



THE ART OF PORTRAIT PHOTOGRAPHY

Premium Photography Guide

Written by Kent DuFault



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01

PORTRAIT PHOTOGRAPHY



Michael Carian

<http://www.flickr.com/photos/carianoff/3705008019/>

You have a camera, a lens or two, perhaps a flash, and you're ready to move onto something besides fences and barns.

Portrait photography is a logical step.



Portraiture encompasses all
fields of photography.

Our fellow human beings are the most interesting subjects of all. Creating top quality portraits could even be a stepping-stone into a role as a professional photographer.

The demand is high.

But so is the demand for quality.

This book will give you the information that you need to succeed. This won't be your ordinary instructional textbook. We assume that you have some photographic skills already in place. Instead, we're going to give you specific tidbits of information and advice that could only come from someone who has produced portraits for decades. We'll also discuss numerous sample images and learn together from their triumphs and mistakes.

Did you know that whether you wish to become a photojournalist, commercial photographer, wedding photographer, or a portrait photographer, you would be required to create dynamic portraits?

Portraiture encompasses all fields of photography.

The good news is that it doesn't necessarily take a lot of equipment to get started.

But the reality is it does take a lot of skill and practice.

Knowing what to do is not enough. You'll also be required to do it quickly, efficiently, pleasantly, and with expectant faces staring at you.

“The most difficult thing for me is a portrait. You have to try and put your camera between the skin of a person and his shirt.”

–Henri Cartier-Bresson



Edoardo Costa
<http://www.flickr.com/photos/edo-finelight/3706467791/>

Cartier-Bresson is one of the world's most famous photojournalists. His quote confirms the fact that to accomplish great portraits, you'll need more knowledge and skill than what camera to use and how to set up your lights.

You may even wish to brush-up on your psychology!

How do you get a toddler to sit where you want them to sit? How do you get an ornery Grandfather to walk into a location that you've chosen? What do you do if you're photographing four siblings and one of them is crying and uncooperative? How do you elicit a smile from a subject that doesn't want to?

We'll also address some of these issues throughout this book.

02

WHAT IS PORTRAIT PHOTOGRAPHY?



Yuri Samoilov

http://www.flickr.com/photos/yuri_samoilov/9965420034/in/faves-carolinastudios/

WHAT IS PORTRAIT PHOTOGRAPHY?

Portrait photography (or portraiture) is the creation of images that tell the story about a person or a group of people. It does this through the display of expression, personality, location, clothing, props, and mood of the subject(s).

Whenever you create a portrait, you should strive to accomplish these three goals.

1. Present an emotion
2. Tell a story
3. Meet the needs of the client

03

PRESENT AN EMOTION



Jenn Durfey
<http://www.flickr.com/photos/dottiemae/5258447418/>

PRESENT AN EMOTION

Portraiture that doesn't present an emotion is lifeless. The job of a portrait photographer is to capture the essence of their subject(s).

How do you present emotion?

The most typical way is through expression.

This would include the positioning of the mouth and eyes. But to a broader extent it also includes body language.

If your portrait is a group of people, consider whether it should include interaction and touching. For a family, it could be a hug, and for a business, it could be handshake.



Richard Foster

<http://www.flickr.com/photos/93963757@N05/8551937456/>

A business portrait could look like this – or –



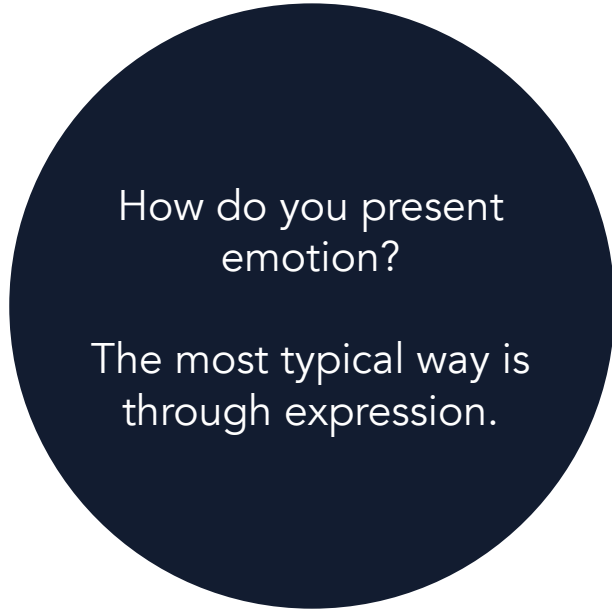
GovernmentZA

<http://www.flickr.com/photos/governmentza/8934416874/>

It could look like this depending on the situation.

While typically portraits done for hire require a smile from the subject, other types of portraits don't.

Before you begin a portrait session, determine what your goals are including what emotions you're trying to present.



How do you present emotion?

The most typical way is through expression.

04

TELL A STORY



Amgad Fahmi
<http://www.flickr.com/photos/titanjad/9497423406/>

TELL A STORY

This aspect of portraiture could be quite complicated, or quite simple. Are you going to build an entire set, or have your subject clutch a favorite object? Whenever possible, tell a story with your portraiture. This can be done with background, clothing, props, location, costuming, etc.

05

MEET THE CLIENT'S NEEDS



Peter McConnochie
<http://www.flickr.com/photos/dougiz/10815776715/>

MEET THE CLIENT'S NEEDS

These are very important, and believe it or not, are often overlooked by beginning portrait photographers.

Portraiture is about the people in the picture. Most clients want to see the expression on the face of the subject.

This portrait might be fine for you (the photographer), but, what about the woman in the photograph? What if she were the client? Would she be happy with this portrait? Her face is almost lost in the image. Still, she might love it if the "place" is important to her, and she loves how tall and thin she looks! Find out what your client wants and give them more!

Obviously, you have more latitude if you're shooting strictly for yourself.

Many beginning portrait photographers shoot images that are far too wide and include lots of background; these types of images can be successful, but more often they aren't.

It can make your images look like you don't want to be in touch with the subject. Including ultra-wide work is fine, but make sure it's part of a group of photographs that meet your client's needs.



Dollen
<http://www.flickr.com/photos/dollen/1254907044/in/photostream/>

This portrait is so wide that the subject is literally lost against the background. Don't let your creativity get so carried away that you forget what you're trying to accomplish.



Martin Cvrkal
<http://www.flickr.com/photos/thecvrk/6846167861/>

This portrait was also shot wide to establish a strong sense of location. This example is more successful. We can clearly see the subject's expression, and her body language, which presents an emotion. The background does help tell a story and, most of all, we haven't lost the young woman's beautiful face. Any portrait client would be happy with this outcome.

06

TYPES OF PORTRAIT PHOTOGRAPHY



James Jordan
<https://flic.kr/p/5pN9ZM>

THERE ARE SEVERAL DISTINCT TYPES OF PORTRAIT PHOTOGRAPHY

1. TRADITIONAL

This is the most common type of portrait work; the type we're all used to seeing. It's created against a backdrop. The subject generally looks directly at the camera. The lighting is generally even, with tamed highlights and open shadows. This style of work is most often used for business portraits, school pictures, church directories, baby pictures, and family portraits.



Daniel M Viero
<https://www.flickr.com/photos/danielviero/8525344136/>

2. LIFESTYLE

Lifestyle portraits have become very popular in the last few decades. This type of work portrays the subject in a living situation. The work is most often (although not always) created on location, rather than in front of a backdrop. The key is to show the subject(s) enjoying their life. It's a mixture of an environmental portrait and a candid portrait. The activity is as important as the faces and the expressions. This style is often used in weddings, family portraits, engagement portraits, glamour work, and editorial photography.



Kent DuFault

<http://www.flickr.com/photos/35449761@N04/11967519044/>

3. ENVIRONMENTAL

An environmental portrait is similar to a lifestyle portrait. The term environmental portrait is used primarily to describe work created for the editorial or business markets rather than families or weddings. Environmental portraits often depict workers, or celebrities, in their own environment. In an environmental portrait the subject generally looks into the camera. An environmental portrait gives the viewer a sense of the person, their place, and how the two relate to each other.



Dima Bushkov
<http://www.flickr.com/photos/bushkov/4394764922/>

4. CANDID

Candid portraits are done on the fly without a lot of set-up. Sometimes the subject of the candid portrait isn't even aware that the photographer is taking their photograph. One of the most difficult aspects to candid portraits is achieving a natural look when working with a client. It's often helpful to give them a task and then photograph them while they go about doing the task. This is a great technique for children. Almost any type of photography assignment can require candid portraits. This is especially true with weddings, families, children, and editorial work.



Daniel M Viero

<http://www.flickr.com/photos/danielviero/8704824917/lightbox/>

5. GLAMOUR

Glamour portraits place an emphasis on sex appeal. An important sub-genre of the glamour portrait is a boudoir portrait. This type of work requires all the skills previously discussed plus additional skills in the application of makeup and the styling of hair. Special attention must be placed on the selection of clothing, props, and posing.



Kent DuFault

<http://www.flickr.com/photos/35449761@N04/11240732936/>

6. EXPERIMENTAL AND ABSTRACT

Portraits in this genre are typically created for artistic purposes only and are often used as an interpretive view of the subject's subconscious thoughts.

Assignment- Do some research on Flickr and locate 6 examples of each type of portrait photography. Study the examples and write down what you think works in the photographs- or what doesn't work! Can you decide what type of portraiture you're drawn to? Is there a type that you have no interest in?

07

EQUIPMENT



WHAT KIND OF EQUIPMENT DO YOU NEED?

Do I need an expensive camera?

The answer is, "No, you don't." However, a DSLR will significantly improve your results.

A DSLR is the best choice for portrait photography.

There are a number of reasons for this.

First of all, non-DSLR cameras have what is called "shutter lag". Some models are better than others, but virtually all point-and-shoot cameras, and many fixed lens hybrid cameras, have this lag.

Point-and-shoot cameras, and many hybrid cameras, suffer from shutter lag.

What does shutter lag mean?

When you press the release button there is a lag in time before focus is set and the shutter fires.

This is just a fraction of a second; but, when shooting portraits, a fraction of a second is the difference between getting the perfect expression or not.

A DSLR is the best choice
for portrait photography.



Any camera 8 megapixels or above should be sufficient to produce professional quality portraits.

A DSLR camera also gives you the advantage of interchangeable lenses!

Do you need a super megapixel camera? Not necessarily- Higher resolution does bring two advantages.

1. You can crop more from the original file and still have plenty of resolution to make a large print.
2. You can make a HUGE print without any image loss.

Both of these points are nice advantages. You don't need them to start out. Any camera 8 megapixels or above should be sufficient to produce professional quality portraits.

Important Tip- You'll often hear photographers debating the merits of different cameras and lenses but never about memory cards. Memory cards are the heart of your system. Follow these tips:

1. Buy the best you can afford
2. Buy the fastest you can afford. (You want your card to keep up with your camera.)
3. Buy several smaller cards rather than one big card. That way, if one goes bad, you don't lose everything. We recommend 8GB, 16GB, and 32GB cards with a 400X (or faster) write speed.

One of the last and most important points on your DSLR camera for portraiture is you want a camera that has the lowest noise ratio possible. Much of your portrait work will be done in available light. If your camera can use an ISO of 400, 800, or possibly even 1600, without turning the image into a sandstorm, that's a big bonus.



This camera displays noise under low light at ISO 1600.



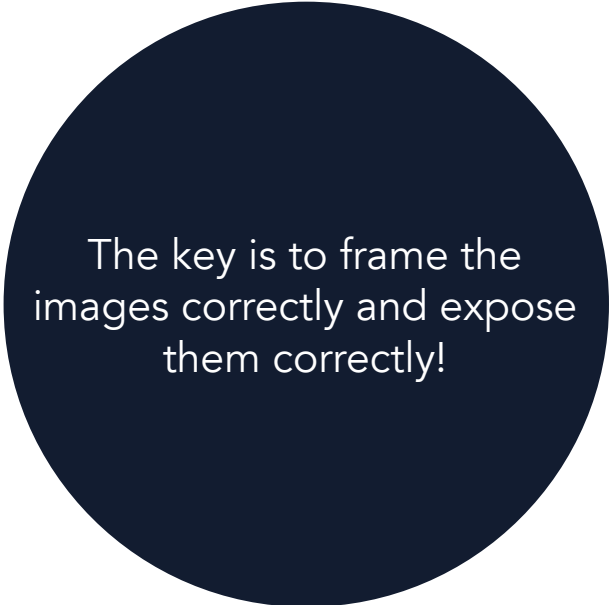
This camera displays virtually no noise under similar conditions and with similar settings.



Uncle Keith
<https://www.flickr.com/photos/yeophotogroup/4674123156/>

Even if you bring additional lighting to a low light situation, noise can still be a factor. In this image the artificial light is being provided for the model, but the background will rely on low ambient light.

We want to briefly touch on the use of medium format cameras. There is no question that a medium format camera will raise the bar on the “technical” quality of your portrait work.



The key is to frame the
images correctly and expose
them correctly!

However, you will drop a significant amount of money to move into a medium format system. Unless you plan on earning your living shooting portraits, we don't really see the advantage in today's marketplace.

We've personally looked at 24 x 30 inch portrait prints that were produced from 8 megapixel cameras, and they looked just fine.

The key is to frame the images correctly and expose them correctly!

Your portrait camera should-

1. Have no shutter lag
2. Be 8 megapixels or above
3. Have a fast write time and buffer speed
4. Produce low noise

WHAT KIND OF LENSES DO I WANT?

This is an even more important discussion than what camera to use!

There is one common denominator that you'll see among the world's greatest portrait photographers; they use **prime lenses**.

Why use prime (fixed focal length) lenses instead of a zoom lens?

1. They generally offer a wider maximum aperture.
2. They are smaller, lighter, easier to handle, and less obtrusive.
3. They generally achieve sharper critical focus.
4. If you're doing location work, they're not as fragile because they have less moving parts.

Does this mean you shouldn't use a zoom lens? Not necessarily, especially if you already own it.

But, if you're serious about doing portrait photography, you should consider adding these prime lenses to your camera bag as soon as you can.

.50mm f/1.8 or f/1.4 or f/1.2

.28mm f/2.8 or faster

.20mm f/2.8 or faster

.85mm f/1.8 or faster

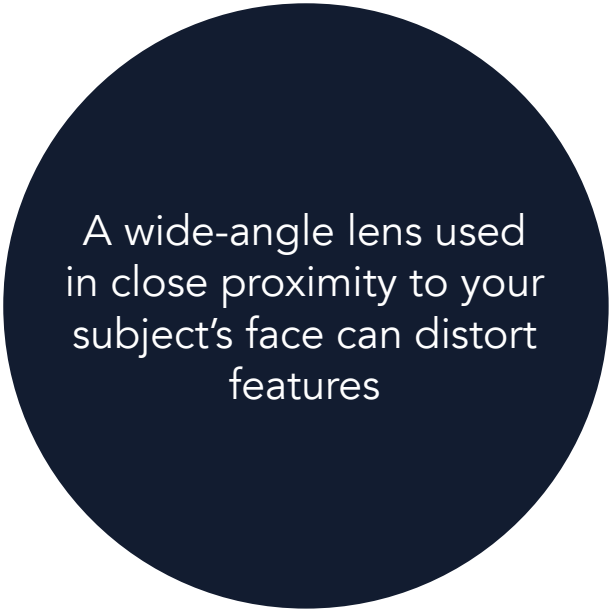
.135mm f/2.0 or faster

No matter what lens you are using, make sure you put a lens hood on it.



Kevin Stanchfield
http://www.flickr.com/photos/sgt_spanky/4161827358/

Most portrait work is produced with a lens in the 28mm to 200mm focal length. (Avoid the use of wide-angle lenses when getting in close to your subject; it will distort facial features.)



A wide-angle lens used in close proximity to your subject's face can distort features

A wide-angle lens used in close proximity to your subject's face can distort features, such as making a nose look too big.

No matter what lens you choose, keep these attributes in mind.

1. A fast lens (wide f/stop) lets you work in low light. It will also give you better bokeh highlights and a shallower depth-of-field. The faster the lens the better. This is why most zoom lenses don't work out well. They tend to be slow with a maximum aperture of f/3.5 - f/5.6.
2. You also want a lens that has close-focusing capability. It doesn't have to be a macro lens, but the closer it focuses the better.

Assignment- Review your current lenses. Take note of their maximum aperture and minimum focus capabilities. Create a list of the next two lenses you would like to add to your camera bag and why.

