**Portrait Photography Composition & General Tips:**

* **Change your perspective:** Changing the angle from which you are shooting can dramatically increase the interest that your photograph creates. Don’t just stand there! Sit, squat, lie down or climb to get that photograph!
* **Examine your space:** Look around for leading lines, framing elements, secondary subjects, etc. Control what is in your image and use everything to your advantage.
* **Avoid the shakes:** If you are planning on using a slower shutter speed, but you don’t have a tripod, use a chair, table, or even your camera bag to keep your camera steady. You can also use the self-timer function.
* **Patience, young grasshopper:** Scenes (especially busy ones) are in a state of constant change. Find your vantage point, set up, and wait for your shot to come together.
* **Continuous Shooting:** This setting on your camera will allow you to take multiple photos in quick succession. This will potentially capture an array of different positions or poses from an active subject (like children or athletes).
* **Scout and examine locations:** Take note of any local features that you could include in your photograph. Build your shots around these features.
* **Attempt to frame your subject.** Framing is an excellent way to draw attention to your subject and even develop a narrative for your photograph.
* **Shoot with a wide angle (focal length):** Wide angles can cause some very interesting distortion. This distortion can emphasize certain elements of your photograph.
* **Work your way towards your subject:** Wide angles can provide interesting photos, but getting up-close and personal with your subject can really assist in capturing the essence of your subject.
* **Experiment with different backgrounds:** Sometimes your subject will benefit from a very minimalist background. Other times, a colorful or very textured background will complement your subject.
* **Know your gear:** Make sure that you are comfortable in operating your camera before the shoot. If you are fumbling with the controls, you will miss your shot.

**Portrait Photography Subject Tips:**

* **Prior Proper Planning Prevents Poor Performance:** No matter who your subject is (family, friend, or stranger), planning ahead is key to capturing your subject’s personality, character, emotion, etc.
* **Make your subject comfortable:** It is important to make a connection with your subject. Ask them questions, tell them a joke, make them laugh, get them to tell you a story. These approaches will help bring out authentic emotions and expressions in your subject.
* **Switch up your subject’s eye contact:** Try having your subject looking off camera (out of the frame) or at someone/something else within the frame. Your subject does not always have to stare straight at you.
* **Introduce something into the shoot that is out of your subject’s comfort zone:** You can get some truly innovative shots when you place your subject in an environment that is unfamiliar. Be careful, this approach can just as easily backfire on you!
* **Take candid photographs:** Sometimes (often times) posed photography looks way to uncomfortable and unnatural. Try getting some photographs of your subject at play or at work. This can place your subject at ease and get them to act naturally in a familiar environment.
* **Compliment your subject:** Make sure that your subject knows that they look good and are doing a great job. Girls usually like to look smaller, so have them stretch out (extending arms in doorways, changing your angle to elongate them, posing them in positions that compliment their feminine qualities). Guys usually like to look bigger, so shoot them in a way that helps them do that (squatting, arms crossed, etc.)
* **Be conscious of insecurities:** Everyone has something that they are insecure about so try to be aware of what your subject is self-conscious about and avoid showing those things when shooting them.
* **Sit up straight, dang-it!!:** No one looks good when they are slumped over. Make sure that when your subject is seated, they are seated on the edge of their chair.
* **Obscure part of your subject:** This can be accomplished with clothing, other objects, your subject’s hands, etc. This can also create a deeper level of interest and/or mystery to your photo.
* **Introduce a prop:** When you introduce a prop into your photos, it can provide another point of interest to enhance your composition. Props can add a narrative to your photograph that otherwise would have been absent. Be careful, you do not want to detract from your main subject.
* **Give ‘em a hand:** Next to the face, hands are the most expressive parts of the body. Hands can really help build a narrative and say something about your subject. Remember to have your subject softly rest their hands on their faces so they are not squishing and distorting their features.
* **Anticipate behavior:** When photographing children or athletes, set up your photo near a base location (goal, basket, home base) and wait for your subjects to come to you.
* **Use your aperture:** Using a shallow depth of field will really assist in highlighting your subject or point of interest. Additionally, it will soften the background and eliminate distractions.

**Lighting Tips:**

* **Make a reflector:** Cardboard and tin foil or a piece of white poster board are inexpensive and highly effective methods for making reflectors. Reflectors will help you control the lighting in your photograph.
* **Experiment with your lighting:** There are endless lighting possibilities when it comes to shooting a portrait. Lighting can create a mood, develop a narrative or hide or emphasize certain features.
* **Create a catch light:** A small reflector can be used to create a glimmer in your subject’s eyes. People often read portraits without catch lit eyes as sad or foreboding.
* **Remember the different types of light:**
  + **Main Light/Key Light:** The light from your main light source (sun, window, spot). This light is usually placed on one side of your subject’s face.
  + **Back Light:** The light to light the background and possibly the back of a subject.
  + **Fill/Side Light:** The light to fill in shadows from the main light.
  + **Top Light:** The light to light the top of the head or hair.
  + **Rembrandt Light:** Lighting that creates a small triangle of light on your subject’s cheek opposite to the light source.
  + **Split Light:** Lighting half of your subject face, while leaving the other half in shadow.
  + **Broad Light:**  Subject’s face is turned slightly away from center and the “broad” side of the face is in light (3/4 view).
  + **Short Light:** Opposite of broad light. Subject’s “broad side is in shadow.
  + **Loop Light:** Lighting that creates small shadows underneath the nose and cheeks of your subject. The nose shadow should NOT fall across your subject’s lips.
  + **Butterfly Light:** Light source is placed directly behind and above the camera (good for glamour shots and de-emphasizing wrinkles).
* **Use natural lighting:** Ambient natural light from a window is often the best light available. This is sometimes referred to as “barn light.”
* **Be cautious with electrical lighting:** Spot lights, floodlights, desk lamps, etc. can “burn out” your subject and create very harsh highlights and shadows. Try using a filter like a light white fabric (don’t set your house on fire, please) and back the light away from your subject.
* **Pay attention to the temperature:** All light has a temperature. Incandescents are warmer than fluorescents, and bright sunny days are warmer than cloudy and/or overcast days. Be sure that you have your White Balance set accordingly.