

Strobism Bitesize: Using a Sto-Fen Diffuser

The Sto-Fen 'omni-bounce' diffuser is often incorrectly used and, to be honest, it took me a while to understand what it was actually doing.

For the uninitiated, it is an opaque white plastic 'open box' that has to be purchased for the exact flashgun model because it relies on a tight, friction grip to cover the working end of the flashgun.



The purpose of the Sto-Fen is given away in its name – it diffuses the light from the flashgun. *But only if it is used correctly.*

Being lit by a flashgun is very much like being lit by a spotlight. It's a very harsh light that creates a lot of hard shadows.

It's much better to be lit by a normal open bulb.

A Sto-Fen diffuser mimics an open bulb and so changes that harsh light by creating a bigger surface area which allows that light to bounce around – hence reducing shadows.

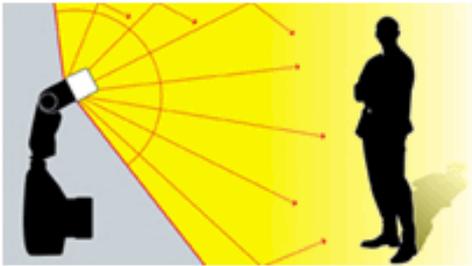
To do this it is imperative that you use it with the head of the flashgun tilted up by about 45 degrees. If you just use it straight on then all you achieve is a slightly less powerful light – but no diffusion.





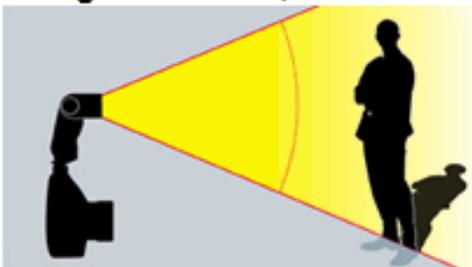
Here's a diagram from the Sto-Fen website (stofen.com) which explains it pictorially:

With Omni-Bounce on the Flash Unit



Flash with the Omni-Bounce installed and tilted to 45 degrees gives a nice soft wrap around of light with a soft shadow behind the subject.

Straight on Flash (Without the Omni-Bounce)



Flash straight on without the Omni-Bounce causes the light to go forward only and creates a harsh shadow behind the subject.

Here are some examples taken of one of our dogs, tired out after a brisk 2-mile morning walk.

First is a shot with direct flash, i.e. with the head of the flashgun pointing straight ahead.

Second is a shot with bounced flash, i.e. with the head of the flashgun tilted upwards by 45 degrees - hence bouncing the flash off the white ceiling above.

Lastly is a shot with the Sto-Fen diffuser fitted - but as detailed above the head of the flashgun still needs to be tilted upwards by 45 degrees.



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Direct flash



A very harsh light - and very noticeably taken with a flashgun.

Bounced flash



Much better than with direct flash but the background is now so bright it draws your eye.

Bounced flash with Sto-Fen diffuser



Much better lighting of the face and the background is darker. The best all round.

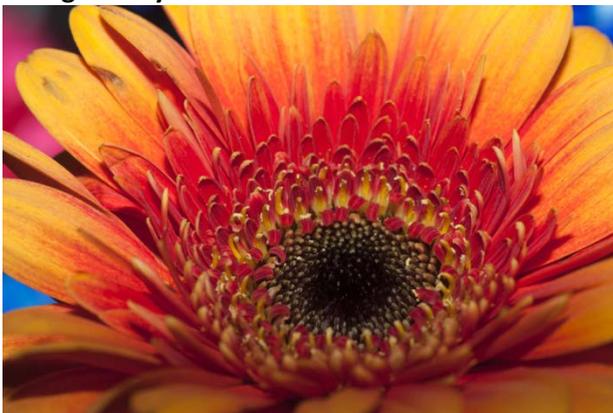


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I should also mention the benefit of a Sto-Fen diffuser when shooting macro. A standard flashgun is too harsh at short distances, even when the power is turned down, and is usually pointing over the top of the subject at the background. With a Sto-Fen diffuser attached a much softer light is produced – even outside when there is no opportunity to bounce the light.

Flashgun only



With the flashgun only, even with the head tilted down slightly as far as it will go, the front part of the image is dark.

With Sto-Fen diffuser



With the Sto-Fen diffuser fitted - and the head of the flashgun tilted upwards by 45 degrees - the lighting is much more balanced.

So that's how to use a StoFen diffuser. It's nowhere near as good as a softbox diffuser but with its relatively low price and minimal storage requirement it's better than nothing at all.

Note: Other types and manufactures of diffusers exist and some even advocate cutting the bottom off a plastic bottle and using that.

If you found this tutorial useful please let me know by leaving a comment on my Facebook page (or just 'Like' it) at <https://www.facebook.com/johnhallettphotographs/> . Thanks