

Group Shoot: Portraits for Portfolios

Even for the most seasoned pro photographers shooting portraits can be intimidating when working with challenging lighting conditions. Here are a few easy tips to help you capture portraits that you can be proud of.

Top Tips

1. Find some open shade

When shooting in the middle of the day, it can be challenging to have the sun positioned overhead, creating unflattering shadows on your subject's face. Positioning your subject within a patch of open shade can be a great place to start. When the sun is high in the sky, shade does not have flat light, as you might expect. Try placing your subject at the edge of the shade to allow light to softly spill into the frame.



Deep shade

Shade's edge

2. Use the sun as fill

During the middle of the day when bright sunlight can be challenging to work with, experiment with placing your subject with the sun at their back and at an angle. The sunlight will act as a back or rim light, and you can then expose for skin tones on the face.

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3. Use reflection

When working with sunlight, you can do a lot by bouncing light onto your subject with a reflector. For example, a hand-held reflector can be used to bounce sunlight onto the face, which works really well when using the sun as a fill light as in the no. 2 photo below. Another option is to place your subject near a reflective surface such as a light-colored building.



No Reflector

With reflector

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Using a building as a reflector

4. Create a bokeh effect

One way to make sure your subject is isolated from the background is to shoot with a very shallow depth of field such as 2.8 or 4. By placing a natural or colorful background behind your subject you can create a soft and lovely bokeh effect. This can give your portraits a dreamy and ethereal feeling. Long prime lenses and zoom lenses can work especially well for this.



No Reflector

With reflector



Another bokeh example

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For more tips on shooting portraits, check out this ZenBlog: <http://bit.ly/1hUPc1T>

Objectives

Partner up

Choose another group member to shoot with and take turns using each other as subjects. Even though it can be uncomfortable at times to be in front of the camera, it can really help you as a photographer to learn how to best direct your subjects and what works well in this regard.

Take a stunning portrait

Challenge yourself to end up with 5 final images that are different from one another. It can be tempting to find a lighting scenario that works and stick with it. Consider trying 5 different lighting conditions for each of your portraits. The more you challenge yourself, the better a photographer you will become.

The Challenge

Create 5 portfolio-worthy images using the following characteristics:

- Pair up to photograph another group member and also be their subject
- Show your subject's unique interests
- Let your subject's personality show through