



**NATURAL LIGHT PORTRAIT
PHOTOGRAPHY**

2 Things a Photo Needs to Be a Portrait

1. A photograph portrait is a picture:
In which the subject consents to being photographed;
and
2. is actually about the subject

The moment a picture is about clothes, makeup, and hair -- or even props like cars and bicycles -- it ceases to be a portrait. It's a fashion picture.





What Makes a Portrait Good?

 n Portraits



Types of Portraits

- Beauty
- Character
- Headshot
- Classic
- Couples
- Group
- Fine Art
- Environment (Documentary)
- Street Portrait



Four Fundamentals

- Composition (and perspective)
- Lighting Skills (natural light)
- Posing Skills
- Post-processing (another time)

Composition

- Avoid dead center
 - Start with the rule of thirds (portrait and landscape)
 - But as guideline, not as absolute rule
 - Fill the frame
 - Frame within a frame (white or sky background)
 - Leading lines to direct viewer's eyes
 - Change perspective (don't shoot everything at you)
 - Try up close and personal
 - Find balance with frame
 - Look for interesting shapes
- (Have your subjects create shapes with their bodies or parts)



The Best Camera Settings for Natural Light Portrait Photography

- Manual mode, or aperture/shutter priority
- ISO – generally the lowest setting
- Shutter Speed – twice the length of your lens (can be slower with image stabilization)
- Aperture – wide open for bokeh (blurry background); twice the widest aperture for maximum sharpness
- LCD screen – set to 4 or 5 brightness, not auto
- Auto exposure, matrix (watch histogram, both ends inside)
- Auto focus, spot on closest eye



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Lens Choices

- The lens you use to make a portrait determines the perspective and has a profound effect on composition
- Wide angle — best for environmental (careful of distortion and lens tilt), stop down for great depth of field
- Normal — simple, wider aperture, greater bokeh, careful with the focus at wide apertures
- Portrait — specialized, more flattering
- Short telephoto zoom — versatile, slower speed, less bokeh, narrow depth of field (frequently less than the subject's head), no distortion

