

Photographing Shadows and Reflections

Shadows

All you need to get started in shadow photography is a light source and a subject that casts a shadow – that's it!

Shadows are about - CONTRAST, so are often shot in Black and White for dramatic effect or in Colour for impact.

Best exposures, and hence shadows, will be made if you set your camera to manual mode, as this gives you more control over the exposure. The automatic exposure meter on most cameras will attempt to 'lighten' the shadows, resulting in an overexposed image.

If your camera has an Exposure Compensation button (+/-) or setting, then use this to give more oomph!

In sunny conditions, early morning or late afternoon will give very strong, long shadows that can be shot away from, or towards the camera for dramatic effect.

If you are photographing indoors you can use a lamp without the shade to create a strong light source, which will result in strong shadows. The closer your light source is to the ground (or to the level the shadow-casting object is, such as on a table), the longer a shadow will be made.

Look for patterns - trees, columns, arches, windows (plenty of these around the Cambridge Colleges!)

Reflections

We naturally first think of using water, lakes and rivers when photographing reflections, and just like shadows, the best light is in the early morning or late afternoon.

Photographing water reflections begs for a large depth of field. You want the objects reflecting on the water to be in sharp focus, as well as the water itself:

- Use Aperture Priority mode with a small aperture of f/16 or smaller.
- A wide-angle focal length lets you capture the big picture.
- Use the lowest ISO setting that allows you to achieve a shutter speed of about 1/50 of a second or faster.
- Focal length should be between 28mm and 35mm.
- The reflections are the main focus of your image, so if possible, place the horizon line near the upper third of the image.

When capturing reflections on the surface of lakes and ponds, Neutral Density graduated filter filters are often essential to balance the exposure of the brighter sky with the darker reflection on the lake. Without the filter the shot would lose much of its impact.

A Polarising filter will help to control the amount of surface shine from the water, but be aware that in nature, reflections are darker than the subject

they are reflecting, so it's possible to use too strong a filter (Neutral or Polarising) and the image will look false.

Puddles and wet pavements produce good reflections due to them being very shallow. Use a wide aperture (f2.8, f5.6) to limit the depth of field, allowing you to focus on the reflection whilst throwing the surrounding areas out of focus.

Remember too that reflections can be found in many shiny things - mirrors, glass, chrome etc.

You can enhance your shot by boosting the contrast of the image (just as in shadows) as reflections have a lower contrast range than the subjects they reflect.

It's important to remember that shiny surfaces don't absorb light, so if using artificial lighting, think carefully about the amount and angle of the light in relation to your surface. You may want to experiment with lighting from above or behind your subject.

Be careful with your composition, so you and your camera are not reflected in the shot, unless intentional!