

Single Light Portrait Guidelines

By Dick Cicone

Single Light Portrait

Subject interaction:

- *Establish if 'photo direction' will be used or not. (Depends if candid, model/image creation or personal portrait)
- *Suggest subject-positioning adjustments to best utilize lighting and desired effect.
- *Compose for $\frac{3}{4}$, profile or straight-on facial view.
- *Try to avoid having the 'nose break the cheek line'.
- *Select an angle complimentary to the subject's features.
- *Perspective considerations – high forehead, deep-set eyes, prominent nose or chin.
- *Lighting considerations - Use 'short light' for round and 'broad light' for narrow faces.
- *Prompt 'complementary' expressions.
- *Show only good pictures.

Candid / available light(no flash):

- *Establish subject's approval/agreement to take pictures.
- *Locate subject near a light source (window, tungsten light etc)
- *Consider placing a 'reflector' (white matte board, umbrella etc) opposite the light source or low in front of the subject to reflect light into facial shadows.
- *Use a complementary 'viewing perspective'.
- *Avoid cluttered or bright/distracting background items.
- *Place subject 4+ feet away from background, NOT against background. Special exceptions exist.
- *Use a tripod if shutter speed is slower than 'hand-held' guide.

Candid / available light (using flash fill):

- *Expose for 'available light' and adjust flash to be one-to-three stops under exposed – just enough flash to 'fill' shadows and NOT make a shadow behind subject.
- *Alternative – use flash as main light (preferably OFF camera) – set for 100% illumination.
- *If 'available light' is bright but not where you want it - adjust shutter speed to underexpose 'available light' by one-to-three stops.

Portrait Lighting: (flash or hot-light)

- *Place light at 10 o'clock or 2 o'clock position, pointing 45 degrees down. (Lower for deep-set eyes)
- *Consider 'diffused' lighting, and Diffusion filter for 'over 20' year old subjects.
- *Side-lighting can also be effective.
- *Direct/harsh lights are typically more masculine.
- *Consider a reflector (matte board etc) on opposite side of subject (from light) to produce shadow detail.
- *Select background illumination/color to separate subject. i.e.; if light hair use darker background.

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Philosophy:

- transmit feeling, thought, etc.
- reflection of both subject and photographer
- avoid mechanical duplication
- remember the reason/use of picture.

Subject/Self Control:

- conversation
- environment
- music, poetry, lighting, environment
- be considerate (don't use a portrait subject as a model without consent)
- relate to create desired response

Preparation:

- preview subject
- preconceive image, notes, sketches
- equipment (film, lenses, lights, filters)
- be confident – your mood sets the photo session mood.

Equipment:

- camera, tripod
- lighting, reflectors
- correct lens for perspective

Adjustments for physical characteristics:

- prominent forehead - tilt chin down, lower camera
 - extended nose - tilt chin up, shoot straight on, lower main light
 - narrow chin - tilt chin up
 - baldness - lower camera, eliminate head lights
 - angular nose - shoot to minimize angle
 - broad face - raise camera, shoot at 3/4 position, use short lighting
 - narrow face - lower main light, use broad light
 - wrinkled/marked face - diffuse/soft focus filter, flat light, low light, 3/4 pose
 - double chin - raise camera, chin and light
 - facial defects – shadow or angle to minimize, flat light, diffuse filter
 - prominent ears - 3/4 pose, shadow close to ear, try profile view
 - eyeglasses - angle down, adj. light to eliminate glare, try profile view
 - deep set eyes - lower light, raise chin, reduce light ratio, flat light
 - heavysset figure - short light, low key, dark clothing, 3/4 pose
- REMEMBER - control all features ie: the nose doesn't grow out of cheek...

Perspective:

- head & shoulders - center lens at top lip & nose tip
- 3/4 pose - center at mid-chest level
- full length - center at waist level

Camera tilt up or down will stretch or shorten the subject.

RAISE CAMERA to elongate face, nose; narrow chin, broaden forehead

LOWER CAMERA to shorten nose; reduce forehead width/height; accent chin & neck

Fill Lighting:

- reflector approx. 20" x 24"-wrinkled aluminum foil, white matte board, umbrella
- flash – off camera, adjust ASA(on flash) for desired light ratio
- use light ratio from 1:2 to 1:6
- OPTION - fill with 4800K (blue) lamps or daylight

Special Effects:

- vignette, color gel, black or white mesh(net) material
- soft focus filter, Vaseline on a (UV) filter
- tissue with hole torn in it, fine black or white netting
- colored filters/gels on strobe
- montages
- multiple exposure

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CAMERA - 70 to 135 mm lens at f8 or f11, 7ft to 10 ft from subject. Suggest use of a 'Diffuser 2' filter.

