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The Ultimate DIY Guide to Beautiful Product Photography

by Jeff Delacruz Product Photography

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The perceived value of your products and the trustworthiness of your brand is often judged based on the quality of your visual presentation. That means having high-quality, beautiful product photography can go a long way.

However, not every store owner can afford to invest in a professional photography studio, especially when they're just starting out. DIY product

photography provides a great alternative, and as long as you know the proper tools and techniques, taking compelling product photos is well within your grasp.

Product Photography Tips

What you're going to need:

- A camera.
- A tripod.
- A white background.
- White bounce cards made of foam board.
- A table.
- Tape.
- The right room.

Recommendations for product photography:

- 1 Set up your table.
- 2 Set up your sweep.
- 3 Set up your camera.
- 4 Set up your product in the middle of the surface.
- 5 Set up the reflector card.
- 6 Take the picture and evaluate.
- 7 Get your pictures retouched.

But it's not just aesthetics we're talking about. Showcasing your products with

high-quality images can also be the difference between a conversion and no sale at all. This is particularly true if you're also distributing your products on marketplace sites like Amazon, where your product photos are displayed alongside those of your competitors.

The perceived value of your products is directly impacted by the quality of your product photography.

But when you're just starting out, getting your product photos up to par can be intimidating because professional photography is often expensive. There are hundreds of product photography tools to help you get the job done yourself, though.

As a business owner with lean startup roots, I understand this more than anyone. I also know that sometimes the money is just not there. If that's you and your budget is tight, have you thought about taking the DIY approach to product photography? It's not as hard as you might think.

There are lots of techniques for shooting successful product photos, but the one I'm going to show you is commonly known as The Window Light Technique. From someone who photographs products every day, this tutorial has been specifically crafted for business owners on a budget. It's designed to be simple while producing excellent, high-quality results for most product types.

Enjoy!



Shopify Academy Course: Product Photography

Photographer Jeff Delacruz shares how you can create your own photo studio and take beautiful product photos for less than \$50.

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Product photography equipment you'll need



Gear is at the heart of photography and can be really exciting, but it can also be very confusing for newcomers.

There's no need to spend a large portion of your budget on high-tech equipment, so keep an open mind and try not to overspend on gadgets that light your product no better than a \$5 piece of card can, for example. You can probably do this window light setup for \$20 or less if you already own a camera.

You're only going to need a few things for this setup.

1. Camera



You don't need a crazy camera system. While shooting images with a Nikon D810 (~\$2,000) sporting a 105mm f1.4 lens (\$740) is awesome, it's also totally unnecessary in this case.

Still, if you're feeling excited and have the budget for a new camera system for this project, I suggest reading a post I wrote on Quora, which offers tips to help you pick out a good camera for product photography. If all you have is your smartphone, that's ok too. Check out this helpful guide to smartphone product photography.

When I did the test images for this article, I started with my older model (2008), beat-to-hell Canon G10 point-and-shoot. I love the Canon G series point-and-shoots because they can go full manual and they shoot a really nice

raw file. I picked this camera because it's definitely not top of the line anymore, allowing me to demonstrate that even with modest equipment, good results are attainable.

So what camera do you need? I would just start out with whatever you have handy and see what the results are. It's a common myth that it's the camera that takes the pictures. In reality, the camera is only one piece of the whole. A photograph is made up of a series of choices that includes: lighting, exposure, styling, and post-processing.

2. Tripod



Not to get too technical, but you're going to set your camera to a very small aperture so that you can have the most depth of field your camera is capable of.

The width of the depth of field defines the area of sharp focus and to get to that you need the largest f/stop number your camera can obtain. Shutter speed and f/stop are related. Since a larger f/stop number, like f/8, lets in less light, you'll need to counter that by using a slower shutter speed to allow more light through.

When a camera has a slow shutter, you can't hand hold it or the subject will be blurry, so a tripod is your answer. If you're interested in learning more about the fundamentals of photography, [check out this video](#) I did with Harrington College of Design. I realize that most point-and-shoots may not allow you to choose your f/stop. That's OK and there are ways to get around this, which I'll discuss in the step-by-step.

Again, you shouldn't need to spend a whole lot of money on a tripod at this point in your adventure and there are many, many options out there that are under \$30. I did a quick search on Amazon and found something that would work for \$20.

3. White background



There are lots of options for a white background and if you're going to be shooting a lot, you may want to get a white sweep from Amazon. I prefer a paper sweep because sweeps get dirty, and you can just cut off the dirty part and roll a new piece down.

