

• studio basics •

the follow-along cheatsheet

Space:

- **Organization:** When you're stuck with a small space, it can be hard when you also have a lot of equipment. Staying organized will save your butt! Here are a few of my favorite organizational items:
 - **Cord Wraps (or Cord Tacos):** Keep your cords organized, they can be the biggest hassle on a shoot day when you haven't wrapped them properly! My favorites are from CB2 (www.cb2.com) and come in an array of different sizes. I also love Bongo Ties, which can be found just about anywhere (I love these from [The Container Store](#)).
 - **Boxes:** As an organizational fanatic, I love boxes. I especially love them when they stack together to fit in small spaces. My favorites come from either The Container Store ([found here](#)) or IKEA ([found here](#)). I put away every piece of equipment I own in either a box or my camera bag, including my lighting equipment. If you're looking for big boxes for lighting equipment, I recommend plastic trunks on wheels ([I love these ones](#)) so that you can wheel your heavier equipment around without having to break your back!
 - **Label Everything:** You can find labels pretty much everywhere and they'll help you remember what is in which container!
 - **Drawer Storage:** Small drawer-based storage can be helpful for smaller things - I actually keep my cords in a craft cabinet! You're going to laugh, but the BEST smaller cabinets with drawers come from Joann Fabrics (or other types of craft stores). You can find my favorites [here](#) (a bigger rolling organizer) and [here](#) (a portable case that works well for small supplies like pocket wizards, cords and other photoshoot accessories).

Backgrounds:

- **Background Crossbar:** [You can find the one I love on Amazon for \\$33!](#) It's cheap, yet strong and versatile - best purchase I've ever made!
- **Fabric:** I use homemade fabric backdrops that I sew together myself. It's a great way to save money and create styles that you like! One very important note about fabric: it needs to be **HEAVYWEIGHT** or **UPHOLSTERY** fabric. This means that the fabric is thicker and light will have a harder time passing through. I recommend velvet ([this black velvet is a great price from fabric.com!](#)) or thick cottons ([like this heavyweight blue floral one here](#)). Avoid anything labeled vinyl, silk, acrylic, rayon or viscose - these all tend to be reflective and will create unsightly bright spots.
- **Buying Backdrops Online:**
 - **Amazon:** Obviously Amazon is chock full of amazing options at good prices. To find all the backgrounds - amazon.com > Electronics > Camera & Photo > Lighting & Studio > Photo Studio > Backgrounds. Pay close attention to the size and fabric content though, as some third party sellers intentionally try to trick you into buying cruddy backgrounds. I especially recommend looking at SIZE, which is a huge issue if you're working with larger subjects. 10x20 feet is a great size for larger portraits and you can search specifically in the Background category! They also have an option to select "Non Reflective" under Feature Keywords and you should check that first as well! Two of my favorites are [here](#)

(similar to my gold bokeh backdrop from the studio basics video) and [here](#) (a simpler, soft gray painted backdrop).

- **Etsy:** A great place to get handmade backdrops! One important note: Etsy also sells *DIGITAL BACKDROPS* for editing, so be very careful if you see one listed for \$3 and think you're going to score big. You'll get some awesome digital downloads, but no physical shipment. Two of my favorite backdrop makers are [My Backdrop Shop](#), [Peek Prints](#) and [Silver Drawer](#).
- **Paper:** It's a great option, especially if you need a big seamless backdrop. You can buy a cheap, wall-mounted support system [here](#) that comes with three rolls of paper. A heads up: pay attention to how you're going to mount it and where, it doesn't have the best set of instructions!

Cameras & Lenses:

- **My Equipment:** Since I'm not a big gear-talk gal, I'm just going to link you all to my basic studio kit! My [Canon 5D Mark III](#), [my 50mm f/1.8 lens](#) and [my 85mm f/1.2 lens](#) are my absolute favorites to use at home or in a small studio.
- **Hudson's Equipment:** Hudson uses [a Nikon D810](#), [a Nikon 50mm f/1.8 lens](#), [a Nikon 70-200 f/2.8 lens](#), [a Sony 70-200mm f/4 lens](#), and [a Sony a7](#).

