

PREPARING FOR YOUR PORTRAIT SESSION



As a photographer, I want my clients to feel prepared and comfortable during their portrait session. This helps me get the best, most natural pictures.

I hope you'll find this article useful when preparing for your photo session. Feel free print it for reference.

Being prepared for your photo session pays off.

Own your role. Of course the photographer you're hiring is a pro and is in charge. They will do their best to provide you with a great experience during your portrait session and with quality images. *But they can't do everything.* Some aspects are in *your* control. If you come ill-prepared for your photo session, this will affect the quality of your photos.

So... what is your role? Your role will involve clear communication of your goals and needs, familiarizing yourself with what to expect, and certain physical preparations.

What is the goal of your photo session?

Do you prefer formal or casual portraits — or a mixture? Let your photographer know. A mix of poses, backgrounds, and styles can present you with options you may not have considered. Taking some photos with props, fun expressions, or interactions can be a great way to capture personality or emotion.

Be yourself. There are all kinds of beautiful. Be your own beautiful and enjoy your photo session! It's not a contest and there's not an audience. Relax, and have some fun!

Archive a slice of life. Life moves on, and this is an opportunity to capture the 'current you'. Great portraits are a treasure! I recently inherited some old family portraits that are a documentation of the last century of my history. Absolutely priceless.

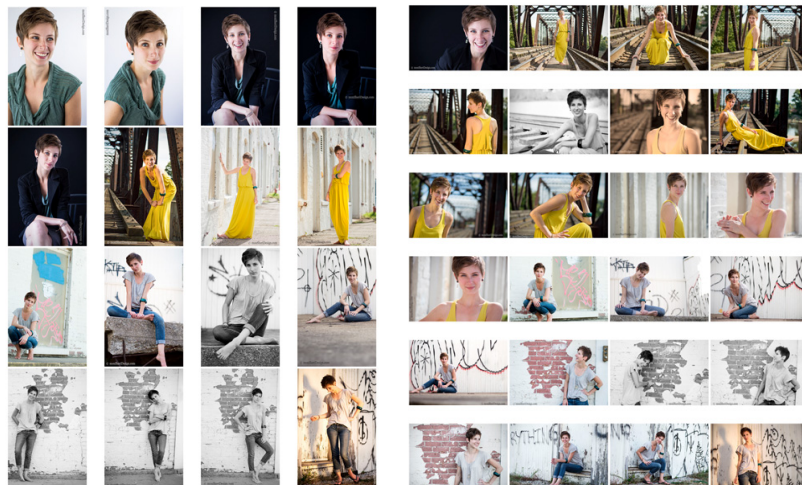
Get familiar with poses.

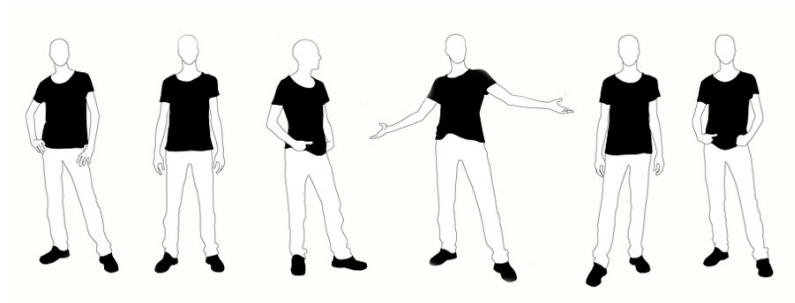
Having some idea of what to do with your hands, ways to stand that you find attractive, and how to interact with your environment can make a huge difference in how well your photos turn out. This will affect how comfortable you feel and look during your photo session. **Practice in front of a mirror and find poses that you think work well for you.**

Pinterest is your friend. I am including a small number of posing examples in this article, plus there are many examples of poses on Pinterest:

- **Senior Picture Poses**
<http://www.pinterest.com/search/pins/?q=senior%20portraits%20poses&rs=ac&len=16>
- **Couple Portrait Poses**
[https://www.pinterest.com/search/pins/?q=couple%20portraits%20poses&rs=typed&term_meta\[\]=couple%7Ctyped&term_meta\[\]=portraits%7Ctyped&term_meta\[\]=poses%7Ctyped](https://www.pinterest.com/search/pins/?q=couple%20portraits%20poses&rs=typed&term_meta[]=couple%7Ctyped&term_meta[]=portraits%7Ctyped&term_meta[]=poses%7Ctyped)
- **Family Portrait Poses**
[https://www.pinterest.com/search/pins/?q=family%20portraits%20poses&rs=typed&term_meta\[\]=family%7Ctyped&term_meta\[\]=portraits%7Ctyped&term_meta\[\]=poses%7Ctyped](https://www.pinterest.com/search/pins/?q=family%20portraits%20poses&rs=typed&term_meta[]=family%7Ctyped&term_meta[]=portraits%7Ctyped&term_meta[]=poses%7Ctyped)
- **Children's Portrait Poses**
[https://www.pinterest.com/search/pins/?q=children%20portraits%20poses&rs=typed&term_meta\[\]=children%7Ctyped&term_meta\[\]=portraits%7Ctyped&term_meta\[\]=poses%7Ctyped](https://www.pinterest.com/search/pins/?q=children%20portraits%20poses&rs=typed&term_meta[]=children%7Ctyped&term_meta[]=portraits%7Ctyped&term_meta[]=poses%7Ctyped)

If you find some you like, share them with your photographer!





