Module 3

Lighting

How to art direct lighting using Workflows

Light isn't decoration.
It's a creative decision.

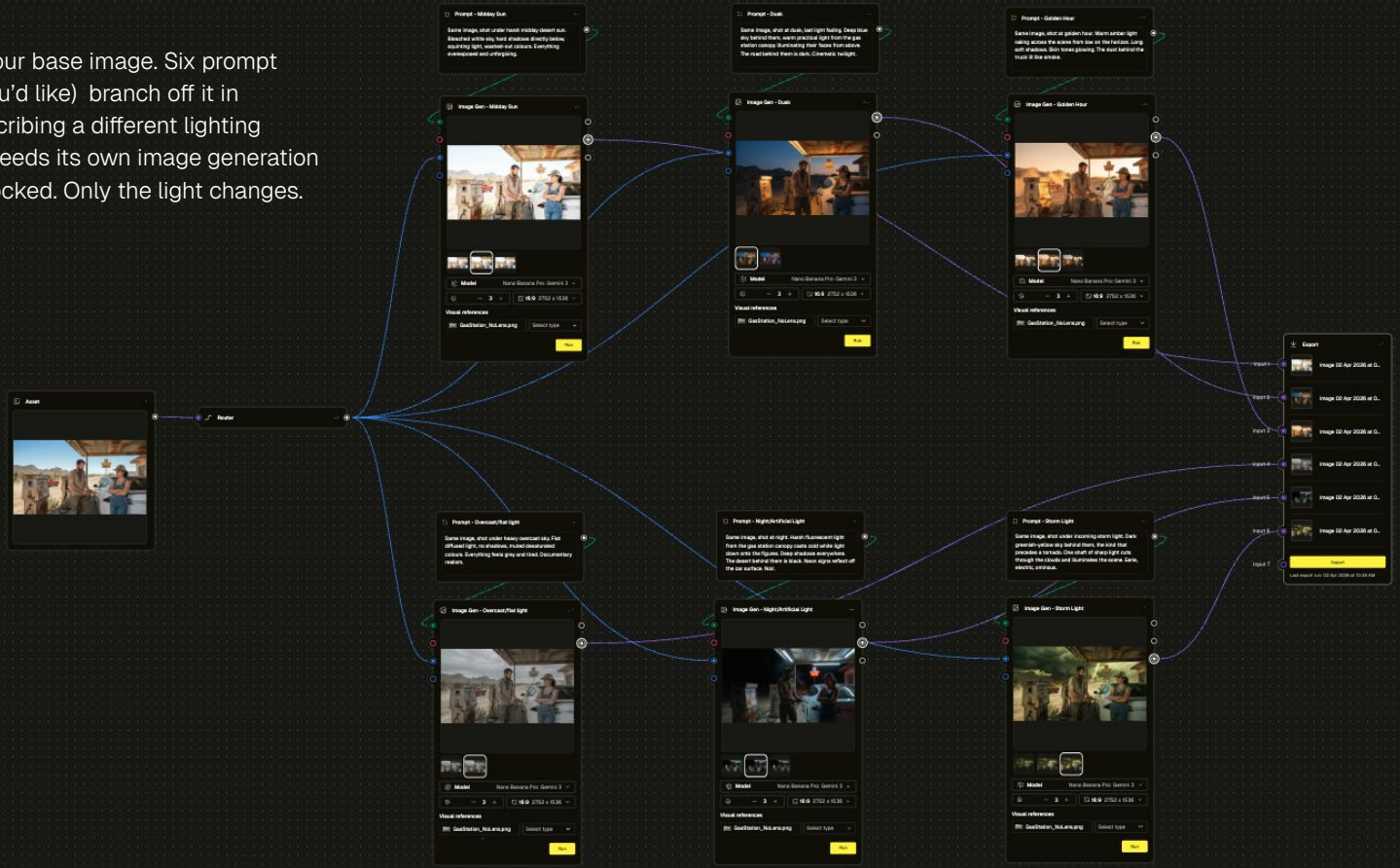
On a real production, testing lighting either means booking a full-day light study to be conducted on location or booking a studio, hiring a gaffer, and burning half a day before a single usable frame exists. Most teams skip the test and guess. Sometimes they guess right.

In Pencil, you don't have to guess. You build one workflow, run it once, and see your scene in as many different lighting conditions as you'd like, simultaneously.

