<u>Still Life, Table Top Photography using a single speedlight.</u>

Select your subject pieces.

Set up your scene on a table, on a piece of mountboard or black perspex (if you want a refection). Mirror does not work too well because of the double refection caused by the top face of the glass and the reflective layer below. Set up a background preferably black or grey about a meter from the back of the table.

You will need a simple speedlight preferably with manual settings, and a zoom facility (most have these).

A means to trigger the flash off camera or a wired connection for off camera use. If you don't have a trigger reduce the ambient light in the room to a level where you are able to use a longer exposure, ie 2 secs so that you can fire your flash manually.

A DSLR or Mirrorless camera set to manual mode and a sturdy tripod.

Start by setting the camera to an exposure setting that will allow you to properly expose the subject to aid your composition. Its important at this stage not to move your camera or your scene.

Reset the camera so that the shutter speed is at your flash/camera sync speed at your desired aperture and ISO. I set mine to 1/250th sec, f/8, ISO 200. If you are manually firing the flash younjust need to ensure that you don't get too much light contamination. Take a shot without flash the resulting frame should be black (or very close to). This tells you that you have no ambient light contaminating your scene.

Set up your speedlight on a stand at a little less than 90° to your subject to give side lighting on the left hand side, this will be your main light. Take a test exposure at around ¼ power and adjust accordingly to get a good exposure. This can be done by moving the flash, changing the power, or changing the aperture. You will probably note that the exposure is possibly little harsh. Soften the light by using a translucent screen or a translucent brolly. This may require some further adjustment to your settings to allow for the reduction in the amount of flash.

It is likely that softening the light will increase the spread of the light onto the background which needs to be avoided. This can be avoided by attaching a 'flag' attached to the speedlight to prevent the light from contaminating the background. You should now be getting close to achieving the required exposure on your scene from you first light. But you will see deeper shadows than you wish on the right hand side of your scene.

Now move the light to the righthand side of your scene and lower the flash power by around a stop to $1/_8$ power, or move the flash further away. Take another exposure and check that the shadows have been filled, again you may need to adjust the power or the distance of the flash to get the desired result. We now have the two images that provide the lighting for the scene.

Time to light the back ground. Set the Speedlight directly behind the centre of your scene just below the top of the table pointing at the background. Set the flash power initially to around ¼ power and make a test exposure. Your aim is to get a graduated circular background. Even though you may have used a black background this will show up as light grey transitioning to black or dark grey. If you don't get the desired circular light gradient defined you may need to reduce the spread of the light by zooming the flash to a longer focal length, ie 105mm.

Finally, you may wish to introduce colour to the background. This can be done by using a gel filter over the flash head. This can something as simple as a coloured sweat wrapper from something like Quality

Street chocolates! Again you may need to adjust the flash power setting to account for the gel. You could of course change the original grey background to a colour of you choice in Photoshop

You now need to select your 3 preferred exposures, main light, fill light and background light and take them into Photoshop in separate layers for some simple post processing.

Post processing.

Make sure that you layers are ordered with the main light image at the bottom and the background image at the top of the stack.

Switch off the background image. Then select the fill light image and set the blending made to 'Lighten' You will see the combined image this can be adjusted using a variety of tools including camera raw filter to get the required effect. Now switch on the background layer and again set the blending mode to 'Lighten'. Like the first two layers you can adjust the background to suit using a variety of photoshop tools.

You should end up with a series of images like this:

Main light

Fill light

Background light

Final Image