



# Portrait Photography

**April 2, 2025**

# Overview

- Types of Portraits
- Lighting Concepts
- Equipment
- It's all about the Eyes and Lighting (and a million other little things)
- Tips for better Portraits

**“Perhaps the hardest part of learning portrait photography is finding subjects to practice with”**

**“With landscape photography God supplies the lighting, with portrait photography the lighting is up to you.”**

# Types of Portraits

- Headshots
  - Usually Head to shoulders
  - Self Portraits
- 1/2 - 3/4 Length
  - Head to Mid thigh
- Full Length
  - Studio or environmental
- Couple and Group
- Why do you Care?
  - Planning
  - Location
  - Lighting



# Lighting concepts

- Incident vs Reflective (in camera evaluative metering)

## Incident

1/100 sec, ISO 400, at f/5.0



## Reflective

1/100 sec, ISO 400, at f/8.0 camera suggested



# Lighting concepts

- Cameras light meter is based on reflected light
  - Measurement in most camera and smartphones usually use evaluative metering
  - Strength of the light is measured at the camera and the color of the subject can adversely affect the exposure. For example: the camera will recommend under exposing a brides white dress or over exposing a black tuxedo by about 1 f/stop. Luckily a shoot with both should be ok
- Incident meters measure light falling on the subject
  - It is measured at the subject and requires an Incident/Flash meter.
  - Incident meter readings are generally considered to be more accurate. The exposure recommended is not affected by the color or brightness of the subject



