

# Portrait Workshop 2011

# Portrait Photography

In the simplest definition a portrait is a likeness of someones face.

Portraits mean a lot more to most people, however, a portrait should capture more than just the likeness of a person, a portrait should also show their personality, or their character, a portrait is usually considered (but not necessarily) to be flattering to the subject, a portrait is usually a collaboration between the photographer and the subject.



# Types of Portraits

## **Formal and informal portraits**

Corporate for business.

Glamour.

Family – Births, weddings, kids and other events.

## **Candid portraits**

Generally these are portraits of people in an environment that tells a story or indicated their hobbies, business, pleasures etc.

# The Background

A "high key" photograph is mostly white.

A "low key" photograph is mostly black.

"Studio" backgrounds are empty featureless places.

"Environmental" backgrounds are noisy cluttered places.

A large sheet and some thumbtacks or gaffer tape makes a great improvised background.

Always have some distance between the subject and the background.

An out of focus background is less like to distract the viewer.

Black and white clothes are hard to capture.

# The Background



A cluttered background works here as it places the subject in an appropriate and interesting environment.

# General Principles

## The Eyes

The eyes should always be in focus.

The iris should be exposed, but not the whites above and below the iris.

Small pupils make for beady eyes, so close them before taking the shot.

Large pupils cause a vacant look, so stare into a bright light before taking the shot.

Try to have the camera at the same level or below as your subject's eyes.

Catchlights keep the eyes from looking empty and soulless.

The eleven o'clock and one o'clock positions are good places for the catchlights to appear.

# What Lens to Use

Large aperture to blur the background. A long focal length lens also helps to blur the background.

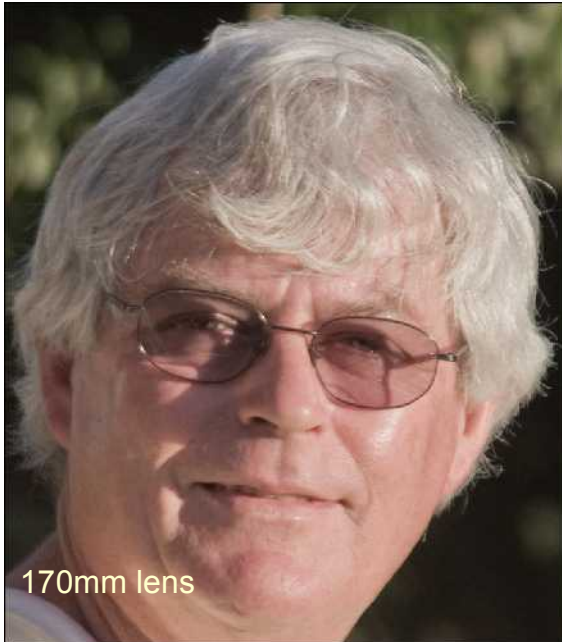
The image below was taken with a 35mm film camera with a 55mm lens.



# What Lens to Use

In a portrait generally a long focal length, at least 80mm (35mm format equivalent) is used to minimise perspective distortion, that is to flatten the facial features.

Short focal length lenses make the nose look bigger and ears smaller.



# What Lens to Use



# Lighting

Overhead lighting looks most natural but can be unflattering.

Lighting from the side provides modelling.

Deep eye shadows are very bad.

Soft directional lighting works best on children.

Soft lighting hides facial blemishes.

Cloudy days provide diffuse lighting.

A window on one side and a big white cardboard reflector on the other makes for diffuse lighting as well.

# Lighting

On camera flash is generally a no no.  
It's stark, flat, makes clutter in the scene stand out  
and can result in red eye.

