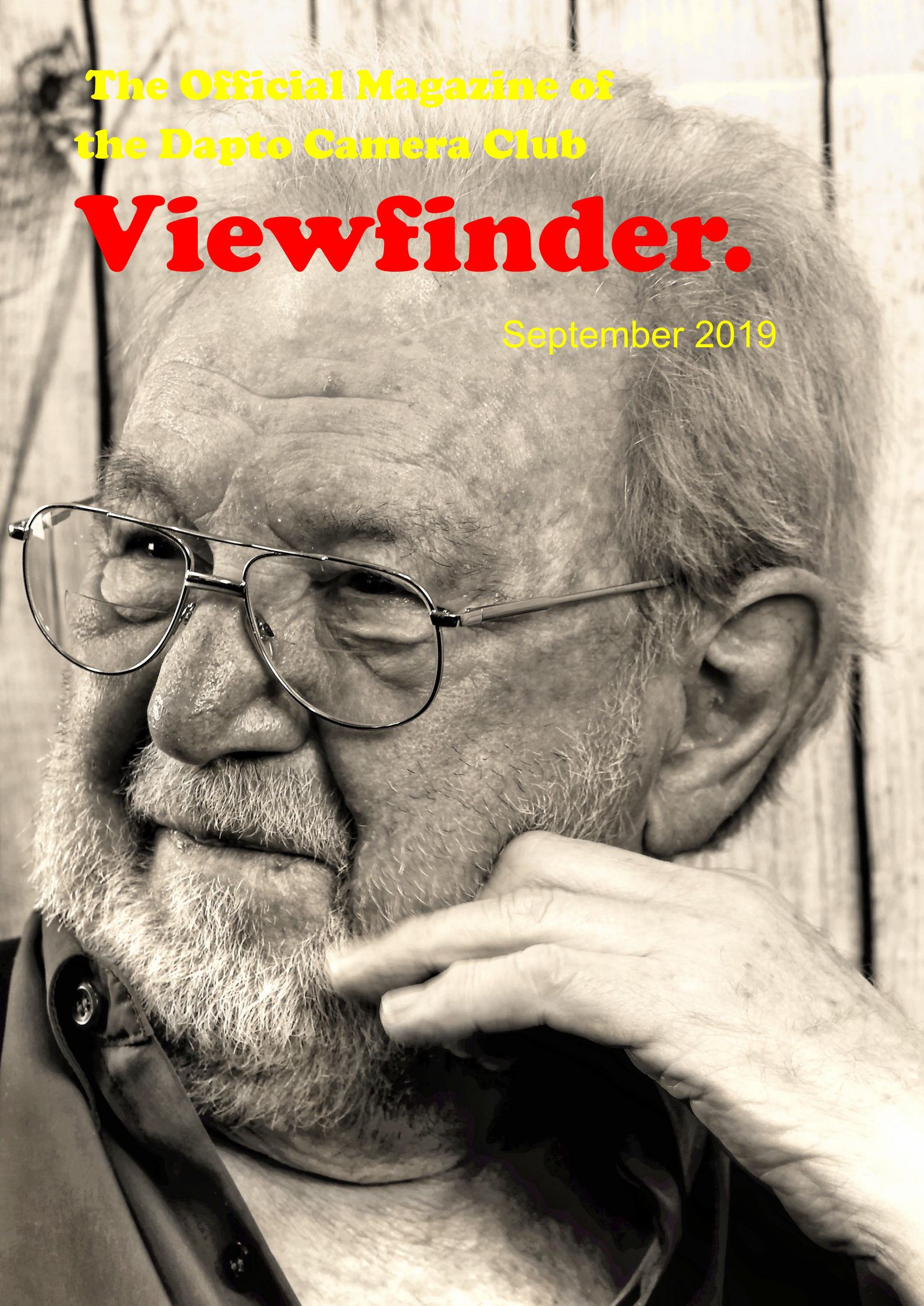


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10 Tips to Create Emotive Portraits

By: John McIntire



Portraiture is as vast a genre of photography as it is rewarding. There are a lot of ways to go about creating portraits with a lot of visual interest, but one of the most satisfying ways to do this (to me anyway) is to create emotive portraits. Being able to capture your subjects showing emotion (whether that be positive or negative) not only allows you to show your viewer a more human aspect of your subject, but it can also help create compelling and arresting imagery. This article provides you ten tips to help you with your create emotive portraits. Some of these tips are technical, but most of them, perhaps unsurprisingly, focus on how you interact with your subjects.

