

Studio and Location Portrait Shoots

Presented by
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With grateful thanks to Jade

Studio

- Camera choice - full frame 35mm has far less depth of field for a given composition than with a small sensor camera.
- Compact or Point and Shoot cameras have a lot of depth of field even at widest lens apertures.
- Lenses - prime 85-100mm @f2.8; [53-62mm (35mm equivalent)] does not exaggerate head features (nose) and hands as a zoom/telephoto or wide angle would do.
- Backdrops - types; coloured, black, white (Ventura 'high key' style)
- Lighting - 'key' and 'fill', 'backlighting', types [soft box, umbrella], lighting positions, modifiers [snoots, honeycombs, diffusers] high/low key

Lighting Setups

- I- Bounce your light sources into photography umbrellas in order to diffuse the light beams and soften the shadows on your subject's face. Harsh direct lighting creates sharp unflattering shadows that make facial features look stark and angular. Instead of aiming the studio lights towards your subject, point them into a photography umbrella that will diffuse the light as it illuminates the model's face.
- Diagram Needed Here

Lighting Setups

- 2 - Try a traditional three-light configuration that is flattering to most subjects. Use two lights at 20-degree angles on either side of your camera and one more light, opposite your main light to reduce shadows from behind. This configuration allows full soft illumination of the subjects face while reducing rear shadows and providing a backlit effect.
- Diagram Needed Here

Lighting Setups

- 3 - Place the studio lights, described in Step 2, progressively farther away from the model. Position the main light where it illuminates the model's face then increase the distance of the front fill light by $1/3$ and increase the distance of the rear fill light by $1/2$. For instance, if your main light is 6-feet from your model, your front fill light should be 8-feet away and your rear fill light should be 9-feet away.
- Diagram Needed Here

Lighting Setups

- 4 - Elevate your rear light in order to highlight your subject's hair. This light is sometimes called a "hair light" because it illuminates the fine hairs around the outside of the head from behind. The rear fill light adds a professional touch that a snapshot just can't achieve. For follically challenged models, you might want to switch this light off!
- Diagram Needed Here

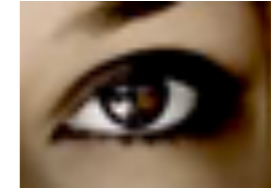
Lighting Setups

- 5 - Cover your main light with a soft box if you want direct illumination with moderate diffusion. This creates a more dramatic effect and is useful when shooting portraits for advertising and business cards. Position the soft box at a 25-degree front angle to your subject and use a reflector instead of a front fill light as described in Step 3. Position your backlight to shine on the backdrop instead of the subject's hair to reduce shadows. Adjust the reflector until facial shadows are very soft, just enough to lend depth to the subject's features.

Flash - catchlights, bounce, colour cast, radio/IR triggers



Eye Catchlights - adding 'sparkle to dull or lifeless eyes'



'specular highlight in a subject's eye from a light source, or the light source itself'

- The position of a catch light is determined by the placement of the “key” and “fill” lights, and changes as their height and angle away from the camera lens change. A studio portrait will show the final product with a single catchlight in each eye, typically in the 10 or 2 o'clock position, created by the “key” light.
- The real reason for the conventional placement of catchlights is unknown, but the earliest portrait painters found that the most pleasing balance resulted when either of those positions was used.
- There is no hard-and-fast rule regarding catchlights; it's simply a matter of personal taste and preference. You will see all manner of catch light size and placement in journals and in professional portraits. There is no “better” or “worse” way to place them. In fact, the only ones who probably really notice them, are photographers!

