

POSING

Guide

by Jay Scott Wood

Your “how to” guide for the best
results at your photography
portrait session!

Cover model: Sonya Arias
Photographer: Jay Scott Wood

What to Expect at your Portrait Session

Your portrait session may be scheduled for outdoors in natural light or in your home with studio lights. Natural lighting from the sun is beautiful, but unpredictable. There is no guarantee what Mother Nature will provide when your appointment is scheduled. For outdoor portraits, you'll need to be flexible as to timing. But don't despair, sometimes what appears to be the worst possible lighting situation can be an advantage. Most people assume that an overcast or cloudy day is the worst case scenario. In fact, the best lighting is provided during an overcast afternoon because this light is distributed evenly, providing excellent diffused light for portraits.



Outdoor light looks best both early and late in the day. Sunrise and sunset is considered 'golden' times for photography. The beginning and end of the day have the other advantage of being relatively cooler in warm summer weather. Sunrise and sunset times are often fleeting however, changing quickly, so those times of the day cannot accommodate clothing changes. During the harsh afternoon sun, a shoot is still possible, so long as we take advantage of open shade of trees or an overhead cover. For the most flattering light, always avoid bright full sun.



Here are some suggestions to help you enjoy your portrait session. First, be sure to discuss your ideas and concerns with me well before the session. My goal is not only to help you create beautiful portrait, but for you to have fun. It is important to me that you enjoy yourself and feel relaxed.

Sleep well the day before your session. A good night's sleep helps you look fresh and ready when you pose! On the day of your session, be prepared with the clothing you want to wear and your hair and makeup exactly as you would like them to appear in your portrait. Don't worry if you have a sudden blemish, retouching is included with your session. Clothing should be freshly ironed, with no obvious wrinkles, stains or tears. These may seem minor, but they will show up in your final photograph. You certainly don't want these flaws to be captured forever in your portrait.

If your session has been scheduled on location at a park, beach or other outdoor venue, a portable changing tent will be provided if you wish to change clothing during the session. The tent is inconspicuous and can be set up anywhere and will provide complete privacy for you to change.

Be Prepared for a Long Day!

Some sessions are quick, but often times it takes a while to get everyone posed and looking just right. Sometimes it is just a matter of getting everyone accustomed to the camera to make them feel comfortable.

Don't schedule other important events during the same day. We may go over the time you've estimated. Eat before the session. We will stop for breaks and lunch when you need it, but don't show up on an empty stomach! Bring a few snacks to tide you over until we can break for lunch. If you aren't a morning person, schedule your session later in the afternoon!

Prepare for the needs of your children. Bring medication, toys, diapers, juice boxes, snacks or anything else you think your child may need.



How to Dress for a Family Portrait

Coordinate outfits for family portraits. Everyone in the portrait should wear clothing that is complimentary in style, color and season. Not everyone has to wear matching outfits, but the clothing you choose for your family should make sense and go together. Someone posing in swimwear next to a person in a suit is not complimentary and will make the portrait look awkward and poorly planned.



Choose clothing that matches the season. Fall weather lends itself to autumn colors, wool sweaters, jackets and crisp long sleeved Oxford shirts. Spring calls for light pastels, floral prints, and suits and ties for formal Easter portraits, or semi-formal with shirts without ties and blazers. When in doubt, well planned casual clothing like chinos and khakis, along with neatly pressed polo shirts or buttoned down Oxford shirts, or jeans and sweaters makes a good choice. A studio portrait with a formal backdrop tends to command more formal clothing, such as suits, dresses and blazers, while outdoor shoots are more casual in nature.

When choosing clothing for your portrait, choose solids and light subtle patterns. Bold stripes, large colorful designs, neon animal prints and brash polka dots stand out and tend to draw attention away from the subject. An assorted mix of patterns and colors will clash and diminish your portrait, rather than to add to it. You and your family should dress in classic and timeless clothing, with colors and styles that compliment one another. Avoid trying to be chic or hip. Timeless styles allow your age to date the portrait rather than the clothing you choose.