1. Concentrate on the gesture

When you're photographing emotion, it will be helpful to consider what information you need in your frame. If your subject is smiling, crop in close on the head and leave all other information out. The space in your frame is valuable, and you want to ensure that you get your message across clearly. Unneeded information (such as things in the background or body parts that are not involved in the gesture) serve only to detract from the focus of the image.

By cropping in closer, the emphasis of the composition is placed on the gesture of the expression, leaving nothing to distract from it.

That said, pay attention to your subject's body language. If they are gesticulating with their arms as part of the expression, be sure to include that in your frame as it will help to complete the expression.

2. Keep the lighting simple

Basic lighting techniques work well when trying to capture emotion. A lot of the time, you don't need more than one light and a reflector.

Just like in a lot of other walks of life, less can definitely be more in emotive portraiture. By keeping your lighting simple, you are controlling how much information is in the frame. Just like the first tip, this is about ensuring that your viewer's attention is placed squarely where you want it to be.

The lighting pattern that you choose will likely depend on what emotion you are trying to convey. For bright, happy emotions, you may opt for something like butterfly lighting. You also might choose to use a lot of fill light. For darker emotions, like sadness, more dramatic light such as that provided by short lighting is a fantastic tool that provides many shadows and can add tons of mood to your images.

3. Communicate clearly

Before you even start a shoot, explain to your subject as clearly as possible what you want from them. If you need to, show them examples.

Assuming you are staging your portrait session rather than taking candid, you will want to very clearly communicate with your subject exactly what it is that you are trying to achieve. Be specific and avoid vagueness. If you tell someone to be happy, you might get that generic smile that everybody gives a camera. Instead of happy, try saying something along the lines of: "I'm looking for genuine expressions of joy. I want you to imagine that you've just got a new puppy." You'll find this kind of thing works well very often as you almost always evoke genuine emotion from some-



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one.

If the puppy doesn't work, feel free to substitute it with anything that might. Kitten, baby, chinchilla, motorcycle; it doesn't matter as long as it works.

4. Genuine rapport



Having a good rapport with your subject will often give you more subtle and genuine expressions.

To get the very best and most authentic expressions out of your subjects, you will want to build a genuine rapport with them. Be nice, be polite, let them talk about themselves, show them the back of the camera, joke around (appropriately) and develop a light-hearted banter (if warranted, not everyone appreciates it).

Also, try to keep the session relaxed and stress-free. You, as the photographer, might be worried about the lighting and all of the technical things, but I think it's vital for you to worry about your role in your head and keep your subject's focus on their role.

5. Make your subject an actor



Instructing your subjects to act out various scenarios can give you a range of images from which to choose the most natural and evocative images.

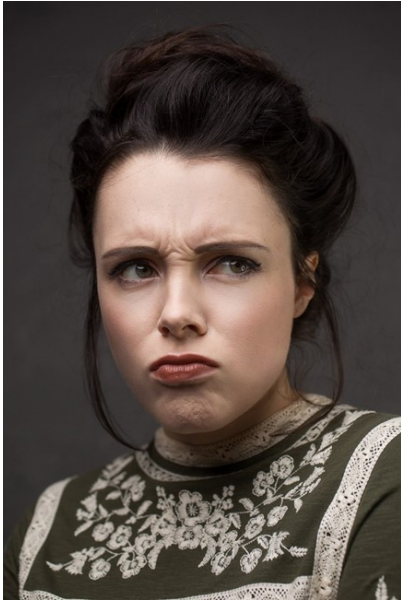
An approach that can help to elicit good expressions is to tell your subject to act rather than to pose. Still images and video are very different things, and people change their behavior accordingly. If you suggest that they should treat the session and the scenarios you give them as if you were filming, or as if they were acting on stage, you can get much more natural expressions. Better yet; book an actor if you want the very best results, and it suits your project.

6. Look away from the camera

One of the easiest ways to get emotion into your photos is to have your subject look away from the camera.

One of the simplest ways to help convey real expression is to make sure your subject isn't looking directly at the camera. Instead, pick a point for them to look at and direct them to do so. Where you pick isn't important as long as you can capture and clearly convey the emotion that you are after. This is very useful for the more somber emotions. Sadness, longing, and thoughtfulness can all be more easily portrayed with your subject looking off into the distance. This isn't a rule, so please don't shoot every single shot this way unless the situation calls for it.