08

NATURAL LIGHT VERSUS ARTIFICIAL LIGHT



Jordan Chan

<http://www.flickr.com/photos/evolutionfotos/6124817694/in/photostream/>

NATURAL LIGHT VERSUS ARTIFICIAL LIGHT

Most beginners begin by shooting portraits with natural light. It makes sense, right? That way you don't need a lot of gear. The downside is that you're limited in what you can do.

We're going to talk about lighting options. Our goal is to get thinking about how you can "light" your portrait work AND stay within your budget!

A large window with indirect lighting and a simple reflector created this dazzling portrait.

Natural light can be one of the most pleasing light sources for portraits. The downside is that you're limited to locations where you can find it, and the light intensity is generally low (forcing you to raise your ISO, increase your shutter speed, or open up your aperture).

Still, we recommend natural light as the way for you to begin creating portraits.



Kent DuFault
<http://www.flickr.com/photos/35449761@N04/8835118427/>

WHERE CAN YOU FIND GOOD NATURAL LIGHT?

If you're working indoors, look for a large indirect light source such as a window or door. You want "indirect light" because direct sunlight will be too harsh.

If you can only find a window or door with direct sunlight, you could modify the light. We will be discussing that in a few minutes.



Ketn DuFault

<http://www.flickr.com/photos/35449761@N04/11294478235/>

Indirect light coming through a window or doorway will provide soft, even lighting. The light source illuminating this boy was a single window to the left of the camera. While window lighting is effective, it is only a single directional light source. We'll show you how to use reflectors to redirect light back onto a subject from another angle. This technique gives you multiple lighting with very little equipment cost.

When working outdoors in the middle of the day look for areas of shade.

The preferred alternative is to schedule your portrait sessions early or late in the day when the sun is low in the sky. A good time is the hour before sunset or the hour after sunrise. This time of day provides a softer more pleasant light source.



Frank Kovalchek

<http://www.flickr.com/photos/72213316@N00/7436213778/in/photostream/>

Using open shade will provide soft, even lighting that is similar to window light, although less directional. When working outdoors in the shade, a fill flash will come in handy as it can provide directional lighting. Pay attention to your white balance; open shade will often have a shift toward the blue spectrum.



Agnes

<http://www.flickr.com/photos/agnesf/7440348176/>

Open shade is a good alternative to bright sunlight.

The light of sunrise or sunset is soft and directional. When using this as your main light source, keep an eye on your white balance as the color temperature can turn very orange-red.

Assignment- Shoot a portrait session indoors using window light. Then shoot a second portrait session outdoors using indirect shade. Finally, shoot a third portrait session outdoors just before sunset. Compare the results of the three sessions. Was there a difference in the quality of light? How about the color balance? Were you able to produce sharp images in all three scenarios?

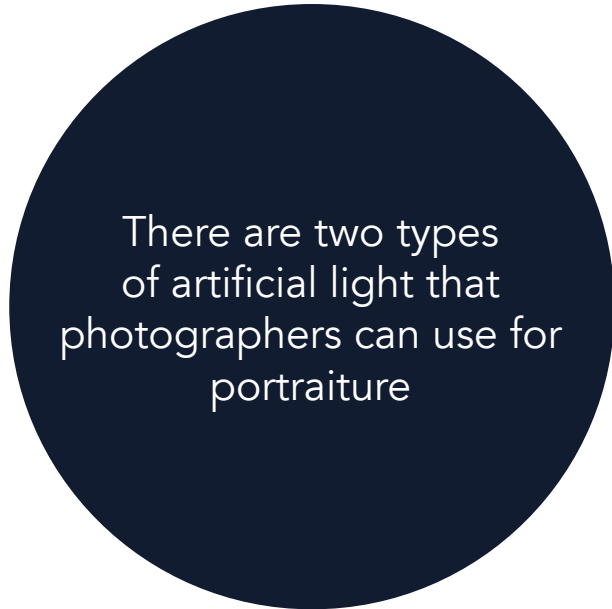
WHAT ARE THE DIFFERENT TYPES OF ARTIFICIAL LIGHT?

There are two types of artificial light that photographers can use for portraiture. Each one has advantages and disadvantages. Let's take a quick look at each one.

1. ELECTRONIC FLASH

Electronic flash is probably the most common artificial light source used by portrait photographers.

This would include studio flash, mono-lights, and portable flash.



There are two types of artificial light that photographers can use for portraiture



Studio flash units have a power pack that plugs into the wall. The flash heads are then plugged into the power pack. The advantages to this type of flash are- high power, heavy-duty construction, fast recycle time, low heat, modeling lamps to indicate lighting, and an available abundance of light modification devices. The disadvantages are- high cost, heavy power pack, high current draw, and corded flash heads. Studio flash units are typically used by professionals in a studio setting.



Mono-light flash units are self-contained. Each one has its own power supply and flash head. The advantages to this type of unit are- high power, continuous adjustable power output, fast recycle time, wireless set-up and triggering, low heat, modeling lamps, durable, easy to pack and travel, and a battery that can power some models. The disadvantages are- high cost, heavy flash head (meaning you must use heavy-duty light stands and grip equipment or you risk the flash head tipping over), and high current draw. These units are an excellent choice if you wish to expand your gear to a professional level but don't have a studio.



Portable electronic flash has gained popularity in producing portraiture. The advantages of portable flash are- low cost, possible wireless use, lightweight, no electricity required, and easy to travel. The disadvantages are- no modeling light, low power, reliant on batteries, possibly no wired alternative (should the units have trouble firing wirelessly), not as durable as the previous discussed options, and limited light modification devices. Portable flash is a fine alternative if you don't mind the disadvantages.

All the flash options offer daylight balanced light.

Our recommendation is to use a mixture of mono-lights and portable flash for location work, and studio flash for a full-time studio set-up.



There are several reasons
to consider flash over
continuous light sources.

2. CONTINUOUS LIGHT SOURCES

Continuous light sources include Tungsten, HMI, Fluorescent, and LED lights.

The main advantage of continuous light over flash (no matter what type you pick) is a “What You See Is What You Get” light source.

In other words, when you set-up your lights, you will see exactly how they are going to light up your subject! You will also find it quicker and easier to determine lighting ratios and proper exposure.

This is not true with electronic flash (even flash that has modeling lamps). Modeling lamps give you a sense of what the light is going to do, but when the flash pops, it’s not exactly the same.

And with portable flash you’ll have no idea what the light is going to do until you take a test shot.

So, why not just work with continuous light sources?

There are several reasons to consider flash over continuous light sources.

Most continuous light sources require AC voltage- meaning they are not easy to use outdoors. Some of them get very hot which can make your subject uncomfortable under certain conditions. Some of them are not the same color balance as daylight which means you must have a good understanding of color balance, color temperature, and how to correct different color temperature sources. Finally, continuous light sources have a lower light output than flash which probably wouldn’t be a problem for a single person portrait, but could be a real problem with a group of thirty people.

Let's look at the advantages and disadvantages for each type of continuous lighting source.

TUNGSTEN-

Tungsten lights have the advantage of a lower initial investment and higher light output. They also have two disadvantages- high heat, and they're not color balanced to daylight.

HMI-

HMI lights offer high light output in a daylight balanced color spectrum. The downside to HMI lights are high initial cost, high replacement cost for bulbs, and the bulbs only last several hundred hours at best.

FLUORESCENT-

Fluorescent lights have come a long way in the last few years. They now offer daylight color balance and provide a soft light, which is ideal for portraits. The disadvantage is that they offer only soft light. They are also bulky (read hard to travel around), require an AC power source, and have the lowest light output of any of the continuous light source options. They are also delicate and can break easily when moved around.

LED-

LED lights are the newest kid on the block. They have some significant advantages for the portrait photographer. They operate cool, many units have a variable color temperature adjustment and a 100% output adjustment, they can operate off AC or DC power, they can be grouped together in large banks for higher light output, and they're also durable and the lamps last for thousands of hours. The downside to this unit is a high start-up cost and a lack of light modification accessories.

If you're serious about portraiture and just starting out, here's what we recommend for lighting.

Work toward building up your lighting kit. You don't need all of it to get started. Add more lights as you grow.

WE RECOMMEND-

1. Three adequately powered portable flash units with wireless capability and PC cord connections.
2. Four to six mono-lights in the 300 to 1200 watt second power range. Purchase units that offer wireless triggering and are lightweight. AC / DC capability would be a real plus.

<http://www.paulcbuff.com/index.php>

There are many mono-light options in the marketplace. We recommend this brand. We have had MANY years of experience with these units. They are cost effective, feature rich, and extremely durable.

3. Three to six LED lights with AC and DC power.

<http://www.bhphotovideo.com/indepth/photography/hands-reviews/innovative-led-lighting-stills-and-video>

The above article provides a thorough explanation of LED lights.

Assignment- Begin to gather some light sources. They don't have to be expensive. Go to your home repair store and buy some clip-on work lights. You can purchase any kind of bulbs. Just make sure they're all the same. The goal here is to get you started with some lighting that you can control. If you own a portable flash unit, you can still add some inexpensive work lights. Just make sure the light bulbs are daylight color temperature.

09

GETTING IT SHARP - THE TRIPOD



Kent DuFault
<http://www.flickr.com/photos/35449761@N04/12093619764/>

GETTING IT SHARP - THE TRIPOD

One of the most important considerations in producing a successful portrait is producing a sharp portrait.

People don't want their portrait to be blurry; it's as simple as that.

You might take the occasional (intentionally) blurred portrait for creative effect, but in general, you'll want your portraits to be sharp.



The point of focus should
always be on the eyes.

Multiple subjects that are all quickly moving will be a challenge in your portrait photography. Study the tips below and learn how you can keep the portrait sharp and in focus!

The point of focus should always be on the eyes.

Have you ever viewed a portrait where the photographer accidentally focused on an ear, resulting in the eyes being soft?

It doesn't work too well does it?

So, how do we go about getting sharp pictures?

Whenever possible, use a good sturdy tripod!

The downside to using a tripod is that it will slow down your ability to move the camera quickly.

Consider this when purchasing a tripod.

1. Buy one that is sturdy but lightweight.
2. You want one that has a quick-release plate and quick-release legs so that it can be raised and lowered without a lot of hassle.
3. Consider investing in a quality ball head or a pistol-grip head.

There are many products out there for you to investigate.

We'll give you a starting point.

We've used this particular pistol-grip head for years in creating portraits, and we've used it under some of the harshest conditions. For the cost, it's an excellent investment. It's easy to use and allows for quick minor adjustments to your framing.

http://www.bhphotovideo.com/c/product/303591-REG/Manfrotto_322RC2_322RC2_Grip_Action_Ballhead.html

You have one other major consideration for your tripod- How far up can it go? We would recommend nothing less than 8 feet. You want to be able to get that overhead angle, especially when taking group portraits.

If you find yourself in a situation where you can't, or don't want to use a tripod, consider adding a monopod to your equipment list. If you're unfamiliar with what a monopod is, you can check out some models here-

<http://www.bhphotovideo.com/c/buy/Monopods-Unipods/ci/397/N/4075788738>

There are some portrait situations where you simply may not want to be bogged down with any kind of camera support (young children as an example). If that's the case, try to use lenses with stabilization and set your shooting mode to shutter priority so that you can control camera shake.

Hot Tip- Here is how you can be sure to place the point of focus on the eyes. If your subject isn't moving use manual focus. If you're using a zoom lens, zoom all the way in and then put the center of your frame on an eye. (This is the same for prime lenses.) Focus. Now re-frame your photograph (zoom out) and shoot. As you practice this you will be able to do this quickly. If you are using a zoom lens we recommend zooming back in and checking your focus every couple of frames. If you're using a prime lens, check the focus as often as you think is necessary.



Where would you focus
if you were taking a group
portrait?

Does our **Hot Tip** mean that you should never use autofocus? No. It simply means that you're more likely to get critical focus on a subject that will sit still.

If you're using autofocus, avoid using matrix settings. Set your focus pattern to a single point or a small cluster.

Where would you focus if you were taking a group portrait?

Excellent question!

With group portraits you want to use your matrix focus points (if you're using autofocus).

Critical portrait photographers use manual focus, and here's why.

They want to know where the depth-of-field will fall.

For example- they don't want everyone in the front of the group to be in focus, but everyone in the back is out of focus.

Group Portrait Tip- Always use F/8.0 to F/22.0. Focus on a face in the center of the group and 1/3 back from the front. Example- You're shooting a group portrait with 12 people. You essentially have 3 planes where heads are located. We'll call them the front row, middle row, and back row. Manually focus on the middle head in the second row. Re-compose your picture and fire a test shot. Check your focus from front to back.



John Ragai

<http://www.flickr.com/photos/johnragai/10010313094/in/photostream/>

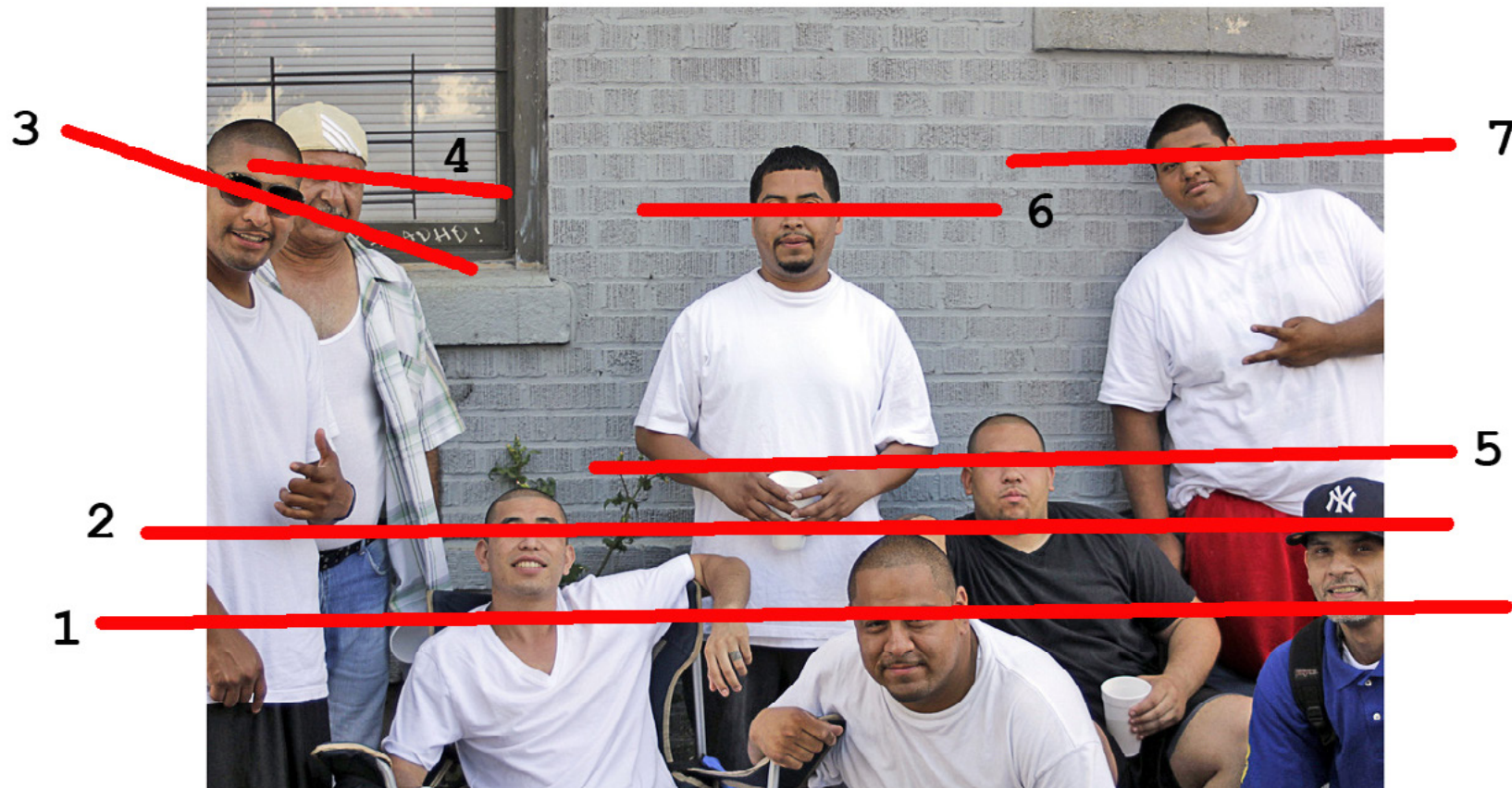
Your group portraits need everyone to be in focus. If the group is situated in rows it can be pretty easy to figure out where to place your point of focus.



