

# PETS

By Kent DuFault

Photographing a pet is an exciting enterprise, as they have minds of their own and rarely sit still. There are numerous ways to try and tell a story with a pet. I'm going to give you some guidance and then some inspiration before sending you out on several pet photography assignment prompts.

I hope you have fun.

Bear in mind that I would like you to try these assignment prompts first with your own pets (if you have a pet or two), and then with the

pets of others. But definitely do both if you can, as the experience will be quite different.

The purpose of this creativity prompt is to provide inspiration to the 'art' of storytelling. The text is geared toward pet pictures and not so much about giving you a photography lesson.

So, the teaching part of these prompts will be kept to a minimum. Although, in reference to the activity of storytelling within your photography, you'll find the included tips and suggestions quite useful.



[Image 001 – Photograph by Alvan Nee](#)



Image 002 - Photographs by Daniel Lincoln ([Left](#) and [Right](#))

The first decision in storytelling pet photography is 'what story do you want to convey'? That probably sounds trite, but it isn't.

It's easy to lose track of what your intended story was supposed to be while in the excitement of shooting pictures. You might still end up with cute pictures, but does it fulfill your goal?

Both examples in Image 002 are lovely pictures. However, the story is very different. The story on the left is about the pet owner. The story on the right is about the puppy.

Why is that? On the left, the composition directs the viewer's eyes toward the pet

owner. On the right, the composition leads the viewer's eyes toward the pet. Both pictures portray both the pet and the pet owner, but with different degrees of visual weight between the subjects.



#### Key Point:

Composition, lighting, lensing, and camera point of view can drastically change your story. Be sure to give it some consideration before you begin clicking the shutter.



Image 003 – Photograph (L) by [Artem Beliaikin](#) and Photograph (R) by [Bundo Kim](#).

Let's say that you know the story you want to tell with your pet picture. The second step is to make creative decisions in the shooting process that highlight that story.

Look at Image 003. The chosen story in this example is 'a pet owner's relationship with their dog.'

The left example tells that story more effectively than the right example, even though both women likely love their dogs just as much.

Could the left example be altered to emphasize the intended story further?



