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Digital Portrait Photography FOR **DUMMIES®**

by Doug Sahlin



Wiley Publishing, Inc.

Digital Portrait Photography For Dummies®

Published by

Wiley Publishing, Inc.

111 River Street

Hoboken, NJ 07030-5774

www.wiley.com

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Published by Wiley Publishing, Inc., Indianapolis, Indiana

Published simultaneously in Canada

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Library of Congress Control Number: 2009937838

ISBN: 978-0-470-52763-4

Manufactured in the United States of America

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1



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Doug Sahlin is an author and photographer living in Venice, Florida. He has written 21 books on computer applications such as Adobe Flash and Adobe Acrobat. He has written books on digital photography and co-authored 13 books on applications such as Adobe Photoshop and Photoshop Elements. Recent titles include *Flash Website For Dummies*, *Digital Photography Quicksteps* (2nd edition), and *Digital Photography Workbook For Dummies*. Many of his books have been best sellers at Amazon.com.

He is president of Superb Images, Inc., a wedding and event photography company. Doug teaches Adobe Acrobat to local businesses and government institutions. He uses Flash and Acrobat to create Web content and multimedia presentations for his clients. He also hosts Pixelicious (www.pixelicious.info), a weekly podcast on digital photography, Photoshop, and Lightroom.

Dedication

This book is dedicated to Roxanne, my photo buddy and best friend.

Author's Acknowledgments

Thanks to all the talented people at Wiley for putting this book together. Special thanks to Steve Hayes for making this project possible. Kudos to Christopher Morris for overseeing this project and lending a helping hand when needed. I am grateful to agent extraordinaire Margot Hutchison for ironing out the fine details between author and publisher.

As always, special thanks to my friends, family, and mentors. Extra special thanks are reserved for Karen, Ted, and Roxanne. And I would be remiss if I didn't recognize my social secretary, Niki the Cat.

Publisher's Acknowledgments

We're proud of this book; please send us your comments through our online registration form located at <http://dummies.custhelp.com>. For other comments, please contact our Customer Care Department within the U.S. at 877-762-2974, outside the U.S. at 317-572-3993, or fax 317-572-4002.

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Introduction

Portrait photography is not rocket science. Photographers have been capturing portraits of people since cameras were invented. When you create a portrait of someone, your goal is to create a likeness of the person at his best. But how do you capture a portrait of someone at his best when he's camera shy, for instance?

Another goal of portrait photography is to tell the viewer something about your subject. In addition to capturing a digital image that looks like the person, you're also capturing the person's essence. When someone looks at a portrait of a person she knows and says that the image captures the subject's true essence, the photographer has done his job perfectly.

Capturing a person's likeness and essence in the same photograph may sound like a daunting task. But it really isn't if you take lots of pictures of people using the techniques in this book. In fact, when you practice portrait photography and start getting some great shots, portrait photography is an incredible amount of fun.

A Peek at the Road Ahead

This book is divided into four parts, each devoted to a specific aspect of portrait photography. The chapters flow logically from one subject to the next to take you from digital portrait photography neophyte to experienced photographer. You can read the book from cover to cover, or if you need quick information about a specific topic, peruse the table of contents or index until you find the desired topic. Most of the sections in this book don't require reading additional material.

The following sections offer a brief overview of each part of the book.

Part 1: Introducing Portrait Photography

Part I contains four chapters that familiarize you with portrait photography:

- ✓ Chapter 1, "Exploring Portrait Photography," introduces you to the different aspects of digital portrait photography.
- ✓ Chapter 2, "Choosing Your Equipment," shows you how to choose equipment for digital portrait photography. You'll find information on point-and-shoot cameras, digital SLRs, lighting equipment, and accessories.

- ✓ Chapter 3, “Getting to Know Digital Photography,” discusses camera settings you use for portrait photography. In this chapter, you’ll find information about shooting modes, ISO settings, formatting your cards, and much more.
- ✓ Chapter 4, “Becoming a Portrait Photographer” is designed to inspire you to think about what you’re photographing instead of blindly pointing the camera at your subject and pressing the shutter button. I show you concepts for working like a photojournalist, visualizing your image, and much more.

Part II: Portrait Photography Techniques

In this part of the book, I cut to the chase and show you how to become a better portrait photographer.