Timothy Krause
<http://www.flickr.com/photos/timothykrause/5774799434/>

But, what if they're not situated in nice, evenly defined rows?

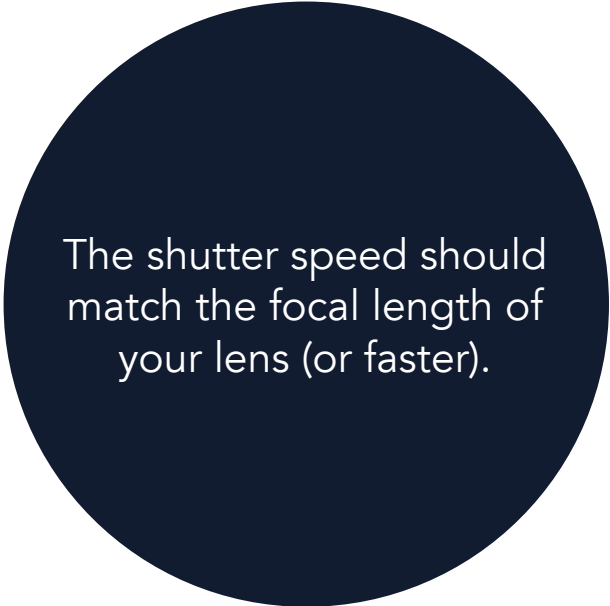
DIFFERENT PLANES OF FOCUS



PHOTOGRAPH BY
TIMOTHY KRAUSE

Timothy Krause
<http://www.flickr.com/photos/timothykrause/5774799434/>

You need to visualize the planes of focus. Start with the one closest to the camera and work your way back. Pick the plane of focus that is approximately 1/3 back from the front. That is where you will want to set your focus point. In this case, it would be plane #2.



The shutter speed should match the focal length of your lens (or faster).

MANY portraits fail due to camera shake. (Another good reason to put the camera on a tripod!)

Camera shake happens when you physically move the camera as you release the shutter.

There are two conditions that exasperate this problem.

1. Telephoto lenses magnify camera movement. It's like trying to hold a pair of binoculars steady. Telephoto lenses that have the stabilization feature will help with this.

But the most important thing is that you **MUST** remain aware of your shutter speed!

2. The slower your shutter speed, the more likely you are going to record camera shake.

Important Tip- How do you know what shutter speed will begin to show camera shake? That "number" varies from person to person. (It depends on how steady you are, your shooting technique, etc.)

This is an "old school photographer's trick" that will help you along as you learn your personal limitations.

The shutter speed should match the focal length of your lens (or faster).

Example - You're shooting with a 200mm lens- your shutter speed should be 1/200th of a second, or faster. You're shooting with a 50mm lens- your shutter speed should be 1/50th of a second, or faster. What if you're using a 28-200mm zoom lens? Check the focal length setting and make sure your shutter speed matches that number, or faster!

Another Thought- If your lens has stabilization, this will buy you one, or two, shutter speed settings.

Example- You're shooting with a 28-200mm lens (with stabilization). You are using the 200mm setting. Optimally, you would want a shutter speed of 1/200th or faster, but, with your stabilization you can easily go to 100th of a second, and possibly even to 1/50th of a second (depending on how steady you are).

The Best Advice You're Ever Going to Get- Unless your camera is locked down on a tripod, DO NOT USE the Live View function on the back of the camera to focus, compose, and create your portrait. Using your camera this way is a sure-fire way to get a blurry portrait (or any kind of picture for that matter). DSLR cameras are ergonomically designed to be held tightly to the face. The act of holding the camera in that position steadies it! Live View is a feature that was developed by the camera manufacturers to help move point-and-shoot camera owners into a DSLR camera.

Let's re-cap how you're going to take sharp, awesome portraits!

1. Use a tripod, monopod, or other camera support if the subject matter allows it.
2. When shooting single subjects focus on the eyes.
3. Use manual focus if practical. If using autofocus do not use the matrix setting. Set your focus sensor to a single or a small cluster grouped together. If using a zoom lens, zoom in, focus, and zoom out.
4. With larger groups use at least F/8.0 (or smaller) to ensure enough depth-of-field. Figure out your focus planes and focus 1/3 back from the front.
5. If you're not using camera support, make sure that your shutter speed matches the focal length of your lens. Use stabilization technology when possible.

Assignment- Using all of your lenses (or varying your zoom lens), shoot a series of portraits, handheld, in available light. Focus on the subject's eyes. Start with a shutter speed of 1/8th of a second and increase your shutter speed in standard increments (1/15, 1/30, 1/60, 1/125, 1/250).

Examine your results at 100%. The goal is to determine at what shutter speed you were able to handhold the camera and eliminate camera shake.



The goal is to determine at what shutter speed you were able to handhold the camera and eliminate camera shake.

10

CREATING LIGHTING THAT MATCHES YOUR VISION

CREATING LIGHTING THAT MATCHES YOUR VISION



We are going to tell you about the tools that are available to modify light.

You know how important lighting is to any photographic project. But... It is especially important in portraiture!

You must know how to create soft light, hard light, back light, focused light, broad light, pinpoint light, bounced light, colored light, etc.

We are going to tell you about the tools that are available to **modify light**, how they work, the nuances to working with them, and how you could potentially “make something yourself” to get the job done without spending a lot of money.

These tools for lighting are called “light modifiers”.

All light modifiers do one (or more) of the following to a light source: soften the light, harden the light, focus the light, bounce the light, hold back **some** of the light, hold back **all** of the light, create a pattern with the light, or change the color of the light.



John O'Nolan
<http://www.flickr.com/photos/johnonolan/4666925520/>

UMBRELLAS

Umbrellas are a great way to start your lighting kit.

- They're inexpensive
- They're compact and travel easily
- They're lightweight
- They're fairly versatile
- They're durable

There are two types of umbrellas: bounce and shoot-through.



Dustin Gaffke
<http://www.flickr.com/photos/onepointfour/8457584922/>

This is a bounce umbrella. The light source is directed into the umbrella. The light is then “bounced” back toward the subject. You can recognize a bounce umbrella because it will be backed with a black fabric that prevents light from passing through.

(Some bounce umbrellas have a removable backing - called a combo umbrella - so that they can be used as a shoot-through umbrella as well.)



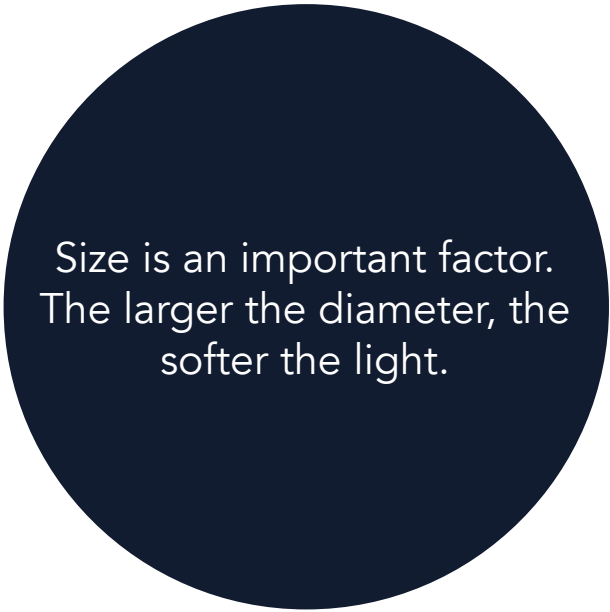
Vox Efx
http://www.flickr.com/photos/vox_efx/3507595454/

With a shoot-through umbrella the light source is directed into the umbrella, but it doesn’t bounce back. Instead, it passes through creating a larger, softer light source.

Why would you choose to use a bounce, shoot-through, or combo umbrella?

A combo offers the most versatility, but it will be the most expensive.

Both types of umbrellas do one thing really well; they create soft directional light.



Size is an important factor.
The larger the diameter, the
softer the light.

The difference between the bounce type and the shoot-through type is this-

With a bounce umbrella you can feather the light hitting the subject. For example- you want the light (from your umbrella) to hit the subject but not the background. Therefore, with a bounce umbrella you can feather it away from the background.

The disadvantage to the bounce umbrella is that you will lose more power from your light source than you would with a shoot-through setup.

The shoot-through umbrella gives you that extra f/stop of power, but it also swathes your scene with light. It can't be feathered like a bounce umbrella.

Just For Fun Tip- If you're just getting started and don't want to spend any money. Pick up an old, used rain umbrella. Use spray glue (available at any art supply store) and glue pieces of tinfoil to the inside of the umbrella. Or, you could spray paint the inside with a reflective metallic paint. If you want to use a photo support bracket to hold the umbrella, simply cut off the handle with a hacksaw.

One last comment on umbrellas; size is an important factor. The larger the diameter, the softer the light. Conversely, a smaller diameter will create a harsher, more directional light source.



Robert S. Donovan
<https://flic.kr/p/7FyjjH>

SOFTBOXES

A softbox is the older, more sophisticated, sibling of an umbrella. A softbox works the same way; you can shoot light through it or bounce light into it. There are two main advantages of a softbox over an umbrella. They can be purchased in different shapes, sizes, and configurations thereby offering more precise control over the angle and quality of the light. They also have more accessories allowing control over specular highlights, color balance, and precision control devices (such as louvers).

The softbox will generally cost more than an umbrella. Many types also require a mounting ring (which is an additional expense). If you have different light sources, they may require different mounting rings.

Using a softbox versus an umbrella often comes down to personal taste and budget: either one can produce professional quality portraits.

Important Tip- When using light modification devices always take special care to put them on appropriate light stands. If you're outside in a breeze, or using a boom arm, always put sandbags (or some other weight) at the base of the stand to prevent it from tipping over. The last thing you want is for your lights to come crashing down on a subject's head!

Bonus Material- Check out this nine-minute video. [It gives some great information on softboxes!](#)

Get Out Your Scissors and Tape! If you're a Do-It-Yourself (DIY) type of person, here is a tutorial on how to make your own softbox!

[How to Make a Professional Softbox For Under \\$20.00 USD](#)



Get Out Your Scissors and
Tape!



Jon Seidman

<http://www.flickr.com/photos/jonseidman1988/4730785294/>

REFLECTORS

Reflectors are one of the easiest light modifiers to acquire and use. They can create soft flattering light or a harsher specular light. By changing the color of the bounce surface, you can affect the color temperature of the light coming from the reflector.



Marco Antonio Torres
<http://www.flickr.com/photos/torres21/2331858120/>

You can bounce light into a reflector. This will create a soft, broad light source. If the reflector is white, the bounced light will have the same color temperature as the source. However, if the reflector is coated with a gold surface, the reflected light will be warmer. Conversely, if the reflector is coated with a blue or cyan surface, the light bouncing back will be a cooler color temperature than the light source.

Another prime use for reflectors is to fill in shadows. In this example, the window is providing the main light and the reflector is filling in the shadows.



Jordan Chan

<http://www.flickr.com/photos/evolutionfotos/6121532047/in/photostream/>

In outdoor portrait work, reflectors can create some directional lighting where very little exists. In this example, it was an overcast day. The photographer placed a highly reflective gold metallic reflector to camera right (model's left). It's just outside the frame. The bright surface reflected enough light to provide some modeling to the woman's features.



Leszek Leszczynski

<http://www.flickr.com/photos/leszekleszczynski/5706191823/>

Using a mirror (or highly reflective metal surface) will create a reflected light similar to a spotlight. In the above example, the hard light coming from the camera right (model's left) was produced by a mirror reflector.

DIY Reflector- One of the cool things about reflectors is that they are super easy to make.

Use this method to make small reflectors up to about 3 foot by 4 foot.

Try this method for something more durable and if you want a larger size for full-length portraits.



Robert Bieber

<http://www.flickr.com/photos/tehbieber/9157403808/>

SNOOTS

“Snoot” is a strange word, isn’t it? However, as a portrait photographer you will find a snoot to be one of your most valuable tools.

A snoot is a small cylindrical device that slips over the “business end” of your light source.

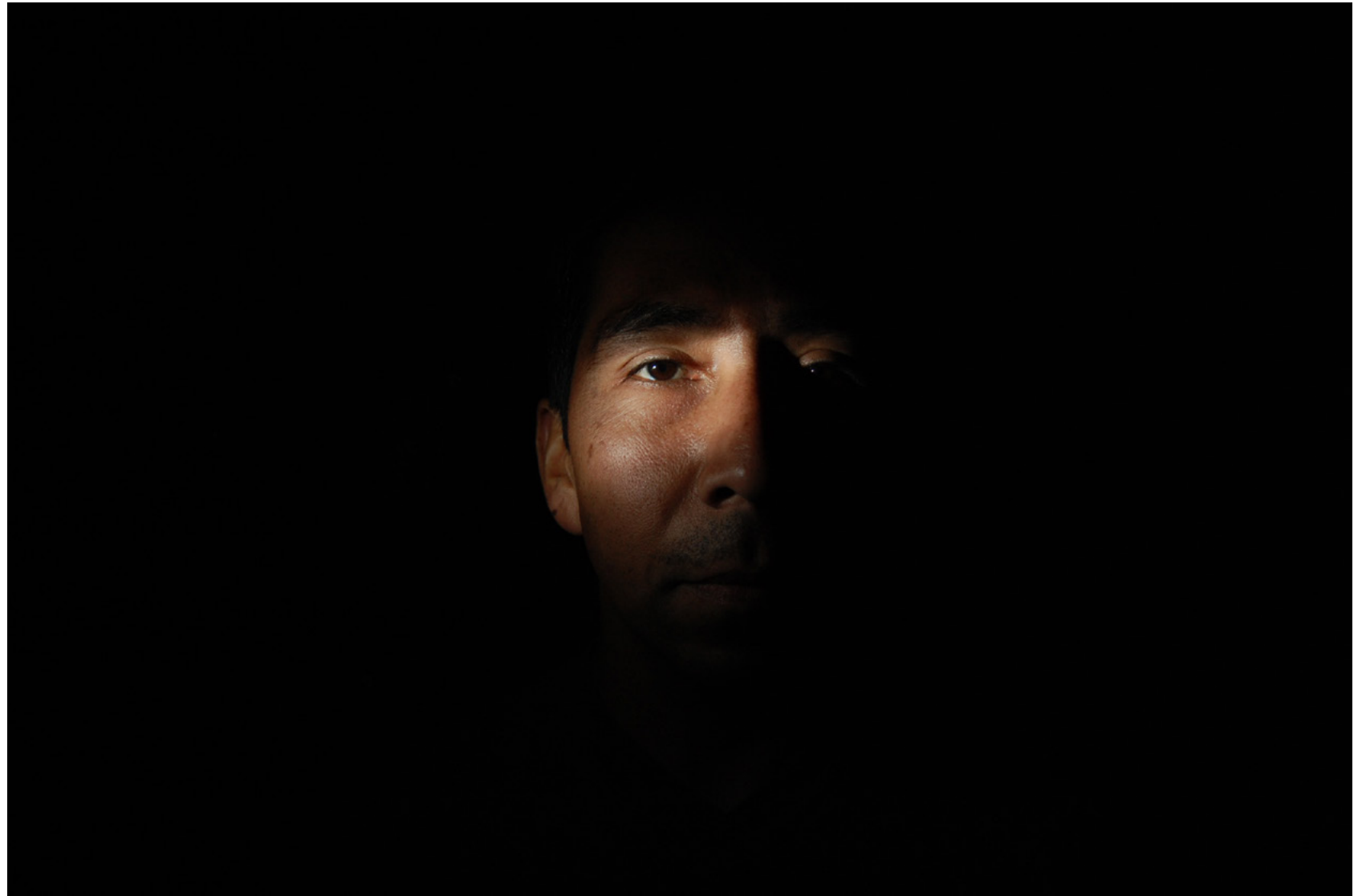
Its job is to restrict the spread of the light. Most snoots are round and therefore produce a round hard light source similar to a spotlight.

How would you use a snoot in your portrait work?

Snooted lights make an excellent hair light. You know, to create a highlight that separates the subject’s head from the background.

They’re also good for special effects and producing a hard specular light on the subject.

Sometimes portrait photographers go overboard with soft light. This can make your portraits appear flat and lacking in definition. A snooted light can put just a little bit of “pop” back into the image.



Felipe Bascuñan
<http://www.flickr.com/photos/linxreloaded/3164920821/>

A snooted light can be a hair light or a background light. This creates definition between the subject and the background.

The tight circular pattern of a snooted light is excellent for special effects!