A really cheap option is to go to your local drugstore or art store and buy some poster board. I've seen it as low as \$7 for 10 sheets of poster board. Remember to look for pure white as off-white or cream will be more difficult.

4. White bounce cards made of foam board

When you're lighting with window light, there will be a bright side where the light is striking the product and a shadow side. This shadow side will typically

be too dark and so we use something white to reflect the light back into the shadow, brightening it up. Foam board makes a great bounce card because it's rigid and white.

Alternatively, you can use black foam board to make the shadows deeper. This is particularly helpful if you're shooting a white product on a white background. Adding black foam board to the sides, just outside of the photo, behind the product will create a dark edge on the white product. Combine a white bounce card at the front and black bounce cards in the back for a more sophisticated lighting setup.

You can buy foam board on Amazon or at a local drugstore. Keep in mind this is just a white card, so you might be able to balance a sheet of white printer paper or use a piece of poster board instead.

5. Table

A standard, 24-27 inch wide folding table works best.

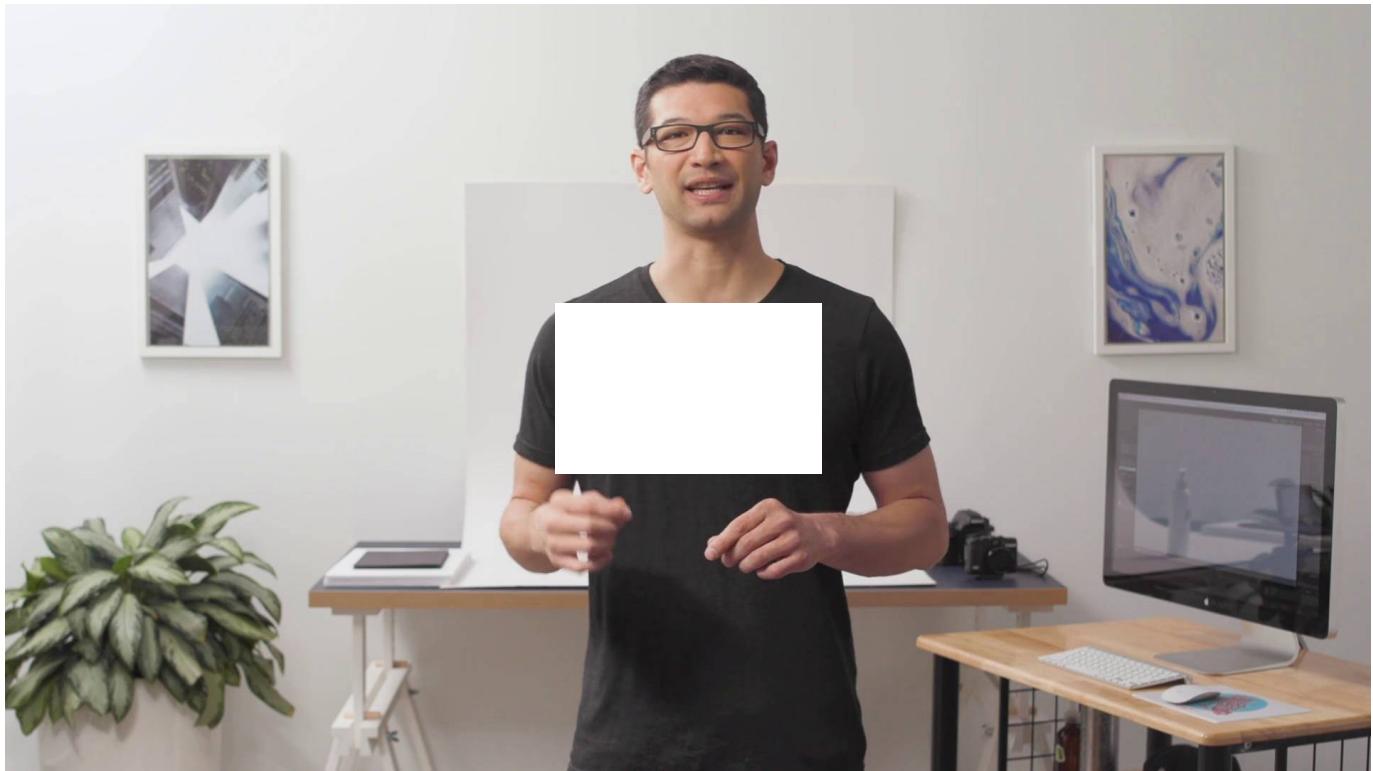
6. Tape

Depending on the table you end up with, you can use tape or clamps to secure your board so that it sweeps properly.

