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HANDLING THE CAMERA AND THE SUBJECT

Film for Portraits

For black-and-white portraits, black-and-white panchromatic film is generally used. With a pan film, the appearance of any red spots, veins, or redness in the subject's skin is apparently reduced in the final print, because of the sensitivity of the film to red. Conversely, an orthochromatic film can be used when the texture of a man's skin, especially an older man, is to be emphasized.

When you select a color film for portrait photography, there are two important considerations: What type of product is to be produced and what is the color of the light source?

Another factor to consider in selecting a film for portraiture is the ISO film speed in relation to the intensity of the light source. A slow film can be used successfully with a light source that has relatively high intensity, such as an electronic flash unit. When the same slow film is used with a light source that has relatively low intensity, an extremely wide aperture must be used. When a fast film is used with a high-intensity light source, a smaller aperture is required, increasing the depth of field which may not be desirable for portraiture.

When you are shooting portraits, do not be stingy with film. With a medium-format camera, you have 9 to 15 frames to work with. When you have the commanding officer or the admiral in the studio for a portrait, shoot at least the entire roll. Never shoot just three or four frames. Film is cheap and you want to provide the customer with a variety of poses and expressions to choose from.

MAKING THE APPOINTMENT

When possible, portrait times should be made by appointment. Using an appointment system gives you a good start towards making a successful portrait. By using an appointment system, it tells your subject that he or she is important and will not be wasting time waiting to get into the studio. This brings the person to the studio with a positive attitude, and that is half the battle. An appointment also helps you. When an appointment system is used, you know how much time you have to work with each subject, and you do not have to rush through a sitting because someone else is waiting prematurely. Between appointments you have time to straighten up the studio, load film, complete job orders, screen processed portrait film, and so on.

Appointments should be made at least 15 minutes apart. This way you have time to take care of other business that may come up. If one customer is a few minutes late, you can also use this time to catch up.

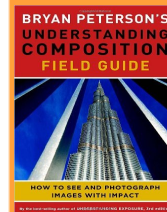
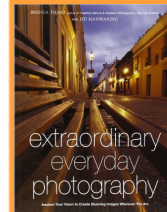
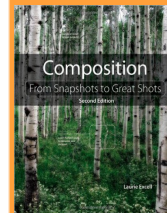
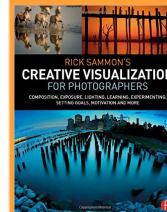
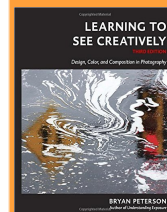
When appointments are made, suggest to the person that they come in early in the day. Most people look their best and their clothes are fresher early in the day. Men, particularly those who develop a heavy beard (five-o'clock shadow), need to have their portraits made at the beginning of the day. However, they should not shave then come right in to be photographed. This provides time for facial blemishes, caused by shaving, to disappear.

Men should have a haircut and look sharp, but the haircut should be a day or two old. Uniforms should be pressed and well fitted with all awards, grade, and rating insignia properly placed. A chart of military awards and decorations is helpful in settling differences regarding the proper placement of ribbons and metals.

THE SUBJECT

When someone comes to the photo lab for a portrait, that person usually feels uncomfortable (like going to the dentist). Your attitude can help make the person feel relaxed. The secret to your success in putting the subject at ease is to convey a genuine and sincere attitude. Let the person know by your words and actions that you plan to do your best to produce a portrait that anyone would be proud to display.

Highlights



Your attitude will leave a lasting impression on the subject and set the tone for the portrait setting. Greet the customer warmly, with a smile on your face as well as in your voice.

You, as the portrait photographer, should make it your business to know something about the subject. What is his job? Where does she work? How long has he been on board? What was her last duty station, and so on? The more you know about your subjects, the easier it is to work with them. Train yourself to gather a quick impression of the subject's intellect, taste, and aspirations. Talk to each of them and gather information regarding their special interests.

Conversation sooner or later strikes a responsive chord and the subject's face comes to life and gives you that natural expression so necessary to the finished portrait. Since the success of the portrait depends greatly on a natural expression, your task is to create a friendly situation whereby the subject feels he has an equal part. The making of a good portrait depends on cooperation. Do not rush a sitting and avoid getting flustered. You must always control the situation.

