

HIGH KEY PHOTOGRAPHY

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Definition

HKP is an artistic style that aims to reduce the lighting ratio present in a scene

It technically means 'elevated level of light'

You use unnaturally bright light to blow out most shadows, rendering a homogenous composition.

You voluntarily overexpose a photo, yet retain details of highlighted areas.

You play around with conventions and break the rules!

It was originally done in early film and TV - to better deal with high contrast ratios, but now is used to suggest upbeat mood.

The amount of HK application varies greatly to where the background is very white and subject correctly exposed, all the way through to images that have hardly any shadows, middle tones or detail

Basically you take a photo with a light or white background. Eliminate shadows by letting in more light. Most of the tones are in the highlight region.

HK photos should evoke emotion

Some emotions expressed in describing HKP:

positive, upbeat, funny, lighthearted, beautiful, magic, evocative, romantic, ethereal, optimistic, cheerful, calm, quiet, simple

You either like or don't like the high key photo.

Playing around with conventions and breaking the rules can be exciting

Subjects that render themselves to HKP:

Snow, models, babies, flowers, landscape, products, weddings

Studio Set-up for HKP

3 lights and a seamless white backdrop

Key light and a Fill light

Backdrop light

Silver side of reflector

Have model wear white

Spread the light!

9 foot wide roll of paper on stands or a sheet

The key light is off to one side and produces harsh shadows on opposite side of the face - so set up a less bright fill light (or reflector) to smooth out those areas. The white background bounces artificial and natural light back to the subject. Experiment and Practice!
Use as much light as possible

Camera Settings for Studio

Aperture priority w fast, wide setting
SS to over-expose your image
ISO 100
Exposure compensation 2-3 stops
Histogram data to the right of midline

Experiment. keep background light at least 1 f-stop over subject lighting. Meter light for subject for overall setting of subject 2, backdrop 1

Outdoor HKP Natural Light

Bad weather can make better HK image
Find a non-distracting background
Overexpose background 1-2 stops w/o blowing out the highlights
Set camera to evaluative (matrix) metering

High KP in Wildlife Photography

Usually we attempt precise details of fur, plumage or skin
HK focuses on composition and framing
Minimalist scenes work best
Monochromatic homogenous background

Technique for HK Wildlife photography

Overexpose image by 1-2 EV of light
Don't burn the image - use the histogram (not LCD)
For SS mode overexpose by changing aperture.
Aperture mode use SS to set overexposure

Study the light - erase details of the background and preserve the subject
Spot (or center-weighted) metering mode. Focus on the animal
Turn on highlight feature during playback

Post Processing

Shoot in RAW

Increase the exposure w/o burning out highlights

Watch the histogram

Overexpose, desaturate, cool