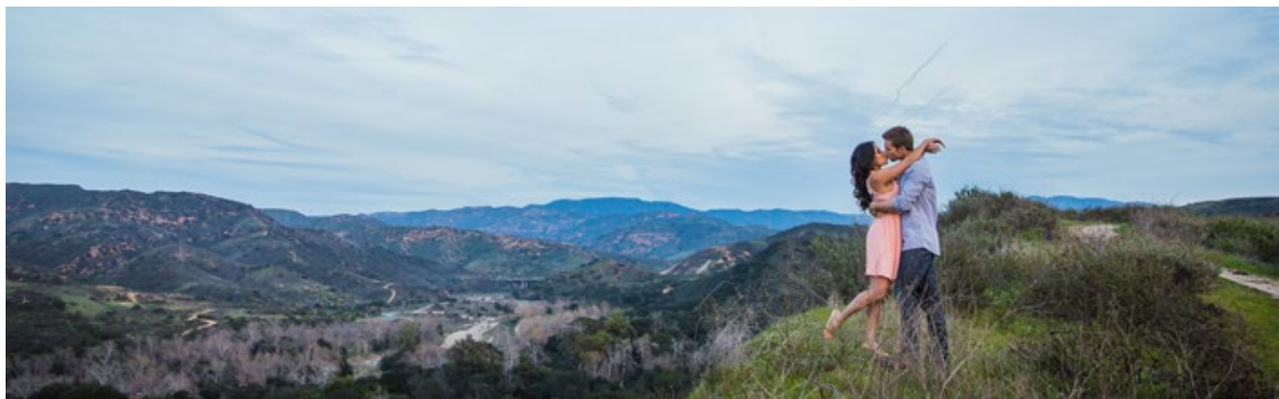
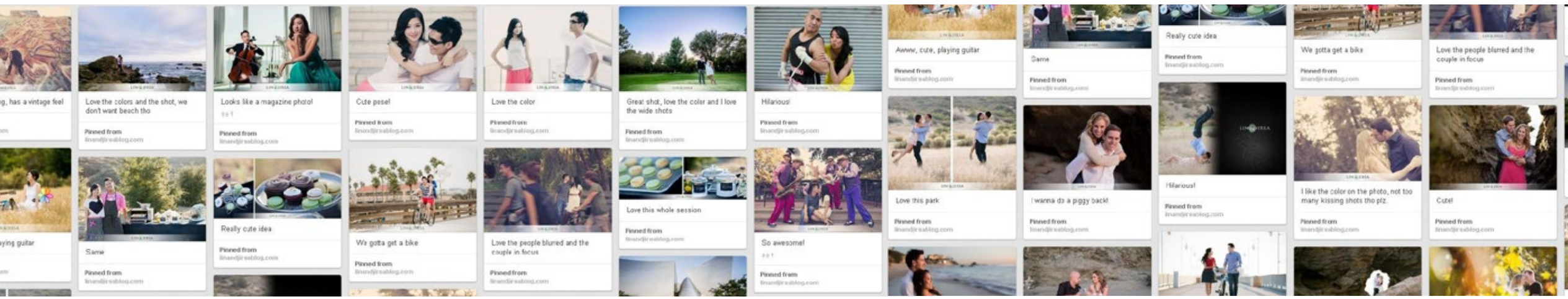
ENGAGEMENT PHOTOGRAPHY GUIDE

SLR Lounge



CREATING A MOODBOARD



Lifestyle photography is a broad, general category so the best thing to do is to have your clients put together what we call a moodboard so that we can understand their goals, tastes and even their personalities before the photo shoot.

There are no set rules for creating a moodboard, however Pinterest is currently one of the greatest resources in our opinion. It helps to set up your website or blog so that clients can "pin" your photos directly, but this is not critical.

What Is A Moodboard? The way we explain a moodboard to a client is that it's less of a fixed "shot list", and more of an "idea board" for them to collect their thoughts and interests. They should pick primarily images from your own website, of course, but a few of their own images are okay if they're just used to show you a particular location or something. Images that the client finds online from other photographers are okay too, but should be kept to a minimum of course.

It can be a red flag if the client's mood board is entirely made up of images from other photographers. This can be an indication that you were not their first choice as a photographer. You may wish to bring this up with the client and discuss how your own style differs, or you should at least study the moodboard very carefully so you know what types of images to deliver.

Descriptive Captions - We recommend asking your clients to write a quick description about each photo they pick. They may just like a location but not the pose. Maybe they love an image that has a warm, vintage look, regardless of the location! They'll also certainly pick many images that aren't necessarily from relevant locations, but they collectively describe the poses and "feel" of how the images are captured, how the subjects are depicted.

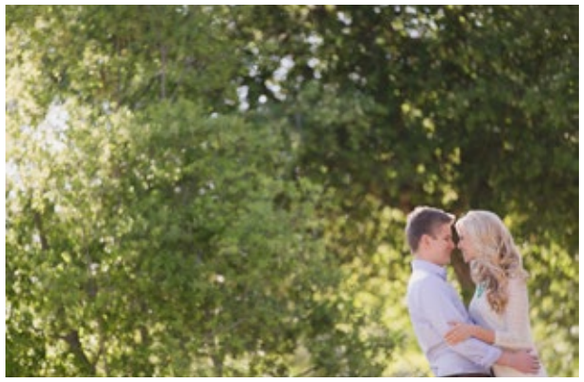
It may also help to have the couple post a few images in a separate category to show something that they do not like, if you feel that they are very detail oriented. That way you can avoid certain things if necessary.

Of course once the moodboard is complete, it is now up to you as the photographer to actually use it to align your own vision with theirs! We'll get into this soon. Start by looking through the mood board to determine things like where to shoot, activities to do, wardrobe suggestions, etc.

See a sample moodboard review on our Youtube Channel, or check out the full Natural Light Couples Photography Workshop.