7. The right room

A room with windows next to a wall is perfect. The bigger the window, the more light you'll get in. Being closer to the window will create a softer light

with darker, softer shadows. Being farther away will give a more even light, but with lighter, sharper shadows.

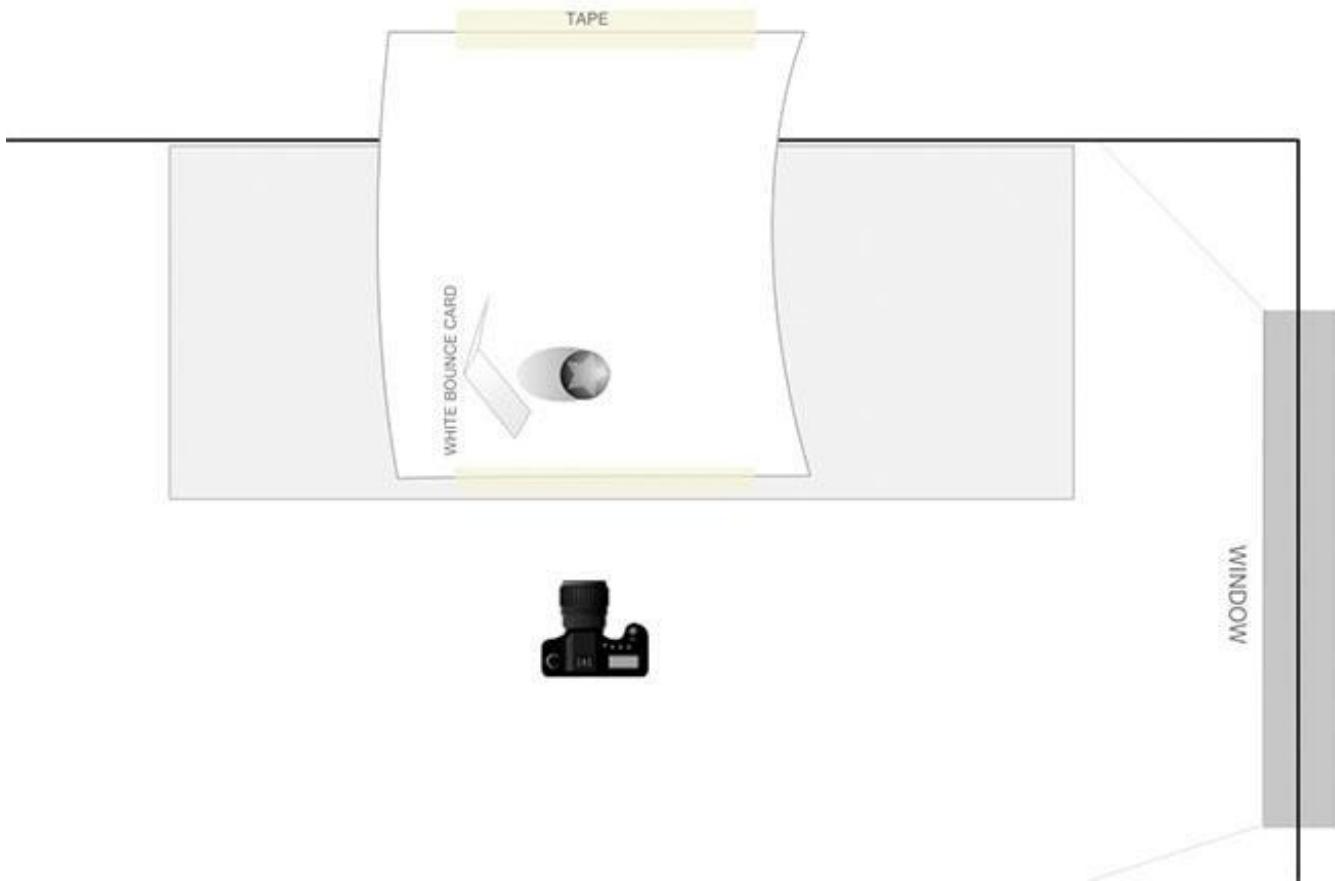


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How to photograph your product on a white background

Alright, let's get into the step-by-step process for shooting your product photos.

