

## HANDOUT: BASIC LIGHTING TECHNIQUES

The most basic lighting scheme used in film is **3-Point Lighting**, which is often used for static setups, such as an interview or a **one-shot** (shot of a single person). It involves a main light (“key”) on one side of the subject, a secondary light (“fill”) on the other, and a third light (“back”) behind the subject to help distinguish him/her from the background. Background elements are lit separately.

**High-key lighting** is a bright, generally even lighting pattern that facilitates a fast and uncomplicated production process, easy understanding of on-screen action and minimal implication beyond what happens on-screen. This type of lighting is often seen in romantic comedies, musicals, sitcoms, soap operas and other light fare. High-key lighting simply functions to illuminate on-screen action, without adding dramatic effect. Interviews in documentaries and news programs often use it as a means of making speech legible and implying an objective tone.

His Girl Friday (1940) Casablanca (1942)

High-key Lighting

Low-key Lighting

**Low-key lighting** is a lighting pattern that has both bright and dark areas in the frame. Since the days of the High Renaissance in the 15th Century, painters have used the chiaroscuro (Italian for “bright-dark”) technique, emphasizing contrast between light and dark as a means of imbuing narrative paintings with drama or intrigue. Borrowing from this visual tradition, filmmakers often use shadow (the absence of light) within the frame as a means of unnerving the audience and implying a tone of danger or uncertainty. Low-key lighting is often seen in horror movies, noir films and thrillers.