

SPS Flash Photography

Decide on your composition - Where do you want your subject? What will the background be? How far will the subject be from the background? Decide if you want the flash on camera or operated remotely on a light stand. For now, let's assume the background is far away and the flash is on a light stand.

Choose camera settings for the background (with ambient light)

Shutter speed – 1/200 ... When you load the flash, the camera will not shoot any faster (or much faster) in normal modes. There is no sense in shooting much slower. So, 1/200 is a good starting point. (We can shoot faster in high speed sync, but are not there quite yet).

Aperture – f/4 to f/11 ... Decide if you want the background relatively blurry (f/4) or relatively sharp (f/11). You can go down to f/2/8, but might throw part of your subject out of focus. You can go up past f/11, but will lose light as you go up. Decisions.

ISO – For a test shot, go to Auto ISO. See what the image looks like. If you want the background brighter or darker, move to a different ISO. Set it. Take another test shot. If the image looks good, your camera settings are good, unless lighting conditions change (if clouds roll in, etc.)

(Note: If your background is far away from the subject, the flash should not affect it.)

Load the trigger atop your camera on the hot shoe.

Set the Camera brand – Hold down the Sync-Menu button for 2 secs. You will come to a settings menu. Generally, the only thing you need to set is the Camera. If Camera is outlined in green, click the center button, then click the down arrow. Different brand names will appear. When you see your brand, click the center button. That should change the selection. Hold down the Sync-Menu button again. That should bring you back to the main menu.

Set the Channel – You likely will need to operate in just one channel; it should be Channel 1. To set the channel, click the CH-Lock button. When the channel indicator turns green, you can change channels by hitting the down and up arrows. When set, hit CH-Lock again to lock the channel. Now when you hit the down and up arrows, you move from one group to the next.

Set the Groups - When you are on Group A, hit the black button next to A and you will toggle through the Modes for that group: TTL, Manual and SLP

TTL means “through the lens” and it allows the camera/flash to adjust the power of the light as it sees fit. It is recommended when the flash is on camera. However, you can still adjust the light from +3 to -3 f stops. You can do this from the trigger or the flash. Test it to see if you can do one in addition to the other.

Manual – This mode is recommended when the flash is remote. The settings are different than in TTL. In Manual, 9 = full power, 8 = ½ power, 7 = ¼ power, etc. You can adjust from 9 to 0 in .1 increments i.e. 8.9, 8.8, 8.7, etc.

If you are going to use two flashes and will later set them both to Group A, they both will get the power you set on the trigger for Group A. But if you want the second flash to have a different power, adjust the power setting on the trigger to something else for Group B.

You can move up and down (i.e. from Group A to B) by hitting the black buttons on the left side of the trigger

Note: the left and right buttons on center wheel. They turn on the beep and the modeling light. Assuming you want them both off, look for a sound icon and a flashbulb icon on the trigger screen. If you see one, turn it off. You can also move between groups by hitting the top and bottom of the wheel.

Lastly, normal flash mode is front curtain mode. On the trigger, you should see three triangles together; the first one is black and the other two are just outlines. If you see rear curtain mode (the third triangle is black) or high speed sync (a lightning bolt with an H), just tap the Sync-Menu button to scroll through the three modes till you get to front curtain mode. A discussion of why you might want to use the others is best left for later on.

To recap, if you have a Nikon camera and are shooting with a remote flash, your trigger settings are Nikon, Channel 1, Group A, Manual, and front curtain mode.

Load the flash on the light stand.

There is an M button for Mode. Toggle that from TTL to SLP to Manual. When you get to Manual, you should see a Z on the screen. That signifies Client mode (i.e. the flash is remote). If you do not see the Z, the light will not flash. Check the trigger and the flash to make sure they are both in Manual mode.

There are four black buttons in a row on the flash. The first one toggles you from Menu 1 to Menu 2.

On Menu 1, the second button controls the Group, the third button controls the Channel. The fourth button toggles you from TTL-All to C-RT. The explanation I read is a bit fuzzy, but I think it must be in TTL-All to get a flash if you are using Manual Mode.

On Menu 2, the second button toggles between Manual and TTL. The scroll wheel allows you to control the power of the flash when you are on camera. If your flash is remote, you must change the power on the trigger. If you change the flash power on the trigger, you will see it change on the flash. When remote, if you change it directly on the flash, you will not accomplish anything since the trigger setting will override it. The third button controls the Zoom. To start, we can leave it at 24mm. The fourth button turns the modeling light off and on. If you turn it off here, but it keeps coming back on by itself, it is because you turned it on via the trigger. If you see the lightbulb icon on the trigger, turn it off there and the modeling light will stop coming back on.

That is all the technical setup!

Now you can begin to shoot. If the light is too strong, you can turn it down or move the stand back. If it is not strong enough, turn it up or move it closer. Just remember these things:

Inverse Squares Law – If you double the distance between the light and your subject, you will only get $\frac{1}{4}$ as much light. If you move it forward cutting the distance between the two in half, the light will be 4 times as bright. Bottom line, moving the lights will have a lot of effect.

TTL adjustments – For each f stop you adjust the power in TTL mode, you double the light. So, +2 = 4 times as much and +3 = 8 times as much.

Manual adjustments 9 = full power (the suggested place to start), 8 = $\frac{1}{2}$ power, 7 = $\frac{1}{4}$ power, 6 = $\frac{1}{8}$ power, etc. Again, each adjustment is significant.