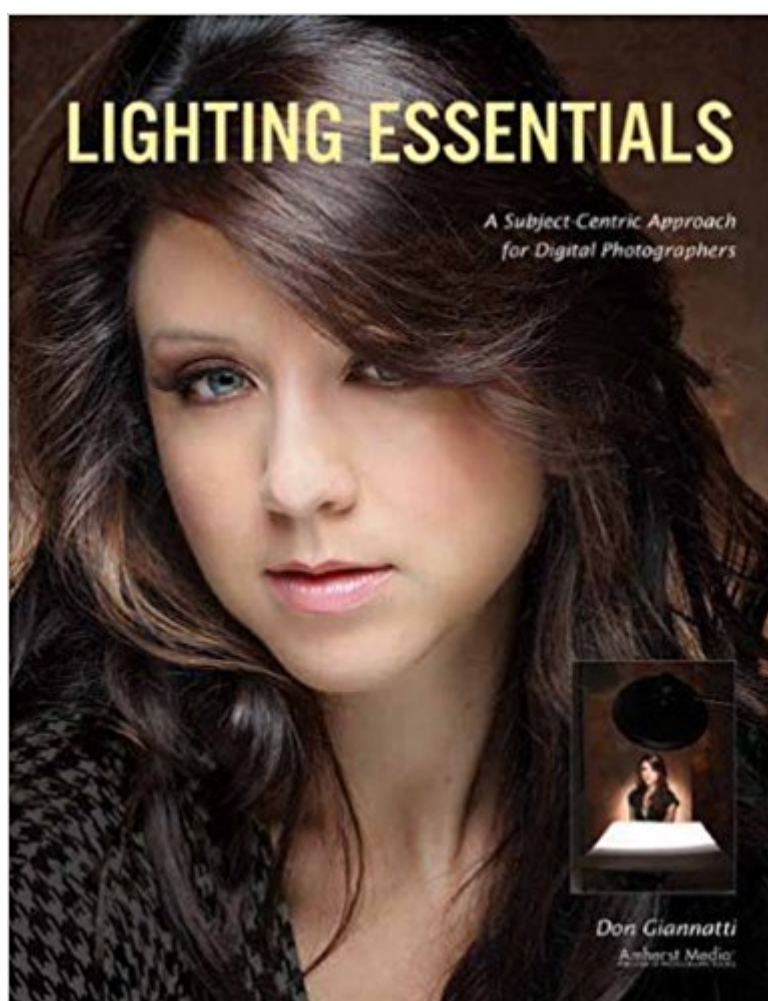


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# Lighting Essentials: A Subject-Centric Approach For Digital Photographers



## Synopsis

Encouraging photographers to take a subject-oriented approach to lighting, this manual shows it is possible to make better decisions about both the technical and artistic aspects of lighting. It teaches how to identify qualities the subject possesses that the light will react with and how to use this knowledge to create perfect photographs. Through a variety of amply illustrated shoots, the book explains how to approach each image from the perspective of controlling the subject's appearance to match the photographer's vision for the picture. This comprehensive guide covers such topics as the benefits and drawbacks of various lighting tools, the effect of light placement, and controlling lighting ratios. Designed for intermediate-to-advanced photographers, it illustrates techniques for using light as a tool to capture the subject in the best possible manner.

## Book Information

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Photography

## Customer Reviews

Don Giannatti has been a professional photographer for more than 45 years. He teaches workshops for photographers across the United States, Canada, and Bermuda. He lives in Phoenix, Arizona.

Disclaimer: I know Don (author) personally and he has taught me many of the things I've learned about lighting and studio photography over the years. What sets this book apart in my mind is that it doesn't start with an image and deconstructs how it was taken, but it starts with what you wanted to accomplish when you decided to create that image, and then proceeds to give you the tools to do

just that. Now, reading this book will not automatically make you great at lighting everything. But it will give you the mental tools to go out and do it, and in the process get increasingly better at it. Not by trial and error, but by understanding the components of intentional and effective lighting. Don refers to it as subject centric lighting - nice catch phrase, but what it comes down is to light with intent, not just because, or luck, or with whatever your favorite gizmo of the day is. Don does illustrate most of the techniques with example images and a little bit of gear details and discussion. Most of the gear described and used is readily available to today's amateur or pro-am. But then, if you take the book to heart, put the gear details aside, and learn the core points of the book, it doesn't matter what gear you use. Most of the examples center around casual model photography. It would have been nice if the book used a broader range of subjects to illustrate the points, because the core principles apply to all subjects whether it's people or objects, and whether it's casual photography, editorial, or commercial work. Who should read this book? This book is not a 101 on lighting. Readers should have at a minimum a basic working knowledge of shooting artificially light photographs, and should have access to both equipment and subjects to put the discussion into practice. This book is for people who are serious about mastering photography by acquiring solid technique and artistry. People who have done a fair amount of work with lighting might find some good reminders of why they're doing what they're doing, but the ground covered is just the fundamentals, so it may not be all news anymore.