Then you pick the lighting style that serves your film/ad/campaign — and brief from a position of certainty, not hope.

The Workflow - In Practice

One asset node holds your base image. Six prompt nodes (or as many as you'd like) branch off it in parallel — each one describing a different lighting condition. Each prompt feeds its own image generation node. The scene stays locked. Only the light changes.



Base Image

This is what the model defaults to when you don't direct the light. In this case: harsh ambient desert sun, which happens to suit the scene. But default light is still a guess. What follows shows what happens when you make it intentional.

Base Starting Image

Midday Sun

The most unforgiving light there is. No fill, no flattery — just raw exposure. Use it when you want tension, heat, or honesty.

Prompt:
Same image, shot under harsh midday desert sun. Bleached white sky, hard shadows directly below, squinting light, washed-out colours. Everything overexposed and unforgiving.

Dusk

The split between warm practicals and a cooling blue sky is something cinematographers spend hours chasing. Use it when you need emotion, transition, or the sense that time is running out.

Prompt:
Same image, shot at dusk, last light fading. Deep blue sky behind them, warm practical light from the gas station canopy illuminating their faces from above. The road behind them is dark. Cinematic twilight.

Golden Hour

The most universally flattering light in existence. Warm, directional, and cinematic without trying. Use it when you want aspiration, warmth, or the feeling something is about to change.

Prompt:
Same image, shot at golden hour. Warm amber light raking across the scene from low on the horizon. Long soft shadows. Skin tones glowing. The dust behind the truck lit like smoke.

Overcast

Flat light that hides nothing and dramatises nothing. It just shows things as they are. Use it when you want documentary realism or a grounded, human tone.

Prompt:
Same image, shot under heavy overcast sky. Flat diffused light, no shadows, muted desaturated colours. Everything feels grey and tired. Documentary realism.

Night/Practical Light

Cold fluorescent top light, deep shadows, nothing beyond the canopy. Use it when you need edge, danger, or late-night desperation.

Prompt:
Same image, shot at night. Harsh fluorescent light from the gas station canopy casts cold white light down onto the figures. Deep shadows everywhere. The desert behind them is black. Neon signs reflect off the car surface. Noir.

Storm Light

The rarest natural light condition — eerie, electric, unrepeatable. Use it when you need something that stops the scroll and nothing else will do.

Prompt:
Same image, shot under incoming storm light. Dark greenish-yellow sky behind them, the kind that precedes a tornado. One shaft of sharp light cuts through the clouds and illuminates the scene. Eerie, electric, ominous.

Six lighting directions. One workflow run. One decision to make.

Each image below came from the same base. The only variable was the lighting condition named in the prompt. This is what it looks like to test before you commit.

Base Starting Image

Midday Sun

Dusk

Golden Hour

Overcast

Night/Artificial Light

Storm Light

Image Gen tip:

If your variant prompts aren't producing visible differences, try increasing the output resolution.

Higher resolution generations give the model more creative latitude to interpret your prompt rather than just reproduce the reference