Bounce, Colour Cast Radio/IR Triggers

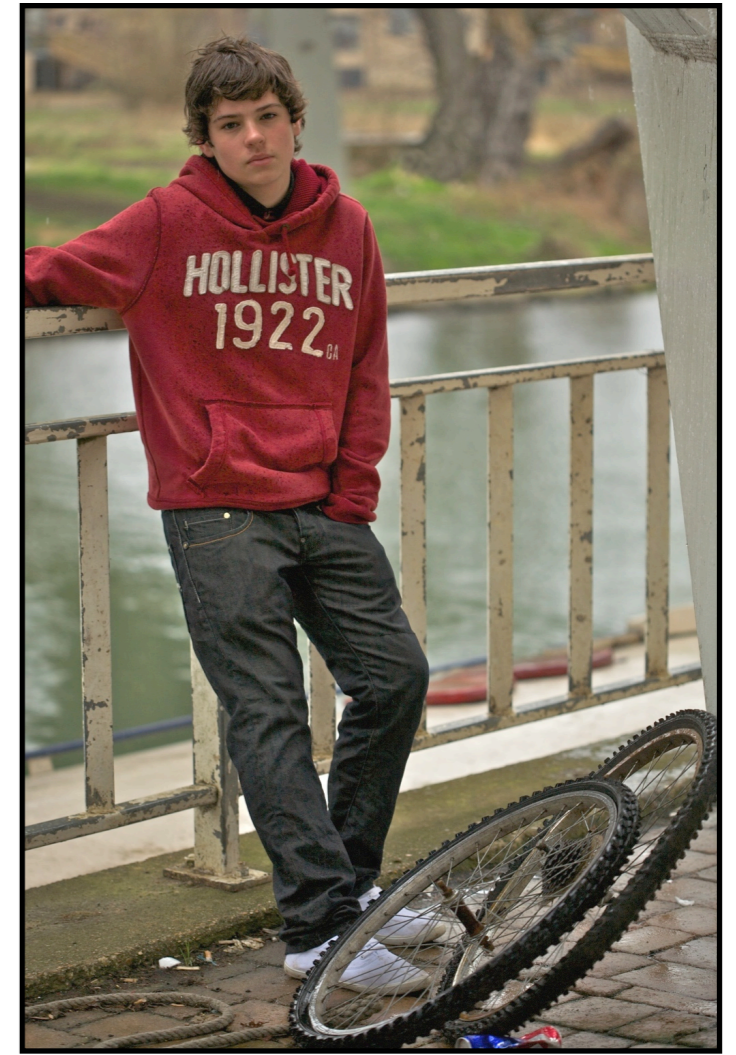
- Bounce - to avoid harsh shadows and to diffuse the light, bounce the flash off the ceiling, wall or nearby fittings (avoid mirrors!). Do this by turning the flashgun head up/down, left/right, or by holding the flash off camera using a cable. Remember that this will affect the amount of light seen by the camera and therefore the exposure.
- Colour Cast - beware of bouncing flash off a coloured surface as this will cast the same colour tone onto your photo. Avoid brown wood panelled rooms or high ceilings, especially if they're made of wood!
- Alternatively, use coloured gels on the front of the flash to create special effects!
- Radio or Infra Red Triggers - these are used to automatically fire multiple flash heads in synchronisation.

Model Positions

- Classic, posed, everything in its place.
- Head Shots - in a $3/4$ front portrait don't allow the model's nose to 'break through' their cheek.
- Avoid over lighting, making the nose look big or creating shadows.
- Eyes - traditionally THE point of focus. If using really shallow depth of field, ensure the eye nearest to the camera is in focus.
- Fashion pose - virtually anything goes! - tight or severe crops, angular, dynamic pose (jumping..)

Location (Environmental)

- Lenses - can use wider angle or zooms to capture some background if needed to set the location.
- Classic locations - House, Gardens, Parks, Country Houses, Castles, Ruins, Beaches...anywhere!
- Contemporary locations - urban (street), modern architecture, street art, derelict.
- Lighting - overcast sky best for diffuse natural light, fill flash to reduce shadows around eyes and chin, reflectors.
- For indoor shoots, use a North facing window or net material to diffuse the light.
- Bokeh (blurred background) - use large aperture (f2.8) for shallow depth of field and keep model away from background. Long zooms can be used (200mm+) at f2.8 aperture, but keep your distance from model to prevent unnatural distortions due to lens compression effects.
- A few examples next...



From top l to r
Backlight studio
North facing window+fill flash
Urban location
Capturing the Spirit

Capture the Spirit

- If the photo captures something that you remember about a person, there is no need to show the whole face clearly. The photo may have a lot of meaning to friends and family even if it doesn't communicate much to a stranger.

Model Positions

- Looking off camera - middle distance (Meryl Streep in 'French Lieutenant's Woman')
- Looking at something in the frame - another person, a prop
- Frame your subject - letterbox, through railings, chair backs, scarves, slats etc
- Challenge Composition rules - head shot at one end of a 'landscape' frame
- Holding a prop (gives something for model's hands to do!) - pet, guitar, ball, backpack...
- Focus on one body part - get close up. Eyes, hair, hands, legs...
- Obscure part of the subject - clothing..
- Take a series of shots - action sequences
- Hold camera at an angle - create dynamism by using some tilt!

Other Considerations...

- Colour or Black and White? Classic portraits are often black and white to give a timeless but bygone appearance - less (information) is more perhaps?
- Get model to lean into camera, and shoot from slightly above. This will give the impression of 'engagement' between you and the model.
- Turn, Twist, Tuck - often used in fashion and portraits to smooth the neck and face lines.
- Change perspective - shoot from below (or above)
- Angle shoulders for head and upper body shots, as shoulders are the widest part of the body and tend to dominate if shot straight on.
- Tethered Shooting - connect your digital SLR directly to your computer, and with appropriate software, see the images as soon as you've taken them.
- WiFi Shooting - an 'untethered' system that sends images wirelessly to your computer.

Thank You

Q&A