Step 1: Set up your table



Once you have collected your gear, it's time to set up your shooting area. Place your table as close to the window as possible without intersecting the shadow from the windowsill. You'll want to start with the window 90 degrees to the right or left of your setup. The closer you are to the window and the larger the window, the softer the light will be.

Also, remember to turn off all other lights inside the room you're shooting in as other light will contaminate the set. This is very important and is the most common mistake I see.

You can try rotating the set so the window is at 45 degrees or try shooting with the window straight on for a different style of lighting. Food photography, for example, is often shot with a window behind the setup and the camera

shooting into the window for a more dramatic photo. Another variation is setting up in a garage with the door open, which will have the same qualities as a window, just without the glass.

You do not want direct sunlight hitting your set. Direct sunlight is harsh, and looks bad on most models and products.

Step 2: Set up your sweep



There are a lot of ways to do this, but the ultimate goal is to have your sweep

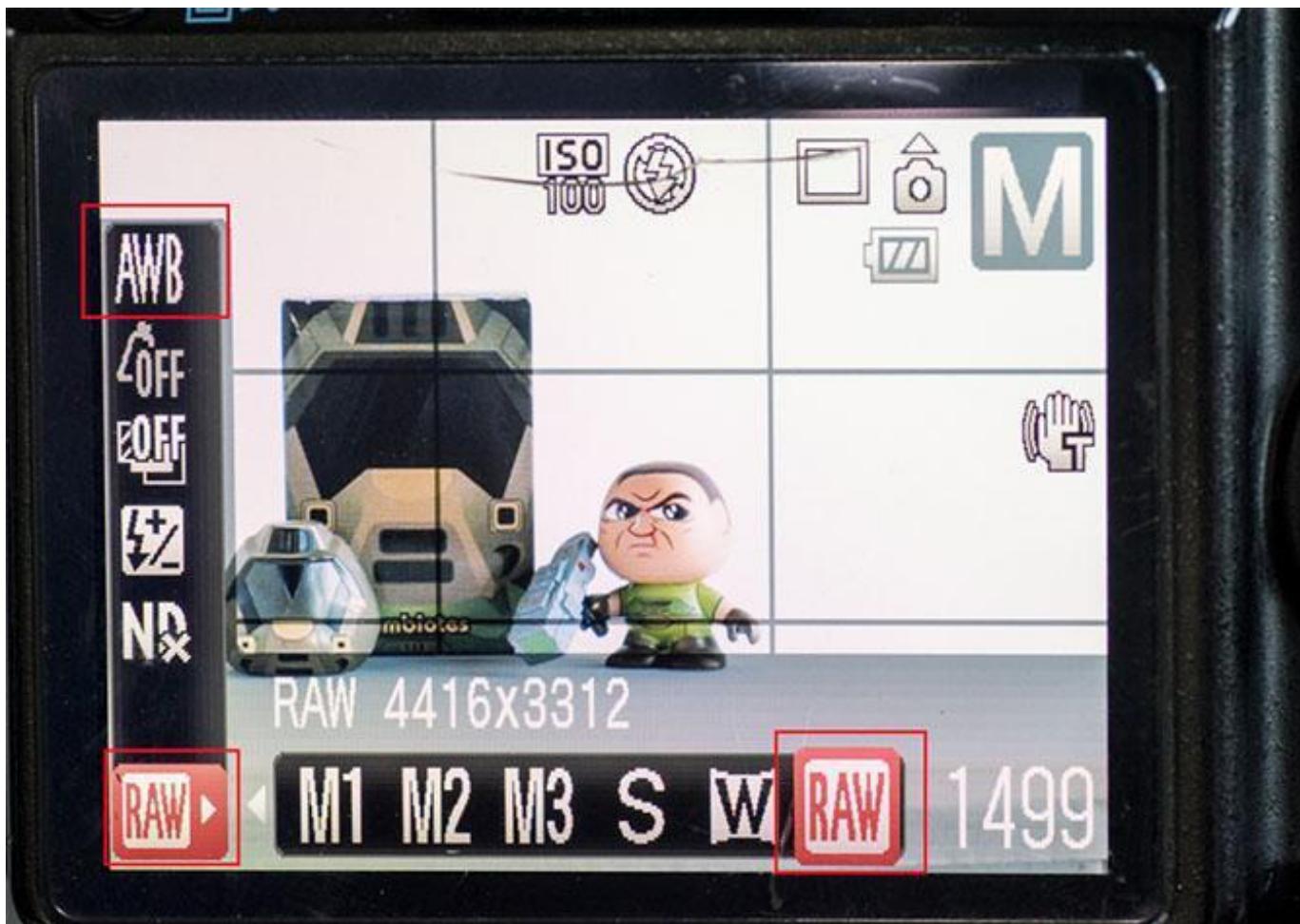
vertical. You may need to roll up the board to help it reach that shape.

