

What expectations should i have with my portrait experience

[Design](#), [Photography](#)



What should you expect when you go to have a portrait made? You just dress up and go to the studio and say “ Cheese”... Right? Oh, hell no! Yes, you could just walk in and let the photographer take care of everything. And you could come away with a nice portrait... You could... It’s possible... But if you want a truly fine portrait, you’re going to need to get more involved.

First of all, not all photographers are the same. Every photographer in fact is different in many ways. Each has a level of experience and expertise unique to them. Each has their own level of artistic ability. Each one has a perspective of their own. To obtain a portrait that is extraordinary, that you will be able to say of, “ This is the greatest portrait ever created!”, you will need to do some research and ask some questions.

Film or Digital

As explained in the first chapter, a portrait is more than just a photograph. Besides the planning and preparation, and then the photography, after you’ve chosen the image you want made into your portrait, there will need to be work done to the image. Things like removal of blemishes, softening of lines and wrinkles, whitening teeth, and more. Back in the day when film was the only option there were a number of artists who were trained and skilled in “ retouching” negatives, and doing certain kinds of artwork to the prints. Those days are past now, and the art of negative retouching and art working the prints is also a thing of the past. Today all the enhancements and artwork are done digitally. How does this affect your portrait? Well, if a photographer uses film, in order to do the enhancements and artwork, the negative will need to be scanned and a digital file made from it. Then the

work is done to the digital file. Or a print can be made from the film negative and the print scanned to make a digital file to work with. The problem with scanning is that with every scan a little detail is lost. With every little bit of lost detail you lose some quality and sharpness, which will affect the final print, and limit the maximum size that can be made. So, it's better to work with the original image, and it therefore makes better sense to work with a photographer who uses digital capture.

I Don't Know How To Pose

A lot of people have a hard time smiling in front of a camera, and I would say that most people don't know how to pose in a way that looks natural and at the same time complimentary. This should not be a problem. Helping you to look your best in photographs is a big part of your photographer's job.

First you should be comfortable with your photographer, and then the photographer should help you with your posing. As far as smiling goes, it is not a requirement that you smile in a portrait. A good photographer will never tell you to say "cheese" or say, "One, two, three, SMILE!" That is a sure way to get a fake, unnatural looking smile. A good photographer will talk with you, and draw out your personality, and guide you into poses that fit you and make you look good. So, knowing how to pose is not important for you. However, it's a good idea for you, when you are a week or so from your photography session, to be looking for poses that appeal to you. Look at ads and editorial photographs in magazines. Look for poses and groupings on television shows and commercials as well as movies. Just be aware of what you see that you like, and then try to copy some poses in front of a

mirror. And if you see something in a magazine that you think you would like to try, cut it out and show it to your photographer.

How Long Should The Photo Session Be

The short answer here is: As long as it takes to get really great photographs! So, how long is that? It really depends on a number of things. First, what is the intent of the portrait? Another is: Where is the photography to be done? Another is, believe it or not: What is the age of the subject? Okay, okay. . . Age really only matters in the case of newborns and very young children. You don't want to stress out a newborn or young child with a prolonged photo session, putting demands on them and flashing lights. Typically I schedule an hour and a half for newborns and babies. The time they are in front of the camera however, is much less than that, about maybe 40 minutes at most. The additional amount of time is to allow for feeding and breaks. Little ones have a very short attention span. For teens, high school seniors, adults and families, I schedule two hours for a session. I found that within that amount of time I am able to create a good number of high quality photographs that will translate well into fine portraits. Often the actual photography doesn't take the full two hours. Typically the session will last somewhere between one and two hours. Here in Hawaii where I live and work, we are blessed with an exceptionally long "Golden Hour". In the world of art, the last hour before sunset and the first hour after sunrise are referred to as "the Golden Hour", because at these times the sunlight has a warm, golden glow, and makes everything look better. Because of Hawaii's proximity to the equator, we actually get about two hours of this golden light, so I always schedule my outdoor location sessions for that time period:

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the last two hours before sunset. And as a result I discovered some time ago that two hours seems to be an ideal amount of time for a portrait session. I am able to get a good number of wonderful photographs, and it isn't so long that it over taxes my clients.