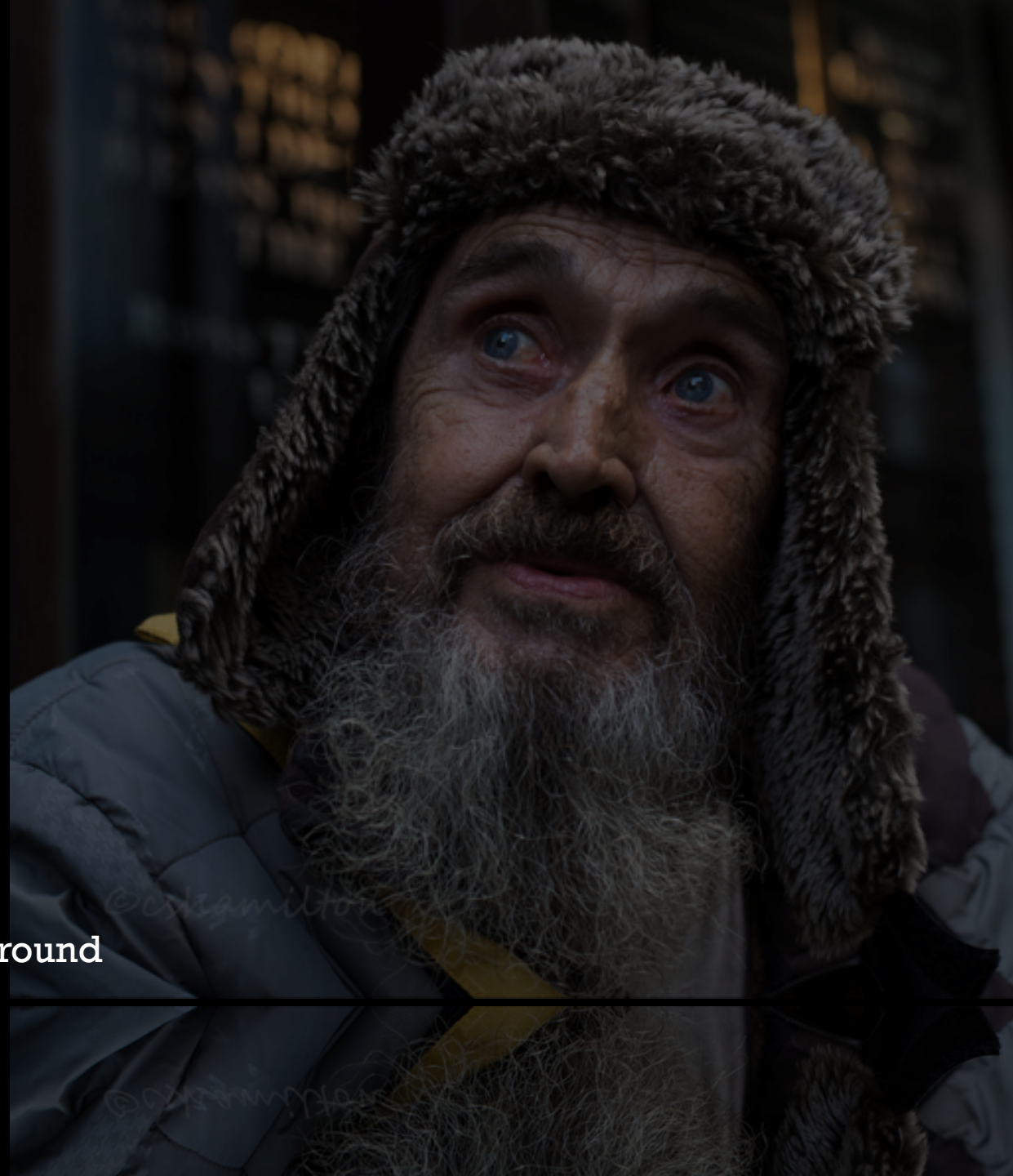
Focus

Portrait photography's most frequent wide-open f-stops limit DOF and make focusing more difficult and more critical e.g. f1.4, 35mm, APC, at 5 feet, has .34 feet DOF; at f8 DOF is 2 feet

- At wide open, subject and camera need to remain still
- Use single point (smallest possible) auto focus moving it on subject's closest eye
- You can't focus and recompose
- Use slow burst mode

Location

- Quality of light most important
- Coast, sea is always a good backdrop
- Waterfalls
- Gardens
- Buildings, especially old, like our ruins
- Interiors
- Environment to fit the subject
- Character shots — gritty character, gritty background



Types of Natural Light

- Sunny, find the shade, both for the subject and the background
- Cloudy — Can be soft and ideal, but sun overhead can still cause ugly shadows under the eyes
- Doorways, bridges, arches — can be used to block overhead light
- Backlighting at sunset — sun behind subject and overexpose to avoid silhouette
- Dusk — a different moodier feel