Wolfgang Lonien
<http://www.flickr.com/photos/wjlonien/5802027434/>

This example shows how a snoot can introduce a hard specular light source into your image.

As you explore the possibilities of light modification, you will come across other devices that control the spread of light (similar to a snoot). Two of these devices (that are also quite commonplace) are barn-doors and grids. Barn-doors provide the same function as a snoot except they are adjustable. Grids narrow the beam of light, similar to a snoot, but they have a honeycomb grid that creates a very specific spread of light. A grid is a great alternative to a snoot when you want precise control.

How to Make a Snoot- If your light source doesn't generate heat, a snoot is pretty easy to make. You can simply roll up a piece of opaque black craft paper and slip it over the light. If your light does generate heat, you'll have to be careful because you don't want to set anything on fire. There is a commercial product available called "Black Wrap". This stuff is excellent. It's made of metal (like tinfoil) so it can't burn and it's a matte black finish. You can use it to make a snoot, a gobo, or anything where you need to shape light.

11

BLACKWRAP

BLACKWRAP



These devices provide more advanced lighting control.

FLAGS / GOBOS / SCRIMS

These devices provide more advanced lighting control. They require the additional investment of more light stands and grip equipment.

Flags- Flags look a lot like reflectors, with one big exception; they don't bounce light, they block it. Example- your main light (which is a softbox) is spilling light onto your background.

You don't want this.

So, to solve this problem you would place a flag in front of the softbox and slide it around until it is **blocking** the light hitting the background but allowing light to pass by onto the subject.



Gavin Schaefer
<http://www.flickr.com/photos/uxud/3461438869/>

Gobos- A gobo (sometimes known as a cookie) looks like a flag except that it has holes in it. The holes create a pattern, or shape, for lighting effects.

In this example, a “gobo” placed in front of a light source has created the pattern across the woman and the background.



Jonathan Kos-Read
<http://www.flickr.com/photos/jonathankosread/6599765335/>

Scrim- A scrim (also known as a diffusion panel, or a butterfly panel) looks a lot like a reflector. Here is the difference. A reflector is opaque and bounces light back. A scrim is translucent and allows light to pass through. There are different types of scrims; some soften and cut down the intensity of the light while others simply cut the intensity of the light.

There is a lot of variety when it comes to scrims.

Where you will find them most useful is controlling bright sunshine. Example- You want to take a headshot of a handsome young man from a particular angle. The sun is shining down across his face blinding him and creating horrible lighting. You set up a scrim and place it between him and the sun. Voila! You have great lighting.

See how the scrim is placed between the subject and the light source? This softens the light significantly.



Teresa Trimm

<http://www.flickr.com/photos/ttrimm/10148184745/>

Show Me How to Make a Scrim- You can make a scrim using a PVC pipe as described in the reflector section. But here's the difference. With a reflector you want to use opaque white cloth that will bounce as much light back as possible. With a scrim you want to use a thin translucent fabric. The best scrim cloth that we've discovered is white translucent rip-stop nylon. It should be available at any major fabric store.

PVC pipe and translucent rip-stop nylon make a GREAT scrim!



Daniel Carlbom
<http://www.flickr.com/photos/dcarlbom/4694404922/>

GELS

Gels are placed in front of the light source to give an effect. Personally, we feel it is one of the most misused lighting tools.



Tom Godber
<http://www.flickr.com/photos/masochismtango/3207484687/>

As a portrait photographer, you must be careful to make sure that the gelled lighting adds to the portrait. You don't want the gelled light to overwhelm your subject.

Here is a good use of gelled light. It creates mood but doesn't detract from the subject.



Frank Kovalchek

<http://www.flickr.com/photos/72213316@N00/5365706091/>

This is not as good a use of gelled light. The blue gelled light isn't flattering, nor does it add any kind of story to the photograph!



Justin Hee

<http://www.flickr.com/photos/justinhee/6219908925/>

This is how most portrait photographers make poor use of gelled light. They put some bright nonconventional color on the background. This almost never works. Take this photograph for example- Where do your eyes want to travel to when you look at the photograph? (Enough said.)



If you're just starting out, you should work with reflectors, scrims, and umbrellas.

Helpful Tip- Gelled lights only work effectively when you can darken the shooting area or shoot against a dark object. The reason is that white light “washes out” gelled light. If you're trying to create a photograph and you can't get your gelled light to show up, it's probably because white light is spilling on to the surface.

What do we recommend for your light modification kit?

If you're just starting out, you should work with reflectors, scrims, and umbrellas. As you add to your lighting gear this lighting package would take you to professional level.

1. Three umbrellas – two 36” bounce and one 48” shoot-through.
2. Three softboxes – one large, one medium, and one small.
3. Four reflectors – two large (36” x 72”) and two small (36” square) with white opaque glossy surface fabric.
4. Translucent and opaque matte black cloth panels that can slip over the above reflectors to alter them into scrims and flags.
5. Two snoots, barn-doors, or grids (whichever works best for you). We prefer grids.

Assignment- Shoot a portrait session using a main light source and reflectors. If you don't own any reflectors make your own. Try to create a lighting scenario where light is illuminating your subject from at least three different angles.

12

MISCELLANEOUS EQUIPMENT

MISCELLANEOUS EQUIPMENT

Bet you never thought it took this much gear to shoot a portrait!

Well, it doesn't really. You can shoot a nice portrait with nothing more than a big window and a camera.

All this other stuff simply gives you more options to pre-visualize a portrait and bring it to life.

But what if you don't have a window to work with, or, you don't like the background near the window, or, you want to try some dramatic lighting? All this other stuff gives you options.

HANDHELD LIGHT / FLASH METER

If you're going to be working with flash units this is really a must-have unless you like fiddling around with your lights- a lot.

Your built-in camera meter cannot read the light from flash units – UNLESS – you're working strictly with an E-TTL type portable flash that will communicate with the camera.

Regardless of the above statement, a good handheld meter that measures flash and ambient light is a sign of a true professional.

If you would like some in-depth information on handheld meters, this is a great article.



Nick Nguyen
<http://www.flickr.com/photos/nicktakespics/3236119542/>

RADIO REMOTE TRIGGERS

Radio remote triggers allow you to fire flash units from your camera without cords.

Many newer portable flash units have this feature built into them.

Check your manual and see if it talks about a master and slave setting. Using this option does require one flash unit to be riding the camera via the hot-shoe and that unit must be a master.

Some newer cameras will have a radio trigger built into them. (The advantage being that you don't need any flash unit attached to the camera. In effect, the camera is acting as the master.)

The last solution (if your flash units don't act as a master or a slave) is to purchase external radio remote triggers.

In this case, a "trigger" is attached to the camera and a "receiver" is attached to each flash you wish to fire.

There are many different types of radio remote triggers. We prefer two brands- Pocket Wizard and Cactus. You will want to purchase the best units that you can afford.

Nothing is more frustrating than your radio remote triggers not firing properly.

BACKDROPS

Backdrops are nice because they can eliminate background that you don't want to see, or, they can add color and texture that you want to include in your portrait.

You can buy backdrops, but the good news is that you don't have to! With a little elbow grease and some ingenuity you can create an infinite number of backdrops for very little cost.

There's tons of information online about creating your own backdrops.

Here are a few to get you started!

<http://www.pinterest.com/spunkyyella/props-backdrops-and-floordrops-oh-my/>

<http://www.itsalwaysautumn.com/2013/06/10/20-fantastic-diy-photography-backdrops-backgrounds.html>

<http://www.betterphoto.com/exploring/MakingBackDrops.asp>

LIGHT STANDS

If you get beyond doing basic window light portraiture, light stands will become a necessity.

When adding light stands to your kit these are your primary concerns.

1. The weight of the stand
2. The height of the stand
3. The spread distance of the legs on the stand
4. The type of release mechanism used to extend the center column.

You may be asking yourself, “Why is all this important? It’s just to hold the light.”

It’s important because you don’t want the light to fall over and break or injure someone.

The type of lights that you will be using have an impact on what type of stands you should select.

Consider the weight of the light source itself.

Then consider the weight of adding on a light modifier (softbox, umbrella, reflector, etc.).

There are many light stands to pick from, and they will range in price from very inexpensive to extremely expensive. In our experience, a good light stand that will hold up over time and meet the needs for portrait work will each cost around \$70.00 to \$150.00 USD.



Kent DuFault
<http://www.flickr.com/photos/35449761@N04/12208213655/>

Selecting light stands is a personal preference.

Here is what we use-

1. The stand weighs 2.75 lbs. (light enough to carry around and heavy enough to withstand a breeze).
2. The feet spread to a diameter of 36" (the wider the better for stability).
3. The stand extends to 8 foot 6 inches and collapses to 29" (we recommend that you get several stands that exceed an 8 foot extension).
4. The stand supports a weight of 9 lbs. (this would work well with most lighting. Heavier lights, such as some tungsten fixtures, would need heavier stands).
5. We prefer a twist lock on the extensions versus a quick-release (the quick release locks begin to slip after a period of time).

Twist locks versus quick release locks are a personal preference.

SAFETY AND LIGHT STANDS

If you have 8 – 12 lbs. of gear extended 8 feet in the air it can become quite a missile if it comes crashing down.

This is light stand **Safety 101**.

1. Always begin to extend your lights upward from the largest section (the section closest to the ground).
2. Place weight near the ground using a device like a sandbag. Also, don't hang heavier objects such as battery packs near the top of the stand. Keep ALL weight low!
3. If you have ANY concern that a light might tip over, use a sandbag or have a helper hold onto it.

DIY sandbags cost around \$2.50 USD

Sandbags of every stripe!

Any DIY Option

THE MOST IMPORTANT EQUIPMENT TIP SO FAR- Not setting your light stand up correctly can be dangerous, and expensive, not to mention embarrassing if your gear falls over in front of a subject.

We have seen hundreds if not thousands of photographers making the mistake we are about to describe!

We don't want you being one of them.

Study the photographs below. If you don't set the legs of your light stand correctly, it loses stability.

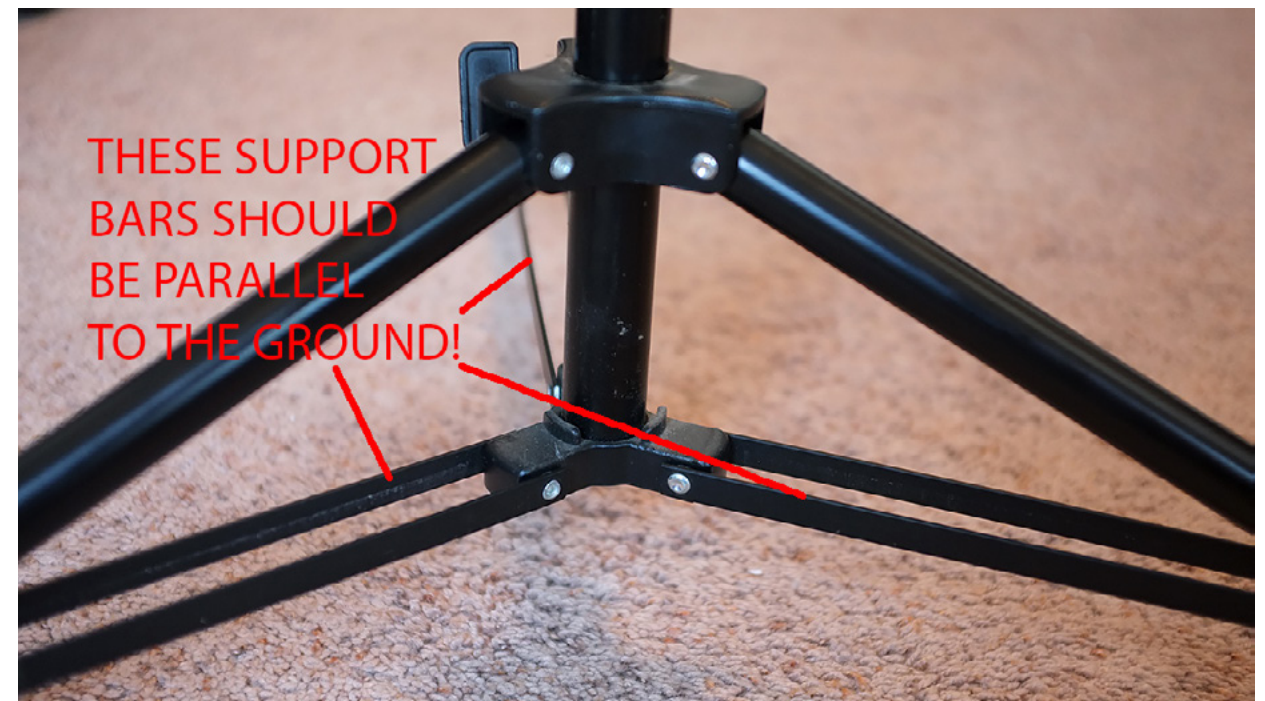
You want the crossbars from the center column to the legs to be parallel to the ground. IF THEY ARE NOT- You lose the rated stability.

Study the illustrations.



Kent DuFault
<http://www.flickr.com/photos/35449761@N04/12208435113/>

These bars provide the rated stability when they are parallel to the ground.



Kent DuFault
<http://www.flickr.com/photos/35449761@N04/12208434833/>

Common mistake #1- Do not setup your light stand like this.



Kent DuFault

<http://www.flickr.com/photos/35449761@N04/12208833426/>

Common mistake #2- This mistake is guaranteed to break a few lights or heads!



Kent DuFault

<http://www.flickr.com/photos/35449761@N04/12208833606/>

One last time folks!



Becky Stern
<http://www.flickr.com/photos/bekathwia/6969430361/>

BOOM ARMS

A boom arm is a crossbar that is attached to a stand and “hung out” over a subject. In portraiture it is mostly used for a hair light or background light. If you invest in a boom arm, you will definitely need sandbags and a heavier light stand.



Derek Dysart
<http://www.flickr.com/photos/ddysart/266626432/>

OTHER TYPES OF STANDS

There are several other types of stands that you may want to look into.

1. Background stand – This consists of two stands and a crossbar from which you can hang your backgrounds.

The background stand can support seamless paper or cloth backgrounds by clipping them to the crossbar.



A good back light stand can get very low to the ground.

2. Back light stand – These are little tiny stands. They generally don't extend any taller than about three feet. They're useful for hiding a light low to the ground.

http://www.bhphotovideo.com/c/product/325266-REG/Manfrotto_012B_012B_Backlight_Stand_with.html

A good back light stand can get very low to the ground.

GRIPS AND CLAMPS

Grip equipment is a term that was born out of the film industry. Basically it means "mechanical stuff" that can be used to hold lighting and camera gear to virtually anything. Grips and clamps have a complete industry all to themselves.

As a portrait photographer you will find some of this gear very useful.

You will need it to "hold" your reflectors, flags, gobos, scrims, boom arms, etc. How much you need is really up to you!



Dan Paluska

<http://www.flickr.com/photos/sixmilliondollar/dan/3701895068/>

We recommend acquiring two things as soon as you can.

1. Spring Clamps – This type of clamp can be purchased at a hardware or home improvement store.

A spring clamp can hold everything from cloth backgrounds to reflector boards. You will probably want at least a dozen of these in your lighting kit.



Mark Turnauckas
<http://www.flickr.com/photos/marktee/7834541196/>

2. Super Clamps – These are versatile clamps that are used to hold just about anything! They are available at photo retailers.

<http://www.bhphotovideo.com/c/buy/Clamps-Clips/ci/1353/N/4062040374>

A Manfrotto Bogen Super Clamp holds a light close to the ground.

13

WORKING WITH YOUR SUBJECT(S) – AKA – THE CLIENT

WORKING WITH YOUR SUBJECT(S) – AKA – THE CLIENT

Creating a portrait is an intimate interaction between a photographer and the subject.

Make no mistake about it- if your subject isn't comfortable with how you're conducting the portrait session, you will not get the images that you desire.

What does that mean exactly?

It means that you need to get to know your subject. You won't conduct yourself the same way with an executive seeking a headshot as you would a teenage girl getting her high school pictures.

However, here is one universal truth: no subject wants to sit and wait while you figure out how your gear works.

We're now going to get into the nuts and bolts of pulling off a successful portrait session; in fact, not just a successful session, but a FANTASTIC session.

We're going to give you every piece of information that you need to create great portraits. But remember this; no amount of reading is going to allow you to develop into a great portrait photographer.

It takes practice.

Why you ask?



This is what makes portrait photography so satisfying.

Because it's not just you conducting the session; it's you and another individual, or individuals.