So, again, the short answer to how long should a photo session be is as long as it takes to get some great photographs. I've tried much shorter sessions, as short as 15 minutes, 30 minutes, and so on. And in the case of a "Headshot" session, for example for a business portrait, as little as 20 minutes is usually adequate. When making a business portrait a photographer needs to be fairly quick so as not to take more of the businessperson's time than is necessary. Overall, in most cases with the exceptions noted above, I have found that generally two hours is an ideal amount of time. Who Chooses The Images? I know of some photographers who insist that they choose the images and finish the portraits without their client's input. I say, "good for you", with tongue in cheek. . . I think that's NUTS! Yes portraiture is art, but portrait artists are in a 'service' business. The patron, or client is the "boss". And portrait art is a very personal and subjective art form. Most of the professional photographers I know will certainly edit out some of the images before previewing with their clients. I know I cut any images where I caught my subject blinking, or where the expression is clearly not what we're looking for. And there are photographers that actually turn over every single image to their clients on disc and let them print what they want, if they want. When you hire a photographer to

create your portrait, you are the boss. It's your portrait. You should be able to select the images that you like to be made into your portraits.

So that is one of the questions you should ask any photographer you are considering. Not only, " Will I be able to preview all the photographs?", but " How will we preview the photographs?" Preview MethodsIn the past, the most common method of previewing photographs was to print " proofs". That is 4×5 (usually) prints that have had no work done to them except perhaps color balance. From there the client was to choose the ones they liked, and order what they want in sizes and quantities. Some photographers still use this method. Now with digital photography taking over the world of photography, and film quickly becoming a thing of the past, more common is the digital preview. There are a few ways to do this. One of the most common methods is " Online proofing" where all the photographs are uploaded to a website where the client may view them at their convenience, and select what they want to order. Often the ordering is done right there at the web page where the images are previewed.

Another method of digital preview is either in studio on a computer, or in the client's home, but still on the photographer's computer. In my opinion, this is far better than posting the images on a website for the client to view on their own computer. The main reason being that the photographer's computer monitor will be calibrated to the correct color balance, and will display the images more accurately. Most consumers' computer monitors are not calibrated, and as a result the images may have a poor color rendition. Still another method of previewing is to project the photographs into a frame on

the wall. I have used all of these methods myself at one time or another. I have found that the superior method by far is to project the images into a frame on the wall. With 4×5 paper proofs it is difficult enough just to see the faces and expressions in the images, let alone try to imagine what they will look like when enlarged to a size suitable for a wall display! With online proofing, as I mentioned above, one doesn't know if the color is being represented properly, and again, the size of the images usually doesn't really let you know what they will look like as an enlargement. The other thing about viewing on a computer monitor is that, even if the monitor is calibrated properly, it presents the images back lit. This gives the image a different look than it will have when printed on paper or canvas. So it just isn't the most accurate. And of course the size of the monitor limits the size that the images can be viewed as.

Projecting photographs isn't perfect either because projectors have such high contrast values. Most projectors have a contrast of something like 2000 to 1 or even greater, which means that the darker shadows will have no detail, and the highlights may be "blown out" also having no detail. However, I have found that overall the projection method to be the best for the client. Here's why. First of all the images are projected at a size that allows the client to easily see the faces and expressions, which is all-important in portraiture. Secondly, the client will also know what the photograph will look like when enlarged to wall portrait size. With this projection method, the client can make better decisions as to which images they really like, and what size they will want, especially for wall displays.

What Are The Finish Options?

As far as what you may receive from your photographer there are really only two options. Your photographer may deliver a CD or DVD with your printable photographs, or you may order portrait prints from the photographer.

Personally I don't trust a photographer that follows the "Shoot and Burn" business model.

First of all, you'll not know what you're getting until you open the files and enlarge them. Only then will you see if the photographs have been enhanced with artwork to make them the best they can be. And what a disappointment that often turns out to be! Do you think a photographer who doesn't want the responsibility of printing your portraits for you will take the time to enhance and do artwork to every photograph they burn to disc for you? Or that they will enhance any of them? If all you want are snapshots, then this model will probably work for you. However if you really want the greatest portrait ever made, a photographer that uses the "shoot and burn" model is not the photographer for you! The other thing about that business model that I take issue with is that then you, the client are left to find a printer to print your photographs for you, or to print them yourself. This is playing "Russian Roulette" with the quality of the finished work at best. And then, will the printer stabilize and mount the prints? Will the printer finish the prints with an art guard? I feel that these items are very important, and certainly affect the final quality of the portraits. When it comes to print options, there are many! There exist a host of print media that you can have your portrait printed on. There are more specialty art papers than I can name here. You can also have your portraits printed on canvas or vinyl, or even backlit

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media. So the question really becomes, “ What are the best options for my portraits?” To answer that question, we must ask another one: What is the intended use? If you will be placing your portraits in an album, you will want them printed on a high quality portrait paper, then finished with an art guard spray to resist fingerprints. Whether this portrait paper has a glossy or satin or matte finish is really a personal preference. I personally prefer a satin finish for my portraits because to me it has a more artistic, and “ real” look to it. If the portraits are to be displayed in frames on shelves or on the wall, then a high quality portrait paper is also a good choice.