Lighting:

- **Lighting Stands:** Buy multiple light stands and buy many! I love [this kit](#) from Amazon, but you can also buy individual ones that are sturdier, larger or come with extra attachments.
- **Flash:** A versatile, portable, light, intense flash system in a tiny package! I love my [Canon Speedlite](#), but the [Yongnuo flashes](#) can be a good bang-for-your-buck if you're on a tight budget. Flash diffusers are very useful and I love my [strange, plastic Cloud Diffuser](#), but this [Octagon Flash Soft Box](#) is amazing! Yongnuo also makes some amazing [Wireless Flash Controller systems](#) that will help if you want to get your flash off your camera. Be careful to double-check that they'll work with your flash and camera first, though!
- **Strobes:** I love my Alien Bees - they're a great price, work beautifully, come in fun colors (which I'm aware doesn't matter, but bubble gum pink lights make me happy!) and are total work horses. You can find [my Alien Bees here](#). The White Lightnings that I use are from the same company - Paul C. Buff - and you can find them [here](#). They're stronger, offer a few more specialty options, come with a longer warranty and are a bit more expensive. I recommend *EITHER* option, so don't fret if \$500 is too much for lights - that's why the cheaper Alien Bees exist! Also, jump on eBay and Craigslist - both incredible places to find used lights as photographers upgrade and want to sell their old equipment at lower prices!
- **Honey Comb Grids:** Paul C. Buff makes their own grids that you can buy and they fit with all of their lights (which I think is genius, you can buy them for their cheapest and most expensive strobe). You can find all of them [here](#). I recommend the \$70 kit of all 4 options if you can swing it - they are endlessly useful and you'll be shocked how much you end up loving them. Most other lighting companies sell grids too, so if you're not going with Paul C. Buff, no problem!
- **Umbrellas:** Since we're on a run with Paul C. Buff, [here are their options](#). What I love the most (and wish I owned) is their Soft Silver PLM Umbrella - it creates an incredibly bright light, much stronger than soft boxes, and the color it produces is gorgeous. They're \$50 a pop and

you'll want 2, so they are a bit of an investment. If you're looking for cheaper options, I recommend the Convertible White Satin with Black Backing Umbrella, which offers the ability to adjust the light and turn a bland, white umbrella into a cheaper soft box-like option. And it's \$15 to boot. If you're on a really tight budget, just grab some super basic White Translucent Umbrellas for \$10!

- **Soft Boxes:** If you want to jump into the world of soft boxes, size does matter. Invest in bigger options that you can customize later - you'll be happy you did. I love my Large Foldable Octabox and I'd recommend it to anyone interested in beauty photography and stunning headshots. It's more of an investment, so be prepared to shell out closer to \$150. You'll be hard pressed to find cheaper options too - the range on B&H is from \$150 to \$500 per soft box. OUCH. If you're looking for a better option, you can give the Impact Soft Boxes a shot, like this Large Rectangular one for only \$90. Still too much? Amazon saves the day again with this DIY Soft Box that you'll have to legitimately put together yourself from Neewer for \$16. If you're going the Neewer route, make sure you double check the specs and see if it'll work with your equipment!
- **Soft Box Modifiers:** If you're interested in changing up the shape of your soft box, you'll want some super-duper heavyweight fabric, like this Cotton Canvas Duck Cloth. The weave of Duck Cloth is unique and it works extremely well for clocking out light (very similar to black out curtains). I would recommend buying a whole bunch (about 2 yards worth) and cutting it up to fit over your soft boxes. I can turn my Octagon Soft Box into a Strip Soft Box (like this one from Profoto) without spending \$180, just by clamping on some thick fabric. Modifiers to the rescue!
- **Transmitters:** This is how you connect your lights to your camera and get them to play nicely. I use a very, very old set of Pocket Wizards, which you can buy a newer version here (just look at the ones in my video and these new options, it's crazy how clunky mine look!). They aren't the standard anymore, however, and my other favorite option is by Yongnuo. I'm linking you to the Canon pack here, but make sure to find the set that work with your camera! They're almost half the price, work beautifully and have been recommended to me by 3 other photographers - that's a good sign! If you don't like wireless, no problem - most lights come with a sync cord and you can always use that.
- **Continuous Ring Light:** My Super Nova Diva Ring Light is the best lighting purchase I've ever made and for a great price. It's pretty dang powerful, works great on the road, creates gorgeous portraits on the fly, works well in a photo booth set up and so much more. I would suggest, before running out to find a cheaper option, to pay attention to: the the color of the light (this one uses a fluorescent light set at 5400K, close to daylight), the ability to dim the light (this one offers a 20-100% dimming range), the number of lumens it produces (this one has an output of 4500), and it's accessories/how you'll be able to mount it (this one comes with three separate mounting options in the box alone). If you're looking for a much stronger option, I would suggest shelling out the money for the Nebula LED Diva Ring Light. It uses LED lights rather than fluorescent lights, is almost 20% brighter than the Super Nova, comes with all the accessories and is virtually heat free (an issue that arises with long shoots for most other lights).
- **Diffusers & Reflectors:** I'm combining these together, because I recommend you buy one single product to fulfill all your needs: The Impact 5-in-1 Collapsible Circular Reflector & Diffuser Disc. Whew, that's a mouthful. It's all the things I use, combined into one easy to carry piece of equipment that's only \$50. It comes with two different gold options (one

