

# ALTON CAMERA CLUB



## PORTRAITURE 1:

Here are some initial and simple guidelines to get you started with portrait photography. There are many comprehensive books available on portraiture and I would recommend that if you find portraiture fun and satisfying then you must read an number of these books in order to develop you talent.

General:

Portraits may be taken in both 'landscape' and 'portrait' formats. Which format will depend upon what you are trying to achieve with the photo.

Make sure you are using a lens suitable for portraits. Wide angle lenses will distort the features in an unflattering way. The ideal is a 50mm prime lens, however longer telephoto lenses can be used from further away. Remember the multiplication factor of your camera [due to sensor size] may also have an effect on the result.

Consider the depth of field you want, and set the aperture accordingly. An out-of-focus background emphasises the subject.

Examine the background. If necessary have the subject move so that the background is less cluttered or inappropriate. Lamp-posts growing out of the head does not make for a great portrait!

Remember, you can crop and rotate the image during post-capture processing. Tilting the subject in the frame can, on occasions, be OK, but be selective and certainly don't overdo it.

Check on colour combinations between subject and background. Some combinations can be good, others particularly vile.

If necessary, use the background to give a setting to the subject, so the viewer can tell the story behind the picture.

If appropriate 'frame' the picture with an item not part of the subject, e.g. looking thro' bushes, thro' the handle of a jug[!!], thro' a doorway, etc.

Tight close-ups make excellent pictures, but try to ensure that there is enough of the face to make the person recognisable.

Street photography: many people are embarrassed to take pictures of people they don't know. Either take them from a distance using a long telephoto lens or simply ask them if they would mind having their picture taken. If necessary tell them you will send them a copy later [and do so!]. Oddball characters make interesting photos especially if you can establish a context for them.

Light:

Use natural light where possible for a gentle graduation of light and shade.

Strong sunlight makes good portraits almost impossible. Take your subject into the shade before taking the shot. This is especially important at weddings where the bride is wearing white [or a light colour] and the groom is wearing a dark or black suit. In bright light you will lose the detail in the clothing.

Be careful when using side lighting. It will show up all the imperfections of the skin, e.g. spots, wrinkles, warts and all...

Candlelight produces excellent portraits, however remember it will generally require a long exposure with the expectant problems this will cause.

Try not to use a high ISO setting as this will cause noise, especially noticeable against a dark background or clothing.

Use of flash requires careful thought. On-camera flash is useful when taking a subject against a bright background, as in-fill, in order to prevent the subject be too dark. Do not get too close and beware of red-eye.

If you have a separate dedicated flash unit use a diffuser or reflector to avoid the harsh effects direct flash gives. Indoors, point the flash upwards and bounce the light off the ceiling. This gives an overall softer light and avoids the strong shadows direct flash gives.

Dave Robinson  
Alton Camera Club