- ✓ Chapter 5, “Composing Your Portraits,” shows you how to use some time-honored rules of photography to create more compelling images. In this chapter, I show you which camera settings to use for portrait photography. Then I discuss rules of composition as they apply to portrait photography. I show you which rules work for specific types of images and tell you when you should break the rules.
- ✓ Chapter 6, “Working with Your Subjects,” shows you how to establish rapport with your subjects, how to pose them, and also discusses makeup and wardrobe. In this chapter, I also discuss photographing pets with their humans and how to capture portraits of pets by themselves.
- ✓ Chapter 7, “Lighting Your Portraits,” discusses lighting techniques for digital portrait photography. In this chapter, I show you how to work with available light, light modifiers, camera flash, and more.
- ✓ Chapter 8, “Photographing Portraits on Location,” discusses shooting portraits at different locations, such as at a beach and in your home town. I also devote sections to photographing wildlife at zoos and wildlife preserves.
- ✓ Chapter 9, “Photographing Portraits in Your Home or Office,” shows you techniques for creating formal and informal portraits in your home or office. I also discuss working with backdrops and creating a makeshift studio.

Part III: Editing and Sharing Your Portraits

This part of the book shows you how to organize, edit, and share your images using Photoshop Elements 8.

- ✔ Chapter 10, “Editing with Photoshop Elements,” introduces you to Photoshop Elements 8 and guides you through the process of downloading images to your computer. I also show you how to organize your images and work with RAW files.
- ✔ Chapter 11, “Retouching Your Portraits,” shows you how to digitally remove blemishes and enhance your subject’s eyes. I also show you how to remove your subject from the background and edit portraits of older subjects.
- ✔ Chapter 12, “Sharing Your Images,” shows you how to create prints of your portraits from Photoshop Elements. I also show you how to create print packages and contact sheets, and introduce you to a resource that turns your digital files into wall art.

Part IV: The Part of Tens

The book concludes with three top ten lists, written by yours truly, who happens to have a gap between his teeth like David Letterman, who is famous for his top ten lists. The lists are grouped according to subject matter. A splendid time is guaranteed for all. And tonight, Mr. Kite is topping the bill.

- ✔ Chapter 13, “Ten Editing Tips and Tricks,” shows you how to replace a solid-color background, how to create a painting from an image, and how to create a vignette. You’ll also find seven other cool editing tips that are designed to make your images shine.
- ✔ Chapter 14, “Ten Photography Tips and Tricks,” shows you how to become a better photographer. I show you how to develop a style, create a self-portrait, and improvise when you don’t have everything with you but the kitchen sink.
- ✔ Chapter 15, “Ten Resources for Portrait Photographers,” shows you ten places where you can get stuff such as equipment, photo books, and much more.

Icons and Other Delights

For Dummies books have icons that contain important bits of information. You can hopscotch from icon to icon and get a lot of information. But when in doubt, read the text associated with the icon. In this book, you’ll find the following icons:



- ✓ A Tip icon contains information designed to save you time — and in some instances, your very sanity.
- ✓ This icon warns you about something you shouldn't do, something your fearless author has already done and decided it's not a good thing to do again.
- ✓ When you see this icon, it's the equivalent of a virtual piece of string tied around your finger. This is information you may want to commit to memory.

You'll also find icons in the margin that show you controls on your camera and Photoshop Elements tools you use to edit your image.

About the Software Shown in This Book

The software I recommend for downloading your images and editing them is Photoshop Elements 8. This is the baby brother to Photoshop. Photoshop Elements is bundled with many cameras. If you don't have Photoshop Elements 8, which as of this writing is the latest and greatest version of the software, you'll be glad to know you can still do many of the same techniques with earlier versions of the software. If you own a different image-editing application, you can still benefit from Part III, as many other photo-editing applications use the same tools.

Shoot Lots of Pictures and Enjoy!

As I mention at the start of this introduction, portrait photography is not rocket science. The old adage “practice makes perfect” does apply, though. Don't expect to give this book a casual reading, try the techniques once or twice, and then park your camera in the closet until the next time someone asks you to take her picture. The only way to become a better photographer is to apply what you know and shoot as many pictures as you can. While you're working your way through this book, keep your camera close at hand. When your wife or significant other pokes her head into the room, grab your camera and start practicing your craft. Take one picture, then another, and another, and so on. With practice, you'll know your camera like the back of your hand. You'll also know which rules of photography and composition work for you, and you'll start to develop your own style. With practice, portrait photography will become second nature, and you'll amaze your friends and relatives with the quality of your work. For that matter, you'll probably amaze yourself, too.

