

Caboolture Photography Club Portraiture Group

Natural Light Portraiture

EVERY DAY IS DIFFERENT

You might have the most beautiful location, composition, model, and pose, but if you don't have the right light then you won't have a good image.

Natural light photographers have one light source, the sun, so choosing the right time of day for a shoot is critical.

Light creates shape, form and texture. It is used to give an emotional context to an image. Using light correctly can turn the ordinary into the extraordinary.

Most of us already know that early morning or late afternoon when the sun is at an angle is considered the best time to take photographs because the light is softer and more diffused. Shooting portraits just before sunrise or just after sunset can provide a soft golden colour and give great depth to your images. Side lighting at this time of day can give a gorgeous texture to the hair. Low light from the back can create gorgeous rim light effects.

Shooting at midday isn't usually considered the best choice because the light causes harsh shadows especially under the eyes and nose. However, don't discard the midday sun entirely, because depending on the type of image you are hoping to achieve you can create some stunning images with your model facing into full sun.

Window and Door lighting is also natural lighting, and you can achieve lots of different effects by using this.

THE COLOUR OF LIGHT - WHITE BALANCE

Understanding the temperature of light aka Kelvin is vital for portraiture. The human eye can make adjustments so that white appears white under almost any coloured light source. Cameras sadly cant do that on their own so we have to adjust the controls manually.

COMPOSITION

1. Draw the viewer in to the centre of interest which is the face or more importantly the eye of the subject. The eye must always be sharp.
2. Frame your subject. Framing can give depth and draws the eye to the point of interest. Try placing your subject in a window or doorway, or use their hands to frame their face.
3. Try cropping. There's no rule that says that the entire face has to be in the image. Tight crops can achieve powerful images.
4. Think outside the square. Try different angles, change your perspective, add a prop or two, have the subject look into camera or away from camera. People interacting can create a story.
5. Use the rule of thirds.
6. Don't Use the Rule of Thirds: Because Rules are made to be Broken Right?
7. Shoot both vertical and horizontal. Move around your subject taking the same shot but from different angles/perspectives

COLOUR OR BLACK AND WHITE

Shoot in colour and then convert to black and white.

Colour can make or break an image. Getting the colour tone right is crucial.

REFLECTORS AND DIFFUSERS

1. Both are important tools for natural light portraiture.
2. Reflectors should never be used as the main source of light. Instead they are used to “fill” light into areas that might be too dark.
3. Different colours of reflector do different things:
 - a. White: adds clean fill to shadows
 - b. Gold: adds warm fill to shadows
 - c. Black: adds more shadow and gives a nice line to curves.
4. Diffusers, also known as Scrims, are used to soften the light and even it out.

DIFFERENT TYPES OF PORTRAIT LIGHTING

1. Loop Lighting : This is when you can see a small shadow of the sitter’s nose on their cheek. It requires the face to be lit from a specific angle. Loop lighting is one of the most popular styles of portrait lighting as it tends to flatter most faces.
2. Rembrandt Lighting : named for the famous Dutch painter, the shadows of the nose and cheek collide. They leave a small area of bright light on the apple of the cheek. It can be dark and dramatic, but it’s not an easy technique to master.
3. Broad Lighting: if your sitter’s face is at an angle, one side will be turned more towards the camera. When this side is in the light, it looks broader – and this is referred to as broad lighting. It will make your subject’s face look wider.
4. Short lighting is when the side of the face, angled away from the camera, is the one facing the light source. The result can be sculptural and flattering.
5. Butterfly or Paramount Lighting : if your main source of light comes from above, the shadow beneath the nose will appear like a butterfly.
6. Split Lighting : with this you cast one side of the face in the light, the other side in shadow. It creates a dramatic lighting effect that is most often used for male subjects

HIGH AND LOW KEY

High Key : In a High Key image the tonal range lies between the middle grey (18% Grey) and absolute white. High Key images are bright and don't have many shadows. They tend to have a dreamy and positive feel to them.

Low Key : In a Low Key image the tonal range lies between middle grey (18%grey and absolute black. Low key images are darker and have more shadow. Low key photos tend to look more dramatic and emotional.

The easiest way to check if your image is High Key or Low Key is to open the image up in Photoshop add a levels adjustment layer and have a look at the histogram.

BACKGROUNDS

1. Always check what is directly behind your subject.
2. Avoid having the head of the subject on a horizon line, window frame, or any sort of line for that matter.
3. Make sure there are no trees or posts sticking out of heads.
4. Try to avoid backgrounds that have bold colours which can draw the eye away from the subject.
5. Try to achieve a more uniform background where possible. Unless of course when you are shooting an environmental portrait where the person might be in a cluttered workplace because that clutter of tools etc also forms part of the story.

CLOTHING

1. Keep it simple.
2. Make sure they are wearing something they are comfortable in.
3. If you are shooting a family or group try to make sure their clothing is all in the same colour palette. Its a good idea to meet with them before the shoot and ask some simple questions such as : will they be hanging this image on a wall in their home? If so then what is the colour palette of the room (wall colour cushions carpets etc) Then suggest they wear colours that will complement the space.
4. Have your subject bring a few different clothing options if possible.
5. Dark plain tops work really well as they highlight the face. Dark clothing is also slimming for fuller figured subjects. However it is important to also check the complexion of the subject as dark clothing on a very fair skinned person can be too contrasty.
6. Try to avoid bright patterns, lines and colours that don't mix when shooting adult subjects. Whereas when shooting children an eclectic mix of colour and style can make for a really outstanding child portrait.
7. Collared shirts help frame the face and can be really flattering.

ACCESSORIES

Beware of shadows! Accessories such as hats and glasses can cause shadows which will might spoil the image. For glasses its best to tilt the subjects head slightly to avoid glare and reflections.

Discourage a LOT of jewellery. Ask if they have a simple piece they want to wear.

Watches can be very ugly, they can cause highlights and draw the viewers eye away from the subject.

PROPS ETC.

Props are a great tool for creating slightly quirky or different images, especially when shooting children. Find props that you can place your subject in, on, under etc.

Think About

Umbrellas

Hats

Crates

Beads

Feather Boas

Fabric such as Tulle

Scarves and Shawls

Old Suitcases

PHOTOGRAPHING FAMILIES

It's all about connection. And as the photographer it's up to you to express that family connection in the images that you take.

Never pose families or groups in a straight line

Use "triangles" whenever possible

If mum or grandparents are in the image then they are almost always front and centre.

Always be prepared for the unexpected shot.

IMAGE PROCESSING

With exception of Environmental Portraiture, all other genres require post processing if you want to submit those images into competition.

If you shoot in Raw then your images **MUST** be post processed in order to bring out the full range of colour, tone and texture.

Shooting in Raw is the digital equivalent to shooting with film. Just as film needs to be processed to produce images, so too does a raw digital file.

There are numerous programs that you can use to post process your images:

Photoshop

Lightroom

Capture One

On One

Others work within Photoshop and Lightroom as Plugins:

Topaz Studio

Luminar AI

Exposure Software

Some provide better outcomes than others.

When post-processing portraits remember:

Less is more!!

Skin HAS texture

The whites of the eyes are NOT pure white.

Portraiture Sub-Genres to consider

Natural Light

Studio Light

Environmental

Editorial

Family

Wedding

Creative

In portraiture there is something to suite everyone.

