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FLATTERING PORTRAITS

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USE THE RULE-OF-THIRDS FOR PROFESSIONAL FRAMING

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FINE-TUNE YOUR FOCUS FOR SUPER-SHARP PORTRAITS

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How to use the rule-of-thirds for professional framing

- **POSE YOUR MODEL**
  Build a rapport with your model and keep the conversation flowing to keep them relaxed and comfortable. Go on a short walk until you find a colourful backdrop you like the look of, then ask the model to pose in a position you like. Always ask for permission first if you want to physically move them into position.

- **CHOOSE A FOCAL POINT**
  Most of the time the closest eye should be the focal point of a head and shoulders portrait – it simply looks more flattering than if the nose or lips are the sharpest point of focus. Consider eyes-on and eyes-off poses, where the model is looking at you and away.

- **USE THE RULE-OF-THIRDS**
  When you’ve decided on a focal point (usually the nearest eye), you can achieve a pleasing composition by placing it within the frame using the rule-of-thirds. This is when you divide your scene up into nine equal boxes to create a rule-of-thirds grid. Positioning your focal point on one of the four intersecting points of the grid (called powerpoints) will give you stronger framing.

- **THINK ABOUT SPACE**
  When you use the rule-of-thirds, place the leading eye on the intersecting line that allows the model to look into the frame. Having the model look into the frame creates active space.

**EXPERT TIP** USE YOUR FEET TO ZOOM
If you’re using a prime portrait lens with a fixed focal length you won’t be able to zoom in or out to make your model larger or smaller in the frame. Instead, use your feet to move backwards or forwards to change the scale.

**EXPERT TIP** USE A REFLECTOR
Flash can cause harsh, unflattering lighting on portraits. Instead work outside and use the natural light to light your model. If needed, bounce a little bit of light back in with a reflector to fill in some of the shadows.

How to master your settings to give your shots more impact

- **USE APERTURE-PRIORITY**
  Put your camera into its aperture-priority mode, as this will allow you to change the aperture value. This is a hole inside the lens that opens or closes to let in light or restrict it. A wide aperture, such as 1/3.5-5.6 on a kit lens, lets in the most light for faster shutter speeds. This wide aperture will also help you blur backgrounds.

- **USE A PORTAIT LENS**
  The ideal focal length for tight head and shoulders portraits is around 85mm. But this is around 50mm when using a camera with an APS-C sensor due to the crop factor. 50mm lenses have super-wide apertures, usually f/1.8, to blur the background further. Don’t have a portrait lens? Set your kit lens to 50mm and dial in the widest aperture value (usually f/5.6 at 50mm) for similar results.

- **ADJUST THE ISO**
  When you use aperture-priority the camera works out the shutter speed. You need to tweak the ISO until you get a shutter speed of 1/100sec or faster to reduce camera shake when using 50mm or 85mm lenses.

- **WORK IN JPEG**
  To keep things simple, we suggest working in JPEG rather than RAW, as this will allow you to upload your shots without having to edit them first.

How to fine-tune your focus for super-sharp portraits

- **USE SINGLE-SERVO AF**
  Many cameras have different autofocus modes. For portraits it’s best to use the Single-Servo (AF-S) mode, which focuses once and locks on when you half-press the shutter. This is preferable to the Continuous (AF-C) mode, which will continually focus for as long as you half-press the shutter.

- **CHANGE THE AF AREA**
  When you’ve framed up on your subject you’ll want to position your active AF point over the model’s nearest eye to make sure this is the focal point. Many cameras have an Auto AF mode where the camera will decide where to focus for you. This isn’t ideal as it could focus anywhere in the frame, including the background. Instead, use your camera’s Single-Point AF mode, which will let you place a fine point over the exact area you want to be sharp. This area is usually a red dot or square when looking through the viewfinder.

- **HALF-PRESS TO FOCUS**
  If there isn’t an active AF point in your viewfinder close to where the model’s nearest eye is, simply set it to a nearby point. Now half-press the shutter to focus on the eye and keep the shutter button half-pressed to lock the focus. Recompose using the rule-of-thirds and press the shutter all the way home to take the shot.

**EXPERT TIP** FOCUS IN BRIGHT CONDITIONS
Shooting towards the sun can produce flattering portraits with hazy, diffused light from flare. This can make it hard for cameras to autofocus though, so shield the lens from the sun with your hand or a lens hood.

**EXPERT TIP** INVEST IN A PORTRAIT LENS
Portrait prime lenses such as a 50mm (APS-C) or 85mm (full-frame) are essential if you want to take your portraits more seriously. They usually have wide f/1.8 or f/1.4 apertures to make it even easier to blur the background.

How to review your images to ensure great results

- **CHECK THE SHOT**
  After you’ve taken a picture, check it on the back of your camera using the Playback button. Zoom in using the Playback Zoom button and check that the leading eye is pin-sharp. If you’re not happy with the image, now is the time to tweak your settings and take another one.

- **MAKE SHAKE DISAPPEAR**
  If you see camera shake – the blur caused by handholding your camera – make sure you’ve opened the aperture as wide as it will go and increase the ISO until your shutter speed is at least 1/100sec. If the shake persists, increase the ISO incrementally until your shots are sharp.

- **PERFECT THE EXPOSURE**
  If your pic is too bright or dark you need to adjust your exposure compensation (usually depicted as a square with a + and - on it). If it’s too bright, dial in -1 or -2 stops of negative exposure compensation. If it’s too dark, add in +1 or +2. Take another shot and check that it looks right.

- **GET THE RIGHT BLUR**
  You can draw the viewer’s eye to your focal point by blurring the background with a wide aperture. If you’re using the widest aperture available on your lens and the background is too sharp, ask your model to move away from it as this extra distance will make it easier to blur.

- **PERFECT THE EXPOSURE**
  If your pic is too bright or dark you need to adjust your exposure compensation (usually depicted as a square with a + and - on it). If it’s too bright, dial in -1 or -2 stops of negative exposure compensation. If it’s too dark, add in +1 or +2. Take another shot and check that it looks right.