7. Give permission to be ridiculous



Tell your subjects they can be as ridiculous as they want. It can help to loosen them up and act more natural later. Sure, there will be unusable frames, but you might just hit gold.

Many people (including those with much experience) tend to go rigid in front of a camera. Let them know that they can act ridiculous. Moreover, encourage them to act as ridiculous and exaggerated as possible. This will help them to loosen up, and it will also help to lighten the mood of the session. Having your subject's pull funny faces is a good way of cutting through the seriousness of a photoshoot.

Another trick that I sometimes use (it doesn't work on everyone) is to get someone to fill their cheeks with air and then blow out as hard as possible.

If they're open to it, it almost always results in fits of laughter.

8. Have a set of techniques that provoke reactions



Blurting out random words and photographing the reactions can lead to fantastic results.

There are a lot of tips on how to provoke reactions from people. My favorite is to blurt out random words and photograph the reactions. To do this, just say a different word in-between frames. It could go something like alpaca, cheeseburger, dunce cap, or giant mushroom. Feel free to adjust your words based on the person you are working with.

Again, it doesn't work on everyone, and you may have to switch to another technique.

If you know your subject well enough, you could always show them some funny pictures or memes on your phone. Just be sure that whatever you show them matches their sense of humor or you might ruin the rest of your shoot.

9. Give food for thought



Try giving your subject a specific scenario to think about for a few frames. This works well across the board, no matter how happy or sad you want them to act.

Instead of strings of random words, you can give your subject a specific thing to think about. This works well for all manner of emotions, whether that be happy or sad. I recently worked with an actor, and she introduced me to the sentence, “Imagine a badger eating spaghetti.” For laughter, I don’t think I’ve come across anything that works better.

For sadder emotions, I suggest (from experience) avoiding being too specific. If you say something along the lines “Imagine the loss of a pet” and they recently lost a pet, it’s really not going to go down well.

Instead, ask them to imagine feeling a loss and let them think about whatever it is that comes to mind. Remember, when trying to capture negative emotions, you will generally have no idea what’s going on in your subject’s life. While you want to capture an emotion, it’s not usually a good idea to put your subject through unnecessary emotional turmoil. Please try to be respectful of that and the people you work with.

I know of a lot of wonderful photo projects that exist to document the rawest emotions in people (Sam Taylor Wood’s “Crying Men” is easily the best photography exhibit I have ever seen). I am not saying “don’t do that” if that’s your goal. However, do be explicit with your intentions to your subjects, and do ask them if there’s anything they would rather you not touch on.

10. Outtakes

Don’t forget to take a look at your outtakes from any given shoot. They are usually the most spontaneous and natural shots of all.

During a normal portrait session, outtakes can often be seen as a fun extra. However, when you’re



creating emotive portraits, it's the outtakes where you might find the most genuine expressions. Don't forget to give them a look through once you have the photos on the computer. You may find that a spontaneous outtake has given you exactly what you were after.

Seriously, the world needs more outtakes.

That's it

Sometimes getting your subjects to react the way you want and then to convey those emotions well in your photographs can be a challenge. With these ten tips, you hopefully have a few more tools in your belt to make that process easier. These are just a handful of things that can help; however, and there are plenty of other techniques out there.



Milky Way Photography Settings: Use These for 98% of Your Shots.

By Josh

Taking photos of the Milky Way requires a totally different approach than almost any other kind of photography. This is why we've dedicated an entire article to the Milky Way photography settings that we use for 98% of our shots.

Before we get started though, I want to make one thing very clear.

Always expose for the sky, not the foreground.

When you start adding foreground interest into a frame, it can be tempting to compromise on exposure so that both parts of the photo are correctly exposed. Resist the temptation.

If you want to get the best image of the Milky Way possible, you'll want to expose for the sky.

Exposure

Aperture

One luxury of focusing at a single point of interest, millions of miles away, is that you don't need to think about the depth of field. Even if you shoot at $f/1.2$.

So the question isn't 'Will everything be in focus', it's 'Will I have enough light for my exposure'. After all, we capture photos of the stars during the darkest nights of the month.

For Milky Way photography, I recommend

shooting at your widest aperture settings— $f/2.8$, for example. This will allow the most amount of light into the lens, and allow for a shorter exposure duration.