Wear colors that show well in photographs, but do not dominate. Darker colors like navy blue, black and earth tones are ideal. Avoid bright shades of yellow, orange, pink and neon colors which can alter skin tones.

Make sure that you have appropriate shoes and socks. Many family portraits are full-body shots, so if you wear sneakers with your dress or suit, your portrait won't look well planned. If you plan to change outfits, bring shoes and socks to go with each outfit. White athletic shoes work well with sports apparel and sports themes, but will stick out like a sore thumb when worn with more traditional casual or formal wear. Brown or black shoes with coordinating dark socks look best. Bare feet only on water or at the beach!



Tips for appearing at your best:

Women should avoid bold and flashy jewelry and instead opt for small unobtrusive necklaces, rings and earrings and wear natural-looking makeup. An oil-control powder or compact will help control shine. Women should also consider applying slightly more lipstick and blush than usual so it shows up in the photograph. Bring extra makeup with you in case you need a retouch.

Oversized and baggy clothes make people appear heavier. It is important that clothing fit properly and is flattering. Clothing should also be age appropriate, not overly snug and not too revealing.

Men should shave before the portrait and trim moustaches or beards. Haircuts should be done two weeks before the session to allow your hair to re-grow slightly to avoid that freshly cut look. Men with shaved or bald heads can avoid that shiny "chrome dome" look by lightly dusting the scalp with talc or an oil-control lotion for men such as Jack Black.



Glasses, Children, other considerations...

Glasses – if you wear glasses most of the time, you’ll probably want to be photographed with them. To eliminate glare or distortion, borrow frames without lenses from your optical store or have your lenses removed. This will save you the cost of removing glass glare from your portrait, which may or may not look natural in the end. If you insist on wearing your glasses and there is obvious glare that cannot be corrected by repositioning, I will usually ask you to remove your glasses for a “duplicate” pose to make retouching easier.



Children - The age of your child will largely determine how you wish to have them dressed. White or pastels look best against a white or light background while dark clothing looks best against a darker background and creates a more formal mood. Dress your child from head to toe, including shoes and socks. I recommend that you select the best time of day for child’s session keeping nap times and peak times in mind. You are welcome to bring along your own props or a favorite toy to make your child comfortable.



Remember that this may be a frightening experience for your child. Keep your mood relaxed. Try not to talk to your child in advance about “smiling”. Coaching a child to “pose” often leads to unnatural “fake” smiles, clenched jaw lines or over exaggerated wrinkling of the cheeks and eyes. Unless the child is a trained actor, coaching usually works against a natural pose and expression!

Do your best to comfort your child and give me time to make them feel at ease. Don’t be disappointed if your child doesn’t want to pose. I will do my best to coach your little one, but sometimes they are too shy to “pose”.

I capture the best shots of a child trying to hide behind mom or when clinging to dad. Often times I will bring along a toy or second camera to allow a shy child to act as my “assistant” and “help” me take photos. With the child engaged, they feel less like they are in the “lime light” and can become more at ease in the process. A child at ease smiles and poses naturally and I often take “silent” photographs when the child isn’t even paying attention. These are usually the best portraits of them all. Patience is the key. Together we will create a special portrait with your little one!

How to Pose

Have you ever watched a professional photographer work? If you have, or if you’ve been the subject of a portrait yourself, you’ve witnessed the photographer giving specific instructions to the model on how best to position their body.

The whole point of a professionally created portrait is to make you look your best, and the instructions given to you by the photographer are precisely what he or she is trying to accomplish. If you were just placed in front of a backdrop, “firing squad” style, and the photograph was taken head on, it would not end up in a very desirable image. The instructions I give you are meant to help show your best features, adopt the most interesting positions and create a vibrant portrait. A slight adjustment in posing for the camera can really make a difference between a good photograph and a bad one.



Sometimes holding your body in unnatural ways to “pose” may “feel” uncomfortable, but visually you will appear more attractive in the final photo than you felt at the time of posing! It’s comfortable to slouch, but is that the best way to capture you in a photograph? I don’t think so. Compare the girl above, the lighting, the pose, it all makes a difference!

