

# Product Photography & Styling for Designers — Workbook

This workbook turns the course into a working studio system you apply to your own products. Pick three to five real items now and use them across every exercise so you finish with a portfolio-ready shoot. Each section maps to one course module, moving from setup through lighting, styling, and a Lightroom-to-Photoshop delivery pipeline.

## Foundations: Space, Gear, and Camera Setup

Lock down a controllable shooting space, an honest gear inventory, and a repeatable pre-flight routine.

### Worksheet: Studio and Gear Inventory

List what you actually have access to this week against the kit roles from the course. Mark gaps you will borrow, buy cheap, or substitute (for example a white shower curtain for diffusion, foam board for a reflector). Do not buy anything until this is filled in.

Camera or phone model and whether it shoots RAW or ProRAW

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Lens or phone lens used (note any wide-angle distortion risk)

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Tripod and whether it can position overhead for flat lays

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Primary light source (continuous LED, strobe, or window)

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Diffusion modifier and approximate size

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Reflector (white) and flag (black) available

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Backgrounds and surfaces on hand

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Biggest gap and the cheap substitute or workaround

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### Exercise: Pick Your Mini-Catalog

Choose three to five real products you can access for the whole course. Pick a deliberate mix of surface types so you practice the hard cases, not just the easy ones. Photograph a quick reference snapshot of each on your phone and note its challenges.

- Which products did you choose, and what brand mood does each belong to (premium, artisanal, youthful, clinical)?

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- Which one is reflective, glossy, or translucent, and therefore your hardest lighting challenge?

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- For each product, what are the three shot types you will need: packshot, hero or lifestyle, and detail?
- What is the single feature a buyer most needs to see clearly before purchasing each item?

### Checklist: Camera Pre-Flight Routine

- Clean the lens or phone glass with a microfiber cloth
- Set shoot mode to Manual so exposure does not drift across the set
- Set ISO to camera base (usually 100)
- Set aperture to f/11 as the default for full product sharpness
- Set a custom Kelvin white balance and turn off competing room lights
- Switch the file format to RAW or ProRAW
- Lock the tripod and confirm the in-camera level is true
- Capture one frame of a gray card or ColorChecker as the first shot of every setup

### Lighting Products Like a Studio

Practice one-light control, build a three-light grammar, and solve the reflective-surface problem.

#### Exercise: One-Light Falloff Study

Using a single key light and one product, shoot the same frame while changing only the light-to-product distance. Tether or review at 100 percent. The goal is to feel the inverse square law in your own images, not just read about it.

- What happened to the background tone when you moved the light close versus far?
- At what light position did texture on the product read strongest, and why?
- Which result best matched your product's brand mood, and what distance produced it?
- When you swapped the white reflector for a black flag, how did the shadow depth and mood change?

#### Worksheet: Three-Light Setup Plan

Plan a key, fill, and separation setup for one product before you touch a light. Set the key first, then bring fill up to the shadow depth you want, then add separation. Record the actual positions and ratio you landed on so the setup is repeatable.

Product and target brand mood

Key light position (angle, height, distance) and modifier

Fill source (light or reflector) position and relative power

Chosen key-to-fill ratio (1:1 flat, 2:1, 3:1, 4:1 sculpted)

Separation or background light purpose (rim, or push background to white)

Shadow decision: soft grounded, hard editorial, or removed cut-out

Any flags added to stop lens flare or spill

## Exercise: Reflective Surface Surround

Take your most reflective product and build a white-card surround or tent so it reflects clean white instead of the room. Shoot through a small gap. For a glass or translucent item, also try a backlit version with black flags at the edges.

- What unwanted reflections appeared before you built the surround, and which disappeared after?

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- Where did you place black cards to give the glass or metal defined edges?

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- For the translucent item, did backlighting improve the glow and form versus front lighting?

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- How much retouching time do you estimate the surround saved versus shooting it bare?

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## Checklist: Clean and Dust-Free Set

- Wipe the product with a microfiber cloth before every setup
- Use a rocket air blower to clear dust just before the frame
- Handle glossy and chrome items with cotton gloves to avoid fingerprints
- Wear dark clothing so you do not appear in reflective surfaces
- Tether or zoom to 100 percent and scan for dust before committing the shot
- Clean glass and bottles inside and out, since smudges glow when backlit

## Styling and Composition

Direct the eye with composition, assemble flat lays and grouped sets, and style on-brand without clutter.

## Worksheet: Brand Mood and Styling Brief

Before styling any product, define the brand in a few words and let every surface and prop choice flow from it. Fill this in per product so your styling is a decision, not a default.

Brand mood in three to five words

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Surface choice and the material signal it sends (marble = premium, wood = artisanal, etc.)