Invite your subject into the studio in a casual way. Have a bright light on, usually the main or modeling light. This way the shock of turning on a bright light in a dark studio is avoided. Ask the subject to be seated; a motion with your hand may be enough. A person who is treated in a friendly yet respectful manner, and kept in casual conversation, usually strikes a natural pose better than one who is not. If this fails, you must skillfully direct the subject. At times you may have to touch the subject to adjust a hat, sleeve, necktie, coat, and so on. Before touching the subject, explain to the person what action you are about to take.

Talk to your subject and direct movements, from in front of the camera, within the circle of light. It is disturbing for the subject to hear a voice from a dark void trying to direct his or her movements.

Posing is the most unpredictable part of a portrait session. The subject is at a mental disadvantage because he has to follow your directions. This requires subtle handling on your part and an understanding of human behavior.

CAMERA HEIGHT

The best average camera height for a head-and-shoulders type of portrait is slightly above the subject's eye level. This places the subject's eyes well above the center of the picture space. Slightly above eye level then is a good place to start. Most portraits are made from this camera viewpoint, but individual features and characters of the subject often dictate a higher or lower camera position.

For three-quarter portraits, either sitting or standing, the camera height may need to be changed. For example, you may want to start with the camera level at the upper chest or even at the eye level of the subject. Other factors that should be considered when selecting the camera height (especially with a head-and-shoulder portrait) include the shape of the subject's face and facial features, such as a long nose and the length of the subject's neck. By changing the height of the camera in relation to the subject, you can make corrections to emphasize or de-emphasize features of the subject.

For full-length portraits, you should start with the camera height about waist level and the lens parallel to the subject. When the camera height is too high or too low and the camera lens is tilted, distortion of the subject occurs. When the camera is too low, the subject's feet appear large and the head small. When the camera is too high, the subject's head and upper body appear large and top heavy.

A camera position below the eye level of a subject can produce a side effect that may be distracting; that is, showing the nostrils more prominently and causing them to appear as two black holes. To help remedy this situation, you should place the modeling light higher to cast a shadow beneath the nose, so the nostrils appear to blend in with the shadow area.

POSING

The posing bench should be set at an angle to the camera. When the bench is square to the camera, people tend to sit on it with their shoulders square to the camera. This puts their shoulders straight across the picture and such a pose exaggerates the width of the shoulders. This pose is obviously inappropriate for a woman. When your subject is a male dignitary (VIP), a pose like this enhances those qualities. Very few people have positions that demand such a pose. Having the posing bench at an angle to the camera before the sitter arrives should automatically suggest to the subjects that they sit with their shoulders turned slightly from the camera. With the shoulders turned slightly from the camera and the head turned back toward the camera, a sense of motion is created. Even more motion and alertness can be suggested by having the subject lean slightly forward.

Eye Direction

To create an intimate portrait, the subject appears to return a glance to the viewer. The subject's eyes should look near the camera lens (just above or to the side of it).

When the subject looks directly into the lens, a stare will result (fig. 7-1). When the eyes are looking too far away from the camera, a vague, faraway look results (fig. 7-2). The eyes also lose their brilliance and sparkle, and too much white shows when the subject's eyes are looking away from the camera.

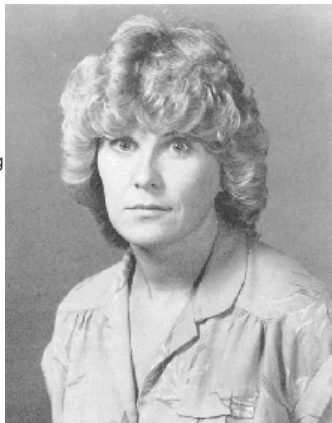


Figure 7-1.—Subject looking directly into the camera.



Figure 7-2.—Subject looking too far away from the camera.

Portrait Composition and Subject Placement

As in every type of photography, in portraiture there must be one, and only one, principal point of interest. Naturally, in a portrait, this is the subject's face. You can emphasize the point of interest in a portrait by doing the following:

- Having it contrast with the background
- Giving it the strongest lighting
- Posing the subject and arranging the props so all elements point to it
- Locating it at a strong point within the picture area

Where are the strong points within a portrait picture space? The *principle of thirds*, as discussed in chapter 5, applies to portraiture as well. These are the areas within a portrait that attract eye attention and are the preferred locations for the center of interest (fig. 7-3). In a portrait, when the main point of interest is located at Point A, the secondary point of interest should be at Point D. If B is the point of interest, C becomes the secondary interest point. Such an arrangement obviously balances the composition.

