Posed Portrait Session Using Natural Window and Doorway Light

- Focus on at least two <u>people</u>, or one person in multiple settings. Do at least a dozen shots of each.
- **Your goal is to capture photos more expressive, creative and powerful than common social media snapshots of family or friends, or super-cliché (and SUPER stupid looking) 'I've got attitude' shots.**
- **Use predominately indirect light from windows or doorways** – no overhead room lights or flash.
- Take photos of **the whole person and environment**, get closer and shoot **head and torso shots**, and get in even closer and do a few **headshots** and maybe some shots of hands or interesting details.
- Use clothing and props to help get the look you're going for.
- Consider background, depth of field and shutter speed, different angles and the rules of composition.
- Leave nothing unwanted in the photo. Take control and make or move to the setting that you want.

Preparing:
- Research portrait examples, clothing, props, settings – create a mood board. Come up with some ideas you want to try and moods/emotions/stories you might want to convey. Collaborate with your sitter if desired. Have printouts showing poses and looks with you to refer to when photographing.
- Coordinate with your model so they wear or bring any desired clothing and props.
- Scout out locations – cafés, libraries, your workplace, lobbies, stairways etc. Keep your eyes open to possibilities.
- Find a window or doorway that lets in light, preferably <u>not</u> direct sunlight. A north-facing window or doorway is perfect, if available. Feel free to break this rule for some of your photos if you can make good use of sunbeams through blinds, curtains, cracked-open doors etc.
- Look around at what will be in the photo and decide what you want to keep, what you want to change or get rid of, and what you want to avoid having in the frame. For tight shots, if you want a plain background and don't have one, hang up a dark coat, blanket etc. behind where your subject will be.
- Think of things you can use as reflectors (for fill light), or flags (to block light).
- Practice posing yourself to see what looks good, so you can more easily demonstrate to and direct your model.

General do's, don'ts and tips:
- **Photograph during daylight**.
- Turn off any overhead room lights and lamps that are not doing what you want.
- **Turn the camera** and shoot **portrait format** 🖼 shots as well as using landscape format 🖼 **!!!**
- Do not cut off fingers or toes.
- Avoid weird mergers – lamps growing out of heads, etc.
- Focus has to be sharp on the near eye of the person. The eyes should have catchlights.
- **Your model should not be holding any stupid electronic devices. NO PHONES. Or cameras.**
- **NO CHEESE FACTOR. NO STUPID HAND SIGNS or snapshots. Capture something genuine.**
- The window or doorway is just the light source – it (and what you see through it) should not be in the photo UNLESS it adds to the picture.

Posing and composing the subject:
- Look and feel relaxed - this will help your subject look and feel relaxed. Treat what you are doing as serious so they do too. Refer to it as a 'portrait session' rather than a 'photo shoot'.
- Be interested in them, not interesting – that's their job. Ask about them, draw them out, get them talking.
- Put on some music to set the mood. Find out what your model likes to listen to.
- Use visual cues to show your model what you want. Model the pose for them, show them example photos, use directions like "Turn your face toward the window and your shoulder toward the camera" rather than "to the left".
- Give positive feedback for what's working, ignore bad stuff.
- Watch the eyes – you want a genuine expression, not forced. Have the model look away from the camera after a shot, then look back for the next one. Vary poses slightly to keep things interesting for them.
- Give their hands something – BESIDES A PHONE – to do if it might help.
- Suggest they think about something pleasant and calm (depending on what you want) – a favorite vacation place, meeting their idol, giving a friend a present or surprise, etc.
- Including hands (caught or posed in a genuine gesture, not flipping off the camera or making some stupid hand sign) in a headshot or head and torso shot can be very expressive.
- When composing in the viewfinder, try not to cut off your model at awkward places (see next page).
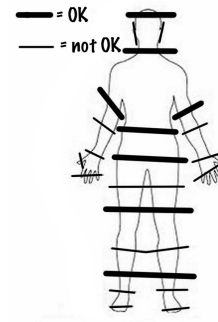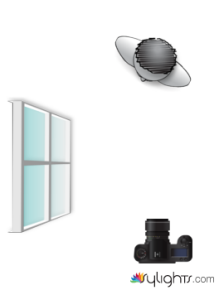
Tech notes:

- Shoot the lowest ISO/best quality that still gives you the shutter speed you need (unless you're going for an effect).
- Apertures are often almost wide open enough (f/5.6 and below) so that the background is at least a little blurred to help separate the subject from the background.
- For photo's where the subject is holding still, shutter speeds down to 1/60th a second are fine if you can avoid camera shake. 1/125th – 1/250th are probably more "normal" speeds; below 1/60th is still doable but blinking and little movements can become an issue (and you'd likely want a tripod).
- Tripods are good for larger cameras and longer lenses. They are also good because you can compose the image and focus, then take your eye away from the viewfinder and talk to the subject or just wait more naturally for the right moment and make the subject a little less conscious of the camera.
- Generally, use a 50mm or longer lens for portrait work. For film and full-frame digital, 70-85mm is a classic focal length, and 200-300mm can be used to help blur the background and flatten features. Wide angle lenses are generally not used for close-up work because in order to fill the frame with the subject you have to get closer, which exaggerates the size of the nearest features and distorts the subject.

Some examples from Nick Fancher, who has all sorts of great tips.

Shade against sun   **Sun against shade**
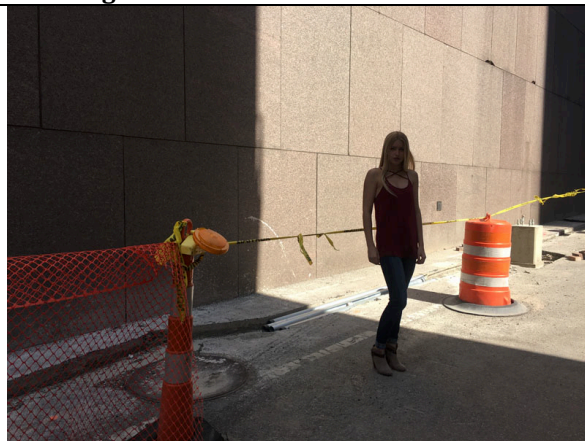
In this first setup, I looked for a spot in the shade in front of sunlight (preferably a plain background). As long as the background is 3-4 stops brighter than the subject in the foreground, it will blow out white when you expose for the subject.

Here I looked for the opposite: a spot of sunlight with a background of shade. I placed the subject in the doorway of a building so that just her face was emerging from the shadows. When the sun hit her space, I exposed for her face, leaving the rest of the scene dark.