DIFFERENT STYLES PART 1

Since we have found that many beginning photographers can easily understand something visually, yet have a difficult time finding the words to express a style, here are a few common terms or phrases you might be able to use with your clients to help both parties understand a particular style:

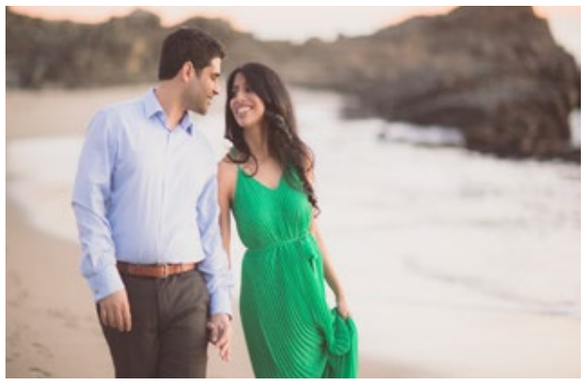


“Bright and Airy”

Also known as high-key imagery, we like to describe our own studio’s style as “bright and airy”. This implies that on average, we’ll avoid very high-contrast situations, or deep dark shadows. (Although we certainly wouldn’t hesitate to use them when necessary.)

“Dark and Moody”

Oppositely, the low-key style can be equally beautiful however it is difficult to describe without making a client feel that it has a negative connotation. So, we use words like “romantic” or “moody” or “dramatic” to describe this style.



“Vintage” Style Imagery

We try and avoid terms like “flat” or “faded” when describing this style, and simply refer to the warm, film-like tones that this style of shooting and post-production offers.

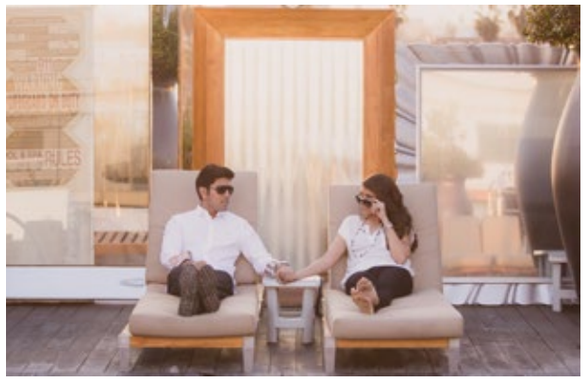
DIFFERENT STYLES PART II

“Clear and Vibrant” Style Imagery

Opposite from the vintage, faded style, we also love to achieve very timeless, accurate colors in our post-production. We avoid calling it “basic color correction” or “normal colors” with our clients, of course, because we feel that our particular standards deserve a higher level of recognition. This is why we use terms like “vibrant and clear” and “accurate, timeless” to describe this style.

“Playful And Fun, Not Too Serious”

When describing how we’ll approach a shoot in general, the clients’ options are usually “playful and fun” and “dramatic and serious”, or somewhere in between. While most clients will want a little bit of both, they’ll want to emphasize photos that capture their personalities more casually, in a fun way.



“Dramatic, High-Fashion, Editorial Style”

Usually fewer clients are looking for this style, however the results can still be very impressive if everybody is on the same page. We usually explain that our style of posing will not be too stiff or over-the-top, yet still achieving dramatic and stylish results.

Overall, the best thing you can do is to express excitement and positivity with your clients whenever you are talking to them about the plans for your shoot. Even if they put a few images in their mood board that you don’t like, try to maintain a strong sense of cooperation and understanding. In other words, try to go for “speaking with authority” instead of sounding like a know-it-all or a snobby artist. Sometimes we “creatives” can let our egos get a little out of control, so remind yourself to always be tactful with your clients’ ideas or requests!

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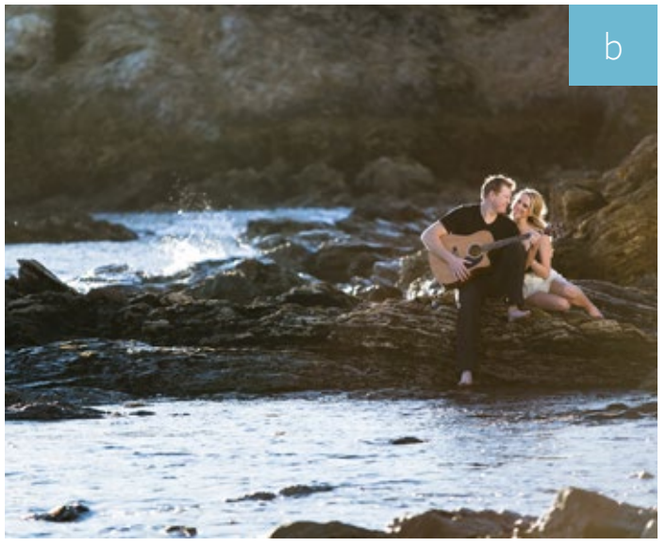
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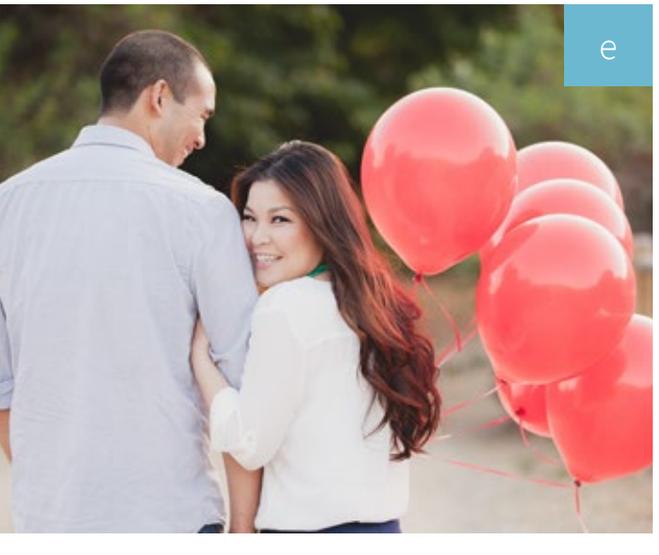
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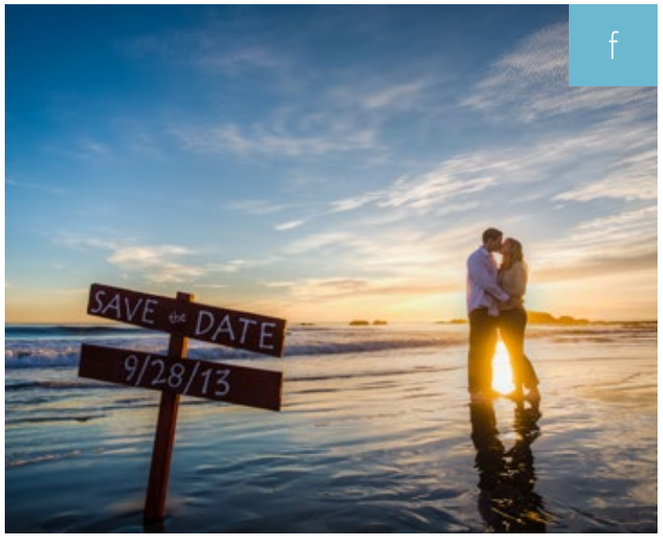

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PROPS & ACTIVITIES

In addition to using the mood board to select locations, poses, or post-production styles, clients should include activities and props. Basing part of your session on an acitivity will add action, excitement, and personality to a session.

