I added the flashes. The Key (flash on the right) was set at TTL + 1.3. The Fill (flash on the left) was set to TTL +0.3. The hair light (flash in back) was set to M 1/64.

I placed a twig on the ground where I wanted my young model to stand and then went about taking pictures. Total time for setup, photos and takedown was about 15 minutes. That is fantastic!



Setup Details

- Camera: D2X
- Exposure Mode: Manual
- Meter Mode: Matrix
- Aperture: 8
- Shutter Speed: 1/125
- ISO: 400
- White Balance: Cloudy
- Lens: 24-120mm f4-5.6
- Sync: Slow
- Commander Flash: SB-800 set for "- - -"
- Key light (right): SB-800 TTL +1.3
- Fill light (left): SB-600 TTL +0.3
- Hair light (back): SB-800 M 1/64
- Accessories: light stands, 32" umbrellas
- Image Quality: JPEG Fine Large



Example Page from Chapter 13

Clamps and Brackets

Having a good supply of clamps and brackets should be required for any flash photographer. They allow you to fasten your flash to just about any object. The standard clamp lots of folks use is the Bogen Superclamp (**Figure 13.7**). It is truly a great product and is also built like a Sherman tank.

I also have a big supply of plastic clamps (**Figure 13.10**) I purchase from hardware stores. These clamps allow you to hold up lights, backgrounds and reflectors with ease. I have modified a few of my clamps by adding 1/4" x 20 threaded screws into the handle. This allows me to attach a flash to the clamp as shown in **Figure 13.9**.



Figure 13.9
Using a simple plastic clamp as shown means you can put a flash just about anywhere! Here, a SB-800 is attached to the clamp with the AS-19 stand that came with the flash.



Figure 13.7
The Bogen Superclamp is a rough and flexible product that will attach to many types of things such as tripod sockets, light stands, tables and doors.



Figure 13.8
Here's the Bogen Superclamp attached to the leg of a tripod. On the top of the Superclamp I've attached my SB-800 flash with the AS-19 stand that came with the flash.



Figure 13.10
I purchase standard plastic clamps from hardware stores and then modify them with 1/4" x 20 bolts so I can mount my flashes to them.

About Mike Hagen



Mike Hagen is the President of Out There Images, Inc. His company is focused on creating the finest photography workshops possible.

Mike Hagen has worn many hats in his short lifetime. He graduated from college with a Mechanical Engineering degree and worked in Semiconductor Manufacturing for 10 years. He is currently a small business owner, a freelance writer and a professional photographer. His passions are traveling, creating, writing, photography and teaching. He is happily married and the father of two beautiful children.

Mike aspires to live life to the fullest and to help others do the same. His enthusiasm and zest for life are infectious. His devotion to God and family guides everything he does.

Mike can be reached at:

Out There Images, Inc.
PO Box 1966
Gig Harbor, WA 98335
mike@outthereimages.com
www.outthereimages.com

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