
10 – which flashgun?

Which is the best flashgun / speedlight / speedlite ?

One of the most frequent questions I get asked, is what flashgun or speedlight would I recommend – especially to someone wanting to go beyond just using the camera's built-in flash.

Moving away from the camera's built-in flash to a larger flashgun opens up an entire world with new possibilities in lighting. Especially so if you are moving up to one of the camera's manufacturer's dedicated speedlights.

I would suggest to go for a larger, more powerful flashgun immediately. The add-ons and gadgets that you find on the market that are supposed to improve the quality of lighting from the camera's built-in flash, are just ways to grab some of your cash without really offering you an improvement.

To improve your flash photography, you absolutely need to get a larger on-camera speedlight. The question then is, which one?

Each manufacturer offers a variety of options at different price points. I suspect the initial reaction for anyone stepping into the world of flash photography, is to be hesitant about buying a large and expensive speedlight .. and then they err on the side of caution, getting a speedlight that is cheaper, but also limited in specifications and ability.



But let's step away from the equipment for a few minutes, and consider what we want to achieve with flash. So let's look at this candid portrait of a baby held in her mother's arms:

To get that specific lighting quality – soft and directional light – you need to bounce your flash. Bouncing your flash gives you a larger light source, and hence softer light.

But it isn't enough to just simply bounce off the ceiling directly over you. That would give flat light that gives no shape and form and dimension to your subject. If you look at that portrait of the baby girl, you will see that one side of her face has more light than the other.

It is this interplay between light and shade that gives a quality of light that is both interesting, and flattering to our subject. To get there, I had to

consider the direction my light needed to come in from, and I wanted to have the light from my flashgun bounce back from the interior of the room to my left-hand side.

In order to do all of this – **soft, directional light** from my speedlight – it is **essential** that my flashgun has a head that can both **rotate and swivel**.

So if you are looking at various speedlights, I would strongly recommend that you dismiss any that don't allow the flash head to rotate and swivel. Anything less would just limit you, and ultimately be a waste of your money. You'd be better off investing a bit more money in a more flexible speedlight.

Also, in bouncing flash like this, we waste a fair amount of light. It really isn't an efficient way to use the light. But .. we aren't after efficiency here. We desire light that is flattering – and then we inevitably come back to those two words – **soft** and **directional**. So in bouncing flash, we waste a lot of energy from our flash, and to be able to get enough light onto our subject, we need a strong flashgun.

Therefore my next recommendation would be to get a **powerful flashgun** – as powerful as you can afford.

I rely heavily on TTL flash technology as you can see on the previous pages and on various other posts on this website. So I would strongly recommend a flashgun that is TTL capable and integrates properly with your camera.

So I would recommend to anyone, even if this is your first foray into buying a speedlight, to get the top-of-the-range that the specific manufacturer offers. Even if it seems overkill and a lot of money in comparison to your camera or a lens, the combination of flexibility and power and integration with your camera system make the larger flashgun the better choice. A smaller, less capable flashgun could very well just end up frustrating you in the limited potential it offers. A full-featured flashgun loaded with mouth-watering specifications could very well make your life easier and your photography more interesting and pleasurable.

speedlights / flashes that come highly recommended



If you have a Canon camera, then your best choice would be the [Canon 600EX-RT Speedlite](#) (Amazon). This flashgun also rotates 180° to either side, but what really elevates this is the built-in radio transmitter to give you easy radio-controlled TTL and manual flash from your camera, without added paraphernalia.



If you have a Nikon camera, then the obvious choice is the [Nikon SB-910 Speedlight](#) (Amazon). A full-featured powerful flashgun that has a flash-head that rotates 180' to either side, which makes it very flexible in where you can bounce your light.

Similarly then, if we look at what is the most powerful and flexible flashguns available for other manufacturers, I would recommend the [Pentax AF-540 FGZ P-TTL](#) (Amazon), for Pentax owners; the [Sony HVL-F58AM](#) (Amazon) flashgun for owners of Sony D-SLRs; and the [Olympus FL-50R](#) (B&H), shoe-mount flash for Olympus users.

These flashguns are spendy, but they also won't limit your potential as a photographer.