It's important to make sure props aand activities fit the couple's lifestyle and personalities. A prop could be cute and creative and it could even fit the scene perfectly, but if it doesn't fit the couple, then it simply won't make sense and won't seem natural. On the otherhand, if the prop or activity perfectly fits the couple, their personalities will shine through in the photos, and the overall signifiance of the photos will increase.

For example, sports fans always have great ideas on how to bring their favorite teams into a photo shoot with jerseys or other memorabilia (image a). If the guy is a musician he might want to bring a guitar or other instrument (image b). Similarly, if a client has a general interest such as going out for romantic evenings, then a picnic setting with a bottle of wine or some other fun props might be ideal on a beach (image c), or in an open field.

Then there are the types of props that are "just for kicks" such as an empty picture frame (image d), balloons (image e), or some sort of sign that relates to the wedding date or the couples' names, or both (image f). These can sound cliche, but they're great to at least help the clients warm up and relax in front of the camera, and when done tastefully they can bring a fun, creative aspect to the photo shoot.

See more Prop ideas on our Pinterest Account.

CHOOSING THE RIGHT LOCATIONS

If a client takes the time to create a sufficient mood board, then choosing locations to shoot will be very straightforward. Maybe they selected lots of images with open fields and warm sunlight (image a), or images on the beach with amazing sunsets, or images of dramatic city skylines and the urban feel.

Of course while this makes it obvious where your client would like to shoot, you will probably still have to help them narrow down their selections to make the session work.

Be Realistic - If you don't live and operate your business near a beach or a downtown area, you will have to carefully discuss these scenes with the clients and maybe suggest locations that can produce a similar feel.

Also, keep in mind that there are lots of settings that have subtle and not-so-subtle differences. For example, the term "outdoorsy" could mean anything from open fields and ranch-style fences (image b) to more rugged, adventurous settings like woods (image c) or desert rocks.

One thing we often have to help our clients with in the "outdoorsy" category is the difference between the look of a suburban park that is generally well-groomed, and the more natural, even "wild" locations. Both can produce awesome results, but you don't want to give clients one if they were expecting the other!

Be Specific - So, pay attention to small details like these in your clients' moodboard, and work with them to clarify certain details such as what they mean by "outdoorsy" or "urban". Giving them clear options is always a great way to help them understand that you want to help them achieve the best results possible, yet you can't fit everything under the sun into a single session.

For this workshop, our client (bride) Jackie selected a lot of images with green and natural backgrounds, so we felt an ideal location would be one of the local parks in Irvine, California. It has a whole variety of natural backdrops, some that look more like the great outdoors and some that are more like a park.

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OBTAINING PERMITS

Many portrait photographers who shoot small, casual sessions and who aren't setting up lots of lighting (and even a few who are!) may feel that they don't need a permit to shoot photos in a public area such as a park, beach, or similar location.

However we strongly recommend getting a photography permit for any location that you plan on shooting at. Generally these permits are quite affordable and sometimes even free; all you may have to do is fill out paperwork in advance. Thankfully most locations that do have fees will recognize the difference between you (a simple portrait photographer) and a large crew that is filming a movie or other large production. This means that their fees are usually quite reasonable for you, usually in the range of $25-$100. This is a cost that we pass to our clients, and we require permits at each location we shoot.

Why do we always insist on getting a permit? Simply because not only is shooting without a permit illegal and can result in fines, it can also result in liability issues if (heaven forbid) anything were to happen to us or our clients during the shoot.

If you decide to ignore permit requirements and get caught, then even if you don't get fined you will wind up getting kicked out of the location, which is a huge embarrassment to both you and your clients. Not to mention that it ends the photo shoot, cold turkey!

If a client is unwilling to pay for a permit, there are still a few other locations which we pay for annual city / county permits. Either way when it comes to location shoots, play it safe, get a permit and stick to the rules. Depending on your clientele you may choose to pay for all your own permits, of course that is up to you!

Permits Allow You To Shoot In Beautiful Locations

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WARDROBE

One thing that clients consistently express concern about is what to wear. We always try and reassure our clients early on that wardrobe selection is actually very simple and easy! A little bit of guidance will spare our clients from hours of searching through their closets, (or shopping) as well as positively affect the overall quality of the images of course.

We have a very simple suggestion for our clients. It's usually good to avoid bold, distracting colors or patterns. These will overpower a viewer, and depending on how fine the pattern is they can sometimes even cause an issue on the camera sensor known as MOIRE. (Google it if you want to learn more!)

b

Of course sometimes bright neon colors or flashy patterns is indeed what a client wants to use in at least one scene of the shoot, which is fine. This might just be a part of the couple's fun, happy personalities (image a)!

When In Doubt, Fit Into The Location - Generally speaking, a wardrobe ought to match the location of the shoot. For example while a dark suit and cocktail dress would really fit in for a downtown city type of shoot (image b), it would be very out of place in the woods or on the beach. Oppositely, cowboy boots and flannel or plaid would look out of place in a city or urban setting.

WARDROBE PART II

Again, rules are meant to be broken of course, and dressing classy in an outdoor setting can look dramatic and artistic if done properly. Just be sure to converse with your clients and stay on the same page. If you plan on shooting after dark or in shadowy areas, keep in mind that darker colors can blend into a dark background very easily. So either be very careful with where you shoot and how you compose your photos, or encourage clients to wear lighter colored clothes for any scene that will have deep, dark shadows.

Another thing to warn clients about is wardrobes that match too much. If they wear the exact same style and/or colors, they might be mistaken for a brother and sister instead of an engaged couple! So, a touch of matching color here or there is great but don't overdo it.