Posing 101

Angle your body in front of the camera lens

Have you ever seen a “mug” shot? Standing head-on in front of the lens is perfect for taking mug shots, but not when trying to create a nice portrait. It seems like most snapshots taken by family and friends are posed in this manner. They take you over to a nearby wall, and place you flat up against it. That’s a mug shot folks! Simply stepping away from the background and turning your body slightly to angle one shoulder facing the lens will turn a “mug shot” into a beautiful portrait. That’s it. Easy right?

When one shoulder is closer to the lens, it makes the subject appear slimmer, the head is poised properly and the overall pose appears more dynamic. When the subject's body is angled, they must turn their head to look at the lens, resulting in a difference between the head and shoulders. Don’t worry, I’ll show you the proper way!



Triangles

I use the term “firing squad” often, because people tend to pose in “firing squad” fashion. You know the pose, all lined up waiting to be shot! Forget the line, consider how everyone will look posed in the form of a triangle. Family members in a triangle formation will allow for the elimination of empty space, creating a more intimate feeling. This also permits everyone to be seen in the portrait. If there are more than three people in a portrait, we will create more than one triangle.

Hands, Hair and Skin



Portraits are about focusing on the face. Your face is the first thing that someone viewing your photograph should see. As human beings, we all tend to notice certain things about a person immediately, skin being one of those. Avoid showing too much skin, particularly bare shoulders, in family portraits. Off the shoulder blouses or open shirts on men are best left for magazines and advertising. Hair and hands are often another source of “visual clutter”. Women who wear their hair long should be careful not to tuck their hair behind their ears, or allow it to cascade over the front of both shoulders.

What about hands? When people are uncomfortable in front of the lens, they have a tendency to make fists or they interlace their fingers, which isn’t the most flattering way to appear. The best solution is to hide them away when possible. Men can fold their arms for a very masculine stance; women can place them in their laps, hold a rose or a scarf, and don’t forget about pockets! Compare the images on these pages where hands are present, versus this photograph where most of the hands are hidden. Notice how you focus on the faces and not the hands?

At weddings, how many times have you seen the groomsmen posed in “fig leaf” style with their hands clasped on top of one another over their crotch? Who actually stands like that normally? Guys....here’s a tip, hands behind the back (military style) or in the pockets look much more natural in formal portraiture.

When hands absolutely must show, the subject should create some distance between their fingers, allowing the hands to drape naturally at your side and allow some of the smaller fingers to curl slightly. Women, in particular need to master how to hold their hands and arms when modeling in a full length photo. Of course, I will be there to show you how!



Posing 101

Act like you know one another!

This is the most widely used photographer's trick. Simply tilt your heads toward one another so you actually appear as if you know one another. If you hold your head straight when you are posing next to another person, it will appear that you either don't know them, or that you don't want to have anything to do with them! The simple technique of tilting your heads toward one another and placing your hands around the other person's waist or touching shoulders, creates the feeling of intimacy.



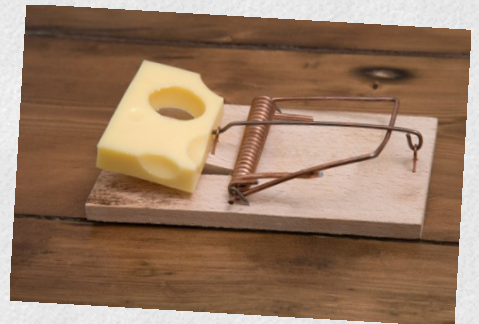
Sit, kneel, stand

No, these aren't commands for your pet, but they are methods for creating more interesting poses. Keep in mind that we will form a triangle when we pose individuals, but it's perfectly OK to sit while others stand or kneel. This is particularly handy for large groups where the height of the individuals in the photograph varies widely. It's often more comfortable to sit during a photo shoot, especially for those who find it difficult to stand for long periods. Grandparents and children often benefit from this method of posing, simply because we can arrange the grandparents and children together, then pose the parents around the grouping. Children are often fidgety and grandparents are more comfortable seated, so they can remain in one place while we pose everyone else around them.

