Beginners' Guide to **digital**
photography

[ **Part 7: Portraiture** ]

## Babies and Children
The best tips for capturing the little ones

## Weddings and Social Occasions
How to perform when the stakes are high

part seven

# Master the Basics

By far the most popular subject in photography is people. Whether it's snapshots of family and friends, special occasions or strangers in a foreign land, anyone who has ever picked up a camera has amassed a vast number of portrait images.

There are a couple of basics to remember when photographing people. Always ensure the eyes are in sharp focus. Look for soft lighting situations as it's generally most flattering to the skin tones, and watch for distracting backgrounds. If you can't move your subject, select a shallow depth of field to blur the background and draw your subject out.

Use a bounced or defused flash or even reflectors to improve lighting conditions or move your subject close to a window for a natural effect. And finally, get up close. By removing all other elements in your frame and just capturing your subject they won't be competing for attention with other distractions. Zoom in on your subject, and then zoom in further. You'll notice your images will become increasingly more dynamic.

# Babies and Children

When photographing babies, it's best to get down to their level. By crawling around on the floor you enter their world and end up with far more interesting images than when shooting from up high. Get in nice and close and turn off your flash. Sudden bursts of light will not only startle baby but aren't good for their young eyes. Instead, choose a higher ISO setting which will enable you to achieve a faster shutter speed in low lighting.

Older children are easier to photograph. It's still advisable to shoot from their level. Capture candid moments when the child is absorbed in a game and unaware of the camera, or playing at the park, swinging or sliding.

Don't limit your photography to peaceful, happy moments. A crying child can evoke deep emotion in the viewer. Crying and tantrums are just another part of childhood and should be captured as you would any other moment. Other great moments to capture include shy times, hiding behind mums' shirt, or to the other extreme, showing off and hamming it up for the camera.

## People in Their Environment

The essence of environmental portraiture is to define the person within their working or living environs. Doing so tells the viewer a story about who that person is, as well as where and how they live. This style of portraiture can be extremely evocative but can be difficult to achieve as you'll often find that whilst trying to define a subject you are also creating distraction.

When framing your image, always remember the person is the main subject, and be very aware of all objects within your frame, choosing carefully which to include and which to exclude. Ask yourself, "What elements help to tell the story of this person?" and include those narrative elements. In cluttered scenes, you can try

using depth of field to selectively focus your subject to ensure they are not lost in the confusion.

Strangers tend to be less threatened by photographers when they photograph from a distance, so by using a zoom, you can get up close without being too obvious. Always be friendly and sensitive to cultural reactions and ideas of privacy; if a person is looking uncomfortable or doesn't want their photo taken, move on. Ask permission before photographing other people's children, offer to send them copies of the photographs and then make sure you actually do!

## Posing Your Subject

When photographing a group of friends and family, pose them so that their heads are very close together. This conveys the closeness of their relationship and gives the image a casual friendliness.

When photographing head and shoulder portraits, ask your sitter to angle their shoulders; as shoulders are the widest part of the shot, angling the shoulders helps give the shot balance and is not only more flattering, but makes for a more interesting image.

People never know what to do with their hands when sitting for a photograph. Encourage them to keep their hands relaxed with fingers separated, rested on a leg or chair, and photographed from the side. If they are feeling awkward you could give them something to hold but it must be relevant to the image and shouldn't be distracting.

# Weddings and Social Occasions

Agreeing to photograph a couple's wedding is a huge responsibility and one you should only undertake if you are extremely confident that you have the necessary skills and are completely familiar with your camera.

Firstly make sure you have several large memory cards as well as a spare set of batteries for your flash as well as camera, as you'll likely be snapping a large volume of images. Also ensure you are shooting using a lossless file format. Quite often couples will request enlargements for themselves or as gifts for family. Consider using the continuous shooting mode. You will find it handy in times when a lot happens quickly. You might want to turn the sound off on the camera too as this is often distracting, especially during the ceremony and speeches.

There are no retakes with weddings so preparation is paramount. Talk to the couple beforehand to find out what kinds of photographs they'd like you take and make a checklist that you can refer to during the course of the day. Ask for the itinerary in advance so you know what's coming up and can be prepared. Plan to arrive at the reception early, before tables are disturbed and so that you give yourself plenty of time to really look around.

Also, get a list of where the couple will be going on the day: e.g. the bride's home, the groom's home, the church, the location for the formal photos, and the reception. By visiting these locations in advance you get a feel for the lighting conditions, various vantage points and locations as well as some ideas for the plan 'B'

wet weather shots.

Take a bit of time to examine a few bridal magazines before the event as they are a great source of inspiration for ideas on posing, angles and viewpoints as well as techniques.

On the big day your sole focus will likely be on capturing all the big moments, but try to remember to capture some of the smaller details. It's the little things that make the day special: beading or lace on the dress, beautiful shoes and wedding rings, table decorations and menus.

If you have Adobe Photoshop or a similar program, you have the ability to be creative with the images in order to offer a few other options for the newlyweds. The Better Photography magazine website (www. betterphotography.com.au), is an enormous source of inspirational, beautiful shots, plus there are free 'actions' you can download for Photoshop. These actions give instant results through a series of automatic photo editing functions. The 'actions' creative effects include a variety of toning options.

Check it out for yourself and play around to see what results you can achieve. To find it, go to the website and click on the FREE tab at the top, select portraiture from the drop down and then click into "How to load actions into Photoshop". This will walk you through the process of loading them into Photoshop. All the work has been done for you by the experts, and they are great fun and very easy to use.

# Put Your Best Image Forward

Email us the best portrait photo you've taken. Files should be approx 1MB and received before deadline of 5pm Thursday.
Entries can be emailed to photo@dailyexaminer.com.au
The best images will appear in the next installment of Beginners' Guide to Digital Photography, published on Monday 4th April..
Prize for the best image each week will be a 7" Digital Photo Frame.
All photographs appearing in the paper will win the photographer 50 free 6x4 prints in store at Harvey Norman Grafton.
At the end of the course, the best image will win the photographer a Panasonic Digital SLR twin lens camera Kit (DMC-G10KTWIN)
VALUED AT $900.00.  **ALL PRIZES COURTESY OF HARVEY NORMAN.**

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