Comfort - A main priority is of course comfort, both physical and mental. Wearing comfy shoes for at least some of the photo shoot is advisable for women who might be inclined to wear heels.

If a guy is used to wearing jeans and T-shirts (see image to the right), then consider suggesting that he do so for at least a few images to keep everyone happy.

Remind clients that it isn't usually necessary to buy all new clothes for a photo shoot; especially if they are worried about feeling comfortable or looking great in front of the camera. Assure them that the best thing is to dress however they normally would for a nice date or gathering. After all, it is our job to help them look their best, and the biggest help is if they feel as natural and relaxed as possible.

Let him be comfortable!

BOOK 1 OF 3 | PLANNING & PREPARATION

PROFESSIONAL MAKEUP

Getting hair and makeup done professionally for a couple's portrait session is something that we highly recommend to all our clients. For wedding photographers, this can usually be coordinated with a "trial run" for the makeup artist and/or stylist that the bride will use on her wedding day. Or for general

portraiture not associated with weddings, we still encourage our clients to get this done simply because this dramatically improves the overall production of the photo shoot, as well as the post-production time afterwards.

It is important of course to talk to clients about the style of makeup they are going to try to do for the portrait session. Remind them to communicate with the makeup artist about where and when the engagement session will be, and what their wardrobe might be, so the makeup artist can help them to look great in those situations.

In other words, girls, don't over-do it, especially if most of your session you are going to be dressed more casually! One thing that helps is to partner with a local makeup artist or a team that you can always trust and recommend to your clients. As wedding photographers this is always a mutually beneficial thing to do, however it can also have a great effect on any portraiture business.

It also helps to test out the hair & makeup for the sake of timing. In general any portrait photographer will want to encourage their clients to hire a makeup artist who can get their job done on time, so that you have one less thing to worry about in the planning stages of the photo shoot. Timing is even more important on a wedding day, of course, so this is another reason why we like to team up with and recommend a select few other vendors.

START AND END TIME

During our years of experience as portrait and wedding photographers, we have found that 3 hours is almost always the perfect length for a portrait session. With any less than 3 hours, we just aren't able to deliver the variety of images that we would like. With any more than 3 hours, the clients often get pretty tired (and hungry!) by the last hour or so.

With 3 hours we are able to capture two or three different locations, as long as they are close enough together to be just a few minutes' drive away. We can also fit in two or three total wardrobes or "looks", usually coinciding with the location changes. We usually deliver about 100 total images from the photo shoot, with a well-rounded variety of images.

Sometimes a client will ask if the 3 hrs of session time does not include driving from one location to another, especially if one of the drives is 30-40 minutes. We simply tell the clients that the time for driving and wardrobe changing is still part of the 3 hour session.

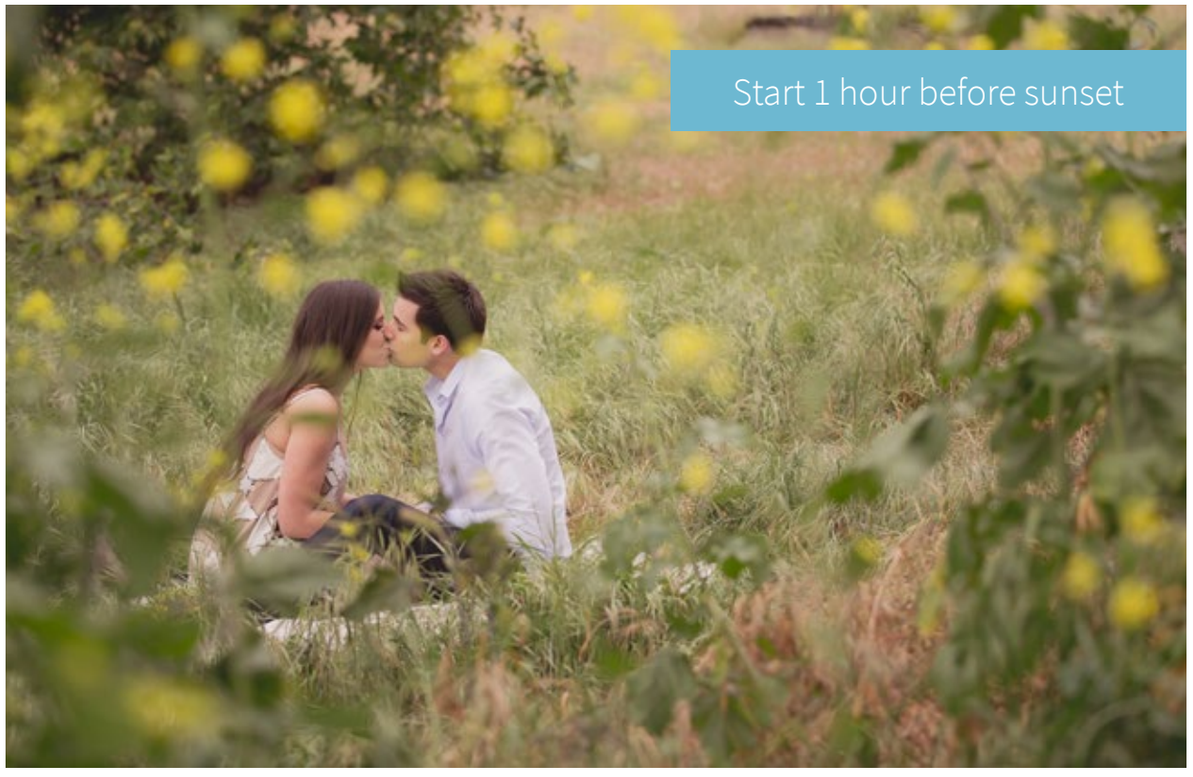
Reassure your clients that even though you may have to drive here or there, or wait to change clothes, you're still going to get the right number of photos.

