

Masterclasses and Teaching Methods by – Ruurd M. Fenenga, NSC

I have taught my “Masterclass on Composition, Negative Fill & Lighting,” at various colleges and universities, i.e., UCLA, as well as various production companies, i.e., Giesbers, broadcast facilities such as Hulskamp, and NEP The Netherlands –the latter being the largest broadcast ENG company in The Netherlands, all with great satisfaction.

My main consideration is that students understand that composition, negative fill and lighting are the main keys to success, although a good camera is a vital addition to the production process. When I have finished with the 11 basic lighting set-ups, I move into the technique of negative-fill, which is, of course, the “subtraction” of light.

My father was a Director of Photography, and my first mentor. One thing I like to pass on to my students at the start of this class is his perspective: “Lighting is placing a lamp on a subject, then taking light away (shape it) then lighting again and multiplying this over and over again, in order to create depth.”

To keep my students involved and motivated I use a variety of methods, combining lecture, hands-on instruction, examples using certain stills or paintings, videos and films -including those I have worked on myself. I also interest them with a bit of storytelling, as well as using the “Socratic” teaching method, which naturally engages students as they attempt to come up with answers to my proposed questions.

I often ask one of the students to sit for me in order to show them the 11 various lighting techniques.

An example of how I would explain one of the 11 lighting set-ups to the students is, I would ask:

“How do you create a silhouette? Can you show me how to do this?”

Most of the time, they put the light in the wrong place... behind the person, instead of aiming the light on the wall.

There is always one student, usually, who gets it right- AFTER I tell them the following: “Everyone knows how to create a silhouette. We experience it almost every day. Let’s say you are driving in your car and going through a tunnel. The person driving in front of you is in silhouette...”

Making them AWARE that they already know how to do this, is always fascinating...they have experienced this a million times!

Or, for another, I may show them a Rembrandt light, and also a painting by Rembrandt.

Or, maybe ask, “What is the fastest way to light two people for use, perhaps, in an interview setting? How would YOU light for such a scene?”

As an added bonus, using the three NIKE commercials that I shot, in Barcelona, Madrid and Blackburn (UK), with soccer players Ronaldinho, Ronaldo, Rooney, Henry and van Nistelrooij, I explain the lighting techniques used with Green Screen, but also share behind the scenes images of the shoot.

I can also use video samples on any one of these lighting set-ups.

After we finish the Lighting Set-Ups, I continue with the Negative-Fill techniques, or, the subtraction of light. As an example, I would start with comparison photos- one with fill light vs. one without fill light and negative fill and say, for instance:

“You can see that the picture on the right – the left side of her face- is darker than her face in the other picture. You create more depth –dark/light/dark/light...etc.” (also called Chiaroscuro.)

I might also use, “Schaduwspel,” a feature film that I shot for one of my former student’s first film endeavors, to illustrate the use of negative-fill, and how it comes across.

If time permits, and to promote a “don’t give up” attitude, I often encourage my students by sharing some of my experience and career progression, with its ups and downs, which is a normal route in this industry. I may tell of my purchasing the Hollywood Reporter and Daily Variety every week in L.A. and sending out 3,000 resumes in one year, one of which garnered me an offer to work the short, ‘Pennyweight,’ and which went on to receive 6 awards from various festivals all over the U.S. and was on the Oscar nomination list for best short film. Or maybe when I was approached to work on a feature about “a ship and an iceberg”yes, “Titanic,” and how I had to turn it down because I was previously committed to, and working as a Cinematographer on, the film “Paradise,” with Dee Wallace Stone (E.T.), Barbara Carrera (Never Say Never Again) and Timothy Bottoms (The Last Picture Show,) directed by Roger Steinmann. The students always seem to appreciate whatever “behind the scenes” stories are shared.

So, my students always come away with the basics, and some extras.

OTHER CLASSES -

As mentioned above, I have been teaching students the craft of filmmaking at numerous schools and institutions for quite some time. The camera disciplines I have are feature films, commercials, corporate films and ENG camera.

In addition to the above, I have been teaching a Masterclass for police detectives, which specializes in reenactments of the scene of a crime. I provide them with exercises for ‘hands-on’ learning, directed toward developing the best methods (tricks of the trade) to producing the best quality recreations of various parts of a crime scene. The class concentrates on POV, crossing the line, how to pull focus, setting the back-focus. Also, how to best create a close-up of potential weapons, for instance, of a gun. Color temperature, mixed temperature lighting, white balance, ND filters, and “Grad” filters, etc.

I also have a Masterclass (and interview session) about my work experience as the first assistant cameraman on the 1989, David Lynch and Mark Frost TV series and cult classic, “Twin Peaks,” winner of three Golden Globe awards, and which has now been revived anew after nearly 30 years (with the majority of the same famous cast) on SHOWTIME. This was most recently presented to 75 students in the city of Nijmegen, and in the next couple of weeks the presentation will be to 100 students at the SAE Institute of Amsterdam.