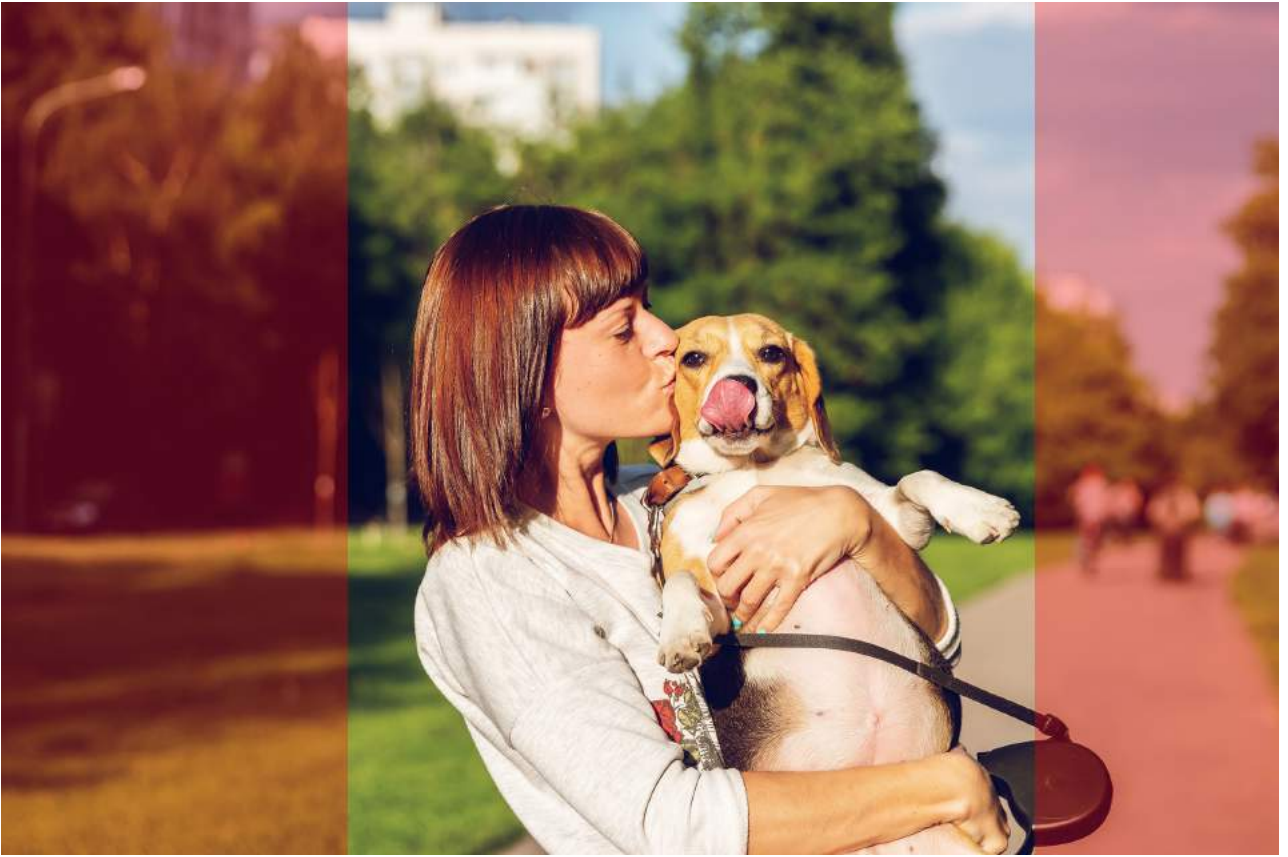


Image 004 – Photograph by Artem Beliaikin

Cropping within the frame, either in-camera or in post-production, can push the story further to the forefront.



Image 004a – Photograph by Artem Beliaikin

In Image 004a, the tighter the crop, the more the story becomes about the woman's love for her dog.

Look at Image 004. Everything in the left red area of the frame is entirely unneeded; it adds nothing to the story and the composition.

A choice could be made for the red area on the right. If cropped like any of the versions that I indicated in Image 004a, the story is entirely about the woman's love for her dog. If more of the right-side area (of red in Image 004) were left in the final picture, the story becomes 'a loving moment between a woman and her pet dog while out on a walk.

Do you see the difference?



### Assignment:

I want you to create a portfolio of 10 photos that involve a pet owner and their pet. I want you to do this twice with two different pet owners and two different types of pets. In each case, five photos should tell a story strictly about the pet, and five photos should tell a story purely about the pet owner, but both the pet and the pet owner should appear together in all of the photographs. Get creative with your camera angles, lenses, lighting, and storytelling options.



### Remember:

Focus the viewer's attention on crucial storytelling elements through your composition.



Image 005 – Photograph (L) by [Ryanto Lutan](#) and Photograph (R) by [Sindy Strife](#)

Here is an essential distinction in pet photography. An excellent pet portrait does not necessarily tell a great story.

The two example photos in Image 005 are lovely pet portraits. However, think about this. What do they tell us about the pet or their lives? What do we learn about these two pets other than that they have cute faces?



#### Key Point:

A pet portrait with a strong story will tell us something about the life of the pet and not merely be a representation of how they look.



Image 006 – Photograph by [Ramiz Dedakovic](#)

Image 006 is a pet portrait that tells the viewer a story about this cat's behavior.





Image 007 – Photograph by Karel Van der Auwera

Image 007 is a fantastic pet portrait that relays important storytelling elements such as animal behavior, a particular moment in time, and the relationship between a pet and her puppies.



**Assignment:**

I want you to set up three photoshoots involving three different pets. In each session, create portraits that tell the viewer something about the pet's life. Here are a few examples to inspire you:



Image 008 - Photograph by Picsea



Image 009 – Photograph by Kayla Farmer

**Important Stretch Goal:** Put yourself out there beyond cats and dogs. Think about horses, birds, reptiles, and fish! Here are a few example photos to motivate you on the idea of exotic pets.



Image 010 – Photograph by Ursula Spaulding

When a cockatiel raises its crown, it means something. That's a storytelling element.



Image 011 – Photograph by David Clode

Storytelling with a fish portrait will be the ultimate challenge. Fish have personalities just like any other living thing. They have likes, dislikes, and needs. They will create technical difficulties for you to overcome.

In Image 011, a rabbitfish gets its teeth cleaned by two cleaner wrasses. An excellent story is told in this beautiful shot.



### Assignment:

Challenge yourself by taking on at least one exotic pet portrait session. You choose the subject. Garner all of your abilities to tell an exciting story about the exotic pet, just like Image 011.