

Unit 5.2: Studio Portraits

Every photographer has a different set-up when it comes to creating a studio portrait environment. There are many different types of lights you can purchase for studio lighting. Our school is equipped with very inexpensive strobes and a backdrop. Over the next week you will be learning and practicing with our studio equipment.

Portraits Lenses:

Perspective and Proportion

Perspective depends only on your position. It has nothing to do with your lens.

Shorter or longer lenses don't change perspective, they just make framing tighter or looser.

Different lenses require you to move closer or farther way to get the framing you want, but it's the change in position that alters perspective, not the lens.

If you want a tight head shot, you have to do it from too close for comfort with a 50mm lens, making a 50mm lens a poor choice for head shots. When you're only a foot or two away, noses grow and ears disappear.

Fifteen Feet

Our brains recall people's facial features as they appear to be from about 15 feet (5 meters) away.

Ask a human visual system researcher for the details, but our eyes don't actually see anything by themselves. All our eyes do is send signals to our brains which are then interpreted in ways about which we're still learning.

In the case of facial recognition, when our eyes see a familiar face, it triggers our brain to reconstruct an image of those features as they appear from about 15 feet.

If we see someone from only inches away, we don't see them distorted as a camera would; our brain perceives and reconstructs their features in proportions similar to a distant view.

Therefore we want to be at least about 15 feet away when photographing people in order to achieve realistic proportions.

So what's the optimum portrait lens?

It depends on how much of a person you're showing. If you want the whole person standing, you can use a 50-70mm lens. If they sit down, a 70-105mm works great. If you want just head and shoulders, you'll want a 200mm to 300mm lens, at least, since you want to stay at least fifteen feet away.

Ever see a pro model shoot in the field? The photographer is usually using a big fat telephoto on a monopod like a 300mm f/2.8 or 400mm f/2.8 for head shots.

Video:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uH84-pA7p-c>

Model Issue Resolution

Here are some troubleshooting ideas to use for particular facial characteristics:

Round Face	Pose model 3/4 to the camera. Raise camera angle slightly
Thin Face	Pose model facing the camera
Face with Deep Lines	Use softer, frontal lighting
Blemishes or Scars	Shadow the problem areas, or reposition the subject
Big Nose	Raise chin slightly. Pose nose straight into lens
Small Nose	Pose nose at an angle to camera
Square Jaw	3/4 pose, higher camera angle
Multiple Chins	Stretch neck; ask the subject to lean head toward camera. Raise camera angle slightly
Deep Set Eyes	Light into the eyes
Blinkers	Time the shot after subject blinks
Large Ears	3/4 pose. Only show one ear. Shadow second ear
Eye Glass Wearers	Shoot with empty frames. Position glasses away from lights. Bring lights in from very high, or bounce off ceiling
Dark and Light Hair Color	Make sure there is some separation between the subject and the background regardless of hair color
Dark Hair Color	Check to make sure that background doesn't show through hair; restyle if necessary.
Dark Skin	Open up the aperture an extra stop or two to retain detail. Use a flash to even out the shadows

Ten Quick Posing Tips

Set up your camera and lighting before you introduce your model.

We have already discussed the importance of being prepared, to have your camera ready and your lighting set up in advance. Being prepared will allow you to concentrate on the models and props and your ideas without distraction.

Keep your lighting simple and your direction clear-cut.

Unless you have a very complicated idea, with multiple subjects on a large set, then chances are that you won't need many lights. I know a few professional photographers that only own and use three lights. And I know of one very successful product shooter that only uses available light. So, try to keep it as simple as possible.

Always plan your work and work your plan.

Have an idea and try to stick to it. You may want to start with some very staged poses as part of your idea, then decide to shoot much looser once you feel you have the image you want. This will also break up the monotony for your subject by giving them a break or trying something different.

Take command of every situation; you are the director.

Since you have prepared the details in advance, it will be much easier to direct your subject and to maintain control of the situation. If you feel organized and are relaxed, then directing the action should be easy. The positive atmosphere will permeate the situation and you will get better results from your talent.

Have and project self-confidence.

The models cannot have any confidence in themselves unless they have confidence in you the photographer. You must display perfect self-confidence at all times, even if you feel rushed or slightly out of control. It's best

to mask your concerns in order to make the group feel comfortable.

Instill confidence in your subjects.

If you can maintain a sense of calm and order, then your talent will respond accordingly. There are many tricks to making someone feel comfortable in front of the camera, but the best way is to let them know what you are doing and showing them your ideas as you go along. If you are casual and relaxed, your subjects also will be.

Focus on your model eyes; they are the windows to their soul.

When deciding on your point of emphasis, unless your idea calls for unusual focus, it is a good rule of thumb to try to keep the eyes of the talent in focus. This is especially true of portraiture, but also a good place to start when you approach any idea.

Look for natural and easy expressions.

Even though models are posed, the pose must never look obvious in the final image. Expressions must be spontaneous even if they are in response to planned action. A trained actor counterfeits genuine emotions, but with the untrained subject, you must make it happen and be ready to catch any fleeting response. The photographer learns how to create a situation or an atmosphere, which evokes natural expressions.

Whenever possible use props with your models.

Even when making extreme close-ups it is good practice to provide the subject with something to engross their attention. Whether the prop shows or not, it serves the purpose of creating a natural and easy expression.

Develop something for your models to do.

If you give your model something to do, it gives the photograph a reason for being, the picture tells a story. On the stage, business is carried out with the aid of props. In photography, the same thing holds true. Give your model something to work with and a good picture is likely to be made.