Part I

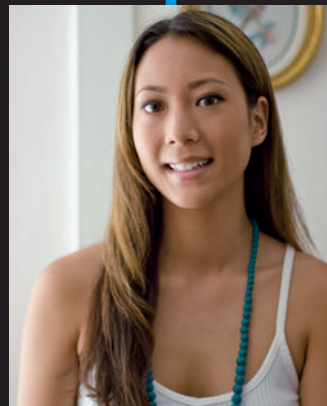
Introducing Portrait Photography



In this part . . .

people have been taking pictures of people since the invention of photography. Photographers have been taking pictures of people on crowded city streets, pictures of friends and family, and pictures that tell you something about a person. And when you capture a person's essence with a photograph, you have truly taken a portrait of that person.

Many amateur photographers and some professionals think portrait photography is a daunting task, but it doesn't have to be that way. In this part of the book, I introduce you to the different aspects of portrait photography. In addition, I discuss digital cameras and the settings you should use when shooting a portrait.



Exploring Portrait Photography

In This Chapter

- ▶ Introducing portrait photography
- ▶ Exploring different types of portrait photography
- ▶ Creating portraits of friends and family

Portrait photography is fun and can become downright addictive. Armed with a good digital camera and a little or a lot of knowledge, portrait photography gives you the chance to capture a slice of history in a person's life. When you photograph someone, you're telling a story. Done right, portrait photography reveals a lot about a person. Whether you're shooting a formal portrait with a background, photographing someone on location, or capturing a candid portrait, you're telling your viewers something about your subject. A portrait should be a flattering likeness of your subject, which can be a bit of work. Portrait photography may seem like a daunting task, but it's extremely rewarding. In this chapter, I show you the various facets of portrait photography and give you an inkling of what's to come.

Becoming a Portrait Photographer

A portrait is a picture that conveys a likeness of a person, especially his face. When someone views a good portrait of someone they know, the subject is instantly recognizable. When someone views a great portrait of anybody, even a stranger knows something about the subject. A great portrait reveals a person's character, attitude, outlook on life, and so much more. When you create a portrait, your job is to reveal something about the person you photograph. When someone else looks at the photo and says you really captured the person's essence, you know you've done your job.



Capturing a portrait that reveals more than a person's physical likeness is easier if you know the person you're photographing. However, you can still create a great portrait of a relative stranger if you take your time and establish rapport with the person. Creating a compelling portrait is more than just taking a picture. Talking with your subjects will reveal things they're interested in. When you see the person's expression change after talking about something they're interested in, ask a couple of questions about the topic, and then start photographing.

After you engage your subject to bring out her best, another task you must tackle is getting your subject to relax. Unless your subject is a professional model, she's going to be shy in front of the camera. The smiles may end up looking forced, the facial expressions phony, and so on. It's like trying to get someone to smile after they've received a letter from the IRS telling them to report for a tax audit. Unless you're shooting candid portraits of people at work or play, a portrait photography session takes time. As a portrait photographer, you must slow down, relax, and take your time. Give your subject the time she deserves. If your subject can't seem to relax and is preoccupied with other thoughts, reschedule the shoot at a time that's convenient for your subject.

Your job as a portrait photography is twofold: getting your subject to put on a happy face and knowing how to capture that happy face digitally for posterity. To do those things, you must get to know your equipment — know how to light your subject, choose the right camera settings, and so on.

Your first foray into portrait photography may be an outright disaster. If you're not familiar with your equipment, you won't be able to devote time to your subject. If you spend too much time fiddling with your equipment, your subject will quickly lose interest, and you won't be able to capture a natural portrait. Let's face it, some people need to be the center of attention, and this is especially true when you're capturing a portrait of a person. Be prepared ahead of time, and your photo shoot will flow.



If you're shooting a formal portrait, always set up your equipment and backdrop before your subject arrives.

Photographing Friends and Family

Photographing people you know and love may seem like a piece of cake, but sometimes knowing the people you're photographing makes the job harder. They may trivialize your interest in photography. They may look at you and think, "There he is with the camera again." This is when you need to take control and let your subjects know that you're a serious photographer, and your goal is to make them look their best. In these situations, you end up being coach, cheerleader, and task master.

Anybody can take a picture of a person. All you need to do is grab a camera, point it at the person, click the shutter, and you've got the shot. (Hmmm . . . guess that's why some digital cameras are called *point-and-shoot*.) The way to get a good portrait is to find a great location, use the proper equipment with the right settings, and work with your subject(s). You're the artist. You'll have to tell your subject how to pose, tilt her head, and get her to put her best face forward. Natural smiles are a good thing. Forced grimaces do not make good portraits. When you're shooting a portrait of a person on location, you need to pick the best area based on the scenery and available lighting. This may involve taking lots of pictures to get a few good ones. But that's the beauty of digital photography. You can see what you've got on the LCD monitor and know whether you've captured the quintessential portrait of your subject or a picture that's a candidate for the trash bin.

