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Photography: Colour balance

Basic Knowledge [5]

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The light falling on a scene always has a predominant colour, such as yellow in the case of the sun, or an orangey hue in the case of tungsten bulbs, blue in the case of a cloudy sky or green in the presence of neon lighting. The human eye does not perceive this colour shift as the brain corrects for it. This is not the case for your camera... But don't panic: you can compensate for this using the colour balance (white balance) setting! Your picture will then appear as though lit with a neutral light source.

How to do

The colour balance feature is built into your camera. Presets are available depending on the type of light: daylight, shade, cloudy, flash, tungsten, neon, custom and auto.

- Choose the most suitable setting for the ambient light, or set your camera to "auto white balance" * (or AWB): this will take care of setting the white balance in most cases.

Particular cases:

- **A colour is dominating the frame :** in a forest, the green vegetation; in a room with bright yellow walls, etc Automatic balance can be distorted: favour colour balancing which is specific to the lighting for the shoot.

- **Is your subject lit using light sources with different colour temperatures?**
  Is your subject very colourful? Set and program personalised colour balance settings (see your camera's instruction manual) by taking a photograph of a white sheet of paper using the same lighting as your shoot. The white sheet of paper, being neutral, enables the camera to take accurate measurements of the variations in colour due to lighting.

Handy tips: Correcting post shoot

You can correct the white balance using image processing software. But note that file format is a key factor:

- in JPEG format white balance correction is rarely perfect and requires several attempts, even with powerful image processing software;
- in RAW format, better colour balance, using either the software provided with you camera or alternative RAW file development software.

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