This is where landscape photographers have it easier than a portrait photographer; they can go out, setup their camera, and then spend whatever time they need deciding how they want to set it up.

But a portrait photographer faces a situation like this: a family of four shows up. Mom spent two hours getting her kids ready. Dad would rather be home watching football. The youngest child started crying as they were getting out of the car. The older child was fine until Mom took their iPad away.

This is the life of a portrait photographer, and make no mistake about it, you will be faced with this, or worse.

But, then again, this is what makes portrait photography so satisfying. It's challenging on many levels.

Here are some words of advice if you're just starting out.

1. Keep your setup simple
2. Practice with family and friends until you know your gear thoroughly.
3. Start with subjects that can work with you: folks in the 12-45 year old category. Then work your way into tougher situations like little children and large groups.

Here are some specific (and extremely helpful) tips on handling the various subjects that you will encounter.



Always keep an eye on
bystanders who aren't in the
photograph.

WORKING WITH YOUR CLIENT

1. Babies – There are two primary issues with babies. You must find a way to support their head so that you can get a good angle on their face, and you must try to get their eyes open. It doesn't work well to shoot a baby outdoors, especially in bright sun. Make yourself a kit that includes noisemakers, flashlights, and small mirrors. These items will help get the infant's attention. Your kit should also have various small pillows or pieces of foam rubber that you've cut and shaped to prop the baby up. Talk to the parents and find out what time of day is good for the infant. Try to avoid right before feeding time or right after a nap. Keeping a parent close to the camera is always helpful when working with infants.

Important Tip- Always keep an eye on bystanders who aren't in the photograph.

Non-photographers will often stand in front of one of your lights and not realize they're blocking it. It's also a good idea NOT to let multiple people try to get the subject's attention. This is especially confusing to small children.



Kent DuFault
<http://www.flickr.com/photos/35449761@N04/12210604595/>

With an infant, your goal is to capture their face with the eyes open. An expression is a great bonus and will often come with jingling keys or a clicking flashlight.



Kent DuFault
<http://www.flickr.com/photos/35449761@N04/12211211996/>

Keeping things simple goes a long way when working with small children and infants. They have a very short attention span. For the above portrait, the photographer pushed the infant's changing table over to the window. He then had the parents settle the baby down before asking them to step aside. The portrait was lit with window light and a small reflector.



Ask the parents to
step back out of the child's
line of sight.

2. Toddlers – Toddlers and small children will generally be some of your most difficult subjects. They have a very short attention span and will test boundaries. With toddlers, you need to learn how to work within their framework.

If you find yourself on your hands and knees trying to make them put their feet in a certain location, you're in trouble.

Small children will often reveal more of themselves when their parents aren't standing there looking at them.

Ask the parents to step back out of the child's line of sight.

Next, try to make the session into playtime. If the child feels that you are playing with them, rather than taking their picture, you've increased your odds of creating an award-winning portrait.

This will take experience, and it will vary from child to child.



Kent DuFault
<http://www.flickr.com/photos/35449761@N04/12210958645/>

With toddlers, you must work fast. Keep your lighting setup simple. Engage the child in playtime- this will create more smiles. This portrait was created using natural light (during the golden hour at sunset). The photographer used one flash unit that was placed on a light stand and fired via a radio remote trigger.



With this age group,
it's important to know
a few things about the
individual(s).

3. Children - All the techniques discussed for toddlers applies to children as well.

But here is the caveat.

Children (today) are getting ever more sophisticated. With this age group, it's important to know a few things about the individual(s). Try to spend some time with them and see what makes them tick and what makes them happy.

If this isn't a possibility, and you need to motivate a child, try this.

For boys have them run, jump, or roll around (anything athletic).

For girls, have them twirl, dance, skip, or jump.

Use these activities to divert the child's attention, shoot away while they're doing it, and then ask them to stop and smile at the camera. Repeat as necessary!



U.S. Army
<http://www.flickr.com/photos/familymwr/4929686071/>

The location can sometimes help you confine a child to an area and help elicit the type of expression you're looking for.



Kent DuFault

<http://www.flickr.com/photos/35449761@N04/12293716933/>

4. Pre-Teens – The pre-teen group will often be some of your best portrait sessions. They're old enough to take direction, but young enough to think the activity is still fun.

With this group you can really stretch for some creative work. If you're doing group shots of multiple-aged children, pre-teens will often be the most helpful. We often ask them pointblank if they would like to be our assistant.

Pre-teens can be quite fun in a portrait session!



Chris Hays

<http://www.flickr.com/photos/chrishaysphotography/2400226780/>

5. Teens – Photographing teens is a complete crapshoot. Many will be very cooperative, and just as many won't. The key to working with teens is to incorporate a sense of glamour into your session: play some music and bring a fan to blow some hair around. Don't go overboard. Teens see themselves as adults. They like grungy locations. The girls like using make-up and sexy poses. The boys like torn jeans and somber expressions. You need to figure out what makes that teen tick. If you give them what they want, they'll often give you what you want in return.



Sanberdoo

<http://www.flickr.com/photos/sanberdoo/502174939/>



Richard Foster
<http://www.flickr.com/photos/93963757@N05/8551938198/>

6. Women – When working with women it's all about posing and lighting. Women do not want to reveal any weight! They also do not want to look old! When working with women, you want to stretch their body out; this will add a slimming effect. Unless you're going for a special effect keep the lighting even, soft, and from the front; this will reduce wrinkles showing up.

Elongate a woman's body, and she'll love her portrait.



Richard Foster
<http://www.flickr.com/photos/93963757@N05/8551939338/>

Look at the arms and shoulders on this woman. The pose and the lighting make them appear thick, and heavy.

Remember this: It can be the most beautiful picture in the world (of her face), but **all she will see** is the part of her body (that she perceives) as being chunky.

This is so important- With women, watch their arms, legs, hands, feet, back, and any joint where their body parts come together. Look for bulges, pinched skin, and drooping skin. Correct these conditions with lighting and posing.



Stephane
<https://www.flickr.com/photos/stf-o/12141743976/>

7. Men – Men are pretty easy to work with, unless they don't want to be there.

That may sound funny, but it's sometimes the case, especially in family portraiture. Dad would be happier sitting at home watching the football game on a Saturday afternoon.

Certainly, this isn't always the case.

But, if you find yourself in this situation, you need to find a way around it.

Here are two suggestions: Do all his shots first: the family, him and mom, him alone, him with the kids. Then, he can step aside and you can work with the rest of the family.

Another suggestion (we often do this) is to tell him that a family portrait session is a lot like going to the dentist. Nobody likes to sit there and have a stranger mess with their personal space. But, if they relax and let it happen, it will be over before they know it.

Working with male models can be a lot of fun. Here's a lighting tip for you. Women generally look better with broad, even lighting across their face. Men, on the other hand, often look better with a sidelight and more shadow. It brings out the masculine features.



Corey Balazowich
<http://www.flickr.com/photos/coreyann/2702157041/in/photostream/>

8. Families – We’ve already covered the different types of folks that will make up your family session. Just add these thoughts.

You might have grandparents in attendance.

Bear in mind that grandparents may not be able to walk very far. They may not be able to sit, or kneel.

Before a family session, you should always interview the client to find out if there are special needs.

In that interview, you also want to determine what shots are most important. This will establish your workflow. Start with the most important shots and work your way down the list.

This dad would rather be home watching football. When photographing groups (including families), it’s your job to get everyone engaged.



Laura Dye
<http://www.flickr.com/photos/lauradye/8080338380/>

Remember to question your subjects about special needs before your portrait session. When photographing families, it's a good idea to have them touch each other: hold hands, hug, and hook arms. This adds a sense of closeness to the family portrait.



Bill Selak

<http://www.flickr.com/photos/billselak/3374565758/>

When doing family portraits some shots like this are great. They show intimacy. But, do not forget to take at least some portraits where everyone is looking at the camera, smiling.



Florida Fish and Wildlife
<http://www.flickr.com/photos/masonbird/8678470403/>

9. Business – Business portraits and headshots can be a great little side business for you. Keep this in mind; businesspersons generally use their image to sell themselves. They want nice lighting, a simple background, and a killer smile.

This is a perfectly executed business portrait. The subject is well lit, the background is complimentary, but simple, and the subject looks pleasant and approachable.



Mason Bird
<https://www.flickr.com/photos/masonbird/8678470403/>

The lighting isn't bad in this example, but the background is very disruptive. It draws the viewer's eyes away from the subject.



Vox Efx

http://www.flickr.com/photos/vox_efx/141746545/

Do you think this is a good business portrait? Absolutely! It meets all the criteria, and the photographer infused some creativity by making it a high-key portrait. Business portraiture doesn't have to be boring to be successful!

14

IT'S TIME TO PICK A LOCATION!

IT'S TIME TO PICK A LOCATION!

We have our gear. We've interviewed our client. It's time to pick a location.

If you have your own studio, well there isn't much we need tell you about that is there?

But, what if you need a studio environment and you don't have one?

We once had to shoot a business portrait in a space about the size of a large walk-in closet; and this photograph was for a magazine. So, it can be done.

We're going to separate our discussion of location into two sections: indoors and outdoors.

Our goal is to give you a list of things to think about, things you might not have thought of on your own.

INDOORS

If you're shooting indoors, it's a good idea to visit the location a day or so prior to the shoot.

Why, you ask?

We had a portrait session once at an old abandoned warehouse. We scouted it with the client, and we got permission from the owner. When we returned to do the shoot (about a month later), the owner (not being a photographer or understanding light) had boarded up all the windows and most of the doors. He didn't realize that they were important to our project.

Things can change.



When shooting indoors
and on-location create a
checklist.

When shooting indoors and on-location create a checklist.

1. Are you going to use window light? If so, what is the right time of day? If not, do you need to cover the window(s) so that light isn't affecting your shot? It's helpful to carry a duffle bag filled with large swathes of opaque black cloth for just this purpose.
2. Do you need power? If so, do you know where the outlets are? Do you have enough extension cords? Do you know if the circuits will handle what you're going to plug into them? What if there isn't any power? Can you bring a generator?
3. Are you in a public place? If so, will you need crowd control? Will you need a permit? Will you need permission?
4. What will the temperature be? Hot? Cold? Are you prepared? Do you have water, blankets, snacks, etc.?
5. Will your subjects need to change their clothes? Are there bathroom facilities? How about a mirror for make-up and hair touch-ups?

OUTDOORS

Outdoor locations can be easier, or more challenging, depending on the day. Weather is something that you generally cannot predict. So, you need to be ready.

Here is the checklist for outdoor locations.

1. What direction will the sunshine be coming from?
2. What will you do if it's windy?
3. How far will your subjects need to walk to get to the location?
4. Is there enough parking nearby?
5. Is it a public place? How will you conduct crowd control?
6. Will your subjects need to change their clothes?
7. Are there bathroom facilities nearby?
8. Do you need permission to shoot there? (Many public places require a permit.)
9. What will the temperature be? Do you have bug spray, water, blankets, snacks, etc.?

Let's take a look at some popular locations!



Iryna Yeroshko

<http://www.flickr.com/photos/mandarina94/6878748712/>

STUDIO

It doesn't matter if you don't have a studio. You can create a studio look in a very small space with minimal equipment. Take this image for example. The main light is a window. The chair is a prop. The background is a cloth drape that has been hung (to hide what was really there). This image totally has a studio look.



Daniel Zedda
<http://www.flickr.com/photos/astragony/4503371734/>

Studio or someone's basement? This portrait was lit with one portable flash that was used with a shoot-through umbrella, a radio remote trigger, and a cloth background.



Mac Vincente
<http://www.flickr.com/photos/macluckystar/7204822834/>

HOME

When shooting portraits in a home environment watch out for busy backgrounds. Also, keep an eye out for mixed light sources. Mixed lighting can often give your portrait a shift in color that is difficult to remove in post-processing.



Seattle Municipal Archives
<http://www.flickr.com/photos/seattlemunicipalarchives/3182935316/>

OFFICE

When shooting in an office environment, pay particular attention to the lighting. Many offices use fluorescent lights which might produce a strange color temperature. Pay particular attention to your background. Offices tend to have many reflective surfaces and windows: check for reflections!



Simon Lesley
<http://www.flickr.com/photos/simonlesleyphotography/3878295596/>



Hamed Saber
<http://www.flickr.com/photos/hamed/564819621/>

PARKS

Parks offer a great setting for portraits, whether it's a single person or a large group. Just remember, sometimes they require a permit!



Brendon Burton
<http://www.flickr.com/photos/burtoo/6732369005/>

OLD BUILDINGS

Deserted commercial buildings, homes, and warehouses make a great location, especially for portraits of teens and young adults. They really love this look. Your primary concern here is safety. You want to make sure that you're not bringing your subject into an unsafe situation. Other issues that you may need to address are temperature, a lack of power, and permission.

Old buildings offer plenty of room. They typically will have available light from large open windows, doors, or dilapidated walls.



Kara Harms

http://www.flickr.com/photos/kara_allyson/5583252907/

When using old buildings, search for textures and unusual color!



Cait S

<http://www.flickr.com/photos/caitlinmccott/4093827350/in/photostream/>

A good place to scout for old buildings is near railroad tracks. This is especially true in rural areas or on the outskirts of larger cities.



Beth Phillips
<http://www.flickr.com/photos/superr-rad/8276973468/>

Old buildings provide great locations both inside and out.



Martina K15

<http://www.flickr.com/photos/martinaphotography/7768979220/>

RURAL / FENCES / BARNs

Rural settings, and especially barns, offer much of the same opportunity as old buildings but with less safety issues. Another great aspect to using a farm for your location is that farm families are generally wonderful and cooperative people.



David Dennis
<http://www.flickr.com/photos/daviddenn/3970203935/>

Barns offer large openings for natural light. You may even be able to incorporate a prop such as a hay bale, or a horse!



Jasmine Paylor
<http://www.flickr.com/photos/dearjasey/8305177331/>

Fences make nice props for your portraits. They help give the subject something to do. They also help solidify the composition if the subject is appropriately placed.



Joey
<http://www.flickr.com/photos/joeykoert/4801517539/>

Barns offer an opportunity for family portraits, high school portraits, and even fashion.



Thomas Leuthard
<http://www.flickr.com/photos/thomasleuthard/9477943529/>

ARCHITECTURAL DETAILS

Architectural details can often be used to enhance a portrait by helping to tell a story.



Thomas Leuthard
<http://www.flickr.com/photos/thomasleuthard/7176939819/>

When scouting for architectural details, try to make them visually interesting, but also relevant to the subject.



Steve Tulk

<http://www.flickr.com/photos/epicsurfgt/5291537823/>

THE BEACH

Taking portraits at the beach is a favorite spot for many photographers. If you intend on attempting beach portraits keep these tips in mind. You'll want to set your shoot up for first thing in the morning or an hour before sunset. Any other time of day and the light will be too bright for your subjects.

Also, the beach is typically less windy in the morning.

Bring sealable plastic bags to protect your gear from the sand.

Reflectors and any large light modifiers are generally useless due to the wind.

With beach photography you want to utilize natural light with a simple fill flash.



Kent DuFault
<http://www.flickr.com/photos/35449761@N04/12236872315/>

The beach is a great opportunity to work with kids. Get them involved with the environment: have them run, walk, splash, etc.



Kend DuFault

<http://www.flickr.com/photos/35449761@N04/12237061003/in/photostream/>

An hour within sunrise, or sunset, will give you the best lighting at the beach. After that, it can become too bright for your subject's eyes.

Assignment- Shoot portraits of the same subject in two different indoor locations and two different outdoor locations. Evaluate how you had to change your strategy and lighting. What problems did you have to overcome?

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CAMERA SETTINGS FOR PORTRAITURE



Ian Mutttoo

<http://www.flickr.com/photos/imutttoo/2152416006/>

CAMERA SETTINGS FOR PORTRAITURE

SHOOTING MODE

If you're an experienced photographer, we highly recommend manual mode. If you're working with light that isn't changing, this shouldn't be a problem. However, if you're outdoors and the light is changing, you may wish to go on auto-exposure mode.

Here are some suggestions regarding auto-exposure modes.

1. Do not use Program Mode or Full Auto. Using this mode removes your decision making process from the portrait. You want to have control over aperture and shutter speed.
2. If you have plenty of light, go with an Aperture Priority Mode. This way you have control over the depth-of-field. If you're using flash keep an eye on the shutter speed to make sure that it doesn't go over your sync speed.
3. If you're working in a location with low light, we recommend you use Shutter Priority Mode. In this setting you can make sure that your shutter speed doesn't drop too slow, resulting in un-sharp images.