Finding the perfect light ***(Quickly)***

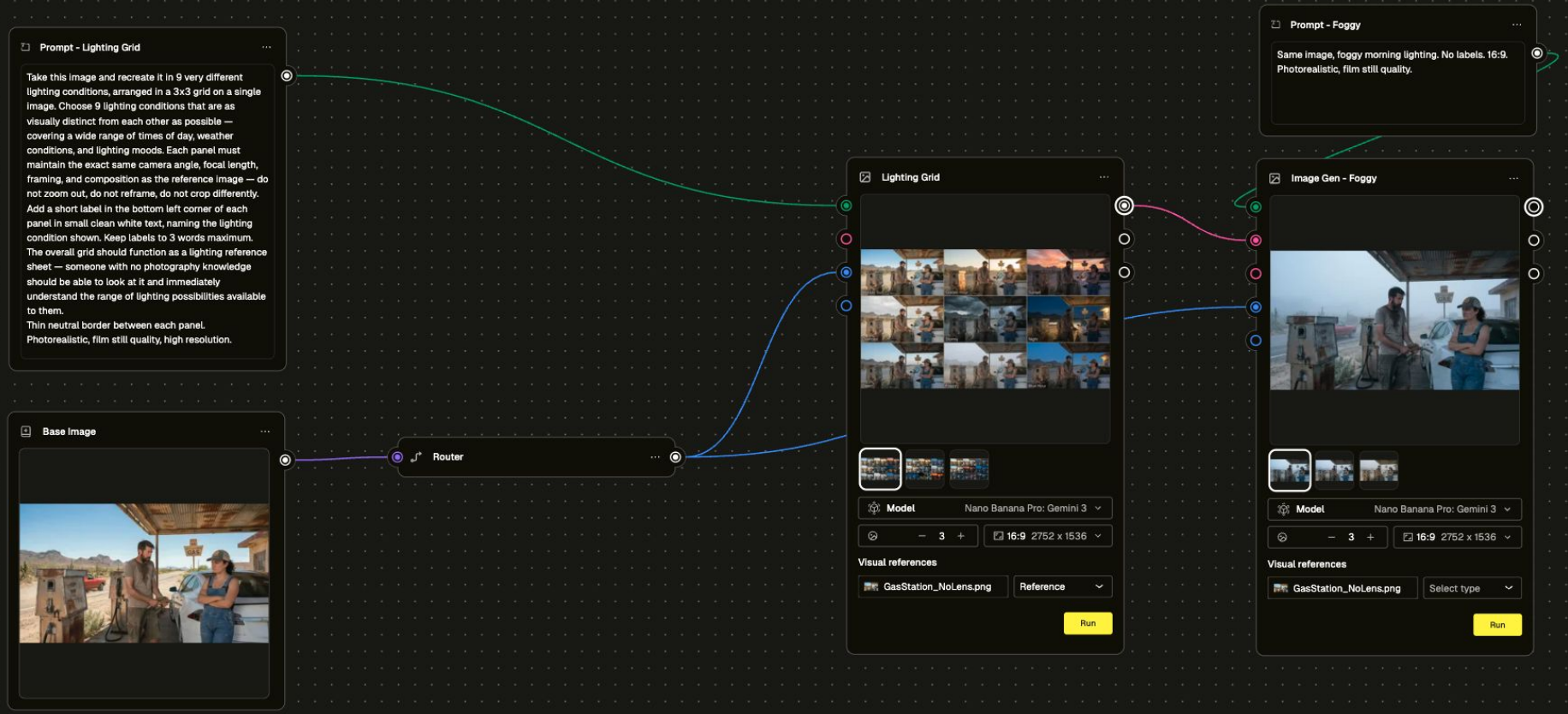
A two-step workflow for finding the perfect light before you commit.

Start with exploration, not decisions.

Most people approach lighting by describing what they think they want. But if you don't have a strong reference in mind, you're guessing — and guessing costs time.

This workflow flips the process. Step one: ask the model to show you every lighting possibility at once. Step two: pick the one that works, and generate it full resolution. Two prompts. One informed decision.

Quick Workflow -
Find your style quickly



Step 1: The discovery prompt

One prompt asks the model to choose 9 maximally different lighting conditions, render them all in the same composition, and label each one.

Base Starting Image

Prompt:

```
Take this image and recreate it in 9 very
different lighting conditions, arranged in a 3x3
grid on a single image. Choose 9 lighting
conditions that are as visually distinct from
each other as possible — covering a wide range of
times of day, weather conditions, and lighting
moods. Each panel must maintain the exact same
camera angle, focal length, framing, and
composition as the reference image. Add a short
label in the bottom left corner of each panel in
small clean white text, naming the lighting
condition shown. Keep labels to 3 words maximum.
Thin neutral border between each panel.
Photorealistic, film still quality, high
resolution.
```

Step 1: Result

A full lighting menu generated from your own image in a single run

Step 2: The selection prompt

See something you like? Name it and run it. One short prompt takes the model straight to a full quality render of the lighting condition you want — using your base image as the reference so composition stays locked.

Base Starting Image

Prompt:

```
Same image, foggy morning lighting. No labels. 16:9. Photorealistic, film still quality.
```

The Takeaway

Two prompts. One decision. No guesswork.

You don't need to know the name of the light before you start. You just need to know it when you see it.

Workflow tip:
Run the discovery grid a second time if the first set of conditions doesn't excite you — the model will choose differently each time, giving you a fresh set of lighting directions to explore.

Go make something worth looking at.

Pencil & the brandtech group