

This portrait photography tutorial teaches you how to take great portraits using natural and artificial light. You'll learn how to choose your camera's portrait and portrait/landscape modes, select a background and props, create a pose and light your portrait. You will learn the best time of day to take photographs and how to position your subject in relation to the sun.

Portrait Photography Made Easy

Making a great portrait is more than just getting someone to smile for the camera. A portrait tells a story, reveals the unique qualities of its subject and explains why that person is special..

Have you ever seen a portrait of a stranger that makes you feel like you know the person?

The world's great portrait photographers, such as the late Yosuf Karsh, have not only mastered the tools and techniques of photography, but often spend time with their subjects in their homes and workplaces, getting to know them and getting a sense of their lives. As a result, the subjects are no longer strangers to them and the resulting portraits are full of insight and understanding. You can achieve similar effects with your own camera and a few simple household items.

Tell a story

When you shoot a portrait, you become a storyteller and, to be a good storyteller, you have to ask a few questions to get.

- What does this person mean to you?
- What about this person do you want to share?
- What qualities do you want to reveal?

For example, if your friend plays the saxophone, you may want to photograph her with her instrument. Is your Grandpa a gardener? Then photograph him with his prize-winning roses. Do you think your girl friend has a mysterious smile? Make it the focus of your photograph. Does your father take a daily walk in the woods? You can photograph him strolling on his favorite tree-lined path. The answers to such questions will help you tell a story as you prepare to take the perfect portrait.



Learn from the pros

If you've ever had your family or individual portrait taken in a professional photography studio, then you know how complicated such preparation can be. Professional photographers use lights, reflectors, backdrops and sets to create perfect photographs. They even use fancy lighting equipment when photographing portraits outdoors. But you don't need expensive equipment and a professional-level camera to produce outstanding results. You can achieve similar effects with your own camera and a

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few simple household items, once you know some of their tricks.

Set your camera

Most digital cameras have a **portrait mode** that keeps your subject sharply in focus while the background is out of focus. The **portrait/landscape mode** keeps both your subject and background sharply in focus.

Use **portrait mode** if you are using a neutral background or if you don't want to draw attention to background elements such as buildings, trees...

Use **portrait/landscape mode** if you want equal emphasis on both your subject and her surroundings.

*If you use **portrait/landscape mode**, make sure that your background doesn't overwhelm your subject or cause her to blend in too greatly.



Choose a background and props

If you're shooting indoors, use a blank wall or closed drapes to create a simple, neutral background. You can drape a solid-colored bed sheet over a wall or furniture to create a neutral backdrop. If you're shooting outdoors, the sky makes an excellent neutral backdrop.

If you opt for a background that isn't neutral, choose a setting that is visually appealing and says something about the person in the picture. Photograph your favorite uncle in his favorite chair, or your best friend sitting under a tree. Just remember to choose a background that doesn't overwhelm your subject.

Finally, have at hand any props you may want to use, such as a favorite toy, a musical instrument, a baseball glove, etc. Props are an excellent way to add color and visual interest to your portrait.

Pose your subject

You don't have to ask your subject to pose for a portrait, but if you do, here are some general rules:

- Pose your subject at an angle (up to 45 degrees) to the camera with body and head facing different directions
- Ask a male subject to tilt the top of his head toward his far shoulder, and a female toward her near shoulder
- Photograph your subject's hands with palms down and all fingers bent; never photograph your subject with fingers intertwined
- Never photograph your subject with her head leaning on her fist
- If your subject's head is leaning on her arms make sure that they point in opposite directions.

- You can also pose your subject in profile, to create a dramatic effect.



Light your portrait

Lighting is a crucial element in taking portraits. The kind of light that you use will have a tremendous influence on the outcome of your portrait.

In photography light is used to create highlights and shadows, thus creating depth and detail. As a general rule, the better the balance between highlights and shadows, the better the photograph.

Indoor Lighting tips:

1. Catch the sparkle in your subject's eyes

Human eyes reflect light sources around them, such as lamps and light bulbs. These reflections are called catch lights and result in a more life-like portrait. You can improve your portrait by controlling these catchlights. Before you shoot your portrait, look at your subject's eyes. Try to spot the catch lights. For the most desirable effect, you want them at the 10 o'clock or 2 o'clock position. You can position a light source off camera that will result in such a placement. Choose a source with only one bulb to create a single, solid catch light in each eye, as single catch lights provide the most appealing effect and give your subject truly sparkling eyes. You can achieve similar effects with your own camera and a few simple household items, once you know some of the tricks pros use.