If you're shooting a formal portrait of someone you know, you need to set up the shot, arrange the lighting, and choose the proper camera settings. In addition, you need to tell your subject what to do, pose him in a pleasing manner, and then put him at ease. Yes, it is a daunting task. That's why the pros get big bucks for creating professional portraits.



Relax your subject and get her to laugh by telling her that the area in front of your camera is a "No Blink" zone.

When you decide to pursue portrait photography seriously, let your friends and family know your goals. They'll be more supportive and won't think you're being a nuisance when you ask to take their pictures. In exchange for a portrait session, tell your subject he'll get an 8 x 10 print of his favorite picture from the shoot. You can get quality prints from online printing companies such as Mpix and Shutterfly. Another good idea is to create a small photo book of your best shots. Then when a photogenic family moves into the neighborhood, you can introduce yourself as the neighborhood portrait photographer. You can also use your brag book at parties and social functions. When you show people a photo book of your best work, they'll know you're a serious photographer. Sweeten the deal with a free print and you've got another subject. I carry a 4-x-4-inch book of my portrait work with me at all times. Showing it to friends and colleagues has resulted in many interesting photo opportunities. For online printing and photo book resources, see Chapter 15.



Your best shots generally come at the end of a session. Let your subject know ahead of time how long your session will run. As the session moves to a conclusion, your subject will become more comfortable in front of the camera.

Creating candid portraits

Candid portraits are wonderful. You capture people doing what they do best, having fun or just being themselves. When you shoot candid portraits,

you're like a fly on the wall. You've got the camera ready to go with all the right settings dialed in. Then when you see your subject doing something interesting, compose your picture, click the shutter button, and you've got an interesting photo.

You can create a candid portrait anywhere. If it's your nephew's first birthday party, make sure you've got your camera ready when he gets a piece of his birthday cake. You'll end up with wonderful portraits of a laughing child with a mouthful of cake, frosting-streaked hair, and gooey fingers. Remember to capture a photo of the tyke's parents hosing him off after the party. When the child grows older, his parents will appreciate the portrait, and the now-grown child may be interested in it — or embarrassed beyond belief.

To capture good candid portraits, take your camera with you wherever you go. In time, your family and friends will get used to the fact that you've always got a camera tethered to your neck, so they won't always be on guard, which makes it much easier to catch them in the act of being themselves.

If you have a digital SLR (single-lens reflex) with a zoom lens that looks like a bazooka, you'll have a hard time being the fly on the wall. If you fall into this category, I suggest getting a good point-and-shoot camera as a second camera. My Canon digital SLR looks quite intimidating with a telephoto zoom attached, so I have a small Canon point-and-shoot that I take with me when I'm running errands, or visiting friends. The point-and-shoot is relatively innocuous, so I carry it with me wherever I go, even into restaurants. You never know when something interesting will happen. When I see something that piques my curiosity, I capture it digitally with my trusty point-and-shoot. I show you all you need to know about buying a second camera in Chapter 3.

Creating formal portraits

Formal portraits are used for many things. Sometimes your subject wants a formal portrait to hang on the wall. At other times, a formal portrait is used for business purposes, such as a company brochure or business card. If one of your friends or relatives needs a portrait for business purposes, you can get the job done. A head shot or head-and-shoulders shot is the accepted format for formal business pictures. You can create formal portraits using a makeshift studio in your home, on location, or in your subject's office. (See Figure 1-1.)

When you photograph any portrait, it's important to light your subject correctly. An on-camera flash is never a good option for formal portraits. If you must use a flash, it's best to bounce the flash off a white surface such as a nearby wall or the ceiling. You can also use a bounce card. Better yet, use two light sources. Portrait lighting is covered in detail in Chapter 7.



Figure 1-1: Creating a formal portrait at your subject's workplace.

Capturing a slice-of-life portrait

Sometimes you can tell a lot about a person by photographing possessions that are special to the person. When you create this type of portrait, you don't even need the person in the photograph. People who know the person will automatically connect her with the photograph based on what's in the photo. I call this a slice-of-life portrait. In essence, it's a still life that tells a lot about a person, without really showing the person. I show you some techniques for creating a slice-of-life portrait in Chapter 9.

