

People Photography
tips for taking a better portrait
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Elements of a successful Portrait Shoot

- Pre-planning
 - Important work before the shoot
- Technique & style
 - How is your technique and what is your personal style?
- Composition & posing
 - Proper posing creates good composition
- Lighting
 - Understand proper use of lighting to make a great portrait
- Rapport with the subject
 - Make it an enjoyable experience

BASIC Stuff

- Lens selection – 2X “normal” focal length e.g. 100mm for 35 mm camera; 70mm for digital
- Metering - center weighted or spot preferred over matrix metering
- Camera position
 - Waist high for ¾ or full length portraits
 - Eye level or just above for head shots
- Lighting direction / patterns to enhance the subject and set the mood
- Keep backgrounds plain and simple
- Talk to your photographic subject and make them comfortable
 - direct them into a suitable pose
- Expression - Single most important element in a successful portrait.
 - Sometimes referred to as capturing the subject’s personality or capturing the emotion of the moment
 - happy, sad, joy, anger, love, reflection, fear, curiosity, playfulness, etc

Pre-Planning

- What is the portrait to convey?
 - Critical to answer this question, as it drives decisions about everything else
- Studio or Location?
 - Indoors
 - Outside -- Time of day?
- Wardrobe & Make Up?
- Props?
- Posing?
- Lighting?

Posing basic tips

- Avoid straight lines
 - Tilt the head - particularly for women
 - Lean forward from the waist
 - Wrists & Elbows bent
 - One shoulder lower than the other
- Sitting
 - Sit forward on edge of seat, never sit back
 - Princess pose vs Indian pose
- Standing
 - Place 1 foot forward the other, especially for women
- Posing the “face”
 - Full face; ¾ view or profile
 - Never pose the face in an “in between” view
 - ¾ view most common, only shows 1 ear, nose does not show beyond the cheek
 - Smile or no smile
 - A contagious smile is always pleasant but not always necessary for a great portrait. Depends upon what it is you want to convey
 - A big smile can make the face tense and eyes squinty. Better to take the photo as the smile comes down & the eyes open up and the face relaxes
 - Look into the camera or not
 - Both can work, again it depends upon what it is you want to convey. In particular, think about a couple looking at each other instead of looking into the camera.
- Groups – avoid eyes at same level, it creates a straight line, making the photo appear static

Wardrobe basic tips

- Choices set the mood and can tell a story
- Solid colors usually work best
 - Don't recommend black in most cases
- Long sleeves usually work best
- Consistency within groups
- Fix wrinkles before you take the photo
- Side lighting to emphasize texture, especially important for a wedding dress
- Wardrobe and jewelry should complement, not clash with subject

Photographic KEY

- Determined by wardrobe & lighting
- Helps set a mood
- Three types of photographic key
 - Mid Key -- most common
 - Medium toned clothing
 - Mid tone background
 - Background light is same exposure or no more than 1 stop less than main light
 - Low Key – dramatic, commonly used for men
 - Dark Clothing
 - Dark background
 - Background is 2 stops less light than subject
 - High Key -- common for fashion photography
 - Light Clothing
 - Light, bright, white background
 - Background is 2 stops more light than subject

Lighting Basics

Three important aspects of lighting

1. Direction / Pattern - “narrow” or “broad”
2. Quality - “hard” or “soft”
3. Depth - how dark or light are the shadows

Lighting Patterns

- Narrow – light “mask” of face, keep shadow side toward camera
- Broad – keep lighted side of face toward camera, shadow side away from camera

Lighting Direction

- Side or split lighting (1/2 face in shadow)
- Rembrandt lighting (45 degree angle and creates a triangle on opposite cheek), this is classic portrait lighting
- Loop lighting (from front and just above camera), most common lighting and easy to get a pleasing portrait. Similar results as an on camera flash with a diffuser, such as the Fong diffuser.
- Butterfly lighting (from front and higher). Creates a slight shadow below the nose (hence the name butterfly). Common with fashion photography.

Note effect of light and shadows on the subject and adjust for desired effect

Quality of Light - “Hard” vs “Soft” Lighting

Hard Lighting - Small Point of light

- Direct Sunlight
- Direct Flash

Soft Lighting - Broad light source

- Overcast Sky
- Flash with Umbrella, Diffuser or Soft box
- Bounce Flash

Depth of Light

Shadows

- Use shadows to shape the face
- Use shadows to set the mood or tone
- Lighten shadows with fill (reflector or flash)
- Soften shadow edge with diffused soft light

Fill Flash Basics

- Use Fill Flash outdoors to “fix” problems with harsh shadows or to balance foreground and background lighting
- Use lens aperture & +/- EV flash settings to adjust impact of flash
- Use camera shutter speed to adjust impact of ambient (or background) light
- Fill Flash works well to fix problem of “back lit” subjects or to make the subject “pop” in relation to the background
- Camera/Flash “TTL BAL” and flash “SLOW SYNC” features are designed to create pleasing “fill flash” effect. In most cases these settings will allow shutter speed as slow as 1/30 of a second.
- Fill flash exposure is normally set ½ to 1 stop less than ambient light

Solutions to Common Flash Problems

- Red Eye
 - Move flash higher & away from camera lens axis
 - Use red eye reduction feature on your flash
 - Fix it in Photoshop or Lightroom
- Reflections
 - Move to side & shoot at an angle
- “over” Flash
 - Adjust flash power +/- EV setting or use bounce flash
- Dark Back Grounds
 - Use “slow sync” or “TTL BAL” features i.e. slower shutter (tripod may be necessary)
- Harsh Shadows
 - Use soft light i.e. bounce flash, flash diffuser or umbrella

Fill Flash summary

- Set aperture for “flash” exposure
- Set shutter speed for “available light” exposure
- Set flash at minus ½ or 1 stop to reduce effect
- Use fill flash with point & shoot cameras
- “Soft” Lighting is IMPORTANT
- Portraits –
 - Use ceiling bounce flash & fill card for catch light or
 - use diffuser dome on or off camera
 - Use flash with umbrella off camera
 - Use white board reflector fill light
 - Direct flash is always last choice
 - Use “center weighted” or “spot” metering for head & shoulders portraits, especially when backgrounds are dark

Amount of light from Flash depends upon:

- Power of Flash
 - Guide Number indicates maximum flash power
 - Power can typically be adjusted manually or automatically on the flash or “in camera”
 - Changing +/- EV or power setting adjusts flash duration from 1/500 to 1/80,000 sec
 - Flash TTL metering does this automatically
- Lens Aperture
- Flash to subject distance
 - Inverse Square Law - Illumination is inversely proportional to the square of the distance between the flash and the subject being lit
i.e. Double the distance = ¼ light
- White Balance
 - Blue is “cool” light
 - Orange is “warm” light
- Color “Temperature”
 - Daylight - “white” - 5,000 to 6,500 K
 - Flash - “white” - 5,300 to 5,600 K
 - Tungsten – “yellow-orange” - 2,500 to 3,200 K
 - Florescent – “green” - 3,700 to 4,000 K
 - Overcast Sky - “blue” - 7,500 to 9,000 K
- Correct using filters &/or digital white balance
- Correct in post production using Photoshop or Lightroom, except when lighting is “mixed”