This book is entirely different from the 8 or so other books on using strobes that I have, instead of showing equipment and showing what it does the author shows an image then shows what equipment to use to achieve the shot. Better than that, he shows the subject, discusses many possible images that might be made depending on what he feels he wants to project to the world, and then discusses the way to set up lights to achieve that goal. Also, not everything is about lighting just with strobes, but matching lights with ambient, or even just the ambient light. This is the best photography book, not just on flash or lighting, that I've seen in a while. I'm a big fan of books that teach you how to fish instead of giving you a fish. Too many books are now hitting the shelves promising to teach you all about flash, jumping on the strobist bandwagon. In most cases, they illustrate and detail a 24" softbox to camera right at 1/2 power with another beauty dish above the subject at 1/4 power gelled 1/4 CTO, and on and on, and you haven't really learned anything because you will never encounter the same scene with the same lighting and the same perspective unless you try to copy everything, and then all you've learned is how to copy. When going through this book, I was reminded a lot of the Ansel Adams books I studied in the early '80's, they were all

about what you wanted the final print to look like, not the shot or the camera, or the lens, etc. I really recommend that you get this book, that is if you're the type of person that really wants to learn how to do things, and not just follow instructions.

The subtitle -- "A Subject-Centric Approach" -- refers to author Giannatti's philosophy of creating photographs: He believes you should start by visualizing how you want the subject to look, then choose the lighting techniques that will produce that look. That might not seem like something that needs explaining... unless you're familiar with the overdone "strobist" style of photography, in which it often seems that the photographer FIRST decides what lighting gimmick he wants to use, THEN looks around for a subject on which to inflict it! Giannatti's subject-centric alternative results in pictures that are more realistic-looking, and is probably much more useful for people trying to learn to do mainstream commercial photography. Giannatti is a highly-rated workshop instructor (I've taken two of his workshops, and they're good) so he has lots of practical experience in teaching these techniques. His fundamental principle is simple: any light source has four basic properties (color, size, distance, and angle) and you select or modify these properties to get the look you want. The book explains this via lots of "sample shoots" and "practice assignments," each with a photo and a text explanation of how Giannatti's decision-making process played out in it. This approach works well in a workshop setting, but there's one problem with translating it into book form: The way the book is structured, you pretty much have to budget enough time to read it from cover to cover in order to benefit from the information. In other words, it isn't the kind of book that lets you read a summary to grasp the basics, try some things on your own, then dive back into subsequent chapters for more detail. It also doesn't work as a reference you can pull off the shelf to brush up on a particular point. Giannatti wasn't trying to write that kind of book, so I won't criticize him for not writing one! But if what you're looking for is a learn-at-your-own pace guide, this isn't the book for you. There are a few more minor limitations/irritants as well:-- The author warns you right up front (the first sentence in the introduction, in fact) that "This is not a beginner book," and that's fine. He expects you already to know the basics of photography and the fundamentals of lighting equipment; fair enough. But he does tend to throw out terms that he doesn't explain until later, which can make things needlessly difficult. For example, even a fairly experienced natural-light photographer might not have heard of a "zebra umbrella" (what, it's raining zebras?!?) but he mentions this particular accessory several times before explaining (in Chapter 4) what it is. A glossary would solve this problem instantly, but there isn't one; fortunately, the book is well-indexed, so if you run across an unfamiliar term, try checking the index for later references. He also uses some technical terms in

non-standard ways ("ambient-light meter" for "incident-light meter," for example) but this isn't a deal-killer as you generally can pick up his meaning from context.-- The photo reproductions fall well short of "high-end catalog quality," with many of the photos looking rather dark and flat. That's not Giannatti's fault, it's the publisher's (Amherst Media) but it sometimes makes it hard to see the subtleties he's talking about. Often I'd read his text about why he chose a particular lighting effect and how it's different from doing things another way -- but when I'd look at the pictures, they'd look pretty much the same. Admittedly, I might have gotten a sub-optimal copy, but it's best not to expect the same printing quality you'd expect in a fine-art book.-- The example photos lean fairly heavily toward the nubile-young-women category. I like looking at pictures of pretty girls as much as the next guy, and there's nothing risquÃ© or not-safe-for-work about them (unless you work for the Taliban) -- but it does seem a lopsided selection. I think Giannatti's fundamental theories would work for photographing any kind of subject -- but if you're primarily interested in shooting, say, food or architectural interiors or flowers or or whatever, you can't expect much help from the sample photos in learning to apply those theories. Who should buy it? If you've attended one of Giannatti's workshops and want a supplement to your own notes -- or if you're planning to attend one and want to do some advance prep -- it's a must-have. Otherwise, if you have a good grasp of photo basics and want to extend your lighting chops (especially in the pretty-girl genre) AND if you prefer the long-form narrative approach to learning, it's a solid choice. On the other hand, if you're already working with lighting and just want to fill in gaps in your knowledge, there may be other books that would be more efficient choices.

Don is a generous teacher - photographer, really happy I came across him. I've tried reading other lighting books by other authors, but Don really speaks in a way where lighting principals make sense and you feel you can go put those principals to work .

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