

## Softboxes and the NILMDTS Session

By Cliff Lawson

There are probably as many ways to light a session as there are affiliated photographers. Arguably the least desirable option is simple on-camera flash aimed directly at the subject. While it certainly illuminates, the light is flat and devoid of much character. I remember reading somewhere that “light illuminates, shadow defines.” In order to get our shadows, we have to get that light OFF the camera. You can bounce it off the ceiling or a wall, you can use a sync cord and hold it an arm’s length off to the side. The Nikon and Canon wireless systems allow you to get that flash off the camera with no wires at all. Of course you can use one of several radio transmitter/slave systems as well.

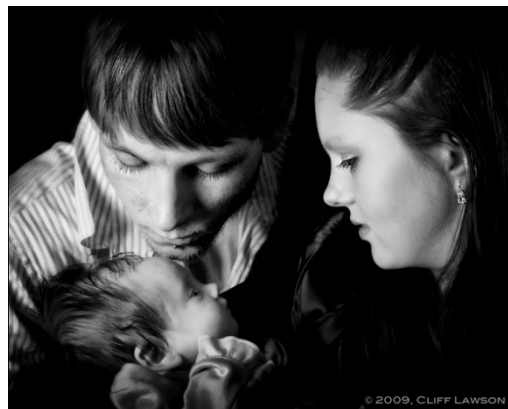


Once the light is off the camera, we want to soften it a bit. This means light modifiers, and here again everyone will have their favorite, but I am going to discuss the use of just one type: the softbox. I am sure everyone reading this knows that when we use the term “soft light” we are describing the highlight-to-shadow transition. Hard light gives us a sharp transition, softer light give us a more gradual transition. We know too, that the larger the light source *in relation to the subject*, the softer the light will be. So if we can take that little speedlight and put it in, for

example, a 12x36 softbox, we will have increased the area from maybe 3 square inches to over 430 square inches. Even a small 8x8 box increases the area to 64 sq. in., over a 20x increase!

One of the advantages of the softbox over umbrellas or bouncing off the ceiling or wall is that we have much more control over the fall-off of the light. The umbrella or ceiling/wall bounce—while certainly an option—will tend to light more of the environment than may be desirable. Softboxes—especially strip lights—contain the spread of light. Note the two examples of softbox lighting; both were made with a 12x36 softbox and a Nikon SB-800 flash. In Image #1 the box was about 3 feet from the subject and the speedlight was at about 1/16 power! Used with a grid, the light would have had even less spread.

For the gearheads, the ISO was 1600, f5.6, 1/250th. The high shutter speed decreases ambient light. Note the transitions from highlights to shadows are relatively soft, but in image #2 the light was closer—about 24 inches—and you can see the transitions are even more gradual. Not wanting have your eyes glaze over and discuss the inverse square law, just know that the closer the light source, the greater the light fall-off with the distance from the source. So that nice close light is both soft and does not illuminate the whole room.



The 12x36 or 10x36 strip lights are made by several manufacturers and many have mounts/speedrings for our small speedlights. Using them wirelessly, a nurse or assistant can easily hold one as they weigh less than about 3 pounds. As you know, we do not recommend using light stands in our restricted working environments and the slim strip lights maneuver more easily than would larger units. Umbrellas are way too cumbersome and cannot be held

by an assistant. Another option is the 8x8 LumiQuest SoftboxIII. It attaches directly to your speedlight and used close-in provides a wonderful, reasonably soft illumination. It too can be hand-held by the photographer or an assistant. Illustrations of both a strip light and the 8x8 accompany this article.



The quick reference: Larger and closer is softer. Close equals quicker light fall-off. Flash is ONLY responsive to aperture, ambient is controlled by shutter speed. (Know your camera's max sync speed.)