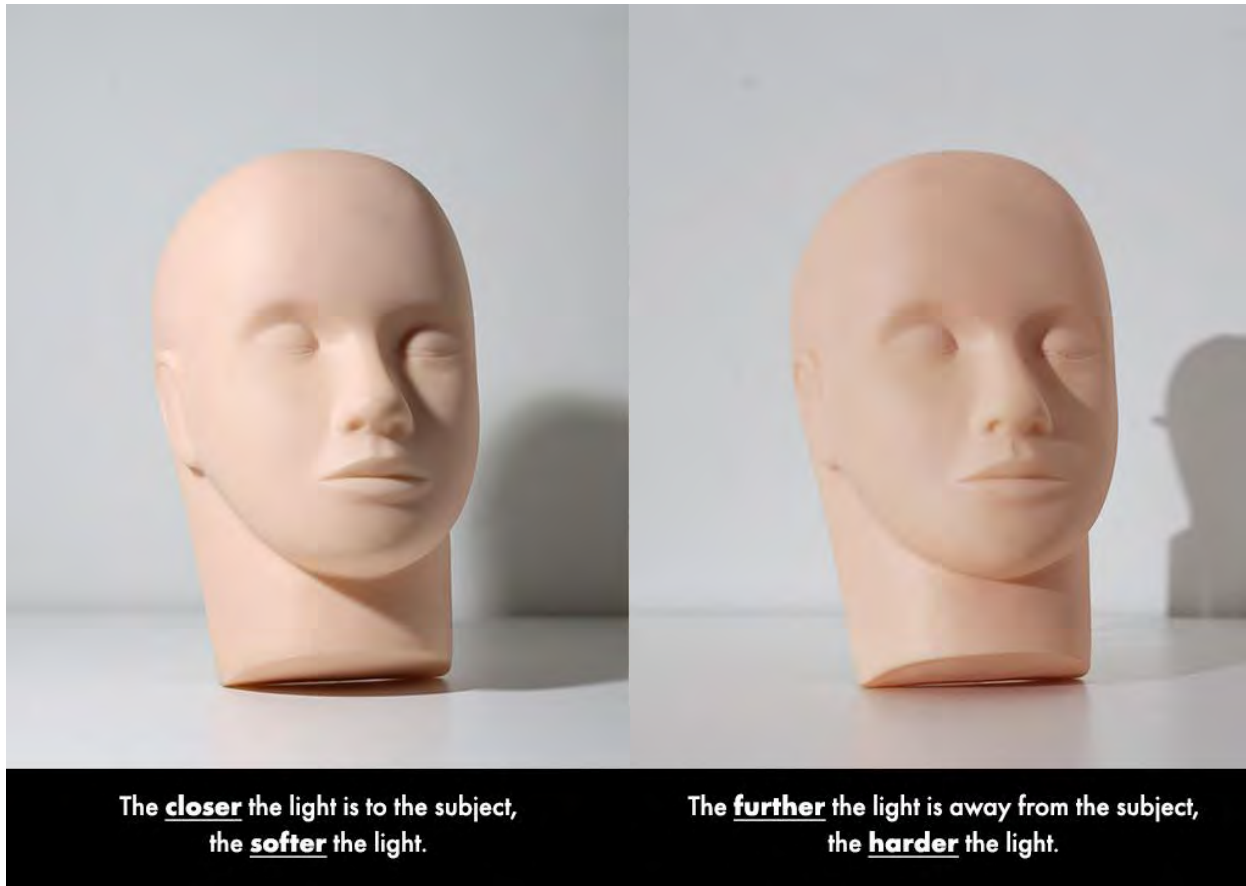
# Lighting concepts

- The bigger the light source in relation to the subject the softer the light



# Lighting concepts

- The closer the light source to the subject the softer the light



# Lighting concepts

- Distance from the camera to the subject does not affect the exposure of the subject
  - However, the surrounding areas may affect the exposure recommendation given by the camera's meter

1/100 sec, ISO 400, at f/5.0 at **8 ft**



1/100 sec, ISO 400, at f/5.0 at **30 ft**





# Lighting concepts

- What is a camera's flash sync speed
  - Shutter sync speed is the fastest shutter speed at which a camera's mechanical shutter can synchronize with a flash. It ensures the flash illuminates the entire sensor while the shutter is fully open.
  - Shutter speeds faster than the camera's sync speed would create a "slit" effect as the shutter curtains moves, making parts of the image dark if the flash were to fire. Most modern camera's won't operate the flash if the shutter speed is too fast without enabling HSS on the flash/camera.
  - Typical maximum sync speeds for cameras range from 1/200s to 1/250s. When using a slow shutter speed you can choose 1<sup>st</sup> or 2<sup>nd</sup> curtain flash to get interesting affects.
  - High-Speed Sync (HSS) is a feature that allows faster shutter speeds by rapidly pulsing the flash to match the moving slit. HSS effectively greatly reduces the power of a flash. Max HSS shutter is typically 1/8000 sec.

# Lighting concepts

- Examples of different camera/flash settings (all ISO 100)



No Flash  
1/200 f/10

ETTL Fill Flash  
1/200 f10

Manual Flash  
HSS 1/64 power  
1/1600 f/5.6

Manual Flash  
HSS Full Power  
1/1600 f/11

# Lighting concepts

## ➤ Pluses and Minuses of Flash & Continuous Lighting

<b>Flash</b>	<b>Continuous</b>
Better Control of ambient light	What you see is what you get (WYSIWYG)
Flash duration can freeze motion (as fast as 1/20,000)	Easier to control shadows
Can overcome the sun in outdoor shooting situations	Many LED lights allow you to dial in color
High Speed sync has limitations	No impact on shutter speed
Camera brand effects flash interface/selection	Works with all cameras including smart phone

# Equipment

- Any camera will do
  - Smartphone
    - Mostly available light
    - Continuous Light (Led lights or even your cellphone flashlight)
    - Most smartphones have Portrait mode to blur the background
  - ILC Cameras (Interchangeable Lens Camera)
    - Almost any lens (35-120mm) will work for portraits.
    - Lens choice mostly controls the amount of background



# Lighting Equipment

## ➤ Lighting Equipment

- Available Ambient and Window light (free! You just need to SEE the light)
- Reflectors – Can be a white(or flat black) cardboard, purchased or even a nearly white (neutral color) wall
- Flash, LED lights/panels and Studio strobes
- Modifiers – change the shape and size of the light source

## ➤ Portrait Lighting doesn't have to be expensive

- A basic, single lighting setup including a flash, off camera wireless trigger, flash stand, and umbrella can be had for less than \$160, but like so many things in photography there is almost no limit to how much you can spend!