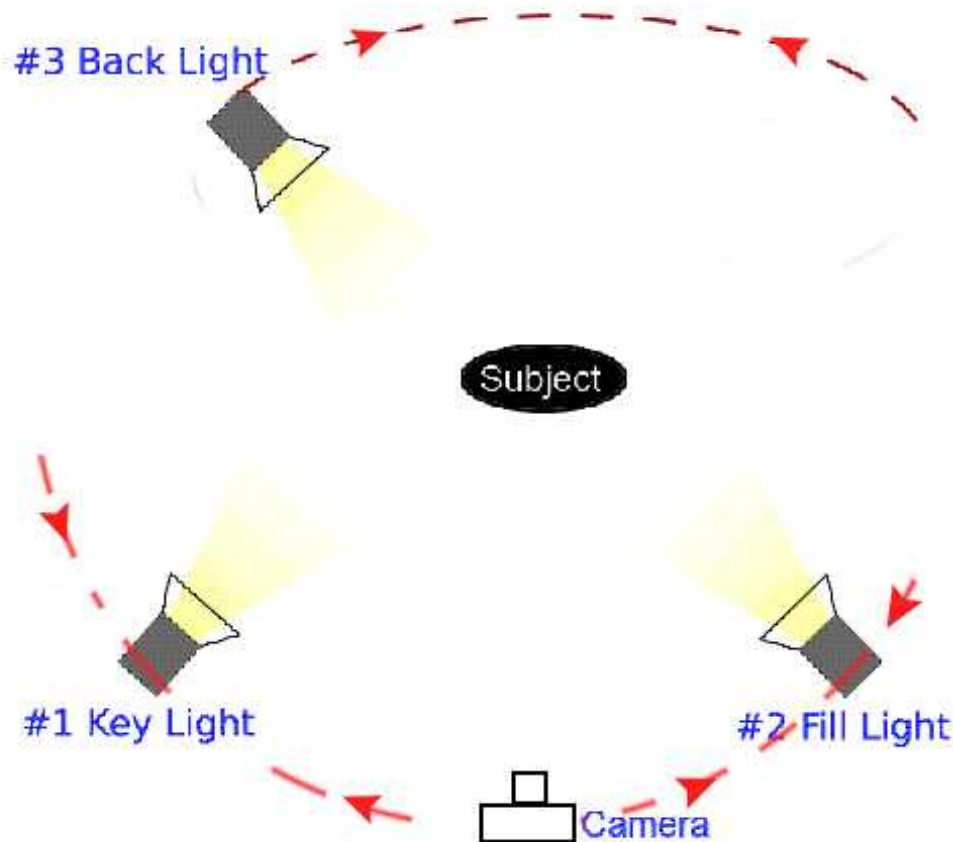


A little flash fill may be OK in a portrait  
taken outside in daylight.



# Studio Lighting

Three Point Lighting:

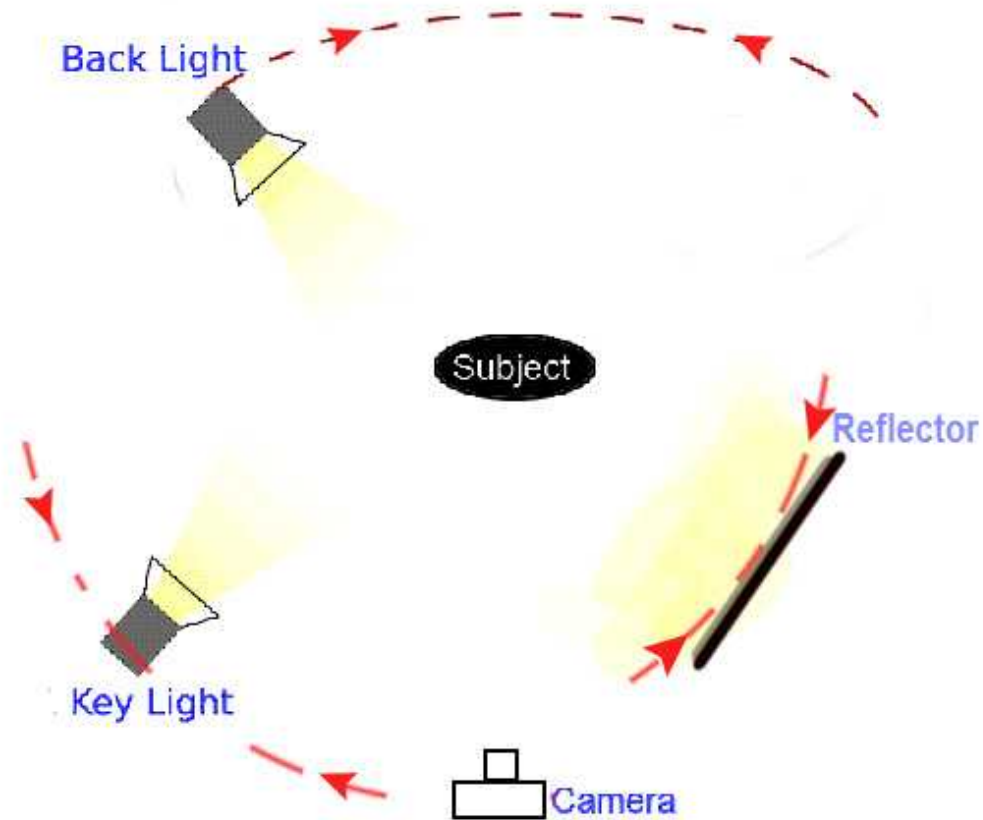


By using three separate lights, you can illuminate the subject (such as a person) however desired, while also controlling (or eliminating entirely) the shading and shadows produced by direct lighting.

A typical three point setup with a back/side lamp to create a contrast between the background and center object so as to give it a three dimensional appearance.

# Studio Lighting

Two Point Lighting:



Alternatively you can use a reflector as a fill to soften shadows.