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Color story: brand palette plus one accent color

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Up to three props and the job each one does (scale, use, or story)

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Prop to remove on the second pass (force yourself to cut one)

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Negative space plan: which side or quadrant is reserved for headline or logo text

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Camera angle chosen (eye-level, 45 degrees, or overhead) and why

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## Exercise: Build One Flat Lay

Mount the camera overhead, parallel to a flat surface, and build a flat lay around one hero product. Cluster related items with breathing room, keep one light direction, and reserve clean negative space in at least one quadrant.

- Does the eye land on the hero product within a second? If not, what is competing with it?

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- Are your object groupings in odd numbers and arranged with rhythm rather than an even scatter?

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- Do all shadows fall the same direction, confirming a single light source reads across the scene?
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- Where did you reserve negative space, and what headline or price could sit there later?
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### Exercise: Negative-Space Variants for Layout

Shoot the same hero product three ways, leaving clean copy space on the left, on the right, and at the top. This makes your images reusable for ads, banners, and social tiles, the downstream design job.

- Which variant gives the most usable, evenly-lit space for a real headline?
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- Did keeping the product on a thirds line make the copy space feel intentional rather than empty?
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- How would each variant crop into a square social tile versus a wide banner?
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### Checklist: Styling Sanity Check

- Restated the brand mood in three to five words before styling
- Every prop earns its place by clarifying scale, use, or story
- Removed at least one prop on the second pass
- Color palette holds to brand colors plus one accent, no clashing items
- Squinted at the frame to confirm the product still dominates
- Captured a clean, prop-free packshot of the same product for marketplaces

## Editing, Retouching, and Delivery

Run RAW files through Lightroom and Photoshop, then export correctly for web, marketplace, and print.

### Worksheet: Lightroom Develop Recipe

Perfect one representative frame from a setup, record what you did, then sync it across the whole set. Filling this in turns your edit into a repeatable preset instead of a one-off.

Lens corrections and chromatic aberration removed (yes/no)

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White balance source: gray-card click or custom Kelvin value used

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Exposure plus Whites and Blacks clipping points set

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Highlight and shadow recovery applied

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Texture, Clarity, Dehaze amounts (kept restrained)

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HSL or calibration tweaks made for accurate brand color

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Settings synced across how many frames in the set

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### Exercise: Photoshop Retouch and White Background

Round-trip one developed frame into Photoshop. Clean it up, smooth an uneven surface with frequency separation while keeping texture, cut it out, and place it on pure white with a rebuilt shadow.

- What did you remove with Spot Healing and Clone Stamp (dust, lint, fingerprints, threads)?
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- Did frequency separation even out the tone while keeping the real material texture intact?
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- Which selection method fit your product: Pen tool clipping path, or Select and Mask for soft edges?
- Does your rebuilt contact shadow make the product look grounded rather than pasted on?

### Worksheet: Export Specification Sheet

Decide the exact export spec for each destination before you export. Confirm color space first, then size, format, and background. This is the handshake that makes the image pass platform review.

Destination (Amazon, Shopify, brand site, social, print)

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Color space (sRGB for screen; CMYK or Adobe RGB for print after vendor check)

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Pixel dimensions or longest-edge size required

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File format (JPEG, PNG with alpha, TIFF, or PDF)

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Background (pure white 255, transparent, or styled)

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Resolution for print (300 DPI at final physical size, if applicable)

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File-naming pattern (sku-angle-variant)

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### Checklist: Delivery and Consistency Check

- Color space matches the destination (sRGB for web, confirmed CMYK or Adobe RGB for print)
- Amazon main image is pure white with the product filling about 85 percent of the frame, 1600 px or more
- Every catalog image shares the same crop, dimensions, and shadow direction
- Files named systematically as sku-angle-variant
- An export preset is saved for each destination so the pipeline repeats
- Did a final 100 percent pass for stray dust, halos, or color casts before delivery

## Your Action Plan

1. Choose three to five real products and define each one's brand mood and required shot types
2. Assemble and inventory a controllable kit, filling gaps with cheap substitutes before buying anything
3. Run the camera pre-flight routine and capture a gray-card frame at the start of every setup
4. Master one-light control through a falloff study, then build a key-fill-separation three-light setup
5. Solve your hardest reflective product with a white-card surround or backlit-plus-black-flag technique
6. Write a brand styling brief and shoot both a styled hero with negative-space variants and a clean packshot
7. Develop one representative frame in Lightroom and sync the recipe across the whole set
8. Retouch in Photoshop with frequency separation, a clipping path, pure white, and a rebuilt shadow
9. Export each image to its exact platform or print specification and save reusable export presets
10. Assemble a before-and-after of your mini-catalog as a portfolio piece proving the full pipeline