softer, one stronger), a silver option, a white reflector, a diffuser and a black light shield. It's an amazing bang for your buck.

- **Reflector Holder:** This is when all those light stands will come in handy! This Impact Reflector Holder is incredible if you don't have an assistant, you just pop it on a light stand and it'll be a great add-on purchase if you want to do studio work. Plus it's only \$14!

Models:

- **Friends & Family:** A great place to start and, as Asumi said, most people you ask will be incredibly flattered that you want to photograph them. Don't be afraid to ask and let them know you need some practice! I've found that flattery is an amazingly useful tool, people love getting free photos of their loved ones and are usually very happy to help out a friend who's going out on a limb to try something new. Here are a few lines I've used in the past:
 - "I just got an incredible new set of studio lights! Would you be interested in modeling for me, we can hand out and I'll buy you some [insert their favorite food here]?"
 - "I'm trying to practice some portrait photography, but I haven't done much in the past. You've always been a great subject when we've travelled together in the past [or insert other activity], could I borrow you sometime to get in some more practice time?"
 - "I've always loved photographing your kids at family barbecues. How would you feel if you guys came over next weekend and I tested out my studio equipment? Any photos I get of the kids are yours, no charge!"
- **Model Mayhem:** So you're ready to go out into the world and use professional or semi-professional models. Awesome! Model Mayhem is a treasure trove of incredible people who love to work in the creative field - from models to make up artists to photo stylists to clothing designers. I recommend you get a free account, put up a few pictures to show you're not a creeper and then find someone to work with. You can search by gender and location, then go from there. When you look at your search results, it's easy to spot the model's measurements, the experience level they have, the compensation they require and if they have tattoos/piercings (which might be an issue for some people). Many will have what are called "Verified Credits," so you can actually see their previous, professional work. Many others work on a Trade basis and won't have any credits listed. It's all up to you and I've had some great results off of Model Mayhem!
- **Instagram:** I listed this option because it's popular, it's visual and it's easy for people who are already Instagram users. I created a Promotion (which you can do if you're a verified business account) and called for models, pulling in tons of results. You can also search by hashtag (for instance, #portlandmodel or #jewelrymodel), narrowing your results and scrolling through to find someone who might fit your needs. It's a different approach, but I've had a lot of success!
- **Model Contracts:** So incredibly important, don't forget this step (like I still do from time to time). I use a book called Business and Legal Forms for Photographers, and this is truly the most important step to working with people. If you don't want to buy the newest edition, find a used, older edition!
- **Stylists, Make-Up Artists & Hair Stylists:** I mention an app called Thumbtack and it is so incredible for hiring creatives! If you're working with friends or family, try asking specifically for what you're looking for - many women can do their own make up, so just ask.