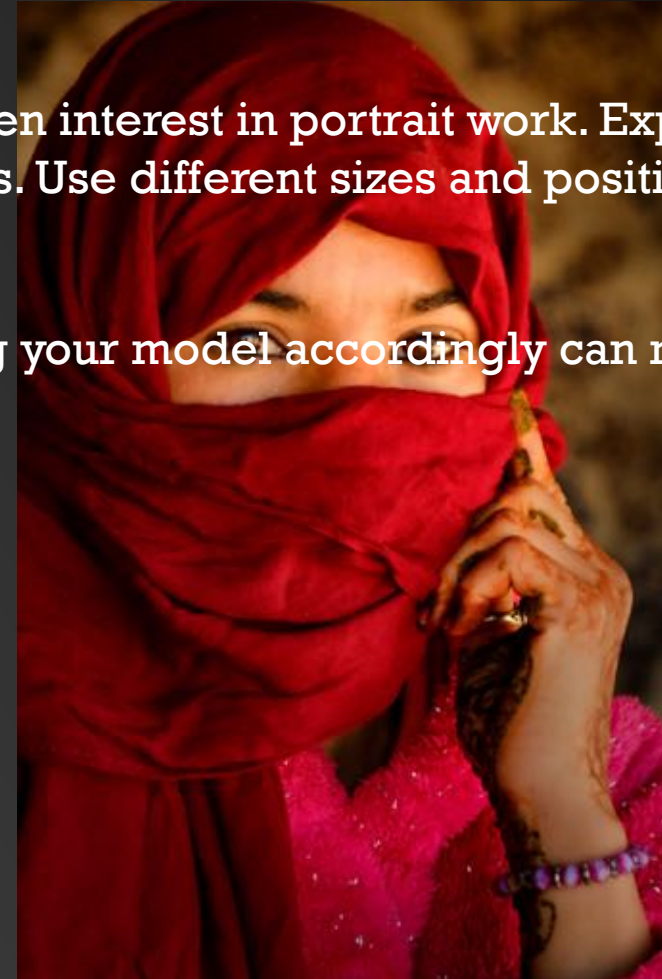
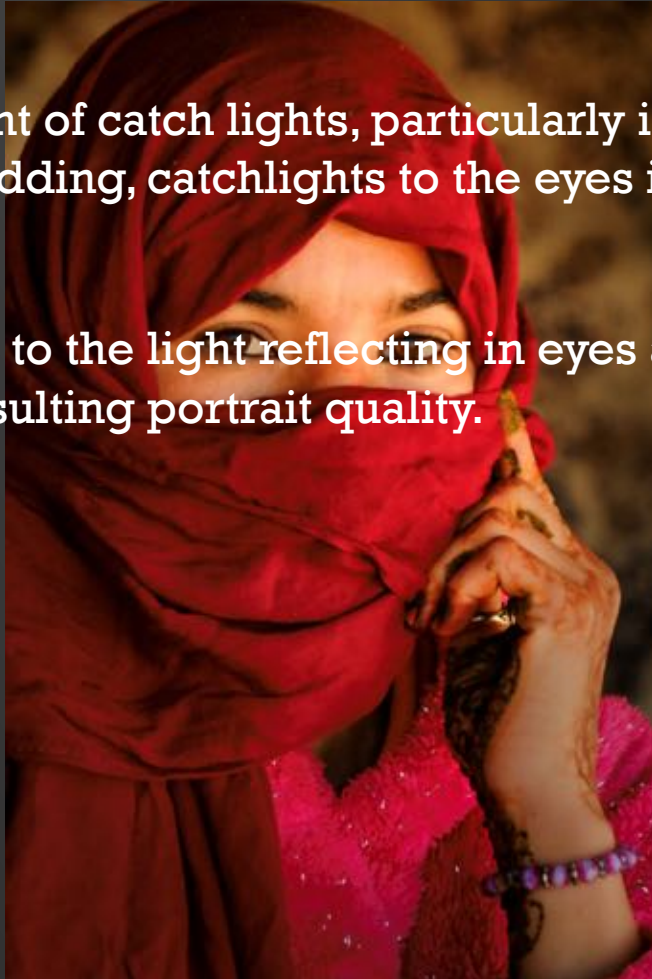


Catchlights

A catchlight is the highlight of a light source reflected off the surface of the eye, which adds depth and dimension to the eye and gives the eyes life in a portrait or snapshot. Without it, you get the dreaded “dead eye.”

Become a student of catch lights, particularly if you have a keen interest in portrait work. Experiment with removing, then adding, catchlights to the eyes in your portraits. Use different sizes and positions, and notice the effect.

Playing attention to the light reflecting in eyes and positioning your model accordingly can make a huge impact on the resulting portrait quality.



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Become a student of light by removing, then adding, and notice the effect.

Playing attention to the impact on the rest of the image.



If you have a keen eye for light in your portraits

and positioning



Experiment with different positions, and

make a huge

Mood

Some concepts to think about when it comes to the feel or mood of the portrait to help with important decisions, such as location, clothing, lighting and choice of model.