Tom Page

<http://www.flickr.com/photos/tompagenet/6042119217/>

ISO SETTING

You want to manually set your ISO; don't let the camera do it automatically. We recommend using an ISO of 400 or less. At ISO 800 (with most cameras) you'll begin to see some noise. When working in low light, try to go to a tripod, monopod, or wider aperture before raising your ISO setting.



Henry Spencer

http://www.flickr.com/photos/free_professional_photos/6820329745/in/faves-35449761@N04/

METERING MODE

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Metering_mode

If you're unfamiliar with metering modes, read this short article and check out Photzy.com for a free guide to exposure and metering!

We recommend setting your metering mode to spot or center-weight. You want to get your meter reading from your subject's face.

A portrait such as this will easily fool your camera meter unless you take a spot meter reading from the subject's face!

WHITE BALANCE



Kevin Long
<http://www.flickr.com/photos/kevinlong/445415273/>

Auto white balance produced this image.



Kevin Long
<http://www.flickr.com/photos/kevinlong/445415279/>

Custom white balance produced this image.



If you start with a clean white balance, you can always alter your color in post-production.

Most modern cameras do a pretty good job with auto white balance. An exception to this would be when working outdoors in shade or on an overcast day. In this situation you would want to manually set your white balance.

Personally, we recommend manually setting your white balance at all times.

If you start with a clean white balance, you can always alter your color in post-production.

How to Set Your White Balance

Assignment- Produce an indoor and outdoor portrait session using only manual focus, manual exposure, and manual white balance.

16

THE ART OF COMPOSITION IN PORTRAITURE

THE ART OF COMPOSITION IN PORTRAITURE

All the normal rules and tools of composition apply.

(If you're unfamiliar with them, you should check out the [Photzy.com](https://www.photzy.com) guides to composition. There are two of them: a basic guide and an advanced version.)

However, there is a nuance to the composition of portraiture and it bears mentioning.

When composing a portrait, you may have two elements of composition to consider.

1. The composition of the subject
2. The composition of the subject within the frame

Let's look at some examples and talk about what this means!



Henry Spencer

http://www.flickr.com/photos/free_professional_photos/6894077739/in/set-72157628975635647

Here we have a portrait located within a frame. The photographer utilized some general rules of composition including: The Rule of Thirds, leading lines, use of shape, repetition, and color juxtaposition.

The photographer also chose to break a rule of composition.

They created a frame break by having the model look off to camera right.

So, the composition of the subject is fine. But the composition of the subject "within the frame" is questionable.

Do you think the frame break works? Does the sky and building jutting way to the left add anything to the portrait? Using your hands, cut that portion of the photograph off and look "just" at the woman with the pattern of the yellow glass behind her.

Do you think it becomes a stronger image?



Stephane
<http://www.flickr.com/photos/stf-o/10445554165/>

This portrait has no composition considerations outside of the subject. There are no frame elements. The photographer must rely on the subject to create the composition (which they've done masterfully by the way!) Now, imagine this portrait, but with a background! Are you beginning to see our point about composing the subject and composing the subject within the frame?

Let's look at a couple more examples.



Stephane

<http://www.flickr.com/photos/stf-o/6227418584/>

Here we have a headshot with no elements outside of the subject. Composition considerations are limited to the subject. Can you identify what tools of composition are used? The photographer used the 1/3 – 2/3 Rule, The Rule of Thirds, and The Golden Spiral. The wisp of hair to the left also acts as a frame, forcing the viewer's eyes back toward the woman's face.



Stephane
<http://www.flickr.com/photos/stf-o/7746721278/>

This is a very interesting example. The photographer has created a composition with the subject's body and placed it within a secondary composition of the frame.

So, what is at work here?

The model's face is placed in the sweet spot according to The Rule of Thirds. The girl's hands create a focal point and definitely add tension. The background elements form a frame around her to force the eyes in.

Do you think this photograph works?

We see a couple of problems with the composition. The lighter square shape to the right is very distracting and doesn't add anything to the portrait. The hands are a nice element, but they're almost overwhelming. They draw more attention than the subject's face. This portrait could have been more successful if the model had been looking directly into the camera. This would have reduced the impact of the hands and the square shape on the wall by adding visual weight to her face.

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BOTTOM LINE

BOTTOM LINE

When creating portraits, the subject is the most important element of the photograph. Everything else that you include in the image should point to and accentuate the subject. Plan your backgrounds carefully. Avoid distracting shapes, colors, lines, etc., unless they bring some value to the story you're attempting to tell.

IN PORTRAITURE- POSING RULES

Posing is tied very closely to composition when creating portraits.

Imbed this valuable point in your mind-

The posing of your subject(s) can make your portrait an award winner, or, it can completely ruin it!

There is very little middle room on the above point. Your subject can have a fantastic expression, but if your pose makes them look like they should be wearing a size 16 shoe, that's the only thing everyone will notice.

MASCULINE - FEMININE

There are a couple of key elements that are specific to men and women.

Women typically look best when they are stretched out. Women don't like anything sagging. It's often a good idea to take a slightly elevated view of a woman so she is looking up and stretching her neck slightly. If you see her body, have her stretch her legs out and place one over the other. Avoid twisting a woman's body if her midriff is visible. Also, avoid squared-up shoulders.

A Fabulous Tip- A great way to learn posing is to study the Master Painters!



Leo Jeje

<http://www.flickr.com/photos/59879617@N07/5613762793/>

This painting incorporates many of the posing guidelines for women. Notice how the body is stretched out. One leg covers the other. The angle of view is slightly elevated. The arms are pulled up and back which prevents sagging skin and breasts.

Men look best with good posture. Watch their jawline. Sometimes it helps to ask them to slightly clench their teeth before shooting. Men like to look like they're in control. That look is achieved by taking a slightly lower camera view, and having the subject look down into the camera; it also helps to have a man lean slightly forward.

Let's examine some examples of men and women in different poses.



Highways Agency
<http://www.flickr.com/photos/highwaysagency/4542412077/>

SITTING

Take note of the lower camera angle so that the men are looking down into the camera. The crossed arms add a focal point and add to the masculine feel by showing flexed muscles.



Mysi

<http://www.flickr.com/photos/astromysicism/3014502165/>

A perfect feminine pose, the body is stretched out and the chin is up.



Dollen

<http://www.flickr.com/photos/dollen/3277065516/>

This is a terrible sitting pose for a woman, look at the size of her calves and feet in comparison to her head.



Frank Kovalchek

<http://www.flickr.com/photos/72213316@N00/6171389318/>

This was a good attempt. But, what about the woman's upper arm: the one that's closest to the camera? It looks heavier than it would have if the photographer had extended her hand out away from her body.



Richard Foster
<http://www.flickr.com/photos/93963757@N05/8550837925/>

This image gives masculine attributes to the man and female attributes to the woman. Can you identify them? We're looking up at the man and he is leaning forward. We're also looking down at the woman. Her arm is stretched up to create a thinning effect, and her chin is up.



Andrew W. Rennie 2010 (120/365)

Andy Rennie

<http://www.flickr.com/photos/andrewrennie/4566748390/>

This is an excellent sitting pose for a man. Did you notice the camera angle? Did you notice that he is leaning forward?



Frank Kovalchek
<http://www.flickr.com/photos/72213316@N00/3419884931/>



Francisco Osorio
http://www.flickr.com/photos/francisco_osorio/7391320160/

STANDING

Examine the two informal portraits. It's apparent how important angles and body language are to portraits of women!



Erik Söderström
<http://www.flickr.com/photos/mescon/4886064645/>

When posing a man in a standing position, one of the difficulties is what to do with their hands. It often helps to give them a prop.



Ed Bierman
<http://www.flickr.com/photos/edbierman/2709094114/>

The work of Master Painters will give you clues to good posing. In this example we learn that you should extend a foot. This prevents the subject from looking stiff and relaxes their shoulders.



© Andrew W. Rennie 2011

Andy Rennie

<http://www.flickr.com/photos/andrewrennie/5358286414/>

This is an excellent standing portrait. Notice the relaxed posture. The hands in the pockets add to the mood AND give the model something to do.



Nicholas A. Tonelli
http://www.flickr.com/photos/nicholas_t/8209911624/

Would you consider this a portrait?
The photographer did. This would be considered an experimental portrait. It definitely says something about the subject without showing the subject's face. This kind of work is very interesting, but if you're creating work for someone else, make sure you understand what his or her expectations are.



Frank Kovalchek
<http://www.flickr.com/photos/72213316@N00/6148801085/>

LYING DOWN

A classic female pose.

Look at the following two portraits of the man lying down. Which one do you like better? Which one do you think he would like better?



Moodboard
<http://www.flickr.com/photos/67835627@N05/7301112448/>



Moodboard
<http://www.flickr.com/photos/67835627@N05/7301111052/>

The point that we are trying to drive home is that posing is about the body. Many portrait photographers have a tendency to focus in on the face. Don't forget to watch the body as well!

There are five standard definitions in portrait photography (as related to how much of the body you're going to show in the picture).

Here are those five standards-



David Robert Bliwas
<http://www.flickr.com/photos/oneworldgallery/2972508557/>



David Robert Bliwas
<http://www.flickr.com/photos/oneworldgallery/3054324914/>

Headshot



Jonathan Kos-Read
<http://www.flickr.com/photos/jonathankosread/7082720999/>

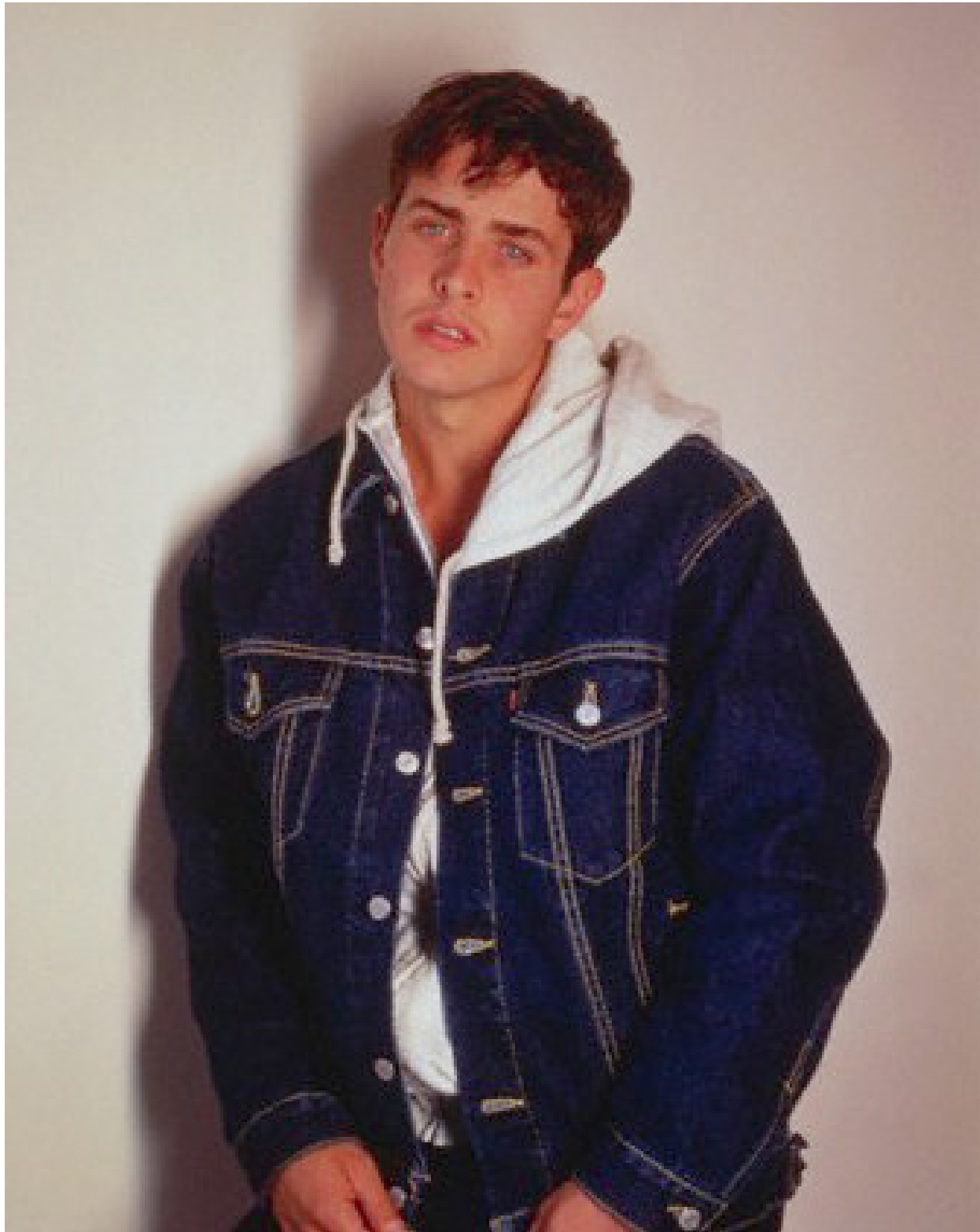


Jonathan Kos-Read
<http://www.flickr.com/photos/jonathankosread/8523706757/>



Mark Bottomley
http://www.flickr.com/photos/mark_b_photo/416329013/

Head and Shoulders



Adele Thompson
http://www.flickr.com/photos/thompson_adele/7287135586/



Sara Ashley
<http://www.flickr.com/photos/24328644@N08/2508700303/>

Half-length



Richard Foster
<http://www.flickr.com/photos/93963757@N05/8550835893/>



Richard Foster
<http://www.flickr.com/photos/93963757@N05/8550837719/>

Half-length



trialsanderrors
<http://www.flickr.com/photos/trialsanderrors/2670653129/>



William Wootton
<http://www.flickr.com/photos/wwootton/7707089674/>

Three-quarter length



PHOTOGRAPHY | MARTIN LIAO
www.flickr.com/photos/martinliao

Boquang Liao
<http://www.flickr.com/photos/martinliao/6839002345/>



Richard Foster
<http://www.flickr.com/photos/93963757@N05/8550834719/>

Full length

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COMMON PROBLEM AREAS WHEN POSING



Trenten Kelley
<http://www.flickr.com/photos/trentenkelleyphotography/10846786856/>

COMMON PROBLEM AREAS WHEN POSING

When you're posing your subject, picking your camera angle, and choosing your lighting, these are the common problem areas that many photographers miss.

HANDS

Watch out for hands that are held at odd angles. This is a definite attention grabber. It's a common problem (especially with children) because the subject doesn't know what to do with their hands. Always direct your subject on hand placement.



Loren Kerns
<http://www.flickr.com/photos/lorenkerns/8555364755/>

This is a great example of the photographer directing hand placement. Each subject had his or her own “spot” for hand placement. They all look engaged and relaxed.



stilettobootlover_83
<http://www.flickr.com/photos/sbl83/8119051427/>

The photographer was attempting a sexy portrait of this young woman. The face, the expression, and the hair all look very nice. But look at the hands. Again, lighting can be crucial in highlighting certain features or trying to hide them.



KROIZ. chuljae@gmail.com Sony NEX C3

<http://www.sonytone.com>

Chuljae Lee

<http://www.flickr.com/photos/kroiz/5939186226/>

FEET

Be very careful with posing, camera angle, and wide-angle lenses. This woman's foot appears to be larger than her entire forearm and hand.



kickfoto.com

Kick Photo

<http://www.flickr.com/photos/sneakerphotography/3117796756/>

Big feet and spread legs: a recipe for disaster.

