

NIKON SB-800 SPEEDLIGHT - PROGRAMMING & USING TWO OR MORE IN WIRELESS MODE

INTRODUCTION:

The SB800 is a remarkable flash unit. It contains features and capabilities that I have never seen before. Unfortunately, the manual leaves much to be desired. And, learning how to set up the complex capabilities of the SB800 can be very frustrating. I know it was for me, and I consider myself very capable in areas such as this. For that reason I undertook documenting this material, originally, to keep everything clearly in focus for my use and referral, should the steps become “cloudy”, in the future.

The material below was assembled after reading a very nice online PDF by Dave Black, and also doing very extensive reading & studying the manual, and “playing” with the units. I have edited, reformatted, and included much additional material, but I've not included any images. I feel the added material is crucial to better understanding the process. It defines how to set up the Nikon D70 and two or more SB800 flash units, using the wireless control capabilities of the D70 and the SB800, with the on-camera SB800 as a master (controller unit). I hope that this document will help others to navigate the often confusing route and confusing Nikon manual for this capability.

IMPORTANT Make sure that you understand the sections below, “general tips”, “more on using the SEL button”, and the “quick reset” before proceeding. These are crucial to working with the SB800, & configuring custom settings, which are needed to work in wireless mode

GENERAL TIPS RE NAVIGATING AROUND THE SB800 MENUS ET AL.

In several activities, when SEL is held down for several seconds, a “menu” of icons displays. Only 4 of the 12 available icons are visible at one time on the LCD. There are 6 rows, & 2 columns of icons. The +/- keys scroll up/down the rows. The 2 pine tree buttons switch L/R between the 2 columns.

MORE ON USING THE SEL BUTTON

The usual protocol for using the SEL button when customizing is to get to the item you wish to customize, and then press the SEL button. This will make that item active (it becomes highlighted) and available for changing, usually via the +/- buttons. Once it has been changed, hitting the SEL button will now accept that new value, and will usually sequence through to the next item. In some windows, such as the channel number and letter, and the light output increase or decrease, items may have already be highlighted after using the SEL button and can be customized with +/- . After customizing, pressing the SEL button will accept the value shown and move to the next available item.

When an item displays the blackened selection area, it can be customized directly, and the SEL button will then accept the displayed value.

QUICK RESET OF THE SB800

Hold down both the **MODE** and **ON/OFF** buttons for 2-3 seconds to reset the SB800 to all the factory default settings. This will not reset the choice of feet or meters for distance.

SETTING UP THE MASTER

1. Mount an SB-800 to the hotshoe of the camera, and turn on the camera.
2. Turn on the SB-800 & press the **MODE** button as many times as needed, until the unit displays **TTL BL**
3. Press and **HOLD DOWN** the **SEL** button for 2-3 seconds and the display changes to 4 boxes. **Scroll to the box displaying 2 flash units, and 2 “squiggly” lines. This box is in the upper right of the 6 row/2 column listing. If the box with the two flash units is not showing, scroll to that box using the + button to move up, and the single pine tree button to get to the upper right box.**
4. Press and release the **SEL** button and it highlights (in black) the word **OFF** in the list. You are now active in that list and ready to choose this SB-800's function by pressing the + or - button to scroll up or down.
5. Press + or - until **MASTER** is highlighted in black. Now Press and **HOLD DOWN** the **SEL** button and the display changes to a list **M TTL, A TTL, B—,C--** on the left side of the screen. These are the default unit settings. Depending upon what you have been doing, they may be slightly different.
6. Press and release the **SEL** button and the **M TTL** should be highlighted (in black). If not, press the **SEL** as many times as needed to get it highlighted. This now sets the **MASTER SB-800** flash output level. Press the + or - to power up/down the flash output in 1/3 stop increments. When the desired level is chosen, press **SEL** again, and the next channel will be highlighted. Set its output accordingly. Then hit **SEL** to accept that. Repeat for all channels being used.

Navigate around this window using the **SEL** button to select Channel 1, 2, 3, or 4, and Groups A, B, or C for customization. Remember, you must set both the Master and all remote units to the same channel.

Additional pushes of the **SEL** button will cycle through the various settings that can be customized.

7. After a group (A, B, or C) is selected, use the **MODE** key to select the desired operation for that group. If **TTL** is selected, then that group will be told by the **MASTER** when to quench. In Manual mode, you will see “**M1/1**” displayed, which means that the full output of the flash will be used. Using the +/- buttons, this can be adjusted from full to 1/128 of the full power. There are various modes that can be selected. Scroll around to check them out.

8. The SB-800 that is attached to the hotshoe of the camera is now the Master. And, this is now the default screen which will display when the MASTER SB800 is powered up. Any time you want to go back to the standard “default” startup screen, either reverse this process, and select OFF, or use the quick reset procedure noted above.

SETTING UP THE REMOTE

1. Take another SB-800. Turn it on and Press MODE button until TTL appears.
2. Repeat steps 2, 3, and 4 above, but this time select REMOTE from the list.
3. Press and HOLD DOWN the SEL button and the display changes to read “REMOTE”. Also displayed are CH 1234 and GROUP A B C. By Pressing and releasing the SEL button, one can select the CHANNEL and the GROUP for customizing this remote unit. The channel must be the same channel as set on the MASTER. The user has 3 group choices. If only 1 group has been established, all remote units must be set to that group. If several groups with different modes/flash levels were set up, choose the desired one for each remote.
4. Once you highlight either of the group or channel areas (via the SEL button) you can press the + or - buttons to choose the channel or group you want for each REMOTE. For my purposes I assign CHANNEL 1 and GROUP A for all REMOTE SB-800's. This SB-800 is now a REMOTE (off camera and wireless) where I control its power output from the MASTER, and it is operating in the mode that I have chosen in the setup on the MASTER.
5. Now go into the MASTER display, at any time, for any shot, and you will see the A TTL (or whatever mode you have selected. If necessary, press and release the SEL button on the MASTER until A TTL is highlighted. Now power up or down with + or - buttons to increase or decrease to flash power output of the REMOTE GROUP A SB-800(s).
6. I can now set up more REMOTE SB-800's and control the power output from each of them wirelessly from the MASTER. Simply, there are 3 GROUPS (A B C). I can have multiple SB-800's assigned to each GROUP A, B or C and control the flash power output of all the SB-800's that are assigned to each GROUP from the Master.
7. All the REMOTE SB-800 Speedlights can be controlled from the MASTER. By judiciously assigning groups, one can get an unlimited number of lighting combinations. And, there is no limit to how many remotes can be used. So long as they are close enough to “read the flash communications” from the Master, they can function.