

Portrait Workshop

by Ian Cran

What follows has been picked up from Lesley Downie, David Oliver and Darren Leal. The first two are very popular portrait and wedding photographers in Brisbane and Sydney who have won many awards for their work, and Darren runs courses and photographic trips and teaches.

The most important considerations:

1. Interaction between subject and photographer.

This is without doubt the most important factor in making a successful portrait, and without it success is only an accident. Before producing a camera make contact with the subject, and continue the interaction through the shooting.

Of course a knowledge of posing helps a great deal, but these decisions should be made before the actual shooting. Directions to the subject during the shoot should be kept to a minimum to keep spontaneity of expression

2. Know your camera and be able to set it quickly. Be ready
 - a. Aperture Wide open, except when you want to include surrounding detail.
 - b. Shutter speed Usually 1/250th but with a good sitter less is possible
 - c. ISO As low as possible but raise it if necessary to get the best shutter speed.
 - d. Exposure Take a reading off the face. It is easiest to use manual, setting the widest aperture and taking a reading off the subjects skin (the face may have make-up so it may be best to read off the neck or chest). If not using manual set Aperture Priority, read off the skin, half press the shutter release and recompose.
 - e. Focus Be careful to focus on your subject. It is very easy to miss the subject and focus on something beyond. With a wide aperture focus carefully on the nearest eye.
 - f. Choose an 80mm to 120 mm lens if possible (these figures are for a full frame camera. For smaller receptors a 50mm to 80mm is just fine).
3. The minimum direction to your subject. When possible plan your composition, placement etc before starting the portrait session, and then concentrate on interaction.
4. Join the digital age and take groups of many shots.

Children and animals

1. Interaction is limited
2. Plan the best site and wait
3. Pre set your camera as above but be sure to have a shutter speed of 1/500th or more, and often choose a longer lens say 120mm to 300mm

Flash?

Never use flash!

There may be night shots where there is no other way, but any light is better than flash. If flash has to be used bounce it off a wall or ceiling.

Occasionally use flash to fill in shadows and when taking a shot against the sun. In this situation reduce the power of the flash by 1 stop. It is better to move the subject to open shade.

Backgrounds A dark background often works best. It is better if the background is not near the subject. Use a wide open aperture to blur the detail in the background.

Lighting

These pros use studios but prefer a home or location. Light from a window (not direct sunlight) and open shade are their first choices.

Reflectors With light coming from just one side it is often good to reflect light into the shadows. The “reflector” can be a sheet, newspaper, book, the sun protector for a car dashboard, a wall etc, as well as home made and commercial reflectors

Stealing Portraits

1. Be far enough away so that the subject is not affected
2. Use a 300mm lens or such like
3. Again shoot wide open and use a fast enough shutter speed to allow hand holding