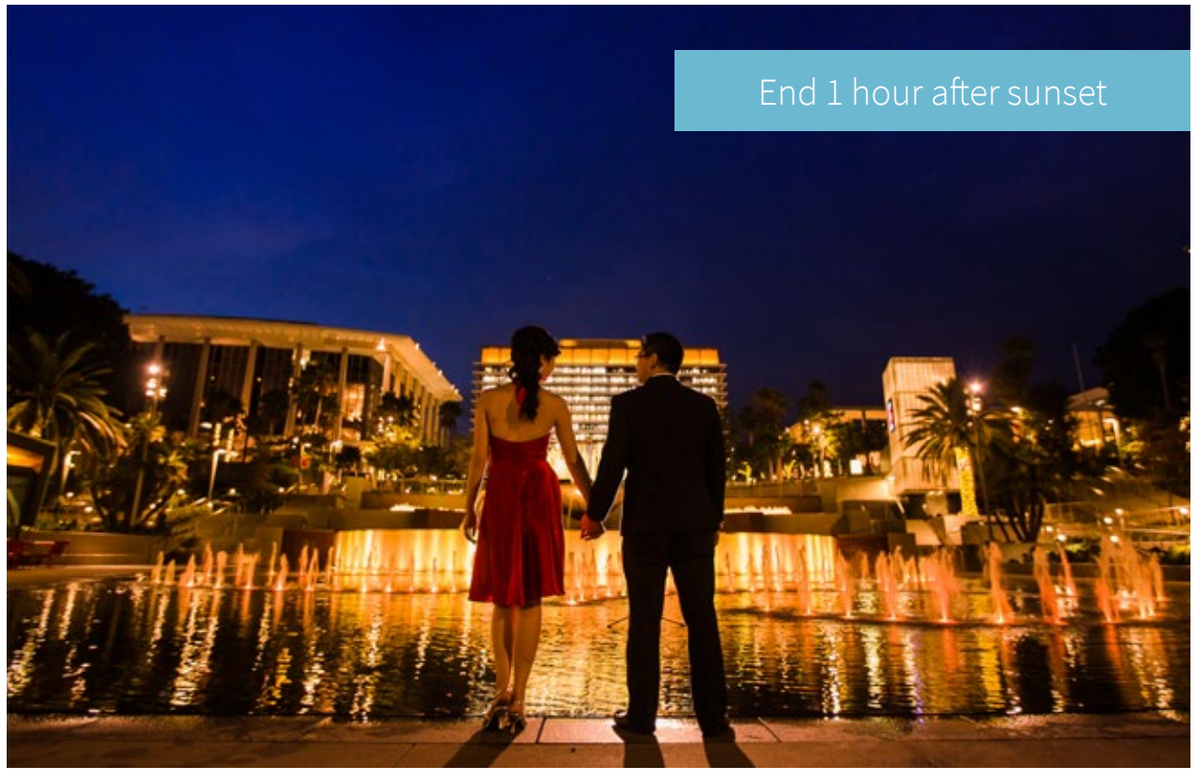
Of course if the client is trying to fit five wardrobes and/or two 40 minute drives into their session, that would be the time to help them be realistic and manage their expectations for what can be accomplished. If they really would like to accomplish that much variety in their shoot, then they may want to add additional time to their session.

On the other hand, if the client is worried that 3 hours is indeed too much time, again you can mention that when you consider going from one spot to the next, they don't need to worry about the day being an intense ordeal. Even if they're not comfortable in front of the camera, the session length should feel nice and comfortable for every client.

The most important thing to do is to be realistic about what can be accomplished. Our suggestions seem to work well for us, however your locations, your shooting style, and/or your ability to "hustle" may slightly affect your own times and policies.

See our Workshop for more info.





FINAL TALK-THROUGH & TIME REMINDER

Once you've done all this preparation it is best to wrap up with a final "talk-through", which we like to do either in-person or over the phone.

Describe The "Look" - During this conversation we do a number of things. First, we confirm the "look" that the client is hoping to achieve, based on the images in their mood board. If we feel that they are very detail-oriented people, then we may go over each image in the mood board briefly and talk about what they like about it, what they don't like, and how achievable it may be for our own session. We also ask them if there are any ideas, themes or locations that may be missing from this overall vision.

Confirm Times & Locations - Next we need to discuss the logistics of the shoot. Of course any serious issues should already be resolved, such as if the client wants to fit too many locations or themes into the allotted time. At this point all we need to do is talk to them about exact locations and addresses, arriving early, where and when to change wardrobes, things like that. It is also helpful to remind them to take traffic into consideration, and to try and arrive early. As wedding photographers, we personally schedule most of our sessions on weekdays, and at certain times of year this can mean driving in rush hour traffic.

Encourage Promptness - Throughout our contracts and our correspondence, we have very explicitly described what happens if the clients arrive late to a shoot. If they arrive late, simply put, that time is lost and the session still has to end when it was originally supposed to. This may sound too harsh if you are the generous, forgiving type however we believe it is necessary because not only is it a waste of time and money for us to stand around waiting, it is also going to affect the quality of the images since we will have less time and less light to shoot with. Of course it is up to you whether or not you actually enforce such a strict policy, but it should at least be in place so that your clients don't frequently take advantage of you.

So again, during the final "talk-through" we simply remind the couple to leave early, consider traffic, and try to arrive on time or even a couple minutes early so that we can begin promptly and accomplish all the things we want to. Lastly, after this final conversation is over we'll go ahead and send them a TXT or email to confirm the address, date and time of the shoot. This is just a great sanity check for any time when you have two or three shoots back to back, plus it also ensures that your clients are on the same page.

LIFESTYLE ENGAGEMENT PHOTOGRAPHY

An “engagement session” is simply a couples portrait session that happens prior to the wedding. It can range from a few simple portraits to a full, all-day production. In this book, we’ll be covering a style of engagement photography known as “lifestyle portraiture,” a collection of photos that are aimed at capturing or recreating real-life moments and situations. When people say “couples portrait session” or “engagement session,” they are typically refering to this style.

Here at our photography studio, Lin & Jirsa, linandjirsa.com we use all kinds of different lighting techniques and equipment to pull off the style of imagery that we love. From natural light to off-camera flash, from dramatic HDR images to Hollywood style constant lighting, we pursue any and every technique that can add a unique quality and style to our images.

Even though we are always refining and adding new techniques to our style, at the foundation of our photography is always going to be lifestyle photography using natural light.

It truly is the foundation of couples portraitrure. It is important to utilize and master these basics, even as you continue to add more complex and challenging techniques to your style. So in this book, we are only going to be using natural light and a simple, affordable Westcott 5-in-1 reflector!