LIGHT – flash at 30 to 45 degrees from subject with a layer of tissue or handkerchief to diffuse light or use an umbrella or reflector for light. Optional paper/block to reduce light on background (barn door effect)
Hot-light (tungsten) should be 'bounced' of a reflector board (not too close because they are **HOT** and could cause a fire.

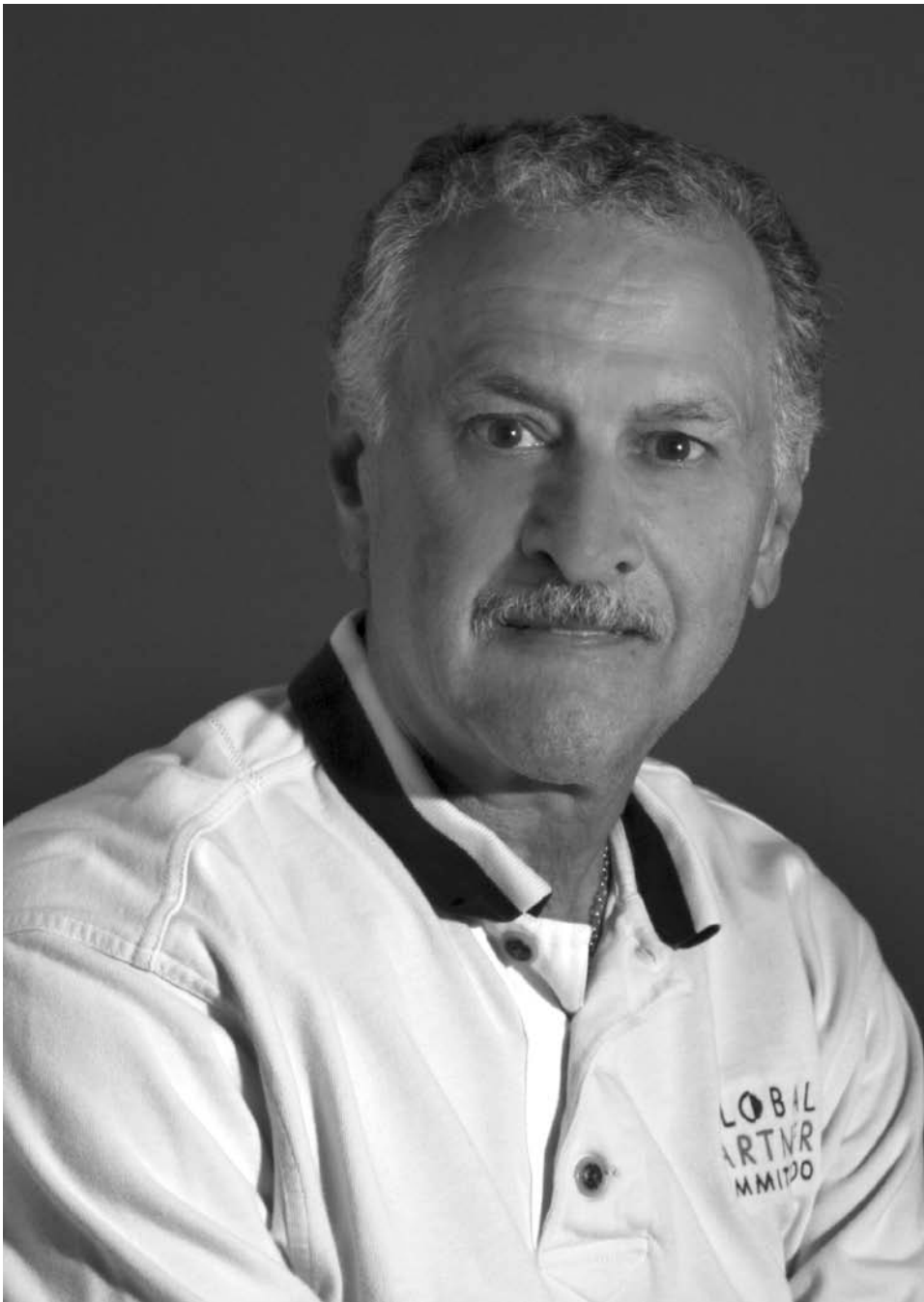
BACKGROUND – placed 4 to 6 ft behind subject. Select color to contrast with hair and clothing.

REFLECTOR – next to subject to reflect light to shaded side.

SUBJECT at $\frac{3}{4}$ body pose to camera. Multiple people should be touching and NOT directly facing the camera.

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Resultant image using guidelines provide soft lighting and details on both Sides of subjects face.