

The Types of Artificial Lights

A flash by itself



Photography umbrella



A flash by itself: The flash's light is sharp and casts hard shadows. That might be what you want—but e.g. for portraits, lighting like this will often make the model look ugly.

Photography umbrella: The light from the flash is dispersed along the umbrella's fabric, and so it illuminates the subject from multiple angles. Here the shadow edges aren't as sharp anymore either.

Softbox



Beauty dish



Softbox: This catches the light into a "box" and only lets it out through the front side. This makes the lighting more even.

Beauty dish: This dish with a light source at its base is a special kind of softbox. Light is sent out from the entire open surface of the dish, except for the center, which is shielded by a disk that reflects light back into the dish. That produces very focused lighting, but without a hot spot in the middle.