In my setup above, I placed the table against the wall, and taped the sweep to the wall and the table. If you don't have a wall, you're going to have to make something to secure the back of the sweep to. Some bricks or a wooden block would work well.

Place your product in the center on the flat part of the sweep and leave enough room to sneak your white reflector card in later. In this case, our product is a cool Skyrim & Doom toy available from [Symbiote Studios](#). Thanks guys!

Step 3: Set up your camera

Every camera is a little different. Some cameras are fully auto and some have the ability to make adjustments. The beauty of this window light setup is that you can set everything to auto if you must and it will still work.



- 1 Set your white balance (WB) to auto (AWB).
- 2 Turn your flash setting off.
- 3 Set your image settings to the highest quality (RAW, if you have it.) Most point-and-shoot cameras don't have the RAW setting, but if you do, then use it. This file is the largest the camera can shoot and it utilizes the full bit depth of the camera. You will have to edit in a software that reads RAW imagery (e.g. Photoshop, Bridge, Lightroom, Aperture), though.

If you don't have RAW, set it to the largest JPG setting you have. On my Canon, there are two settings to look out for:

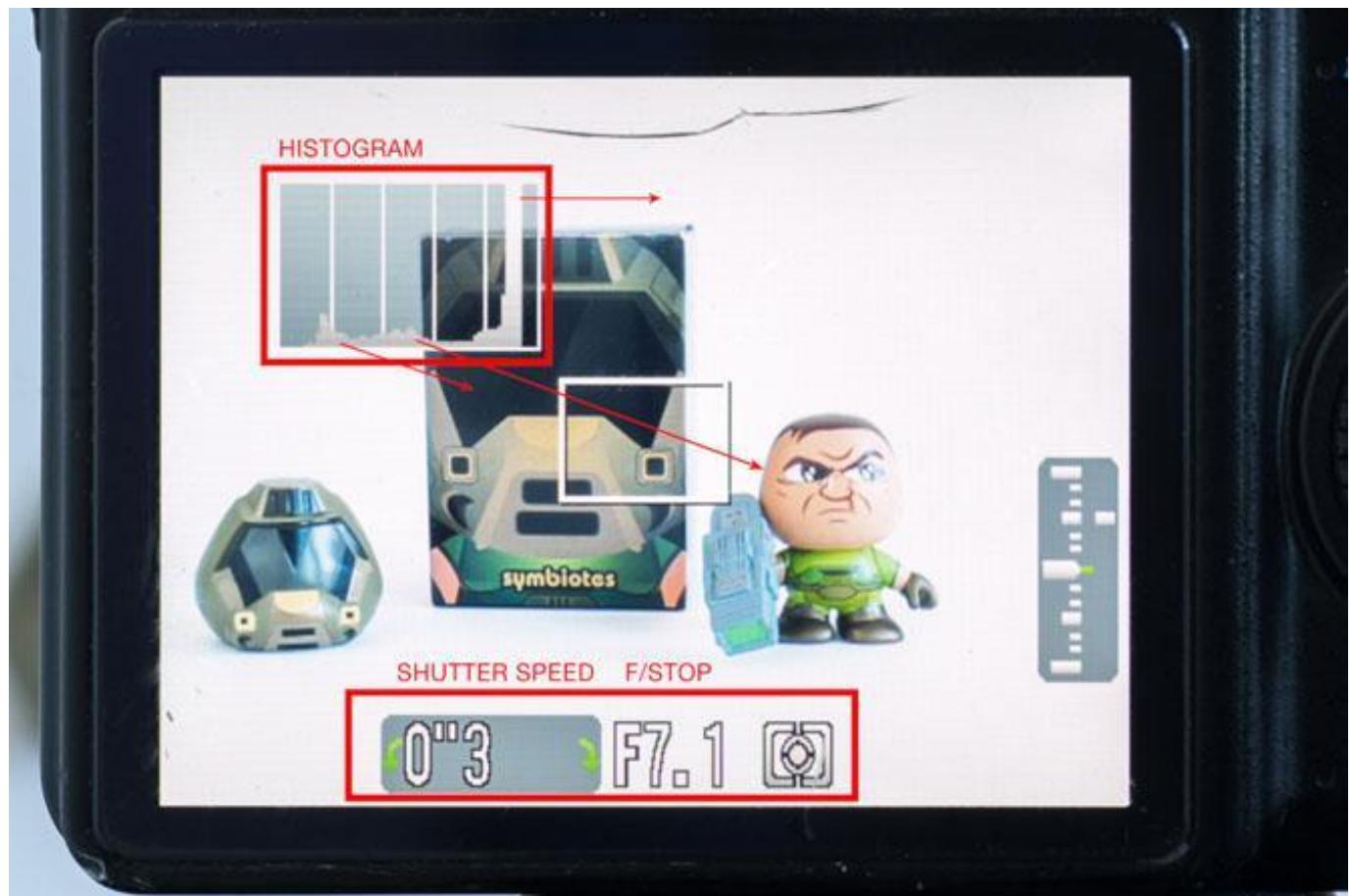
- **Size.** L- (large), M- (medium), S- (small). Pick large. This setting determines the file size and you almost always want to shoot at its largest file size for