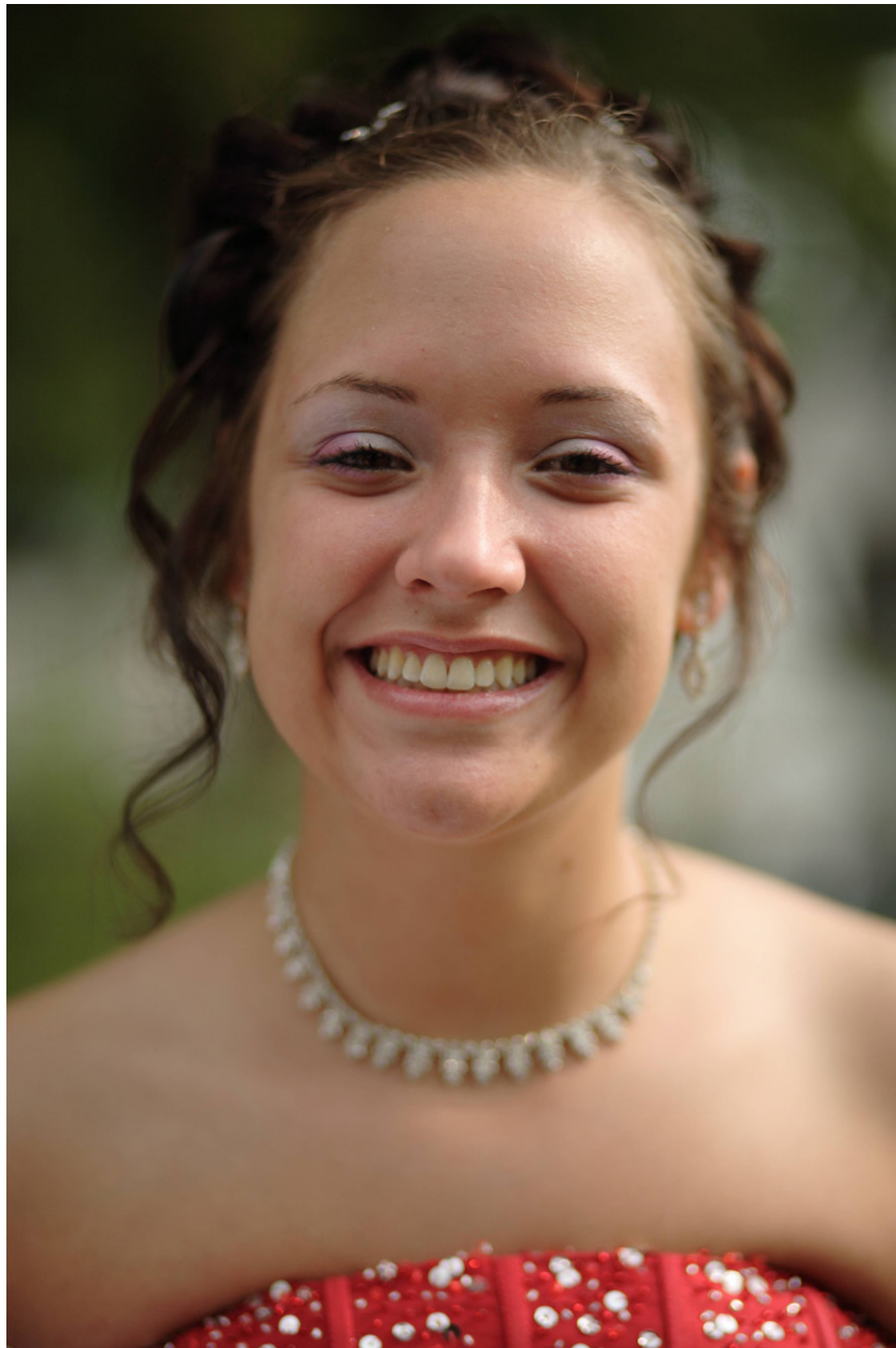


Don Stewart

<http://www.flickr.com/photos/don-stewart/2574049790/>

ELBOWS

What is the first thing you see in this photograph? Her elbow! In fact, her elbow is so dominant that the face becomes almost non-existent. This could have been vastly improved with better lighting.



Ray Dumas

<http://www.flickr.com/photos/rtdphotography/2828625076/>

SKIN WRINKLES AND FOLDS

Watch for clothing, posing, or lighting that pinches, binds, or creates folds in the skin.



Corey Balazowich
<http://www.flickr.com/photos/coreyann/1207662328/>

If you notice the details, a simple adjustment can fix the problem. In this image, Mom has a bulge on the right side of the picture and Dad's arm is extended backwards which makes him feel disconnected from the group. Had the photographer directed the Dad to gently place his hand on Mom's side (where the bulge is), it would have corrected both problems!

Assignment- Produce two portrait sessions: one with a man and one with a woman. In each session shoot the five standards of portrait. Watch your problem areas. Evaluate your results. Did you catch all the problems in camera?



If you notice the details, a simple adjustment can fix the problem.

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BUILDING GROUP PORTRAITS



Logan Hunt
<http://www.flickr.com/photos/loganzhunt/3894060054/>

BUILDING GROUP PORTRAITS

When tasked with producing a group portrait, it's never a good idea to just line people up in a row.

Lining people up creates a boring and unprofessional composition.

The best way to group people is by forming triangles, diagonals, and an X pattern. This will create a tension that brings interest to the portrait.



Ron Sombilon

<http://www.flickr.com/photos/ronsombilongallery/3598679525/>

TRIANGLES

Forming a triangle works well for groups up to about six people. When you begin your posing, start with one person and build from there.

Important Tip- As you build your pose with a group, put heavier people to the back. This will help slim their body.



Original photograph by Sombilon Art, Media, and Photography. This image has been altered.

Triangle Pose

Ron Sombilon

<http://www.flickr.com/photos/ronsombilongallery/3598679525/>

Did you pick-up on the triangular pattern?



Ron Sombilon

<http://www.flickr.com/photos/ronsombilongallery/4655993143/>

How about this triangular pattern?



Ron Sombilon
<http://www.flickr.com/photos/ronsombilongallery/4655940235/>



Original photograph by Sombilon Art, Media, and Photography.
 This image has been altered.

Diagonal composition

Ron Sombilon
<http://www.flickr.com/photos/ronsombilongallery/4655940235/>

DIAGONALS

Even a group of two can be a diagonal.



Ron Sombilon

<http://www.flickr.com/photos/ronsombilongallery/4656538584/sizes/l/in/photostream/>



THE X SHAPE GROUP PATTERN

Building diagonals, triangles, and the X pattern takes practice. This is especially true when you need to work quickly.



Original photograph by Sombilon Art, Media, and Photography. This image has been altered.

Ron Sombilon

<http://www.flickr.com/photos/ronsombilongallery/4656538584/sizes/l/in/photostream/>

Quick Tip- If you know how many people will be in your group portrait, work out your arrangement on paper prior to the session. Sometimes, you may have to alter your plan- but it gives you a good starting point.

So, what do you do if you have a large group of people?

Build your large group one person at a time by creating small sub-groups that are positioned in diagonals, triangles, or the X pattern. Insert your sub-groups so that they form a larger diagonal, triangle, or X pattern.



Greg Dawson

<http://www.flickr.com/photos/gregdawsonphotography/4482571243/>

BODY SIZE

The last topic we would like to cover regarding the posing of groups is body size and type.

As you insert subjects into your shot, be mindful of body size, height, color, and clothing. Small subjects should be put in front. Larger folks should go to the back. Try to create a rhythm by spacing different body types throughout the image.

The photographer did a good job of creating a triangular composition. The problem with this image is subject placement. The woman is completely lost in the background. She is smaller than her son and husband. It doesn't help that her shirt is black and the men are wearing white (which also reduces her in size).

As a portrait photographer it's part of your job to evaluate what's presented to you- and then create an image that displays a balance between everyone represented in the photograph.

Assignment- Assemble a group of 8 or more people for a group portrait. The more people you have, the more you'll learn. Assemble the portrait using diagonals, triangles, and the X pattern.

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EXPOSURE, SKIN COLOR, AND CONTROL

EXPOSURE, SKIN COLOR, AND CONTROL

We assume that you have a basic knowledge of exposure. Earlier, we discussed that you should set your camera to spot or center weighted. This is so your camera is metering the most important area of your portrait- the subject.

Now, consider this. Metering exposure for a photograph is an interpretive art. This is particularly true for portraiture.

In landscape photography, for example, you probably take a general reading of the entire scene and set your exposure.

If you're more advanced, you probably read a highlight area, then a shadow area, and finally an overall reading. You then pick the best exposure that will give you the most detail from white to black.

Now, let's think about this from a portrait point-of-view.

When you create a portrait, you want complete control over every aspect of the photograph. This includes the lighting and exposure. So, 99% of the time you will make exposure decisions for the subject, the background, props, etc.

How do you this? By what you include in a photograph and how you light it.

We're going to break that down in second.

But before we do that, we want to mention skin color.

Would you light and expose a dark skinned man the same way you would a light skinned man?



Metering exposure for a photograph is an interpretive art.

The answer is no. And you need to keep this in mind; otherwise you will be disappointed with your results.

If we are photographing a dark skinned man and we take a meter reading from his face, will we get a proper exposure?

No, because the meter will want to create an 18% gray scenario and the man will be overexposed as the camera meter attempts to lighten his skin.

How about if the subject is light skinned? The answer is also no! The meter will underexpose them as it attempts to darken their lighter skin tone into an 18% gray.

A Beginner's Tip- In general, after taking a reflective light meter reading from the main light side of the subject's face, you will want to-

- Light skin – Increase exposure by 1 stop
- Mid-tone skin – Decrease exposure by ½ stop
- Dark Skin – Decrease exposure by 1 stop

Let's return to the idea of lighting and exposure for the entire photograph.

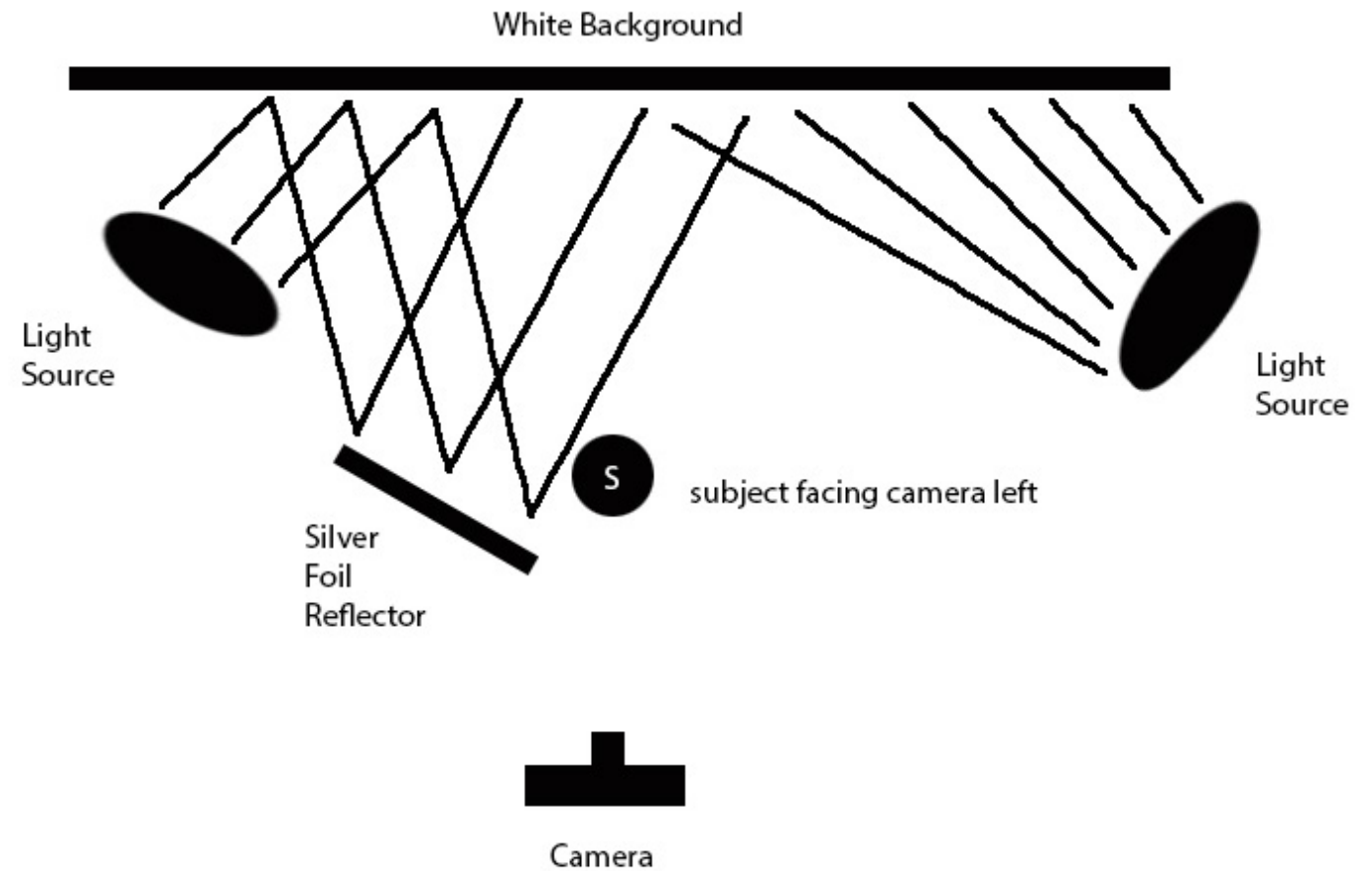


Kent DuFault

<http://www.flickr.com/photos/35449761@N04/10751389436/>

The photographer had a very specific intent for this portrait. He wanted to show the man's face, but he also wanted to use the man's hair as a graphic element.

How would you meter this and set your exposure?



Kent DuFault
<http://www.flickr.com/photos/35449761@N04/12270861536/>

Here's what the photographer did.

The initial camera meter reading was taken off of the man's face from the direction of the camera. It indicated f/5.6 at 1/200th of a second.

The photographer was happy with the shutter speed but decreased the aperture from f/5.6 to f/8.0 to compensate for skin color.

The photographer then took a meter reading off of the white background. It read f/11.7 at 1/200th of a second.

Do you think that with the camera set at f/8.0 that the lighting on the white wall was correct?

No.

The wall would photograph as a gray tone.

The photographer increased the amount of light hitting the wall to f/16.5.

This then overpowered the amount of light on the man's face. So, the reflector was backed away from the subject about 2 feet. This brought the meter reading down to...

What do we want the reading on the man's face to be- f/8.0 or f/5.6?

That's right- f/5.6.

Metering and lighting are extremely important in portraiture. If you have more questions regarding these specific subjects, we do have guides available at Photzy.com.

Assignment- Set up a portrait session. Evaluate the skin tone of your subject. Establish in your mind where they fall in a dark to light ratio. Set up your lighting and take your meter reading from the subject's face. Starting at that reading shoot the same photograph while changing the exposure in ½ stop increments. Go to 3 stops over, and 3 stops under, the nominal setting. Determine how much you had to adjust the meter reading to get accurate skin tone.

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GETTING IT IN FOCUS

GETTING IT IN FOCUS

This seems like such a simple subject that it shouldn't even need to be discussed. Yet, we see many portraits being displayed that are out-of-focus, or, the focus is misplaced.

Getting your portraits in focus involves three things!

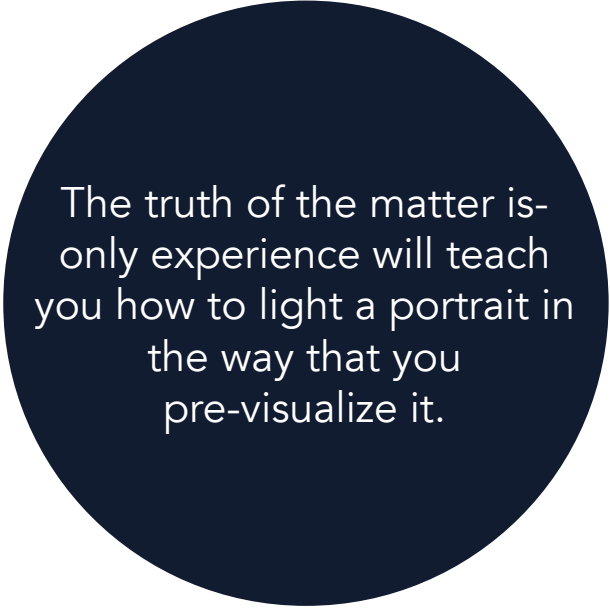
1. Proper focus placement
2. Proper camera support (depending on the shutter speed)
3. Proper use of depth-of-field (depending on the choice of f/stop)

PROPER FOCUS PLACEMENT

- Single Subject – focus on the eyes
- Multiple Subjects (Small Group) – Pose them in a way that keeps their eyes on the same plane. Use a mid range f/stop such as f/8.0
- Multiple Subjects (Large Group) – Use a small f/stop such as f/16.0. Focus on one subject that is 1/3 back from the front of the group, and in the middle of the group.

PROPER CAMERA SUPPORT

Use a tripod if necessary. Use stabilization technology. Practice breathing techniques; this allows you to release the shutter slowly and methodically.



The truth of the matter is-
only experience will teach
you how to light a portrait in
the way that you
pre-visualize it.

