

## *Worth a Thousand Words*

### *Making the most of your photos*



Photo courtesy Bowie State University

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My favorite portrait I have ever taken shows my friend Alys is a sundress with swirls and flowers of technicolor marker up and down her arms. Her hair is pushed off her face and she's smiling a little sly, showing no sign that the cold temperature of the snow falling on her bare shoulders has any affect on her day. She's outside and the photo is bright and you can barely tell that the porch where she's standing is facing a road that is slowly but surely becoming an ice covered slushy mess. She looks radiant.

Good portraits aren't just images. They are stories; they are explanations of people that capture them in a way that words can sometimes fail to do. Good portraits are raw and real and show something truthful about the people the depict. Good portraits aren't always planned, though sometimes they are. Good portraits can be hard—but there are definitely a few ways to make capturing these images a little easier.

When I was still getting used to my DSLR

camera I took hundreds and hundreds of pictures of my best friend Mike. Some of these photos were good. Some not so much. But taking these photos was important for a couple of reasons. First, it got me comfortable with my gear. It's hard to take a photo you are proud of if you spend your entire time being scared of the camera that is in your hands. Once you get to know your gear, using it and understanding how it works becomes almost second nature. And once all the technical know how becomes second nature, you are able to focus more on the image you are taking, and not the way in which you are taking it.

The second thing that these hundreds of photos did was create a sense of familiarity. Photos come out their best when the subject and the photographer feel comfortable with each other. Once Mike and I felt more comfortable with the roles of subject and photographer respectively, we were able to create images that were more honest and nuanced. Simply put, if your subject feels awkward, your photos are going to look awkward. Don't be afraid to get a little goofy.

Take some silly shots first, with funny faces or weird locations so that your subject feels happy and relaxed.

It's always important to be mindful of how you are framing your subject within the photograph. One popular idea in photography is called the rule of thirds. According to the Digital Photography School, one of the leading photography websites today, "the basic principle behind the rule of thirds is to imagine breaking an image down into thirds (both horizontally and vertically) so that you have nine parts." The intersections of these lines-- there are four of them-- create the areas of an image where photographers should try to place points of interest, for a photograph that is well balanced and visually stimulating. These lines correlate to how people's eyes view images, so this rule allows photographers to work with how people naturally look at pictures, instead of against it.

Playing with different ways of framing can provide interesting results-- the most important rule is to be mindful of what you are doing.

*“Keeping in mind some simple tips and tricks makes our photos better and more fun-- both to take, and to look at.”*

Many portraits have a blurry background while the subject is shown in focus. This is called depth of field. There are a few different ways to achieve this look, but a lot of it has to do with editing and also with the type of lens and camera you use. Prime lenses are lenses that don't zoom-- these allow for a much greater depth of field, creating that blurriness behind the subject. But these lenses can be expensive, so another way to achieve that look is to use a program like Adobe Photoshop to blur the background by hand. It's definitely hard, but the results can be amazing.

One last important tip for portrait photography is that-- like any kind of art-- photography is all about color and light. Think about the time of day that you are shooting. Shooting outdoors in the middle of the day can often create harsh light and shadows, while shooting just before sunset or just after sunrise creates a much softer light and glow that comes out much more flattering.

Fstoppers, a popular photography blog, recommends scouting your location before you even bring your subject there, so you can get a feel for the color and lighting and figure out how you want your subject to dress and what time of day you want to photograph.

Portrait photography really allows people to put their best face forward. It captures personalities, moments in time, and lets us show off the beauty in the people around us. Thinking through our portraits before we take them, and keeping in mind some simple tips and tricks makes our photos better and more fun—both to take, and to look at.