2. Create a flattering pose with short lighting

Ask your subject to turn slightly to one side. Then light the side of the face that is away from the camera, that is, the side you see less of. This is called the short side. Short lighting does several things. It has a slimming effect and lights the eyes, cheeks, nose, lips, forehead and chin. The area lit is roughly the equivalent of a Halloween mask. This draws attention to the most important

features of the face while throwing other elements into shadow. A simple household lamp placed at 45 degrees to the subject's short side will do the trick.

3. Create a dramatic pose with broad lighting

Pose your subject in the same way as above, but light the side of the face that is closest to the camera. This is the broad side. Broad lighting gives weight to your subject by lighting a larger area of the face and creating deeper shadows on the short side. The shadow cast by the subject's nose creates a triangle of light on the short-side cheek that draws attention to the eyes. Broad lighting is less flattering because it highlights imperfections and wrinkles. However, it results in a bolder portrait that emphasizes character.

4. User frontal light to create an outstanding profile

If you're photographing your subject in profile, use soft frontal light to illuminate the entire face and eliminate shadows.

5. Create depth using backlighting

Place a light behind your subject to create depth between your subject and the background. This works especially well if you are using a solid background such as a wall or curtain. Place the light in a way that creates a halo around the subject and make sure that you are not creating shadows against the background.

6. Create a glamorous look with a homemade reflector

A piece of white cardboard or polystyrene can serve as a reflector to indirectly light your subject. Place a light to the side of your camera and have your subject hold the cardboard or polystyrene in her lap to reflect soft light onto her face and to eliminate shadows.

7. Use natural light from a window

Photograph your subject next to a window at a 45 angle, with the subject's short side to the window. This way, you get the same effect achieved by professional photographers without having to use artificial light at all. If you do decide to use natural light, the best time to do so is late in the afternoon, in the hours before the sunset.



Outdoor Lighting Tips:

1. Choose an appropriate time for your photographs

The best time to take an outdoor portrait is in the hours before sunset because the sun is low, thus creating rich details and providing a soft red tint that enhances skin tones.

The worst time is in the hours before and after noon (10 to 4, depending on the time of year) because

the sun is too high and its light is too harsh. The result is an image that is too bright, too dark, or both. It is very difficult to properly balance highlights and shadows when the sun is so high, but you can use your camera's flash and a makeshift reflector to create balanced lighting.

Just after sunrise is also a great time to take a portrait, but it's inconvenient and people don't look their best just after they've woken up.

Position your subject in relation to the sun. Shoot your subject at an angle to the sun. If the person you are photographing is directly in front of sunlight, she'll be entirely in shadows. Try to place your subject at roughly 45 degrees in relation the sun (both horizontally and vertically, which is easiest in the hours just before sunset). Again, you can use your camera's flash and have your subject hold a makeshift reflector in her lap to balance shadows and highlights, and to create appropriate contrast.

Taking the Picture

Select the type of shot you want: a close shot, a medium or a long shot. The type of shot simply means how much of the person you want to show in your picture. A close shot features your subject's head and shoulders; a medium shot features head, torso and hands; a long shot is either 3/4 of the body (head to knees) or the entire body. Remember, the more you show of your subject, the more of the background appears in the picture, so make sure that your subject takes up as much of the picture as possible and that the background does not overwhelm her.

Take lots of pictures. You can go back and select the best shot as the final portrait, just like the pros do. You can start with close shots, move on to medium shots and finally take long shots. You can also stick to one type of shot.

Experiment with light, props and poses while you're taking the portrait and make sure that your subject is having fun. The camera captures everything. If your subject is bored or annoyed, it will show up in the final portrait.

Portrait photography is very challenging and takes lots of practice. Ask your friends and family to model for you. They'll be more than happy to pose for you, especially once they see the results that you achieve with the professional secrets you now know.

Tip 1: To reduce the effect of your flash, place a piece of tissue or medical tape over the flash window to create softer light.

Tip 2: Indoor lighting adds a yellow tinge to your photographs. Set your camera's white balance (WB) to indoors for realistic skin tones. (Note: most cameras won't allow you to change this setting in auto mode.)

Tip 3: Turn on your red eye reduction if you're using a flash.

Thanks to www.blackphoto.com/tutorials/lesson_portraits.asp

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