If you're taking a photo where you include some foreground interest in the frame, such as the tree in the image below, then $f/2.8$ is the magic spot. It's just wide enough to allow plenty of light into the lens while providing a deep enough depth of field to get the foreground in relative focus too.



Shutter Speed

If the aperture you choose for Milky Way photography is the widest possible, then the shutter speed should be the longest possible.

But how long is the longest possible?

We can set almost limitless exposures on our cameras. But there's a very specific limit to how long you can expose for photos of the stars.

Set too long of a time, and the stars will start to move in the sky and those sharp dots of detail will look like soft smudges.

Fortunately, there's a very easy way to work this out with a quick calculation involving your focal length, called...

The 500 Rule

The 500 Rule calculates the longest exposure time possible for Milky Way photography without

capturing movement in the stars.

It does this by taking the number 500 and dividing it by the focal length of the lens you're using. For example, 500 divided by 14mm would be 35.7; this means 35.7 seconds is your maximum exposure length.

For that same calculation again, this time for a 24mm lens, the result is 20 seconds.

The reason for this is because when you zoom in, the you notice movement much faster. If you took a photo at 300mm on your lens at 1/50 of a second, it would be almost impossible to hold the camera steady and not detect any motion blur. But if you were to take the same photo at 24mm, it's very easy to capture a sharp photo.

So the wider your lens is, the more time you have to expose for the stars.

There is one small caveat though, and that's for people not using full frame cameras.

If you're using a crop sensor camera, then your smaller sensor effectively magnifies the scene. It



does so by cropping it.

So if you're shooting with a Canon crop sensor, you would want to divide that final number by 1.6. If you're using another model, you would divide it by 1.5.

For example, if you had a 14mm f/2.8 lens, but you put it on a Canon crop sensor body (like a Digital Rebel or a 70D), you would divide 35.7 seconds by 1.6 for a 22.3 second exposure time. If you were shooting on a Nikon crop sensor (like a D5000), you would divide 35.7 seconds by 1.5 for a 23.8 second exposure time.

All you have to remember is that you take 500, divide it by your focal length. And if you're on a crop sensor camera, divide that number again by the magnification factor.

ISO

Unlike aperture and shutter speed, there are no rules on what you can set the ISO to. It's always important to remember that the higher the ISO, the noisier the image will be.

Using a full frame camera, you will quite easily get away with setting your ISO to only 3200. But

if you have to compromise due to your sensor size, or your lens, then I would recommend an ISO for 6400.

Any higher than that will show too much degradation in the image quality. At that point, you're probably better off pushing it in post-production.



Focusing

Focusing on the Milky Way is super simple.

All you need to do is to set your focus at infinity, which looks like the figure eight symbol in the image below:

On Canon cameras you want to line up the little sideways L with the line to focus on infinity. On other cameras you'll want to align the infinity symbol with

the line, so always check to see how it works on your lens.

Once you've set your focus to infinity, turn your focus mode to manual focus. This way, your camera won't try to refocus in the dark when you go to take a photo. It will not do a good job!

Remember also to check your focus every time you recompose your shots. It's very easy to knock the focus ring and send your photo into a blur.

In-Camera Long Exposure Noise Reduction

A useful, but time consuming function of digital cameras is In-Camera Long Exposure Noise Reduction.

The camera does this by first taking a regular 30-second exposure. Once that's captured, the camera will close the shutter and capture another 30-second 'blank' exposure. The camera will then compare the blank exposure to the original photo, to identify the digital noise, and then remove it from the original photo.

And it does a pretty good job!

But as with everything to do with exposure, there is one major downside: time.

This process is very time consuming and will drain your battery life, so it's not perfect. And if you're taking a bunch of photos for a panorama, it simply won't be quick enough to capture photos without the stars moving too much to stitch together later.

Our Go-To Settings

These are the settings we use for 98% of our Milky Way photography.

They're specific to our gear. But once you've worked out what the settings are for your gear, you'll find that you can also use the same settings for the majority of your shots.

Here they are:

- Focal Length: 14mm
- Aperture: f/2.8
- Shutter Speed: 30 seconds
- ISO: 3200
- Focus: Manually set to infinity

In Camera Long Exposure Noise Reduction: Off

Shooting into the sun.

There are many reasons why photographers often avoid shooting into the sun - strain on the eyes, lens flare, huge dynamic range, underexposed images and depending on the lens used, it can cause damage to the sensor.