Lifestyle Photography makes for the perfect introduction to Couples Photography because it allows us to primarily focus on our subjects, posing, storytelling, lighting and overall composition. From this foundation, add interesting lighting or post production techniques and the skies the limit!

Much of this content is based on the Natural Light Couples Photography DVD, available in our Natural Light Couples Photography DVD. In the DVD, you'll see the posing, communication and shooting in action, you'll receive the exercise files, and you'll learn the post production side of the process as well. Check out the product page for more information.

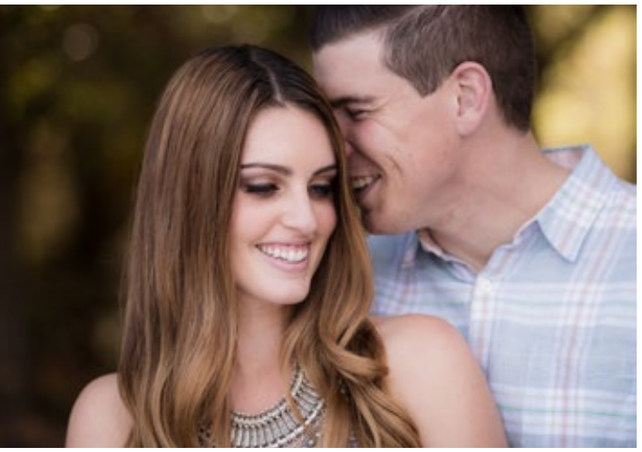
If you're interested in expanding your knowledge with lighting techniques and advanced post prouduction techniques, you'll want to supplement the knowledge from this book with the following workshops.

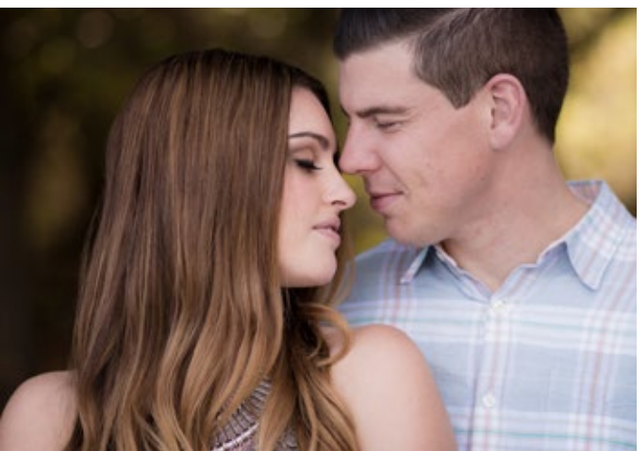
1) Lighting 101 | Foundation and Light Shaping
2) HDR Photography Workshop | Master HDR Photography
3) Lightroom Workshop Collection | Presets, Tutorials & More

Like with any SLR Lounge product, we have designed this book to be an industry standard training solution and a must-have for any portrait photographer.

So, thanks again for your support, and let's get started!

WHY TO SHOOT AN ENGAGEMENT SESSION





Since the majority of our clients are hiring us to photograph their wedding, the Couples Photography session they receive will be their Engagement Session, or E-Session for short.

A couple considering you as their wedding photographer may ask you “why do we need to do an engagement session? Can we take it out of the package to save money?” At our studio, we try to ensure that every client books an engagement session before their wedding for 3 very important reasons.

3 PRIMARY REASON FOR BOOKING AN ENGAGEMENT SESSION

Get to Know the Couple

The primary use of this engagement session is not only to create some portraits, but also to get to know the couple. Wedding days are an intimate affair, so it is crucial to grow a relationship with each couple before their big day.

If you can develop a strong connection with your subjects, you will notice that they naturally let down their guard and act more like themselves when they are in front of the camera, allowing you to capture more of your client’s personality and emotion.

Learn Their Preferences

The next benefit of an Engagement Session is to learn your client’s personal preferences and style regarding their portraits. Some couples may like more romantic and kissy poses, while others may want to avoid overly affectionate imagery and focus more on casually having a fun day together.

Either way, knowing this will help you to deliver a product that is more personalized, again not only for the Engagement Session but more importantly for the actual wedding day.

Free Marketing

The third primary benefit of doing an Engagement Session is to provide free marketing for you!

If you can take your clients out on an Engagement Session and deliver photos they absolutely love, they are going to share those photos with their friends long before the wedding, use them for display on the wedding day, and possibly for their “thank you” cards. Essentially, they will put your work in front of all the people they are close to.

BOOKING AN E SESSION

Many photographers, including Lin and Jirsa Photography, build these Engagement Photography Sessions into wedding packages at a heavy discount. That way, there is really no reason to reject the Engagement Session in order to simply save money. When we tell our clients that their Engagement Photos have a 50% discount in the package, and that normally we charge over $1,000 for a standard Engagement Session, they almost always leave it in the package.

There are a few other ways you can approach this, too. You can charge more for your wedding photography coverage services, and then add the engagement session as a free component so that the client simply can't ask to take it out. Oppositely, some photographers even offer the engagement session for free before the client even commits to booking a wedding package! We feel that both of these business tactics aren't as optimal because they incline the couple (and even the photographer) to put a lot less effort into the session, which causes you to miss all the benefits we described. However they have both been proven to work, so the decision is up to you

In conclusion, shooting an Engagement Session will only help you to deliver higher quality and more personalized images which in turn is only going to help in growing your skill and your business!

THE NATURAL LIGHT MYTH

Before we continue, it is important to dispel the myth about natural light. Advanced or professional photographers may argue that shooting by natural light is just something for beginners to do when they are afraid to master more advanced lighting techniques like studio lighting, or even simple off-camera flash.

In our opinion, this is simply not the case. Shooting in natural light can definitely produce stunning, professional results. Furthermore, being able to sense light in general is one of the very first steps to becoming a great portrait photographer. If you don't know how to create a beautiful, flattering portrait with nothing but natural light, you most likely will not improve your portraiture simply by adding flash.

This is why we want to teach every aspiring portrait photographer how to shoot in natural light first. We're not saying that you should avoid more technical lighting equipment. In fact we strongly believe that a skilled photographer should master all different kinds of lighting, not just one or the other. Both styles of lighting are a very big part of almost every portrait photographer's skillset.

