

Intensity vs. Amount

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One of the areas in which some people are confused about is the difference between light intensity and amount of light. We are going to clear up that confusion right from the start.

When making an exposure, keep the following analogy in mind. This is how I have taught it in college. Your exposure is like a bucket of water. Just as it takes a certain amount of water to fill the bucket, it takes a certain amount of light to expose the film. However, the way you fill the bucket can make a difference. Do you use a slow trickle or do you fill it quickly from a high-pressure fast flowing source? This is how you can understand intensity. Do you make your exposure from a candle or from a bright light? The candle is low intensity while the bright light is high intensity. If you use a candle you will need to have a longer exposure time than if you were to use a bright light. The bright light would require a short amount of time to make the same exposure. The amount of the exposure remains the same, but the intensity changes.

When doing photography, we must keep in mind that only a certain number of combinations will work to afford you a good exposure. We are limited by a number of factors.

These factors include:

- Camera equipment
- Lens
- Subject
- Tripod
- Location
- Available light
- Film speed
- Shutter
- Aperture

In some situations, you can get away with long exposures of several seconds, and even as long as a minute or two or longer. However, in most situations, it is a better combination to use shorter times and higher intensity in order to make your exposure.