But, when you shoot into the light from the sun, it can add a beautiful mood to the scene, adds contrast and enhances depth in landscape scenes.

If you use sunlight creatively, you can shoot brilliant images and here are some things to take care of to shoot into the sun and avoid the problems above.



- Choose the right time of the day when the sun is low on the horizon creating soft light.
- **Place the sun where you feel it looks right for the scene you are shooting. Sometimes placing it to one side, towards the edge of the frame or even slightly out of the frame will let you catch the glow of the sun in the scene you are shooting.**
- Use the lens hood that came with your lens to eliminate/minimise lens flare.
- **Position yourself behind your subject (for example portraits) so you can avoid direct sunlight falling on your lens or position yourself and the subject at an angle**
- Change your perspective to avoid lens flare and haziness caused by sunlight.
- **Use objects like mountains, tree branches, etc. to partly obscure the sun to avoid too much light and also a nice starbursts.**
- Use a graduated ND filter if required for evenly lit scenes.
- **Exposure bracket your shots and blend them while post processing for high contrast scenes you photograph.**
- For portraits, use the right metering mode (preferably spot metering) to get the exposure right on the subject's face. Make use of a reflector if necessary

- **Keep an eye on the histogram to avoid blown highlights or losing details in shadow areas.**



Now these tips will get you started with some good results, but part of our journey as photographers is to really learn how light works.

Natural directional lighting.

During the day it is often best to move your subjects inside and play with directional light as the light outside is generally too harsh. Side lighting is often a powerful way to create dramatic portraits and can easily be done by moving your subject into a doorway or next to a window. Side lighting a subject really gives more depth to a person and can create strong emotions.

Playing with the other forms of directional lighting can also pay off, but side lighting is usually the easiest with the best effect.



Photos by [Jacob Maentz](#)

The young man in the photo above was sitting down in his home with nice soft light entering through a window. The light had a very soft tone and the background was eliminated to bring all the focus to the man's face. The woman above was placed by an open door (during mid-day) allowing for directional light to create a dramatic portrait. The slightly warm color of these two photos also enhances the portraits.

6 Great Ideas for When You're Not Feeling Creative

by Marc Andre



Every photographer will eventually experience a time when they're just not feeling very creative. You may feel uninspired, frustrated with your work, or just stuck in a rut. When you face a situation like this, there are several things you can do. In this article, we'll look at 6 productive ways to move forward, as well as some ideas of things you can easily photograph to get your creative juices flowing again.

1. Work on Editing Old Photos

If you're like many photographers, you enjoy actually taking the photos

more than you enjoy editing them. As a result, most photographers have a lot of photos on their hard drive that have never been processed.

If you're struggling and you don't feel like taking photos right now, one option is to use your time to go back and work on those photos that you've already taken.

Even if you don't have any photos that are waiting to be processed, you probably have some old photos that could be improved. Even if you don't have any photos that are waiting to be processed, you probably have some old photos that could be improved. I know when I was first learning how to edit digital photos I went a little overboard at times, and I think that is pretty common. I've gone back and re-processed some of the better ones and found that the results are much more pleasing.

If you need some help with post processing, be sure to check out the Decoding Lightroom video course.

2. Try a Different Type of Art

How about dedicating some time to other artistic activities that may help to restore your creativity? You could draw, paint, play music, work on graphic design, or some other type of art. Taking some time to expand your horizon could be just what you need.



3. Read a Photography Book or Magazine

Books and magazines can be extremely helpful for learning, improving your skills, and for finding inspiration. There are books on every aspect of photography that you can imagine, and magazines are also a good choice if you're looking for something shorter.

You may already have some books or magazines at your house, and most libraries have a decent selection of photography books as well. Another option is to download ebooks. You can find a

number of free photography ebooks at Amazon, and many more are available at very reasonable prices.

4. Take a Break

Maybe you just need some time away from photography. You may find that taking a break will help you to come back refreshed and motivated to get back into it later.

Sometimes, as creative types, we need some time away from the camera to get a new perspective and find inspiration. That is completely normal and it happens with most creatives, from a painter needing some time away from the canvas or a guitarist wanting a break from music for a few days.

5. Push Yourself

How about giving yourself a challenge that may help you to break out of that creative rut? Instead of avoiding photography, you could choose some sort of challenge that gives you some newfound energy and motivation.

