

# So, You Want to be a Better Photographer?

Shooting Portraits



Portraits are one of the oldest applications in photography. People would sit still for very long stretches of time to have their images captured by photographers. Also think about the idea of the "selfie." It goes back much farther than commonly thought- Van Gogh even painted self-portraits. Often, as artists, the easiest and most accessible subject is oneself.

People are common subjects for a photographer; you can shoot your family and friends, formal portraits, large crowds, and even yourself. So consider your subject- will you ask a person close to you to pose for you? Or will you shoot candidly? Who will you shoot? A sister, a significant other, or your closest friend? How will your relationship to your subject change the way you shoot them? Be sure to remember your environment and your lighting; choose a setting where your subject will be comfortable and be sure to be conscious of your light source. Lighting will always make or break an image, but it is especially important in portraiture. Natural and diffused works well, but stark and high-contrast can also be compelling with the right subject. Remember to make sure the eyes are in crisp focus- they are often the most important part of viewing a portrait. You must also decide what sort of expression you'd like to see in your subject; it will determine the mood and tone of the entire portrait session. Remember that your subject does not need to be smiling for a portrait to be good; they also do not need to be looking directly at your camera.

You will want to shoot a lot of frames; sometimes it takes awhile for a subject to get comfortable and often the first images from the session will be stiff and unnatural. Remember, most of the people you know are unlikely to be professional models. You will need to do some directing- tell them how to pose and where to place their hands. Use your

environment to get creative; remember our design principles and composition tips!



[Here you see the frame of the mirror making a natural frame around the subject, also serving as a small window to the art gallery with a glimpse of the painting behind the subject. Don't be afraid to explore your environment and get creative- not every portrait needs to look similar. This is where you'll begin to hone your photographic style!]

If you would like to explore self-portraits, you must decide how to shoot yourself. Remember to remain in a creative headspace. Photographers often shoot in reflective surfaces like a mirrors, windows, and puddles, but that makes your face part of a larger composition. You can also utilize a reflective surface that will distort your image, like water or a fun house mirror. Consider how you want the audience to see you. Formal and posed, professional? Gritty? Dark? There are many ways to depict oneself in photographs that do not necessarily mean you need to shoot head shots.

I hope this inspires you to shoot engaging and unusual portraits! As always, happy shooting!