Google it! If you Google *photo sessions* or *photo shoots* you may find it helpful to **watch a few videos about the process**, so it will seem more familiar when you approach yours.

What should you wear for your photo session?

- **Make sure your clothing is ironed** if you don't want to look rumpled in your portraits.
- **Bring props:** instrument, dance shoes, hats, or mementos for a special portrait or detail shot.
- **Specialty clothing** that reflects you or your cultural heritage.
- Bring one to three **changes of clothes** if this is included in your session. Discuss any clothing change limitations with your photographer. *Remember that clothing changes take their toll on time, energy — and your hair.*
- **SENIORS:** props or clothing that commemorate your high school experience, your personality, your passions, your memories, your interests. (ie: your prom dress, sports uniform, instrument, dance shoes, etc.)

Dos & don'ts for portraits:

- **WOMEN:** Lipstick and moderate makeup make your features pop, **especially lipstick**. Not super dark, unless you're aiming for drama. Use and bring powder to avoid shiny skin, plus any products you'll need for touch-up.
- **Don't wear lip gloss or glossy lipstick.** Glossy looks like white spots or multi-lip-tones on camera.
- Make sure **your hair is neat**.
- **Hairspray is your friend for headshots.**

- **Other hair products:** I wouldn't recommend using glossy-looking hair gel on short or long straight hair. Your hair will look greasy on film. Use a hair product that does not have a 'wet look' for short or straight hair. *Exception: 'Wet-look' hair products can look nice on curly hair.*
- Do use **eye drops** before you come if your eyes are bloodshot.
- Don't use make-up with **skin glitter/sparkles**. Glitter comes out as plain white 'blown out' spots on film, and they even look like small pimples sometimes.
- **Use a lint brush** before going to your photo session, especially if you wear dark clothes and have pets.
- **MEN:** A pimple is easy to photo-shop out — **5:00 shadow** is not. **If your photo session is in the afternoon or evening, please shave again before you go.** If you go to your photo session with 5:00 shadow, you will have 5:00 shadow in your photo.
- **HEADSHOTS:** Choose **clothing that looks professional** and is not busy. Classic, clean lines are best.
- **Don't try to look like a different person.** This is not a beauty contest, and you don't need to look 20 years younger. It's a good goal to look your best, but you need to look like you. Everybody has their own look, and their own beauty. *Be happy in **your** skin.*

OTHER SPECIFIC TIPS

Newborns

- Most newborn photographers have their own set of **props** especially for newborns, but if you have a special blanket, newborn cap, headband or other props that you would like to try in a pic, bring it along.
- Don't forget to take some pics that **include mom and dad** (and possibly siblings).
- **If you include siblings, bring reinforcements.** Have grandma, an aunt, or a dear friend that the children are comfortable with on hand to entertain the sibling(s) and to manage a delayed arrival so the baby-only shots can be accomplished first. This way if all composure dissolves as it often does with babies, you are more likely to have gotten the most essential images.
- Do your best to have baby in a **sleepy, content state** for the photos. The more content baby is during the pics, the better the pics will be.

Maternity

- Do you know if you're having a boy or girl? If you do, you and your photographer can have some fun with **gender-reveal pics**.
- If you have an **ultrasound pic**, bring it along!
- **CLOTHING:** If you want to do B&W photos, bring a black tank-top, black yoga pants or shorts — even if they are not maternity. If you want bare-belly shots you can scooch yoga pants, non-maternity jeans, or a skirt underneath your belly. A flowy blouse or dress will look nice for some types of photos.
- **Include dad &/or siblings** in some of the photos, if you like.

- **Props:** Bring a shirt, shoes, boots, baseball glove, hat, etc., if you like. These can be cute propped on the belly, held by mom or a sibling, or as a detail photo for the baby's photo album or bedroom wall. Then you can photograph baby with it in newborn pics!

Children

- Inform the photographer of the **age, sex, name, and any special needs** of children ahead of time.
- **Bring a favorite toy** or other prop that is comforting to your child if you don't mind including it in the photos — or keep it hidden to pull out if needed.
- Try to schedule your session so you **don't miss nap time**.
- **Make sure kids are not hungry.** Bring a non-messy snack, just in case.
- **Teeth and faces should be thoroughly cleaned** before beginning and as-needed, so bring wipes.
- **I do not guarantee smiles.** I am stuck behind the camera. And I'm a stranger. Please plan to help your children smile and be entertained for your photo session, *if that's okay with your photographer*. That can be a good way to get a genuine smile from young children. In my opinion, children don't have to be looking at the camera. They don't even have to be smiling (though I usually aim for that). Some of the best pics I've taken — and some of my favorites that others have taken — do not include a smile.

Family/Group

- **Relax.** It is important that your group is not tense for your photo session. Pictures can still be good if everyone is not primed just so, and even if a little one is acting up. Furthermore, those 'imperfect' photos may be some of your favorites later. Try to not be overly formal or rigid in your expectations of children — or the results. *Young children don't generally do formal well, but they are awesome at casual!*
- A group can include a lot of people, and this can include a lot of dynamics and obstacles. Try to **be patient with each other** and with having to produce that same old smile again and again.

Being properly prepared for your photo session is an investment.

If you're going to do it, do it right. Wouldn't it be a shame to spend the money, time, and preparation and not be happy with the resulting portraits? If you take charge of your part of the process the pay-off should be an increase in portrait quality, and who doesn't want that?

Do you have any great tips to share?

I'd love to hear them! Please feel free to scroll to the end of this article and add your tips or comments!

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