There are plenty of different things you could do, including:

- Limit yourself to a single lens
- Try a new type of photography
- Take a walk and photograph whatever you come across

Use your smartphone camera

6. Things to Photograph:

If you want to break out of your creative rut by finding something to photograph, there are plenty of options. While you can choose anything that you want, here are some options that may be accessible.

Your Family

Your family members can be excellent subjects for your photography. Not only will you get some practice, but you'll also come away with photos of the people you love. If you have kids, chances are, they are among your favorite subjects to photograph.

You can either take the photos around your house or head to a specific place. I enjoy taking my kids to the park and getting portraits in a nice setting like the woods or beside a lake.



Flowers

Flowers make a great subject for photos, and they're easy to find. You may have flowers in your yard. If not, you can head to a local park. Botanical gardens and arboretums are also great places to go. This page has a huge list of botanical gardens organized by location. You can probably find one within a reasonable distance from your home.

Another option is to go to the store and spend a few dollars on flowers. Bring them home, put them in a vase, and work on some still life photographs.

Nature

You don't have to go to an epic location in order to come away with beautiful landscape or nature photos.

In fact, more common or everyday locations will challenge you a little bit more in terms of creating compositions that work. All you need to do is visit a local park or public area that you can explore, and photograph whatever you come across. Opportunities are certainly easier to find in rural areas, but even urban areas have parks that can be useful for photographing nature.

Urban Scenes

Instead of photographing nature, how about heading to a city to photograph an urban landscape?

You can take a walk in the city and photograph the buildings and people that you come across.
Yourself

Another option is to take some self-portraits. Put your camera on a tripod and use the timer or remote, and practice taking photos of yourself. Self-portraits can be a great way to challenge yourself, and you won't even need to go anywhere or rely on anyone else.

If you've been feeling a lack of creativity, hopefully these tips will help you to use your time productively and bounce back to regain that creativity.

Know Your Subject Better

The Tips and Tricks

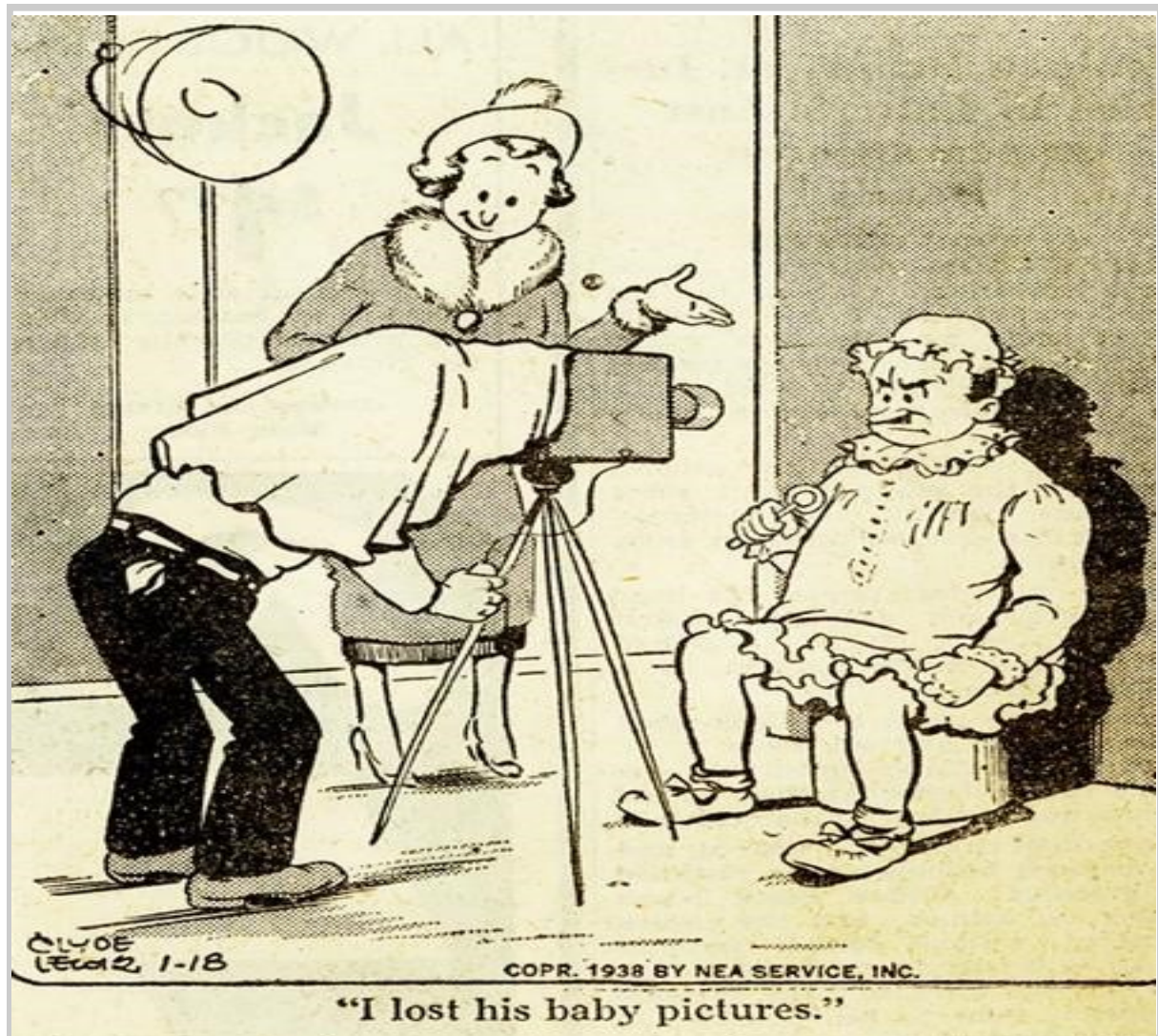
Here are some simple tips and tricks that can help you get to know your photography subject better.