Don't Say Cheese

Face it, cheese belongs on a hamburger not in your portrait! We've all heard it... a family member takes out their camera, asks for people to pose for a snapshot, then they yell out that obligatory phrase "say cheese". The result? A nice big fake smile and squinty eyes!

When people fabricate smiles, they look unnatural, stiff and uninterested. How do we avoid this? For one thing, becoming more comfortable in front of my lens is key. The beginning of every session usually results in "throw away" photos. The initial part of a session are often times when subjects are the most uncomfortable in front of the camera. Instead, I try to keep up a stream of conversation and take photos at random intervals. As the session progresses, everyone in the photo becomes more relaxed and their smiles and expressions become more natural and normal.



So, how do you smile for a portrait anyway? Practice. Yes, practice! In your bathroom, in the mirror, without anyone else looking, practice a fabricated smile. Remember, not a grin, which shows both upper and lower teeth, but instead a smile, which shows only the upper teeth. Actors and actresses can do it on command and it can look very convincing, but practice makes perfect. Avoid over exaggerated smiles, crinkling of your nose, squinting of the eyes. A smile should look natural. Think of something funny, enjoyable or pleasant, then smile naturally.

The camera, the lens, the shutter button...



Pointing a big camera and lens directly at a person can make some people uncomfortable. As the session progresses, I will instruct you as to when you need to look into my lens, at one another or stare off into the distance. Sometimes I will ask you ignore me completely. There is a method to my directions. I am attempting to capture a moment that looks natural, even if that moment is fabricated.

When I ask you to look into the lens, remember that when your final photo is complete, the person you will be looking at isn't me or my lens, but the person viewing your photo! Take, for example, this image of the young man in the tuxedo. You feel as if he is looking directly at you! If you look past my lens or at something occurring behind me, it shows in the final image. Remember, the lens is the eye of your viewer.

Don't worry, we'll get a good shot. I always take multiple photos per pose. The reason is simple. People blink. You should feel perfectly at ease blinking even when I am taking your photograph. I can capture 8 images per second, so there will be one without a blink!

What Happens after your Session?

After your portrait session is over, all the images will be backed up and I will begin the process of sorting through them. Once I sort through all the images, they are color corrected and some light retouching is done. I don't spend a lot of time retouching proofs because retouching is time consuming and better spent on those images you wish to save or select when you order prints. At the time that you choose images that you want, I closely examine and make any retouching adjustments necessary. If there is something obvious that you want corrected, please alert me when you are choosing your images.

All images are reduced in size and loaded onto my web page for proofing. You will be alerted to view your images online and choose those that you wish included in orders or albums. A shopping cart will be added to your gallery so that you may order prints directly from the online gallery. All images will be reviewed, retouched and color corrected before submitting them to the lab. Only high resolution images will be submitted for processing.



Print finishes...

Prints ordered through my web site are offered in three different photo papers. Matte (known as E-Surface or Lustre), Gloss (known as "Metallic") and Black and White. It's difficult, if not impossible to judge print finishes on your computer or in this guide. To accurately determine print finishes, please ask for actual print samples.

All images are printed on professional Kodak paper, which has an archival value of 100 years. All images offered will be in color, unless you specify that you want Sepia or Black and White conversions. Please let me know and I will gladly provide you with proofs to view before ordering.

Please read through my catalog to learn more about ordering prints, paper types, finish styles, image sizes and other products, such as proof books, framed prints and gallery wraps. If you don't see what you are interested in, let me know and I will provide you with availability and a price quote.

As always, if you have any questions, please ask! Thank you! - Jay



JAY SCOTT WOOD

FINE PHOTOGRAPHY

Capture Every Moment!

518 E. Comstock Avenue, Glendora, CA 91741

Telephone: 626-483-3122

Email: jaywoody@verizon.net

Web: www.jayscottwood.com

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