optimal image quality. You can always shrink an image once it is taken, but you can't make it larger.

- **Quality.** S (superfine), F (fine), N (normal). You should always set it to superfine. This setting determines the number of pixels that are used on the camera sensor. Not using all the available pixels will render a lower quality image.

Set your ISO to 100 as well. The ISO controls the sensitivity of the sensor. The higher the ISO, the more noise there is. Typically, the lowest ISO you can set your camera to is ISO 100, so set it there if you can.

Exposure Settings



Option A: Set your camera to Manual (M)

This is the best setting for this type of work because nothing will be moving or changing as you take the pictures. In Manual, change your f/stop to the highest number, which will give you the greatest depth of field.

Preview the image on the back of the camera through liveview. Everything is probably pretty dark, which is ok. Now, switch to your shutter speed and rotate the dial to make it bright enough that the image is properly exposed.

Your shutter number should be going down as you do so. For example, your number may go from 1/60 to 1/4. These are fractions of a second, which your shutter will be open for. As the number lowers, it will let more light in. Adjust this number until the preview of the image is correct.

Option B: Use aperture priority

Your camera may not have this either, but if it does, change the f/stop to the highest number. This should automatically adjust the shutter to be what the camera thinks it should be. This may be wrong and you may need to use the exposure compensation dial to add light.

Option C: Auto exposure

If you're stuck in the all-auto world, there may not be much you can do. Don't fret, it's not a big deal. If you have an exposure compensation dial, you will most likely need to add +1 or +1.5 to get the correct exposure. If all you have is the running man images to choose from, try picking something like sunset. With the iPhone, just tap the area you want exposed properly.

Use the histogram on the back of the camera. You're looking for the slope to be closer to the right-hand side, like in the image above.

Exposure Tip: Don't trust the image on the back of the camera, instead pay attention to the histogram to know if your exposure is correct. The far right-hand side is white and the left-hand side is black. In the example image above, there is a little gap on the right-hand side, which means that there is no pure white. Adjust the exposure until the part of the curve representing the white background is touching the right edge without going over. In this example above, you would probably need to add 1/3 of a stop, or one click, for more light.



Zoom In

Cameras typically have an optical zoom and a digital zoom. Don't use the digital zoom as this will lower the quality of the image because it's essentially

just cropping the digital image. If you have an optical zoom, try zooming in as far as you can without going digital zoom. A longer zoom will remove distortion caused by a wide angle lens. Cell phones, for example, have a very wide angle lens, which is a common issue.

Step 4: Set up your product in the middle of the surface

Setting up your product is one of those things that seems simple, but can take time to perfect. If it's a bottle, for example, you have to keep the label type centered. Often there are many tiny movements and adjustments required to get everything lined up perfectly.

Step 5: Set up the reflector card

This simple white card is the single most important light modifier we have in our studio and I use it for every shoot. The light will bounce off the card and fill in all the shadows. How you position this card is a matter of taste, so try it at different angles to the product.

Step 6: Take the picture and evaluate

Once you take the picture, take some time and really look at what you've created. This is where experience and education comes into play. What's working, what isn't working and what can you do to make it better? Experiment with different methods of making your image better and, over time, your skills will naturally improve.

Upload your images to your computer to get a better idea of how they look.