## ➤ Flash Comparison

Item	Price	Weight	Guide Number	TTL auto	Zoom	HS Sync	Li-Ion
Godox TT600	65	14oz	197' at ISO 100 and 200mm	no	24-200mm	no	no
Godox TT350 mini	85	7oz	118' at ISO 100 and 105mm	yes	24-105mm	yes	no
Godox TT685	129	1.19lbs	197' at ISO 100 and 200mm	yes	20-200mm	yes	no
Godox V860II	179	15oz	197' at ISO 100 and 200mm	yes	20-200mm	yes	yes
Godox V1	259	1.17lbs	76 ws	yes	28-105mm	yes	yes
Godox V100	349	1.4lbs	100 ws	yes	28-105mm	yes	yes
Godox Xpro wireless trigger	69	2.8oz	Controls all above				

# In Portraits, It's All About the Eyes

- If the eyes aren't sharp, it's probably a reject
- Focus on the near eye
  - At 100mm at 10ft, f/2.8 DOF is only 9"
  - At 200mm at 10ft, f/2.8 DOF is only 0.5"



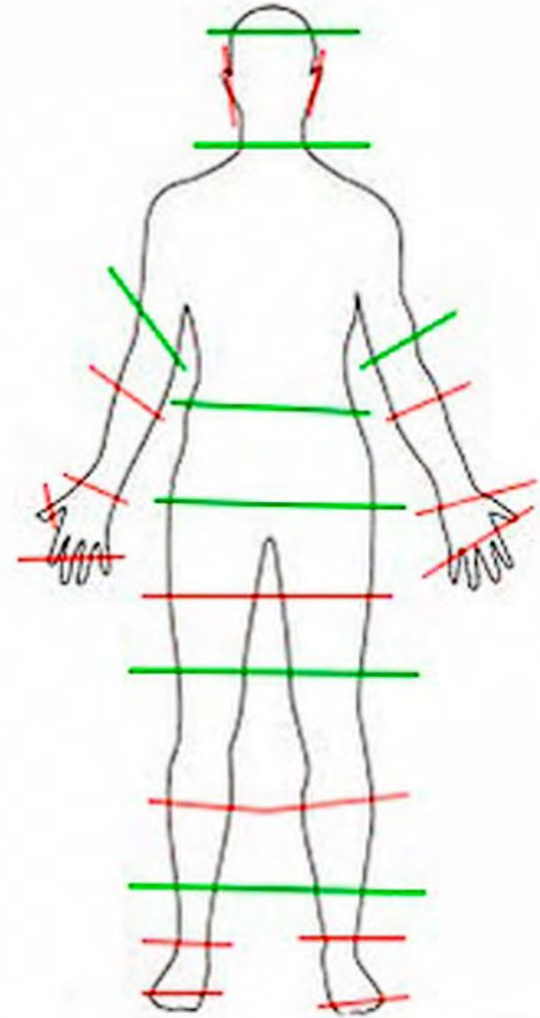
# Tips for better Portraits

- Slow Down
- Shoot from the subject's eye level, especially with kids
- Be aware of the lighting and environment
- Watch the dynamics of your camera and lens
  - Consider the effect of f/stop and lens choice
  - What is the depth of field?
  - Is the environment/background portrayed the way you want
- Talk with the subject and share the experience



# Tips for better Portraits

- Cropping guidelines
  - Green yes Red no
- For best results shoot in Raw Format .
  - Light temperature (K – Kelvin) is very important. Getting skin tones right in portraits is critical. With raw photos color temperature can be fully adjusted in post processing.
  - The tone controls found in most post processing applications are frequently needed and adjusted.





# Tips for better Portraits

- Don't forget about the classic Black & White look



# Additional Resources

- The Beginners Guide to Classic Portraits (free course)
  - <https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLyrKONqDZzlwpWXdWBYdYJUK0iXI-ByBh>
- The following Photographers offer classes on Portrait Photography
  - Lindsey Adler – New York Fashion Photographer
  - David Hobby – the Strobist.com – best free source of lighting education
  - Jerry Ghionis – Award winning Wedding Photographer
  - Peter Hurley – Headshot specialist – former actor
  - Sue Bryce – Educator and author of “The Portrait System”