

Capturing Subject Color and Background Color That Match

By: Jason Stratton

The Problem: Taking pictures inside with a flash sometimes yields dimly lit, yellow or green background environments.

Solution: Filtering your flash with the proper color correction gel will allow you to balance the color temperature of the flash with the background.

But first: This is not a new problem by any means. Since most film is daylight balanced, meaning that white looks white only under the light of the sun or a flash, most indoor pictures come out yellow if the flash didn't fire or if the background light was bright enough to show up in the photograph. This is due to the fact that indoor, or tungsten lighting, is in fact much warmer than daylight and gives a very yellow look when captured on film. The same applies to florescent lighting except that the color you get back is usually green.

Now I know you're jumping ahead to the fact that digital cameras now allow us to adjust the white balance in order to match these different lighting conditions. White balance adjustments work great when shooting pictures using only available light. There are also a variety of other products out there like the [expodisc](#), [warmcards](#), and [digital targets](#) that aid in setting your camera's white balance accurately even under mixed lighting conditions. Knowing your camera's white balance system is key to getting consistent color and great skin tone, and is also important in setting up a balance between your flash and shooting environment's color temperature.

Did you know: When shooting with a flash your digital camera will always default to a 'daylight' or 'flash' white balance setting. This works great when using fill flash outside. Both flash and sunlight give about the same color temperature which means you get a great color match between your flash and the light environment. Indoors everything lit by the flash will look great, but sometimes the background will appear

yellow or green. This is most prevalent when; 1. Using a lens with a larger aperture like f/2.8 or f/1.4., 2. When shooting a slower shutter speed. In the first scenario your lens is bright enough to allow the room light to show up in the photo. In the second scenario the shutter speed is left open long enough that the room light has time to show up in the photos. If you try to compensate by simply setting your camera's white balance to indoor or tungsten lighting while shooting a flash indoors, everything lit by the flash will come out blue because the flash output is the same color temperature as the sun.

The Answer: Make your flash output a yellow or warmer light for indoor, tungsten lighting; make it output a green light for indoor, florescent lighting. Maybe someday this will be as simple as changing a setting on your flash, but for now you will need to get a filter. [Sto-fen](#) makes a variety of flash diffusers and filters available for just about any flash on the market. [Nikon](#) also makes a set of gel-style filters; model SJ-1 that will fit on any flash with a pull down diffuser. Use the amber or gold filter to balance with tungsten lighting and the green filter for florescent.

Finally: Once you have the correct color filter on your flash, be sure and set the corresponding white balance mode on your camera. The results will be indoor photos that are both well lit by the flash and consistent in color between the subject and the background.