For wall displays of larger portraits I feel that a fine art canvas is the superior choice. Having your portrait printed on a fine art canvas will give them the appearance of greater depth, and a more painterly look. Of course canvas is more durable than paper and will last longer as well. In all cases your portraits should be finished with an art guard spray or coating. This adds protection against UV rays, fingerprints, and pollutants in the air, and adds longevity to your portrait art. How Long Should It Take For Delivery? Delivery times will vary depending on the amount of work that goes into turning the photographs into portraits, and the photographer’s workload. I’ve heard of some truly ridiculous delivery times! It should NEVER take six months for completion and delivery of a portrait order! I always give myself three weeks to do everything including artwork, printing, mounting and spraying. And I do all of this work by myself. Well actually, I tell my clients three weeks, and then I do my best to deliver earlier than that. Then again, I don’t accept more than two photo sessions in a day, and typically only take on four or five

sessions in a week. I don't like to rush, and I do like to deliver portraits that really thrill my clients. I would say that a delivery period of three to six weeks is reasonable. If the photographer is delivering in an hour, or even a day, you are not going to be receiving the highest quality portraits, no matter how many people are on staff. If the photographer says it will take more than six weeks for delivery, I would pass on that photographer. They are obviously too busy or they're just unorganized and too slow.

Should I Expect Any Kind Of Guarantees? Portraits are such a personal thing, and for fine portraits the investment can be considerable. Therefore it is my feeling that the client is entitled to a money back guarantee. Absolutely! And this is one of the first questions you should ask any photographer that you are considering to create your portraits: " What is your Guarantee?" If the photographer doesn't offer a guarantee, move on. In my business, I guarantee that my client will be thrilled with the portraits I make for them, and not just satisfied. If they are not thrilled, I will do whatever it takes so that they are thrilled. I'll make more photographs for them, I'll do more artwork. And if I can't make it so they are thrilled, I will refund every penny. (I've only had one taker on this guarantee in over 30 years of creating portraits for people.

Should I be Given The Negatives? Back in the days of film, it was extremely rare that a photographer would offer to give or even sell the negatives. You see, photography is an art form, and professionally made photographs are protected under the copyright laws as intellectual property. Now in the

digital age, there are many people out there offering their services as professional photographers, who really are not professionals.

Well, I guess if the definition of professional is one who is paid for what they do, then I suppose they do qualify. However, there are professional standards to be met before one can be considered a true professional photographer. Would you consider someone that could operate an airplane on autopilot, but didn't know how to take off or land, a professional pilot? I don't think so! In effect this is what has proliferated in the world of photography in recent years. People who have bought a nice digital camera, and are able to use it in the ' auto' mode, and have been told by friends and family that they " take great pictures", have begun offering their services as professional photographers. While they may get paid to make photographs, they certainly aren't professional photographers! They don't know photography, and they don't understand the business and responsibility that comes with being a professional. So they go out and make 100s or even 1000s of photographs, burn them to a disc and turn them over to their clients, figuring there will some good ones in there. In my opinion, that's not how a professional works. A professional photographer is an artist. An artist is generally attached to their work, and they rightfully take pride in their work. Therefore they will want to be sure that any representation of their work will be the best it can be. They can only be assured of that if they print the work themselves. So, while it does happen that ' negatives' are offered as part of the service by many these days, I would be very wary of any photographer who does so as a matter of course.

Can I Make Copies Of My Portraits? As I mentioned previously, professional photographs are protected under the copyright laws, and so it is illegal to copy your portraits in any form without written consent from the photographer. Often a photographer will give written permission for a one-time reprint use, such as for greeting cards or invitations. And it's not uncommon for photographers to allow clients to email their portrait or post it on a social network site. In fact many photographers will offer to email the portraits desired for that purpose to the client, or make a low resolution copy and put it on a disc for that particular use. However, you should expect these low res copies to have the photographer's copyright stamp on them.

What If My Portrait Gets Damaged, Or I Want More Made In The Future? A lot of photographers will purge their files of images after a certain length of time. Some will archive all image files and keep them indefinitely. So this is a good question to ask photographers that you are considering for creating portraits for you. I am one of the later that archive and keep all the files.