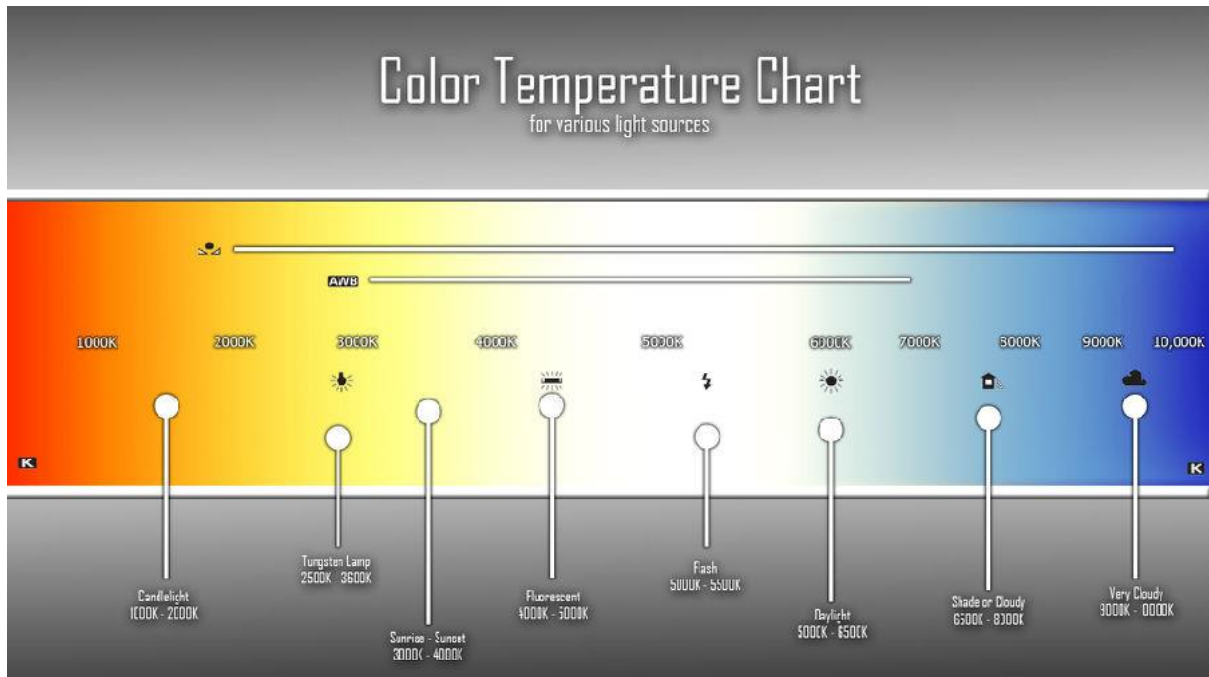# Creative White Balance

This is a handout based on my ramblings on speedlights, white balance and colour temperature and how to use gels creatively.

We started with a little bit of theory – I'm not going to go too deep into this one, there are plenty of tutorials on the Tinternet, but here's a little table to help.

Colour temperature is simply the colour of your light source.

I like to think of white balance as a see-saw: so if you take a picture under tungsten lighting (3000K) your colour will be too warm, so you add the opposite (blue) to get a balance. This can be done in your RAW conversion or by placing gels over your light source. The balance point is around 5500K as this is the average colour of noon sun and daylight balanced flashguns. To avoid any colour casts we use a Grey Card or set a custom white balance in camera.

Now the fun bit.

The most common gels are orange (CTO or Colour Temperature Orange) and blue (CTB or Colour Temperature Blue).

Example 1: using your flash as a fake Sun

Pop on a CTO gel to your flash, position it behind your subject and fire away! Simple. If you have a modifier that makes the light a circle it will look better (or use tinfoil!). Otherwise, you can add blur in Photoshop.

Example 2: Balancing tungsten lights.

If you take a picture in a hotel room lit only by beside lamps (warm/tungsten) you can add blue in RAW to get the right skin tones or adjust your camera white balance to tungsten to do the same.

However, what if you added an ungelled flash to light your subject? You will have two light sources of different colour temperatures. With your WB set to flash, you will get correctly balanced skintones (from the flash) and a nice, warm tone in the background.

Trying to balance the tungsten lights would add blue to the skin tones, too. So, if you want to balance the background and the subject the solution is to put a CTO gel over the flash to compensate (make your flash the same colour as the background lights).

Example 3: Getting Blue from Orange

The other little demo we did was to bring the orange gelled flash to the front and put the neutral, ungelled flash to the back. Now we put the camera white balance to Tungsten – of course, this will add blue to give the correct skintones, BUT the background will now go blue, also!

Here is another example using the same principle. Outdoors, I used a single flashlight with an orange gel and set the WB to tungsten. This gave balanced skintones and a fairly boring, grey sky a much more interesting blue colour.

So, a quick recap:

1) Gel your flash orange (CTO) and use it behind the subject as a fake sun.
2) If you have different colour temperatures of your light sources, balance for the skintones either in camera or with a gel (or use the sliders in RAW) to make the background colour shift also. Use this creatively and you can make your backgrounds more interesting.

Hopefully, do more on this during our summer outings.