Fill Flash

Almost every sunlit close-up photo of a person can benefit from the use of fill-flash. The hard shadows from sunlight can be softened by the proper application of flash. The trick is to add just enough flash to reduce the shadows but not too much so that the use of flash is obvious. Many cameras have a flash system built in that automates the process. Try using it on all of the people pictures that you shoot outdoors.

If the use of flash is too strong, use the flash compensation control to reduce the flash output relative to the daylight part of the scene. Most compensators allow as little as 1/3 EV change. Try different settings to see how your camera and flash work together. Use the settings that look best to you.
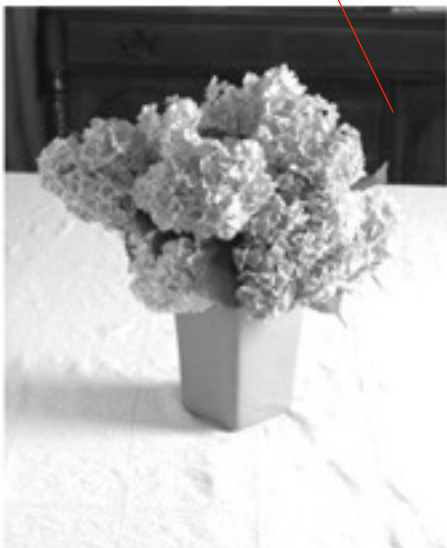
Auto flash systems also have a tool called second curtain or rear curtain synch (abbreviated Rear). This mode sets off the flash just before the 2nd curtain of a focal-plane shutter starts to close. That allows the camera to make the daylight exposure first and fill in flash last. This works well in bright light, but you should be sure to turn it off in dim light or you will get blurry images due to camera and subject motion (unless you use a tripod and photograph still subjects).

Program exposure mode works well with fill-flash, but you can also use the other modes. Using aperture priority will allow you to control depth but you will have to make sure your flash has the power to reach the subject at the aperture that you choose.

If you don't have a TTL auto flash you can compute the right settings using the manual flash control techniques. Take a manual light meter reading of the ambient light using the shutter speed that synchs for flash. Determine the f-stop that gets a good exposure. Set your flash at the distance called for by the required aperture. Adjust that distance for the appropriate amount of fill-flash. Position the flash closer for a brighter fill or move it away for less fill. If you are using a shoe mounted flash, a zoom lens would be helpful in controlling composition. Remember: $f = GN \div d$

Normal synch   Synch balanced with ambient

Dflash Dark background

open background