

How To Master Portrait Photography

There are so many different types of photography, from abstract to landscape and to portraits. Each type has its own set of rules and necessary settings, so if you're really good at one you might still struggle with the other. Portrait photography is one of the hardest types of photography out there, simply because you're shooting with a living and unpredictable being, especially if it's children! However, there are tips and ways you can use to improve your skills and ultimately master portrait photography, without ever needing to go out and spend even more money on equipment.

How To Capture The Moments

A lot of portrait photography is staged, and that's great and works really well, but some of the most beautiful images are candid photographs. Even if you're there to shoot a more official and staged photo shoot, you should still shoot candid photos, because sometimes those are the best. This can be the subject at work, with their family or simply just doing something that they love.

Focus on Expressions

Much like candid shots, focusing on expressions can be the key to a wonderful image. However, there's more than just telling the client to "smile." You should be able to pose them in a flattering manner to avoid things like double chins, but also make sure you focus on the eyes and that they are either looking at the camera or clearly have a set point in the view rather than just seeming distracted.

With younger kids, it's always good to try and make them laugh and make them feel at ease because that's the best way to ensure they look natural rather than terrified and stilted.

Composition

The last thing you want is for the photos to look like passport photos, they should look natural and effortless and just like they were sitting like that and you managed to snap a photo.

Keep in mind the rule of thirds, but don't be afraid to break the rule if you think it'll make a good image. But another rule to keep in mind is where you can cut people off. Try to avoid things like cutting off the top of the head, at the knees, ankles or hands. Instead, cut off just above the knees, mid shin or forearm to make it look less awkward.

Symmetry is also a huge component to an aesthetically pleasing image. It's not always necessary, but it's a good rule of thumb to follow and can make a mediocre image look significantly better.

Don't forget to try new angles as well. Although there are a lot of great rules of thumb to follow with photography, it would be boring if everyone took photos the exact same way. Instead try taking the photo looking up at the subject, looking down, from afar, and don't be afraid to experiment. If it doesn't turn out well, at least you tried.

Background and Light

These are probably the two most important aspects with portrait photography. The last thing you want is a background that distracts from the subject of the photo, so stay away from places that seem cluttered or have too much going on. Some typical places to take portrait photos are in woods or near a stream, something that's streamlined and easy to distinguish from the subject. An example of a bad background would be a factory with lots of things lying around and lots going on around them. Choose your background wisely, because otherwise it can easily throw off an entire image that otherwise might be fantastic.

Light is another thing that can make or break a portrait photo. If you take the photos in a time of day where the light is too harsh you're going to have shadows and it's going to be really hard to fix in post-production. Instead, try to take the photos where the light is evenly distributed and no parts are washed out while others are not. It's always better to get the image correct in the camera first, rather than needing to fix it after the fact.

Play With Black and White

Not all photos look amazing in black and white, but these photos can be timeless and add a whole new dimension to a photo that you otherwise wouldn't have. Black and white can also be a great option to avoid distracting colors or somewhat awkward shadows that don't work too well in color photographs.

Choose a Focus Point

Having a focus point is crucial to making sure the entire photo is in focus and clear. This doesn't mean you can't use a large aperture to blur the background and other things you want noticed less, it just means you need to pick a focal point, whether it's the eyes, the nose or the mouth, and make sure that is completely in focus, and then you can work on changing the appearance of the background.

Pay Attention to the Details

Ultimately, great portrait photography comes down to paying attention to the details. Whether it's a shirt that's slightly twisted or a few stray hairs in the face, these kinds of details could make a perfect photo just look a little bit awkward. Make sure you're keeping your eyes peeled for these slight mistakes because while some can be fixed in post-production, it's always better to not need to.

Portrait photography is difficult, but it doesn't need to be impossible. If you focus on these tips, your skills will improve immensely and you'll be ready to take on your next client, whether it's a child, new mother or old woman in the street.