



Getting ready for your portrait session

Most people don't give a second thought to their portrait session, they just dress "nice" and show up leaving the headaches to the photographer. Sometimes this works just fine, sometimes they are disappointed with the results. I am putting this guide together in the hopes that it will maximize your chances of getting fantastic portraits you are very happy with. This list is designed for the person getting their picture taken, but can also be useful for photographers.

Indoor vs outdoor

Most portraits except driver's licenses and passports today are done outside. The exception to this rule is corporate, business, or occupational photographs which we will discuss below. In this area of the United States, odds are it will be hot. Dress cool. Please do not show up for your session in a long sleeve sweater. Assume you will be sitting very still in the sweltering heat with little to no wind for a couple of hours. I will try hard not to let this happen, but if that is what you are prepared for then you can only be pleasantly surprised if it does not happen.

Other things to think of outside are bug repellent, running makeup (use only very light makeup, and bring some facial tissue to pat the sweat off with), sunburn and a towel or blanket to sit on to keep the chiggers at bay.

For indoor photographs they will typically be at your home or place of business. Be sure to wear attire that reflects where you are. For example, few people wear suits around their home, and few people wear pajamas at work. Dress as you normally would at work (suit, uniform, whatever) and at home you want to be dressed nice but casual.

Clothing

If it is possible, never wear a pattern. This means no plaid, stripes, lines, dots, or any other shape. Patterns tend to exaggerate features making you look lighter or heavier than you really are (no, it always works the way you do NOT want it to, so don't think about magically gaining/losing ten pounds wearing stripes, you will not like the result). It also makes it harder for the photographer to correct for exaggerated features.

Try not to wear fur or fuzzy clothing as it makes the image look less sharp. Also have your clothing ironed or pressed to avoid wrinkles which are difficult or impossible to remove once the picture is taken.

Wear colors that go well with your skin tone, hair color and the background we will be using (wearing red while shooting with a garden or grass in the background tends to make one think of Christmas time). Shooting in front of a red barn while wearing yellow makes you look like a clown named Ronald. Colors such as brown, maroon, blue or green are nice if the background is dark. Avoid beige, white, tan, pink, etc when there is a dark background. With light backgrounds light colors are very nice, especially white.

If your session is more than one person, be sure that the colors all go together well, all blues, all pastels, all very light, etc. If your colors clash then the entire picture will not work. You can however mix colors such as black and white, think of a man in a dark suit (black, navy, or even medium blue) with the woman in a white blouse.

Avoid wild styles, the simple clothing makes the timeless pictures you will enjoy for years to come. Men tend to look better in collars and everyone looks good in long sleeves, even in Texas heat. Women tend to look better in V necks as it elongates their neck and body while flattering their face, they however should not be cut too deep.



Makeup

Photography these days can do a lot more than in the past. To that end it is very important that you not overdo makeup. A simple, light, even application with no harshness is all that is needed, the photographer can take care of the rest. Even if you have a scar, pimple, birthmark, etc that you want covered up, it is better to let the photographer take care of it than for the photographer to fight for hours trying to smooth out ten layers of concealer.

Hair

You should have your hair cut/styled from a few days to a week before the session. Longer than that and it tends to start looking uneven to the camera, sooner and it can be a little unruly. It needs just enough time to get settled in after being cut so that it is relaxed yet even.

Nails

One of the fashions I have seen is to paint the nails silver, or have reflective glitter on them, or even glue little mirrors on them. This is a bad idea because these will reflect light in ways you probably do not want in your final image. Remember that this is a picture I hope you will cherish for years to come, don't spoil it with a fad that you will hate next year. Simple is always better in a standard portrait.

Jewelry

Keep it simple works here too. Pearls are the timeless classic with dress or nicer casual clothing. Avoid mixing gold and silver if possible as it will confuse the eye when looking at the picture. Simple diamond stud earrings are great as well and usually photograph better than dangling earrings. Watches or bracelets are fine and can add a little flair.

Footwear

Often overlooked footwear should complement the outfit. Nothing screams like slacks, black shoes and white socks to avoid that combination. Men typically photograph well with brown or black shoes and dark socks. Women should coordinate their shoes, hose/socks with their outfit.

Other tips

If you wear glasses expect to remove them unless you just have to have them in the picture. They almost never photograph well and even when they do they often require substantial work for the photographer to get them that way.

Photographers work in horrible conditions, standing in one spot for hours (I recently shot a softball tournament and stood in one place for ten hours). Do not expect them to dress overly nice for an outdoor portrait session. Weddings, sure, personal portrait session, photographers will shoot in shorts and a short sleeve shirt.