Colorful <—> Monochrome or desaturated

Warm <—> Cool

Light <—> Dark

Low contrast <—> High contrast

Conservative <—> Edgy

Modern <—> Vintage or retro

Hard <—> Soft

Natural <—> Stylized

Character <—> Beauty

Asexual <—> Sexy or sensual

Casual <—> Fashionable



Posing

- Pose the hair — Hair on the shoulders should be avoided at all costs
- Pull the Chin (or Ears) Forward — "turtling," because it's like a turtle coming out of the shell. Uncomfortable or unnatural, but the results are always worth it
- Lift the arm — When people stand naturally they stand with their arms flat at their sides, making them look awkward and uncomfortable, and their arm presses against their body making it look larger than it actually is
- Leave Visual Space by the Waist — One of the things you can do to trim down your subject is by giving them their "natural" waist, without any additives
- Turn the Shoulders — By having your subject turn, they are showing a slimmer profile of themselves to the camera, and look slimmer
- Don't Show the Whites of the Eyes
- Don't Let the Nose Break the Face — If they turn too far and the nose crosses this line, it "breaks" the natural curve of the face. It creates the "Pinocchio" effect and extends the length of their nose

On the Shoot

Build rapport — Essential. If you talk to your subject about things she likes you will see more life in her eyes, get better expressions, including natural smiles and she will be more relaxed

Be confident — Always act confident and as if everything is going according to plan even if it isn't. Keeping things simple helps

Look for natural expressions — As you talk to your subject you will notice natural expressions and mannerisms that you can use, especially for character portraits

Be observant — What subjects make her eyes light up with enthusiasm? How does her expression change when you talk about different topics? What unconscious gestures does she make while talking about things she likes?

Shoot lots of photos — The more photos you take, the more confident you seem, and the more the subject gets into a rhythm as you try out different ideas

Show the subject some photos — It helps them understand what you are trying to achieve

Have the subject lean on something — more relaxed, easier pose

Simplify — full length pose is more difficult, more in for $\frac{3}{4}$ or head and shoulders

Use Props — gives your subject something to do, brings more relaxation



3 Portrait Photography Mistakes You Must Avoid

 On Portraits



Shooting a Stranger

I was roaming the island's ruins checking the light for my Monday portrait test shoot.

I needed a subject so I could test the DOF so I asked a family that was visiting if one of them would volunteer.

In the process I met this lady who turned out to be a descendant of B.B. Sams. She was willing, and she was a great and fun subject. I not only got my test results, but also found a new friend.





3 Tips for Shooting Powerful Street Portraits of Total Strangers

 On Portraits

10 ways to Learn Portrait Photography

1. Take Portrait Photography 101 — <https://www.onportraits.com/how-to-learn-portrait-photography>
2. Take a Continuing Education Portrait Photography Class
3. Study Great Portrait Photographers
4. Take a Portrait Photography Workshop
5. Watch Portrait Photography Videos — There are 10 million great videos about portrait photography on YouTube!
6. Study the Light All Around You
7. Read Portrait Photography Books
8. Photograph Total Strangers — , if you can get a great picture of a stranger, you can get a great picture of anyone
9. Start Shooting Self Portraits
10. The Ultimate Way to Learn Portrait Photography: Just Get Out There and Shoot!

Practice

- Want to practice portrait photography without a model?
- If you can't find enough portrait subjects to practice with, use yourself!
- Put your camera on a tripod, set up your natural light and become your own portrait/lighting crash test dummy.
- Try soft light, hard light, and everything in between. Try different lenses. Try different settings.
- Since you're not taking up anyone else's time, you can experiment endlessly. And you should.
- Also, you probably know your own face better than you know anyone else's. So carefully observe how different lighting techniques and lens choices affect how your face looks.
- You know what really teaches you a lot about lighting? Trying to make yourself look skinnier!
- Just like street portraits, self portraits are a fast track when it comes to learning portrait photography.

The 10 Commandments of Portrait Photography

- A Portrait Is About the Subject, Not the Photographer
- To Call a Picture a Portrait, You Need Consent
- A Portrait Is About a Person, Not How They Look
- A Portrait Can't Ever Tell You Everything About a Person
- An Effective Portrait Makes You Curious About the Subject
- We Learn from the Masters, Not the Latest 'Influencers'
- Ideas Are More Important Than Technique
- Technique Is More Important Than Tools
- A Portrait Does Not Have to Flatter the Subject
- Do No Harm — A portrait session should be enjoyable for everyone involved.

Your Challenge for Next Month



Post three photographs of one person you know well that communicate different sides of that person's character in three different ways.