LIGHT MODIFIERS & CAMERA BAGS

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Our last piece of equipment is going to be our light modifier, a simple Westcott Photo Basics 5-in-1 40” reflector (image a). We recommend carrying two of these reflectors with you. We will be using one to actually reflect light using the white or silver side, and the other to shade or block light when necessary.

We carry everything in the UNDFIND One Bag (image b). This is a camera bag that we designed ourselves to serve as a quick change lens bag that also looks stylish. It sounds trivial, however style is quite important to wedding and portrait photographers. It also helps to have a camera bag that doesn’t proclaim “expensive contents!” to the average passer-by.

We usually carry two of the 13” One Bags, one that the photographer uses with just our camera plus 1-2 lenses, and the other for our assistant with maybe one additional lens plus the reflectors and spare camera batteries, etc. We also like to dedicate an entire compartment of our bag to carry things that clients might need such as pins, tape, brushes, etc, and for holding their sunglasses, mobile phones or other items that might be noticeable in their own pockets.

We cover this in detail in Chapter 2 of our Workshop.

THINK BEFORE YOU SHOOT

In addition to everything that we have talked about, you need to make sure that you are also watching your compositions, checking your backgrounds, minding your details and camera settings, and so forth. So once again we'll remind you all to slow down and take your time! Remember that your job is to create images that make your clients look good and there is absolutely no need to rush the process.

Memorize this little 10 step checklist, and go through each step in your mind before you press the shutter each and every time. While this may feel unnatural or cause you to pause and think, the first few times you go out on a shoot, it will eventually become ingrained in your head. Everything should soon be second nature, from setting the scene and finding good light, to posing the couple and checking your settings.

If you follow these steps in shooting your images, you will find that each one of your scenes, and almost every image you click, achieves a consistent, high standard.

One final tip that we have for portrait photographers is, since sharpness and focus are very important, to configure your cameras to allow "one-click 100% zooming" during image playback. Both the Canon 5D mk3 and the Nikon D800 have this feature, and there are numerous tutorials on how to configure your particular camera to do this. It will save you tons of time when zooming in to your subjects' eyes for checking sharpness!

THE PRECLICK CHECKLIST

1. Choose the scene
2. Find the light direction
3. Pose the couple
4. Modify the light (if needed)
5. Set your camera settings
6. Choose your composition
7. Check the details (hair, hands, etc)
8. Watch the background and cropping
9. Shoot the image
10. Verify expression & sharpness

MANUAL EXPOSURES WITH EACH SCENE

We don't really want to get into camera settings too much, because at this point most of you should know the basics of aperture, shutter speed, and ISO. However there is the one thing that we always recommend:

Time Is Money - If you are in a controlled lighting environment, you want to dial in your settings and shoot in Manual Exposure Mode on your camera. Setting your camera settings with each scene, and then shooting in Manual, will greatly improve the overall consistency of your exposures. In other words, if you plan to shoot 20-50 photos in the same spot with the same light, why let your camera chose an exposure automatically? This will only create more work for you in post-production.

In addition to decreasing your post-production time, all of your images will look consistent in case you need to show them to your clients during the photo shoot.

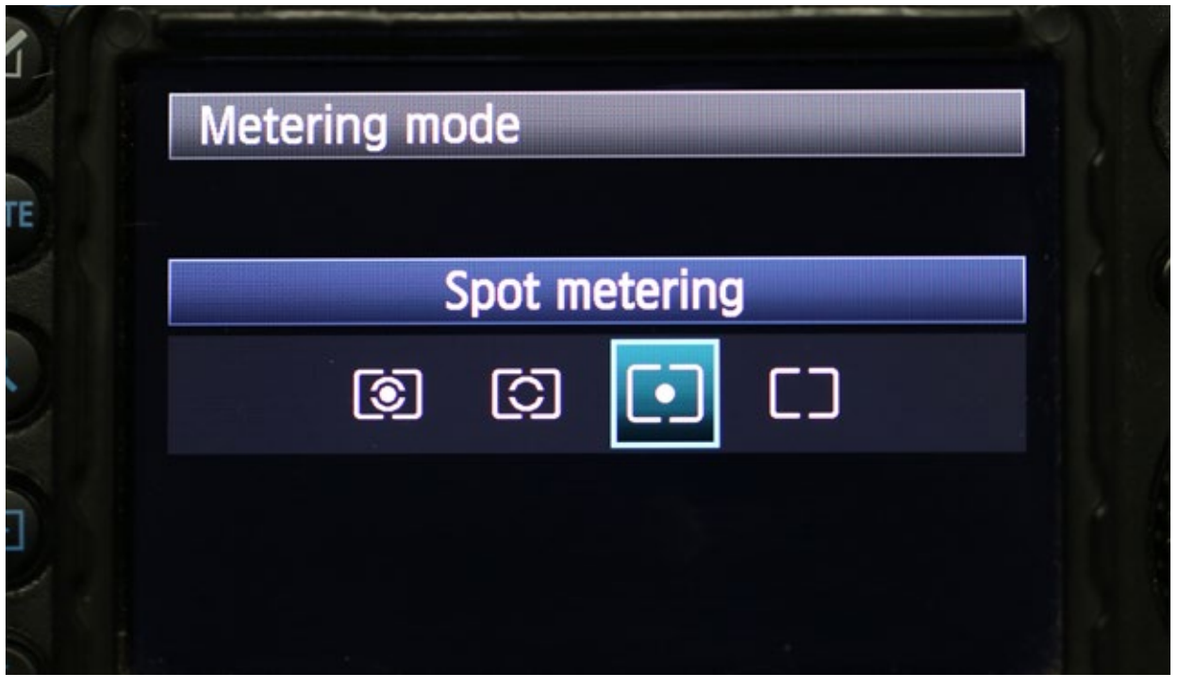
You can also use manual White Balance, whether you prefer to dial in a color temperature in Kelvin or you prefer to use a White Balance device. We prefer to use Kelvin WB because it allows us to effortlessly "warm up" or "cool down" our images instead of using a fixed measurement tool. However, we recommend trying different methods and picking the one that is easiest for your particular shooting style. If your camera does not have Kelvin White Balance control, then you'll have to practice using daylight, cloudy, and those other White Balance Presets on your camera.