Photographing children

Kids do the darndest things, especially the young ones. But they can also be like a bull in a China shop, moving every which way but where you want them to move. Getting a child to sit still is like getting a straight answer from

your congressman. And forget about the bit that children should be seen and not heard. If you're photographing young children, you'll hear them: The din can get rather loud. You may also have a failure to communicate. You get your best kid photographs when you photograph a child who knows and trusts you. If you can create a rapport with the child, or for that matter, any subjects, perhaps you will get the shots you're after. Your best bet is to have the child's parents at the shoot. They can stand behind you and get the child to do what you want her to. Maybe.

You'll get some great shots if the child has something to occupy his attention. Props like a favorite stuffed toy, a blanket, or some candy gives the child something to interact with. (See Figure 1-2.) If you know the child, you can get some interesting photos by playing a game of hide and seek. When you find the child, snap a head-and-shoulders portrait that shows his gleeful expression and sense of innocence. If you want to create portraits of your kids, check out Chapter 6.



Figure 1-2: Bribing a child with candy.

Photographing pets

Unfortunately, pets have shorter lifespans than their human masters. When they are no longer with us, photos are all we have to help us remember our furry, feathered, or scaled friends. You can capture wonderful photos of your pet at play, or you can take more formal snapshots of your pet. Your pet's patience and trust in you and your equipment will determine the quality of shot you can get. If your pet is trained, you can capture a great portrait with your digital camera. However, you'll often get the best shots of your pet being his goofy self. If you're photographing a friend's pet, you'll get better shots if the pet knows you. However, it's always best to have the pet's master present. She can tell the pet what to do based on your instructions.

Dogs can be great hams. A dog may pose for you, allow you to place a hat on his head, and so on. On the other hand, a cat tends to be aloof, turning away from the camera when you point it at her. But if you're patient, you can get a great photo of your cat playing, or contemplating what's on the other side of the window. Sometimes all you need to do is grab your camera when your cat's snoozing, call her name, and click the shutter. (See Figure 1-3.) Another great shot you can get is a pet with her owner. The pet will be comfortable with her owner alongside. Kids and pets are also a recipe for wonderful photographs.



Figure 1-3: Photographing your cat can be a challenge.

Creating animal portraits

If you live near a zoo or a wildlife preserve, you can capture some wonderful photographs of animals. Armed with a digital SLR with a telephoto lens, or a point-and-shoot camera with a zoom lens that has a long focal length, you can get some great images. When you photograph at a zoo, you're a safe distance from the animals. However, when you photograph animals in the wild, you must exercise caution. Recently, while I was photographing some gorgeous white egrets at the Venice Rookery, a representative from the Audubon Society told me about the Rookery's resident alligator. When he saw I had a telephoto lens, he chuckled and told me he had to be on the lookout for tourists with point-and-shoot cameras that would try to walk within a few feet of the reptile to take a picture. Alligators may seem lethargic, but they can move quite quickly when provoked. Always keep a safe distance from any wild animal, including cats and dogs that may be roaming in your neighborhood. I show you some useful techniques for photographing wildlife and animals in Chapter 6.

Shooting Portraits on Location

When you decide to capture a digital portrait, the next decision is where to take the picture. Studio-type photographs with a colorful background are great for business photographs and formal portraits. But you can also get some great shots by photographing people on location. I find that people have a tendency to be more relaxed when they're outdoors. Recently I photographed a family at their home. I took most of the pictures outside of their home. The location was fantastic; their house was right on the water with lush foliage in the yard. I also took some photos inside their house, but the ones they liked best — the ones that were the most natural — were those that were taken outdoors. The family eventually ended up using one of the photos for their holiday greeting card.

Photographing people in parks and public places

Parks and scenic parts of town are wonderful places to create compelling portraits of anybody. The background is what makes photographs in a park or on a photogenic city street so special. When you photograph a person outdoors, your subject is the center of interest. A background that is in sharp focus gives the viewer too many details. Your job is to choose the proper lens and exposure settings to render the background as a pleasant out-of-focus blur. After all, you're taking a picture of your subject, not the scenery.

Of course, when you shoot outdoors, lighting is very important. If you shoot in adverse lighting conditions such as direct sunlight at high noon, your subject will have harsh shadows on his face, which will reveal wrinkles, or character lines, if you will. If your subject is female, showing skin texture is never a good thing. Shooting at the right time of day usually ensures that you'll get