

NIGHT BOKEH

By Kent DuFault



<https://www.pexels.com/photo/bokeh-301664/>

Pixabay – No EXIF

Bokeh is a term that became popularized in the last fifteen years or so. The term was first introduced to the photography world in 1997 from *Photo Techniques* magazine.

The term has its origin in the Japanese language – boke. Bokeh is the aesthetic quality of the blur produced in the out-of-focus parts of a picture. Another definition is the way the lens renders out-of-focus points of light.

Reading those definitions, I'm sure that you can see how vital bokeh can be to your nighttime photography images.

I've had countless hours of fun creating abstract bokeh shots like the one above. This type of photo can stand on its own or be used as a layering device in post-processing.

Note: When the goal is maximum bokeh, always keep your lens set to the widest aperture (typically f/2.8 or wider).



Photograph by Kent DuFault – iPhone 6 Plus, 4.2mm lens, f/2.2, 1/4th, ISO 250, and the Bokeh frame was combined in Photoshop

Do you see the white highlights in this portrait? Those bokeh highlights are from a different image frame that I combined with this nighttime portrait for effect.



Assignment:

Use all of your different lenses. Go out at night and find well-lit areas. I find shopping areas to work really well. Every picture that you take should be entirely out of focus. Concentrate on different types of bokeh. The type of lens will change the bokeh, and it will also be altered by how out of focus you set the lens and your distance from the light sources. Experiment to learn what types of bokeh you can create.



<https://unsplash.com/photos/l1sqXJBgd0>

Gabriel – Canon EOS 60D, 50mm lens, f/2, 1/80th, ISO 400

Using bokeh in your nighttime photos can add a 'cinematic' quality to your pictures. This is the time to experiment and see how the technique fits your style of shooting.



Assignment:

Create a portfolio of photos at night using bokeh highlights **as the subject** of the pictures. Be sure to consider the composition and plan for a cinematic feel. Imagine the opening scene of a movie is your shot.



<https://www.pexels.com/photo/volkswagen-van-diecast-model-on-street-with-bokeh-background-3004666/>

Haydan As-soendawy – Nikon D5300, 50mm lens, f/2.8, ISO 400, no shutter speed EXIF

This photographer combined a nighttime photo with forced perspective (a toy) and used the bokeh to help create a sense of realism.



Assignment:

Acquire a toy that interests you as a subject. Photograph it at night using bokeh highlights as part of your story. You can go for realism, as in the example photo, or create something whacked out and wonderful. Forced perspective works best with a longer focal length lens.



<https://www.pexels.com/photo/round-light-spots-glowing-in-dark-6315054/>

*Uriel Mont – Sony ILCE-7M3, 85mm lens,
f/2, ISO 6400, No shutter EXIF*

Let's play around with bokeh a bit further by adding in some ICM. Are you familiar with ICM? It stands for Intentional Camera Movement.

The example photo includes bokeh highlights with a foreground object and some minor ICM movement.



Assignment:

Create a portfolio of images with bokeh and ICM utilized.

- 1 Find a pleasing selection of lights with a clearly defined shape in the foreground.
- 2 Use different levels of the out-of-focus function to see how the effect varies.
- 3 Keep your lens set to the maximum aperture.
- 4 Use shutter speeds between 1/30th and 1 second. Study how the ICM effect changes.
- 5 Try slow movement of the camera first using a simple back and forth motion.
- 6 Now try more erratic movements.
- 7 Pick your favorite frames and have some fun with them in post-production.



<https://www.pexels.com/photo/selective-focus-photography-of-lanterns-1313817/>

Min An – Nikon D700, 85mm lens, f/1.8, ISO 500, no shutter EXIF

In the earliest comments of this Creativity Prompt, we learned that bokeh is often thought of as out-of-focus points of light. But really, bokeh is visible in any part of the frame that is out of focus.

When it's not displayed as a point of light, it becomes trickier to use it favorably, especially at night.

So, your task, should you choose to accept it, is...



Assignment:

Try your hand capturing images with bokeh at night that don't rely entirely on points of light. Keep an eye on your shadow areas, as you don't want them to be overly dense. Use the example photo (above) as your guide.



<https://www.pexels.com/photo/person-wearing-jacket-holding-face-986729/>

Nick Demou – Canon EOS 20D, 50mm lens, f/2, ISO 100, no shutter EXIF

You've probably figured out by now that bokeh is one fantastic tool for creating mood. Let's ratchet up your creativity by now including a person.



Assignment:

While shooting at night, include one or more people that are surrounded by bokeh highlights. Use the bokeh to tell a story. In the example photo (above), the bokeh points of light create tonal and chromatic contrast, making the bokeh **a frame** around the subject. All of that forces the eyes inward toward the smoke surrounding the subject's face. This creates mystery and story.



<https://www.pexels.com/photo/4336199/>

Marcelo Dias – Canon EOS Rebel T6, 33mm
zoom setting, f/16, 1/200th, ISO 100

From what we've discussed, would you say that this image displays bokeh? Absolutely! Bokeh is out-of-focus areas, and those lights in the background are most definitely out of focus.

Did the star effect throw you off? It is fun to try similar concepts with new variations. The bokeh was combined with a cross star filter.

Did you know that if you place a shape in front of your lens, all of your out-of-focus highlights will turn into that shape?



Assignment:

- 1 Gather the following items: A standard focal length lens for your camera (typically 35mm – 55mm), thick paper (art paper works well – have black and several colors), pencil, and scissors.
- 2 Place the front of your lens on the paper and draw a circle around it using the pencil. Create three of these from each type of paper that you collected.
- 3 Cut out the circles.
- 4 Bend each circle in half.
- 5 Cut a shape into each circle. Creating a heart shape is an easy one to start with. On each of the three circles from each color, cut one heart into one circle. On the first circle, make the heart small. On the second circle, make the heart a medium size, and on the last circle for each color, make the heart shape large.
- 6 Go out shooting at night. Keep your aperture wide open and adjust the ISO as necessary to achieve a usable shutter speed. If underexposure occurs, raise the ISO setting. Hold or tape each circle to the front of the lens.
- 7 Enjoy the bokeh shapes!



<https://www.pexels.com/photo/bokeh-photography-of-buildings-during-nighttime-1829067/>

Well Naves – iPhone 7 Plus, 3.99mm lens, f/1.8, ISO 100, no shutter EXIF

You won't experience the great fun and enjoyment of nighttime bokeh photography unless you try layering bokeh shots with night photos using some type of post-production software.

You don't have to have Photoshop, but Lightroom won't work because it's not a layering program.

The good news is that many smartphone apps allow layering, and they are either free or very inexpensive.

My current favorite post-production layering app is "Lightleap" by Light Tricks, which I have on my Apple iPhone 11 Pro. This app isn't free, but I feel that it is pretty inexpensive given all of the creative power that it provides (including layering).

If you're set on using a free app, I think Photoshop Mix is a good choice.



Assignment:

Combine some of your bokeh pictures with existing nighttime shots, and why not create some nighttime images for the express purpose of combining them with bokeh pictures. Even if you are editing on your smartphone, you can use images created with your DSLR or mirrorless cameras. Just transfer the file to your phone, complete the edit, and then transfer it back to your desktop or tablet for further editing.