As stated earlier, the subject's face is the point of interest in a portrait and, of course, covers a considerable area in the picture space. Usually in portrait composition, the eyes fall close to Points A or B. But these positions are approximations only. The final adjustment of the head depends upon several factors: the eye direction, the shape of the body, and the leading lines. No rule can be given for best portrait composition. Rules only give guidance to a rough approximation of good placement. You can only arrive at the best composition for each portrait through the feeling for balance and subject position.

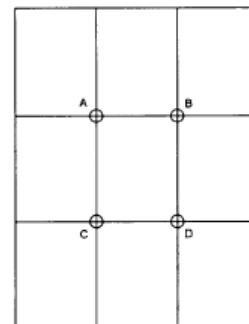


Figure 7-3.—Rule of thirds.

When the head and shoulders are placed high in the picture frame, a sense of dignity and stability is gained. Such placement is particularly appropriate when the subject is a person of importance, such as the CO. However, when the head is too high (fig. 7-4), viewing the picture is uncomfortable because there is a feeling that if the subject stood up he would bump his head. Also, when the head is too high, the proportion between head and body areas becomes awkward. Most inexperienced photographers place the head too low, rather than too high. This is usually the result of the photographer's desire to show as large a head as possible. When the head is too low, there is not enough body to support it (fig. 7-5).



Figure 7-4.—Subject placed too high in the photograph.



Figure 7-5.—Subject placed too low in the photograph.

When the head is turned toward the side, avoid having the tip of the nose from coinciding with the outline of the cheek or projecting only slightly beyond the cheek line. In either case, the far eye will be divided by the nose. When the tip of the nose sticks out only a little beyond the cheek line, it appears as a lump on the cheek.

Before you seat a subject, suggest that the subject may like to check his or her appearance in a mirror. Combing the hair, straightening a tie, setting a hat at the proper angle, and smoothing out the lay of the clothes should ensure a neat, well-groomed appearance. When the subject is in military uniform, be sure that medals, ribbons, insignia of grade or rate, and other accessories are worn properly. These minor details are easily overlooked and failure to correct a discrepancy may make it necessary to retake the portrait.

When a military subject is seated, one particularly important point to consider is the lay of the coat collar. The collar has a tendency to separate from the back of the subject's neck and project outward resulting in the impression of a hump. The coat should be pulled down to make the collar fit properly and make the line of the subject's back appear free from slouch or slump. When the portrait includes only the head and shoulders, the drape of the coat can be improved by unbuttoning the lower button and pulling the bottom of the coat down.

The sleeves of a coat are another problem, particularly when you photograph a seated subject. There is a tendency for the sleeves to work up and wrinkle at the elbows, allowing either too much wrist or too much shirt cuff to show. To help remedy this, have the subject pull the sleeves of the coat down and straighten out the wrinkles as much as possible. Wrinkles, folds, and unwanted creases in a uniform detract from a neat appearance. When the subject is wearing a long-sleeved shirt under a coat and the hands will appear in the portrait, both shirt cuffs should be visible or both should be out of sight. Do not have one cuff visible and the other not.

Stay near the camera and tell the subject what to do. You are obligated to give directions regarding the pose. A subject is not able to see all posing aspects for the portrait. Whether the subject is an admiral or seaman, you are expected to detect and correct any discrepancy in pose, uniform, gestures, or actions, and so on. One of the greatest obstacles to successful portraiture is the timidity of some photographers and the way they handle the subject. Never take a portrait when something about the portrait is wrong because of fear or timidity to speak and act in the presence of high grade. The results will be disappointing and embarrassing.

When the military subject is to be photographed uncovered, be sure that the hat is removed far enough in advance so any impression on the forehead caused by the hatband has time to disappear.

When the subject shows a tendency to squint or blink, suggest that he rest his eyes by closing them for a moment. The facial expression is an important element to a good portrait. Unless some method is used to induce a pleasant expression, the subject will generally appear bored and uninteresting. Telling a subject to look this way or smile is not enough to cause the subject to smile. A forced smile sometimes looks more like a frown. A good method to get a pleasant expression is through conversation. Talk about a recent incident, a funny story, the weather, or any other topic that will cause the subject to concentrate on something other than the business of making a portrait. With most people, a smile is contagious. When you smile at a person, the person usually responds with a smile. Beware of a broad smile 7-8. because it rarely looks attractive, and it is usually not appropriate for a person in a military uniform. While you are trying to induce the expression that will show off the subject to the best advantage, be particularly observant of the details necessary to maintain a neat appearance and good composition.

[Previous](#)

Public domain book (NAVY Training course).