

# White Balance Magic

There is a secret to creating great-looking video that professional videographers know (and most amateur videographers don't). The secret is white balance. It is the easiest, most overlooked and under-utilized feature on your camera. It is part of the formula that sets professionals apart from the amateur.

There is a feature on most video and still cameras that allow you to manually set your white balance. Why is it important?

## Getting the correct color

Well, let's say you are capturing video of your office party that's held in a conference room lit by florescent over-head lighting. You shoot for an hour and take your images home to edit and notice a serious problem: Your image or video looks green! What happened? You didn't perform a white balance!

Ok, you'll have to check your camera's manual to get the instructions on how to do it, but here are the basics. First, you start by going to the location you will be shooting. Then, you need to show the camera a true white reference image that it can scan and correct the color it will output. What do you use? Well, if you don't have anything else, you can use a plain-white sheet of paper. That will be much better than not doing it at all and making your boss look like a martian. But, the preferred method that the pros use is a white-balance card that is technically better than any object you can put in front of the camera. The benefits of using a white-balance card is output color that is very accurate and even more importantly, consistent.

## Color Consistency

Let's say you are shooting a wedding, and you are shooting the bride in her white dress getting ready in a dressing room with florescent lights. The next shot you are in the church sanctuary, where you have a mixture of natural light from the windows, incandescent lights from above, and maybe even some colored light streaming in from stained-glass windows. Do you really think her dress will look the same color white in both shots? Not likely. But, if you were to take a few moments to do a manual white balance at each location, you will be very pleased with the results.

## Save Time in Post

OK, I'll admit that there have been times that I have forgotten to take the White Balance out of "Auto" and grabbed a good "Manual" balance, resulting in color shifting and other weird issues that are nearly impossible to fix in post. But, except for the occasional memory lapse, those days are over. I recently discovered an amazing set of white balance cards that help to warm your images to perfection. Most white balance cards leave you with an image that is slightly cold, or in other words, on the blue side of the spectrum. But, this set of cards will actually warm up the image, leaving you with a beautiful, natural looking image that you don't have to color-correct in post!!

That saves me time on each and every clip that I edit. So, if I save 5 minutes on each clip, and I start with 60 clips in a DVD project, that saves me 5 HOURS per project!! So, I'm happy to have added the Warm Card system to my arsenal of tools.

Did you know that even today's most expensive professional video cameras still require a manual white balance? In fact, on a typical day's shooting a cameraman might have to set his white balance a dozen times or more. So, if an \$80,000 broadcast television camera can't be counted on to white balance itself automatically, then it's not surprising that your under-\$5000 digital camera can't do it either. Warm Card System Vortex Media DCP WarmCards Digital Camera Pack, White Balancing Set

To learn more about white balance, here are some good reference sites on the web:

<http://www.mediacollege.com/video/camera/white-balance/>

<http://www.videomaker.com/article/9366/>

<http://www.videomaker.com/article/7266/>

<http://www.cybercollege.com/tvp018.htm>