Three point lighting

There are many ways to light a scene or an object to bring out its form, detail, and texture.

One of the oldest and most reliable is three point lighting.
Three point lighting

This uses a **key** or **main** light for the main planes of the subject.

A **fill** light to remove any dark areas.

And a **back** or **rim** light to pop the subject out from the background. This was particularly important when film was black and white only.
Still image from Casablanca (1942)

This shows the actor Conrad Veidt lit by classic Hollywood three point lighting, shown by the highlights in his eyes and the back lighting around his hair and collar. Back lighting, to separate characters from the background, was particularly important in the days of black and white film. Note that Veidt would have been looking almost directly into a very high power (and hot) light. Actors wore orange makeup to hide the sweat on their skin (the orange registered as skin tone on film) and had belladonna dropped in their eyes to counteract the tendency to pinpoint pupils in the blinding light.
Back lighting

Here are two examples of contemporary back lighting, one outdoor and one indoor. Note how the lights (off camera in the first case, and shown in the second) detach and define the people from their location.
The color and direction of lighting affects mood

**Top-Down Lighting Bias**
A tendency to interpret objects as being lit from a single light source from above.

- People interpret dark areas of objects as shadows resulting from a light source above the object.
- Things that are lit from the top tend to look natural; whereas things that are lit from the bottom tend to look unnatural.
- Objects that are lighter at the top and darker at the bottom are interpreted to be convex, and objects that are darker at the top and lighter at the bottom are interpreted to be concave.
- Use a single top-left light source to depict natural-looking things. Explore bottom-up lighting when depicting unnatural-looking or foreboding things. Adjust the difference between light and dark areas to vary the perception of depth.

**See Also** 3D Projection • Figure-Ground Relationship
Threat Detection • Uncanny Valley

The Lincoln Memorial is usually lit top-down (left), but it has on occasion been lit bottom-up (right), revealing zombie Lincoln.