DEPTH-OF-FIELD

Remain aware of your f/stop and shutter speed at all times. It will be difficult (if not impossible) to get everyone in a group shot in focus if your aperture is at f/4.

THE ART OF LIGHTING

There are plenty of books and articles out there that talk about lighting a portrait.

The truth of the matter is- only experience will teach you how to light a portrait in the way that you pre-visualize it. There are just too many variables to narrow it down to a simple formula.

This is what we recommend.

Find a helpful subject.

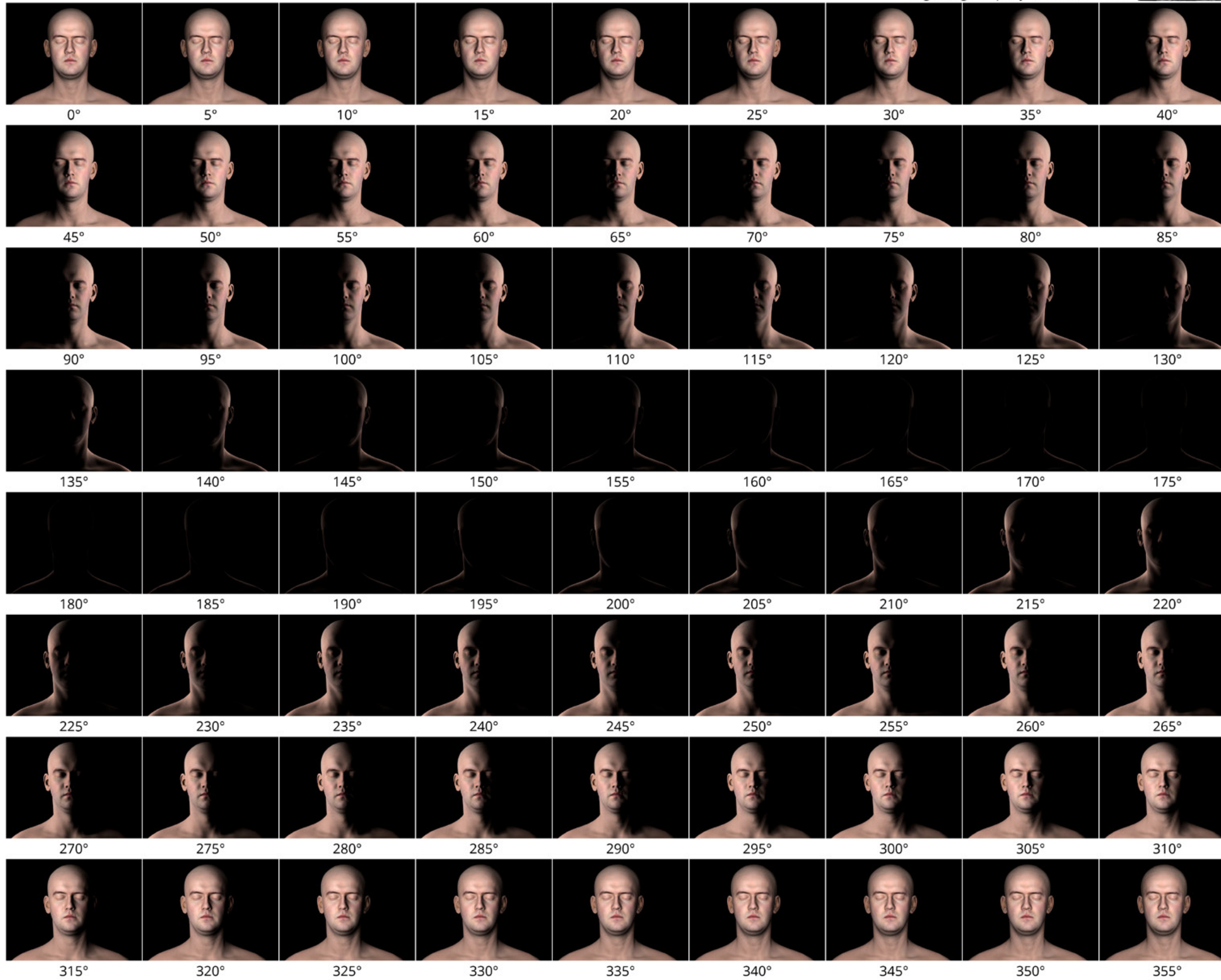
Darken a room in your home.

And play with your light sources-

Make these charts.

Softbox Level 0°

Lighting Map by Patrick David



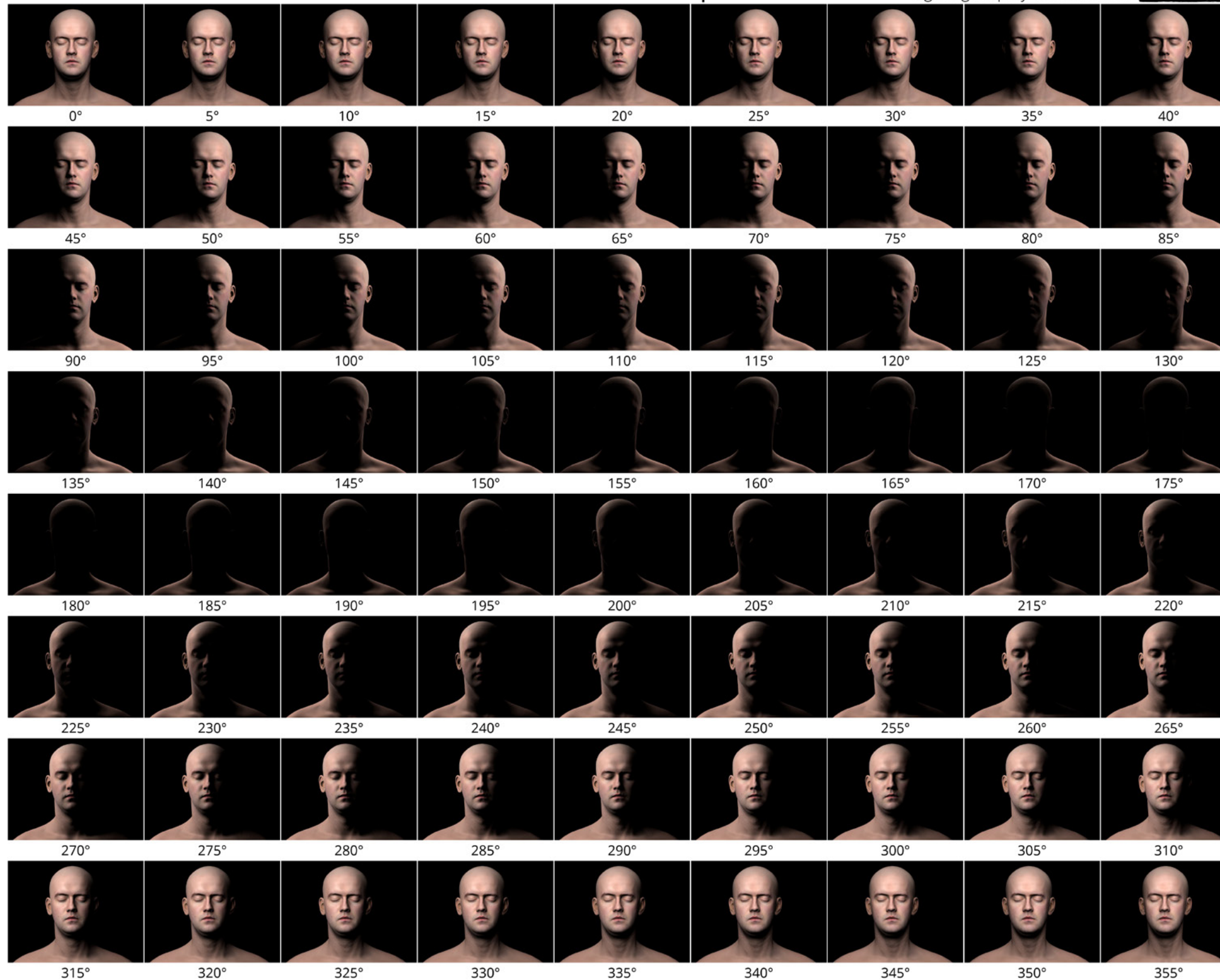
Pat David

<http://www.flickr.com/photos/patdavid/6813371626/in/photostream>

The light source is at the subject's eye level and moved in small increments all the way around the subject.

Softbox 30° Up

Lighting Map by Patrick David



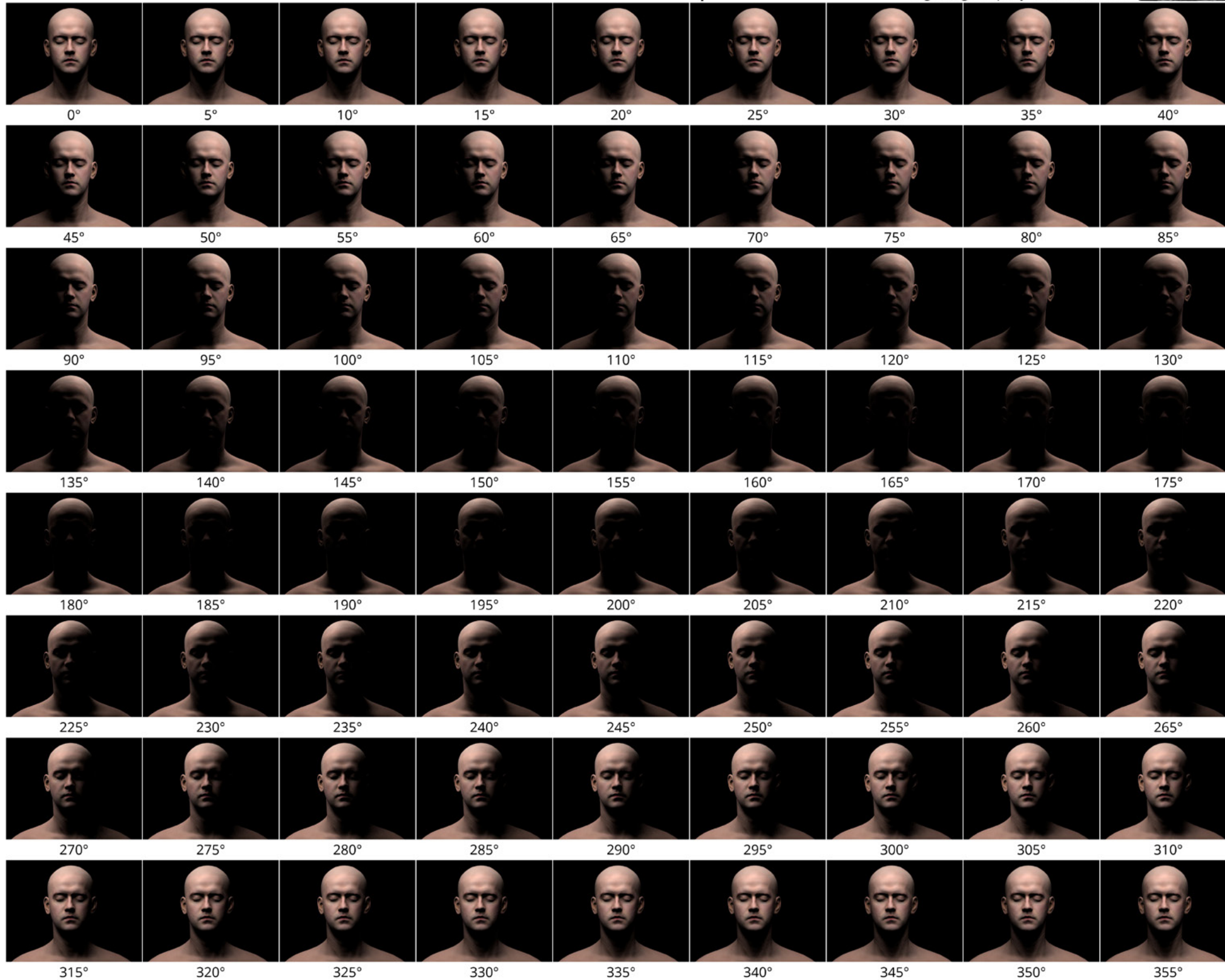
The light source is elevated 30 degrees above eye level.

Pat David

<http://www.flickr.com/photos/patdavid/6959484035/in/photostream>

Softbox 60° Up

Lighting Map by Patrick David

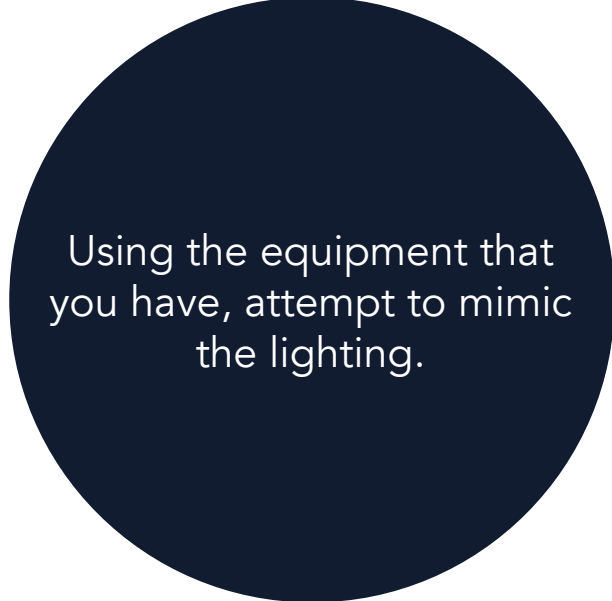


The light source is elevated 60 degrees above eye level.

Pat David
<http://www.flickr.com/photos/patdavid/6959484393/in/photostream>

If you have invested in some light modification equipment, or made it yourself, **Assignment-** Select twenty portraits that you like from Flickr. Using the equipment that you have, attempt to mimic the lighting.

We guarantee you, if you take the time to complete these exercises you will learn more about lighting a portrait than if you spent days reading about it!



Using the equipment that you have, attempt to mimic the lighting.

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PROVIDING THAT EXTRA TOUCH



Courtney Rhodes
<http://www.flickr.com/photos/pumpkincat210/3926622628/>

PROVIDING THAT EXTRA TOUCH

There is no doubt that paying extra attention to details such as hair, cosmetics, props, and clothing will take your portraiture to the next level.

It can be difficult to address all these issues on your own.

We encourage a team concept. Develop relationships with others who have expertise in photo production. They can help you with make-up, hair, props, and lighting.

You'll be amazed at how many folks will jump at the chance to work on a photo shoot (at no cost).



Meagan

<http://www.flickr.com/photos/meaganjean/4243680410/in/photostream/>

Make-up and hair are often best left to the professionals. Try to connect with a local cosmetologist that has an interest in photography.

We do recommend that you keep a basic hair and makeup kit with your photo gear. Items such as a brush, comb, cover-up, base powder, sewing kit, hair ties, bobby pins, tweezers, small scissors, cotton swabs, Q-tips, rubber bands, and a variety of safety pins will always come in handy.

Post-Production: Don't Turn Your model Into a Plastic Doll

There are too many aspects to post-production to include in this book. There are many guides that cover retouching.

We would just like to close with the following thought...

Photoshop has become so easy that skin retouching is almost a non-skill. Because of this many photographers have a tendency to remove every flaw and mark of texture on a subject's face.

This results in a look that we call, "The Plastic Doll Effect".



Tom Strickland
<http://www.flickr.com/photos/tstrick/7137353171/>

This is photo retouching gone awry. You can see skin texture in the shadows to the left. Look at the bridge of the nose and the cheekbone areas below the eyes. This is "The Plastic Doll Effect".



Jassie Singh
<http://www.flickr.com/photos/photo-wala/6580712181/>

This is a much better photo-retouching job. Imperfections have been removed but the skin texture is intact.

The marks and scars of your subjects are a reflection on their life.

Yes, it's fine to clean up the skin, and sometimes it's necessary; just don't go too far and remove your subject's personality.



U.S. Army
<http://www.flickr.com/photos/familymwr/5182810727/>

Now there's a face with PERSONALITY!

We hope that you take the information provided in this book and use it to create fascinating portraits. Portraits that tell the story of your subject(s) in a way that only YOU can create!

About the Author



Kent DuFault is a professional photographer and author.
You can check out his work here:

Short Stories: <http://www.amazon.com/-/e/B006RASQUI>

Website: <http://www.bellakentuky.com>

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Twitter: @bellakentuky

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LEARNING AND IMPROVING YOUR
PHOTOGRAPHY PLEASE VISIT
PHOTZY.COM
