

# 12 TIPS FOR AN EFFORTLESS SESSION

Want to make things run a little smoother during your portrait sessions? Here are a few simple tips that will be a big difference!

## 1. Plan ahead with the subjects

It is a good idea to meet with the subjects prior to the portrait session. This meeting gives you the opportunity to get to know them a little bit, which will help you later, when you're trying to capture an image that represents who they are. It is also a good idea to discuss what they are looking for. You can get an idea of what style of portrait they are interested in, as well as finding out what shots they want. (e.g. Mom and daughters, just the kids, generation shots, etc.) Additionally, you can make suggestions about how they can best prepare for their session. Check out "Preparing for Your Portrait Session" on [PortraitTutor.com](http://PortraitTutor.com).

## 2. Keep a few things handy

There are a few items which you can keep on hand, that will be useful over and over again! Here's a list to get you started:

- Hairspray
- Comb/brush
- Hairclips/Bobby pins
- Mirror
- Safety pins
- Lint roller



## 3. Direct the session

When you are doing a portrait session, think of yourself as a movie director. You are in charge in coordinating everything. Part of that involves having a plan. Take into consideration the shots the subject(s) would like, and move through them efficiently and effectively. It is a good idea to start with head shots, and gradually include more of the body, saving the full shots for last. The second part of being the director involves *direction*. The subjects will depend on you to tell them what to do. Don't expect them to have any idea what to do. Direct them in everything that you want them to do, and they will feel comfortable, and confident in your abilities.

## 4. Interact with the subjects

Helping the subjects feel comfortable is crucial. If they don't feel completely at ease, it will show in their portrait. One of the most valuable things you can do to help them relax is to interact with them throughout the whole process. From the moment you greet them at the door, to the moment they're finished and leaving, you can maintain an ongoing interaction with them, to help them feel comfortable. Tell jokes or anecdotes, or ask them about themselves. Balance the talking and the listening, and get to know them. If using a tripod, use a shutter release cable to take the photos, so you don't have to stay hidden behind your camera the whole time. This interaction will not only help the subjects relax, but it will also allow you to capture real emotions and expressions. Rather than being flat and lifeless, the portraits will come alive and reflect the subject's character.

## 5. Posing subjects to capture personality

Subjects will rely on your skills to pose them in a way that is both natural and flattering. As you interact with the subject, you should be getting an idea of which types of poses would be comfortable for them as well as reflecting their personality. Some people will prefer a more formal, traditional pose, while others would rather be more relaxed and casual. As a photographer, if you can find poses that capture the personalities of your subjects, they will come back to you again and again.

Many photographers don't have an extensive knowledge of the wide variety of poses available. If you are one of those photographers, and could use a little help when posing subjects, you may be interested in *The Ultimate Posing Guide for Portrait Photographers*. (Available on [PortraitTutor.com](http://PortraitTutor.com))

## 6. Focus on the eyes

The eyes are the windows to the soul. Yes, it's cliché, but it's also true. When you look through that viewfinder, the first thing you should check is to make sure the eyes are completely in focus. It can be the difference between a lifeless photo and a vibrant portrait!

## 7. A few more things to check

Before pressing the button, there are just a few more things to check in the viewfinder. First and foremost is composition. Be sure that the subject's face is dominant in the portrait, and that everything else is secondary. Check to make sure that the overall composition is pleasing and flattering. In addition, it's always a good idea to check the subject's hair and clothes. Make sure everything is laying properly and



looks clean and neat. Most of us have had photos taken where a lock of hair was out of place, or a shirt was sticking out funny, or any number of mishaps! And we never like those pictures, even if no one else notices! So do yourself a favor, and retain the loyalty of the customer by checking to make sure they look their best!

## 8. Taking the shot

You're finally ready to take the shot! Here are a few quick tips for the moment of pressing that button: When shooting, don't feel limited to one position. Move around the subjects and get the shot from different angles. Also, be flexible with camera orientation (vertical versus horizontal). Vertical portraits are more traditional, but there are many situations when horizontal orientation will make a more striking photo. Be sure to take multiple shots of everything. No matter how hard you try to avoid it, you will still get pictures of people blinking! Finally, continue interacting with the subjects. Help them feel comfortable so you can get the most natural-looking smiles in their portraits.

## 9. Capture honest expressions

Everyone experiences a wide array of emotions. So, while it is traditional to have all portraits with the subject smiling, there is no written law that says they *must* all be that way. Watch your subjects carefully, and occasionally steal a shot when they don't think you're ready. Get a shot of them rolling their eyes, laughing at a joke you just told, or getting frustrated at their sibling outside of the frame. Sometimes these portraits can become the most treasured, simply because they are the most REAL. So, take a little creative license and catch them when they think you're not watching. They may just be pleasantly surprised with the results!



## 10. Capture personality

Sometimes we stumble across little tricks to help bring the personality out of our subjects, and we capture their true personalities. Always strive for this kind of success. Here are a few ideas of how to do this. Have a subject bring his favorite CD to play during the session. You may get lucky and capture him playing air guitar – a shot that he'll always love! Or you can invite a little girl to bring some of her favorite dress-ups. In doing this, she may feel more comfortable and begin twirling around the studio. Won't her mother treasure that photo for ever? These are a couple of examples, but you get the idea. Find ways to bring out the personalities of your subjects, and they'll absolutely love the result!

## **11. Come prepared**

You should always be prepared with back up equipment. Chances are you'll never need it. But it's better to be prepared, than not. If some of your equipment should fail halfway through a session, you want to look professional and be able to complete the session. Having a back-up camera is essential. Other items to have on hand would be additional memory cards (or film, if using film), extra batteries for camera and other needs, and extra lighting equipment. If you are ever in a position to need any of these things, you'll be so glad you were prepared!

## **12. Smile and have fun!**

One of the most important things you can do as a photographer is simply to smile and have a good time. If you're having a good time, then odds are that your subjects will be having a good time as well. Your positive and fun attitude will help them relax and enjoy themselves, thus enabling you to capture a better portrait of them. Most importantly, everyone will simply be having a good time!