

## YOUR CAMERA'S WHITE BALANCE SETTING CAN TURN YOUR URBAN PHOTOGRAPHY INTO ART

### INTRODUCTION

The science behind white balance and digital photography can be difficult to understand. Nonetheless, the ways you can use your camera's white balance settings to give your images a warm, vibrant look or a cool film noir look are straightforward. If you want to be able to add this effect to your photos, then check out the tips below.

IMAGE: <https://pixabay.com/en/milk-dairy-products-pitcher-bottle-1887234/>

CAPTION: A shot like this could be ruined with improper white balance.

White balance came about as an issue with digital photography because camera sensors detected light differently than the human eye. Light can be understood to have different "temperatures" (which optical engineers measure in degrees Kelvin). When we look at a dim light, which has a lower "temperature" than bright light, such as a candle or a sunset, the light appears to be orange. Bright light, such as a clear blue sky or a fluorescent light bulb, has a higher "temperature" and seems to be blue. Visualize how much hotter a gas burner (which burns blue) is than a burning match (which burns yellow and orange), and you have a sense of the difference between various color temperatures.

IMAGE: <https://pixabay.com/en/match-fire-close-burn-matches-631729/>

CAPTION: A lower color temperature

IMAGE: <https://pixabay.com/en/gas-flames-stove-burner-fire-blue-1938298/>

CAPTION: A higher color temperature

When light from that candle or the sky shines on a white sheet of paper, our brains do not interpret the paper to appear differently, even though a different color light is shining on it. Digital cameras, on the other hand, do see the white piece of paper to be different colors depending on what sort of light is present. You can utilize your camera's white balance settings to either display your image neutrally or enhance its mood just by adjusting what white balance setting you are using.

### IMPROVE YOUR PHOTOS BY USING THE WHITE BALANCE SETTING

There are a variety of terms for the different white balance settings in the many popular camera brands out there, but the settings can be broken down generally as follows:

- Auto white balance,
- daylight,
- overcast light
- fluorescent light
- incandescent light (also known as the "Tungsten" setting, for the element used in light bulb filaments), and

- custom white balance settings.

Tutorials exist for many of the popular camera brands - Canon LINK: [http://cpn.canon-europe.com/content/education/infobank/white\\_balance/white\\_balance.do](http://cpn.canon-europe.com/content/education/infobank/white_balance/white_balance.do), Fuji LINK: <https://fujifilm-blog.com/2016/01/04/using-white-balance-to-take-better-photos/>, Nikon LINK: <http://www.nikonusa.com/en/learn-and-explore/a/tips-and-techniques/setting-white-balance.html>, Olympus LINK: [http://www.olympusamerica.com/crm/oneoffpages/crm\\_whitebalance.asp](http://www.olympusamerica.com/crm/oneoffpages/crm_whitebalance.asp), and Sony LINK: <https://www.sony.net/Products/di/en-us/Learnmore/knowledge/08.html>, for example - that show users how to select and use these white balance settings. If you photograph using the RAW format, you can edit the white balance in post processing, using curves (here's a tutorial that shows you how to modify white balance in post processing) LINK: <http://www.picturecorrect.com/tips/try-this-secret-photoshop-trick-for-better-white-balance/>.

### CREATING NATURAL WHITE BALANCE IMAGES

If you are shooting indoors or under streetlights and forget to pay attention to your white balance, you can find that your images have a sickly green pallor. In most cases, you can avoid this problem by setting your white balance to "Auto White Balance" or to the appropriate setting given your conditions.

IMAGE: <https://pixabay.com/en/street-the-kuznetsk-bridge-moscow-2154254/>

CAPTION: This image of Moscow shows how white balance can create a natural street scene.

A more advanced method of setting your white balance to give an entirely neutral image is to use a white balance card LINK: <http://amzn.to/2oGirey> (note, this has my affiliate link in it; your publication may want to use its Affiliate Link) specially designed to adjust your camera's white balance settings. Just place the white balance card in front of your lens, then utilize your camera's white balance adjustment function in your camera's menu to convey to your camera's sensor that "white" is the color of the white balance card. This tutorial LINK: <http://www.picturecorrect.com/tips/how-to-set-custom-white-balance-with-a-gray-card/> goes into greater detail regarding how to use a white balance card. The Daylight preset also provides a fairly close-to-neutral white balance for imagery. A neutral street scene, like the image of Moscow, above, is critical for highlighting color elements in the photo, such as the awnings and planters.

IMAGE: <https://pixabay.com/en/awb-cards-grey-scale-photo-1165145/>

CAPTION: A white balance card can set the color temperature in any setting.

### CREATING COOLER IMAGES

Urban photography often relies on a cool blue tone that captures the moodiness of a city. You can see this technique used in crime dramas or advertising images that showcase modern or sleek design. You can get this effect using the Tungsten/Incandescent setting outside, particularly at dusk. The image below, also of Moscow, demonstrates this sort of blue tone.

IMAGE: <https://pixabay.com/en/moscow-russia-rain-moscow-city-1557494/>

CAPTION: Shooting this photo with a high color temperature, such as with the incandescent white balance setting, conveys the chill of the rain on this Moscow city street.

## CREATING WARMER IMAGES

A classic street scene does not always need to have a cold, moody look. If you are shooting an urban scene at sunrise or sunset, you can increase the warmth and vibrancy of the image by manually selecting the overcast setting.

Here's an example of a street scene that uses a low color temperature white balance to give warmth to a fantastic capture of autumn in the city.

IMAGE: <https://pixabay.com/en/central-park-new-york-city-benches-535645/>

CAPTION: Autumn in New York City's Central Park

## LET'S GO TO EXTREMES

If you want to go to extremes with the warming effect, manually set your white balance to a low-temperature white balance setting, such as 3,000 K or lower (depending on your camera's capabilities). Shooting with a low color temperature gives a richness to summertime shots and conveys the idea of heat in an image.

IMAGE: <https://pixabay.com/en/taxi-cab-taxicab-taxi-cab-new-york-238478/>

CAPTION: This street scene conveys the summer heat radiating off the New York street through its use of an orange, low color temperature.

If you want to go to extremes with the cooling effect, manually set your white balance to a high-temperature white balance setting, such as 10,000 K or higher (depending on your camera's capabilities). Using a high color temperature is an excellent way to change the time of day of an image from afternoon to early evening (as the viewer associates the blue tint with the hours just after sunset).

IMAGE: <https://pixabay.com/en/architecture-blue-blur-bridge-2178736/>

CAPTION: The blue tones of this long exposure image can be created with a high-temperature white balance setting.

## CONCLUSION

White balance, while it initially seems tricky, can be considered a series of settings on your camera that can be used to convey different moods through changing how the camera's sensor interprets light. White balance settings can be used to compensate for overcast skies or electric lights (with the fluorescent and incandescent settings), creating a natural, pure look for your images. It can also be used much like colored filters were used on film cameras, to convey a mood or tone.