1. **Do not forget to smile.** A smile is a good icebreaker. Most of the time, people you meet for the first time form their initial impressions about you by observing whether you smile or not. So, please, smile your sweetest smile and let your subject know that you are friendly and can be trusted.
2. **Find a common interest.** If your subject is a celebrity or important personality, find time to research and gather information about the person. Let's say you're photographing a local TV show host. Find essential information about the subject's TV hosting history, endorsements, charities or advocacies supported, interests other than hosting, and future plans. Doing this will help you find details that you can relate with and use for the photoshoot. Looking for a common interest is a good way of establishing a connection.
3. **If you are shooting an inanimate subject, put down your camera and observe your subject.** If your subject is the sunset or a winding trail in a secluded area, find time to be away from your gear. Put down that camera, find an area where you can sit (or stand) comfortably, and observe your subject. Seeing the sunset or the winding trail with your eyes (not through camera lens) will give you an entirely different view. You'll be able to spot little things and discover important details that you can use for the images you are planning to create. Once you've completely absorbed your subject's details, find time to describe it. This will help you find aspects that you can use in telling the story through your photos.
4. **Talk to your subject.** And when you do, do not forget to look at your subject and establish eye contact. Since you already have an idea of what your subject's interests and background are, it will be quite easy to strike up a conversation. You can start by asking, "*How are you feeling today?*" It's a very simple question that can break a lot of barriers. If your subject knows how comfortable you are to talk to, establishing a connection and earning trust points will be easy.

Go out of your comfort zone. Even if you are not into socializing or you're not comfortable around people you do not know, push yourself to go out of your comfort zone and find the courage to get to know your subjects. It can be two days before the shoot or five minutes before the event. It will be uncomfortable at first, but you'll soon get used to it, especially when you realize how much your subject has come to trust you.

Conclusion

Getting to know your subject may mean extra work and added time for you. But this shouldn't matter because the reward you'll get in the end will bring you satisfaction and creative victory. No matter what camera trick or technique you know, if you do not establish a good connection with your subjects, you won't be able to produce that masterpiece you so want to have.



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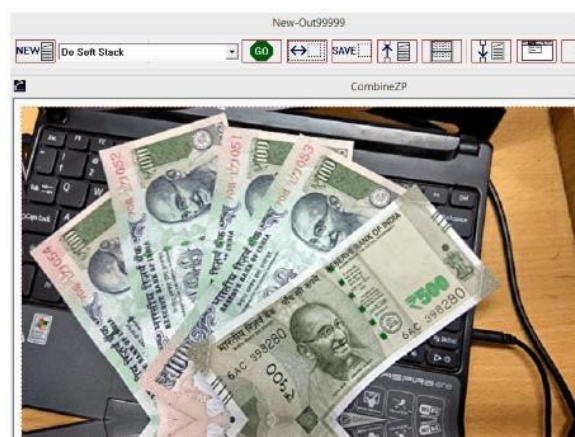
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