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Twenty-two Illuminating Lighting Principles  
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Here are 22 lighting principles drawn from the demonstrations on the DV Enlightenment DVD:

1. Great lighting is simple. Sometimes a single light and a piece of white foamcore is better than a whole professional light kit.
2. Hard light comes from a point source and creates sharp, distinct transitions and shadows.
3. Soft light comes from a large light source, creates soft, wraparound light and is the easiest to make flattering.
4. Shadows add a third dimension to your composition- the whole purpose of lighting is to describe the three dimensional shape of your subject in light and shadow.
5. The direction of your light sources- especially your primary light source- is profoundly important in determining the look, mood and emotion of your shot and the effect it has on your viewers.
6. A classic position for your key (primary) light source is at a 45 degree horizontal angle from the line between camera and subject, and a 45 degree angle of elevation from the ground.
7. Move the key light more to the side or back of the subject for a dramatic, low key lighting setup.
8. Light from a lower angle to create a mood that is fashionable, futuristic, wondrous, scary or evil.
9. Light from overhead for an interrogation or spiritual look.
10. Avoid shooting with the key light close to the camera.
11. Use a flag to cut spill from your key light onto the background.
12. Use a reflector for fill- to reduce- but not eliminate- attached shadows on your subject.
13. Fill controls contrast ratio, thereby mood.
14. Backlighting defines the edges of your subject and separates your subject from the background.
15. Cast a pattern of light and shadow on the background.
16. Light to support your message.
17. Use motivated lighting.
18. Avoid your subjects casting shadows on each other unless desired. Avoid multiple shadows. Avoid mic boom and crew shadows and reflections.
19. When shooting outside, try to shoot at golden hour, magic hour, in the shade, or on an overcast day.
20. Use zebra to gauge consistency of background lighting.
21. Put safety first when lighting.

22. Learn the rules, then break them. Don't repeatedly and robotically follow any formula for lighting- look at each scene with fresh eyes and visualize what lighting setup would best communicate the message and emotion of that scene.

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Choose a model!  
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No, I'm not referring to picking a good-looking person to star in your movie--although that can't hurt!

One technique that is almost always used by professionals but rarely by amateurs is choosing a model for your project. This means choosing a film, a scene from a film, a TV commercial, or TV show that has a look and feel that you want to achieve with your project.

Even a painting, song or symphony, poem, sculpture or architecture could serve as an emotional inspiration for a desktop movie project (but it's harder discerning how a poem was lit).

Then, you can study all the elements of this model, and use it as a guide when planning your own production.

For example, let's say you're producing a financial planning video, or planning a happy scene in your movie. You might decide on a "Maxwell House Coffee commercial" feel. So you record the commercial and study the sets, actors, shot composition, camera settings, editing style, pacing, music, and titles.

You set up your project to have warm morning sun streaming through the windows, plenty of close-ups on happy caffeinated faces, long, leisurely dissolves, orchestral music, large, bold green titles, and shallow depth of field. You want your viewers to almost smell the coffee beans when watching your project.

TV commercials make excellent models because some of the world's best camera operators, editors, and motion graphics artists work on them. Designed to have a distinct creative style that is memorable and enjoyable, commercials pack an amazing amount of production value into 30 seconds.

I have a ReplayTV that, like Tivo, offers the great feature to allow you to quickly skip past all the crappy reality shows and sitcoms and just watch the commercials- frame by frame if desired!

Great filmmakers model the filmmakers who came before them— and try to build from the present state of the art to move it forward, not reinvent the wheel. This is also true with great painters, sculptors, musicians, scientists, writers, and athletes.

Rebel Artists Read This: Resist the impulse to start out your moviemaking career in a vacuum without any references upon which to build. Studying the best can only lead to developing your own unique style once you've learned the century-old lexicon of filmmaking. Writers don't invent their own language, they just put existing words together in new and interesting ways. Otherwise no one would understand their work.

Remember: Plagiarism is the sincerest form of flattery.