Either way, in post-production you will find that you can batch process the entire shoot with minimal need to adjust different developing settings. In other words, if you're adjusting WB, exposure and contrast for every single image you edit, you are not going to achieve maximum efficiency! We clock our post-production at under 30-60 minutes for culling and color correcting an engagement session where approximately 100 images are delivered as proofs.

SPOT METERING VS MATRIX / EVALUATIVE

The last camera setting and technique that we will talk about is using Spot Metering. We like to use spot metering when shooting portraits to quickly gauge the correct exposure for a subject's face or skin, regardless of how bright or how dark a background might be.

However, keep in mind that we only use spot metering in Manual Exposure Mode! If we shoot in Aperture Priority, Shutter Priority or any of the other automatic program modes, the camera is going to be constantly changing your exposure dramatically, based on the exact position of your spot meter. If that spot happens to be over something dark such as a black suit, it will automatically brighten the entire exposure way too much. Or if the spot meter is placed over something bright like the sky or a white dress, it will try and meter that as grey which will dramatically under-expose the entire image.



It is important to read your camera user manual and determine how your particular metering system works, because some cameras will move the spot meter around to whichever focus point you select, (many Nikons) while others only have one spot meter at the very center focus point. (Many Canon cameras)

Either way, use Spot Meter on your subjects skin to gauge your best exposures in Manual Exposure Mode. This will speed up your shoot and reduce the number of "test exposures" once you get the hang of it.

Some professionals use external light meters, which are highly accurate, however we feel that they are not necessary for professional results in natural light. The most important thing you can do is to develop an efficient work ethic that makes your clients feel like you know what you are doing, without being too much of a perfectionist. In other words don't geek out too much, or clam up and take forever to get the perfect camera settings. Your clients are usually not models, so the more technical you get the more they may be intimidated.

We cover this in detail in Chapter 2 of our Workshop.

LIGHTING TECHNIQUES

SHOOTING WITH AVAILABLE LIGHT

We are focusing on natural, “available” light in this book, however available light doesn’t necessary just mean sunlight, or hard light, or shade. It simply means “the light present within a particular scene.” So available light can come from the sun directly or indirectly and it can also come from man-made light that is available such as indoor lamps or outdoor street lighting.

But we are mainly going to discuss the use of sunlight, directly and indirectly, with reflectors as modifiers in this book. So even though there is often plenty of light at night in some urban areas, we like to plan our shoots mainly around daylight hours. For example, if our shoot is 3 hours long, we will plan for the shoot to start around 2.5 hours prior to sunset and last up to 30 minutes after sunset during dusk. Often times natural light is very beautiful until well after sunset!

Of course we typically want to avoid times of the day when the sun is directly overhead. Interestingly, here in North America there are really only a few hours in the summer time that we would consider “tough” lighting conditions. Most of the time, especially in winter, normal sunlight is very easy to work with!

Basically, depending on where you live and of course the time of year, there are about 2-4 hours of daylight each morning and afternoon when you can shoot great natural light portraits. Morning sunlight is a beautiful time, and you can shoot from around sunrise to about 2-3 hours afterwards. Of course you’ll need to have a couple that is willing to get up at four or five AM to get ready! Since this is generally not desirable for most clients, the vast majority of your portraits are going to occur in the afternoon and around sunset.

We are going to be showing you some lighting techniques that will allow you to create some pretty amazing images with just a reflector and sunlight. In fact if you think that shooting with natural light will limit you to creating images that only ever have a single light source you’d be wrong! We can pull off a two-light or even three-light setup using reflectors as key lights and fill lights, plus the sun as a rim light or hair light.

SEEKING OPEN SHADE

If the sun is too harsh when you begin your shoot then obviously you'll want to find some shade. Believe it or not however, not all shade is created equal! When you are shooting in the shade, you want to make sure that your couple is posed so that they are facing a direction that has flattering light shining on them. And yes, shade still has a light direction!

To see how directional light can be in a shaded area or on a cloudy day, we like to use "the hand test" method. It might make you look a little weird in front of your clients, but this is always good for a few laughs. To do the hand test simply hold your hand up in front of your face with your palm facing you, and slowly turn around. Pay attention to how the light looks on your hand. In one direction or another you will probably get a lot of uneven shadows on your skin (image a), yet as your palm is aimed perfectly at the softest, largest light source your hand will fill entirely with light and have a much more gentle look (a). Try facing your clients in this direction, and you'll notice how the light truly flatters them!

For practice, instead of the hand test you can go out with some test subjects (not clients) and try taking pictures of them facing in all different directions, in various locations and lighting conditions.

We cover this in detail in Chapter 3 of our Workshop.

SHOOTING IN OVERCAST SKIES

Many photographers talk about how they love overcast days for portraiture, however an overcast sky is not a green light to shoot anywhere with your subjects facing in any direction, or to leave your reflectors at home. Why? Because soft, overcast skies are still strongly directional and can create deep shadows on your subjects' faces. You'll find that the best locations to shoot are still the ones that allow you to control light.

Once you have determined a general direction for your subjects to face, you need to see if your composition and background are also aligned with your artistic vision. If not, then you'll need to move around a little bit and/or use your reflector to add subtle softening effects to their skin.

In fact, even if your natural light is beautifully soft and your background is perfect, you may still want to have a reflector present to add a little sparkle in people's eyes! Have your assistant bring the silver side of the reflector just underneath the clients at their waist level to amplify the catchlight in their eyes. Just be careful not to do this in a location where the sun itself will hit the reflector and bounce up into clients' faces, as this will look very weird and create a sort of "campfire story" light.

REFLECTOR AS A MAIN LIGHT

Reflectors are extremely powerful tools that can be used for much more than simply filling shadows or making eyes sparkle. We can even use a reflector as a main light, in the same way that photographers use flashes and umbrellas and other such lighting tools. To do this, you need direct sunlight or very strong indirect light, which you bounce onto the subjects faces.

The Technique - Bounce the light from a slight angle, usually 30-45 degrees, so that it still falls on both cheeks of each subjects' face (see image below). Again, before you jump right into blinding anyone, please understand the power of the sun! Using the silver side of the reflector as a key light, and bouncing light directly from the sun creates a very powerful, constant light. This is not only uncomfortable to stare into, it can also cause your subjects to squint and it will even make them "feel the heat" a little bit.

In other words, unless you're also in the tanning business, use the shiny side of your reflectors very sparingly in direct sunlight. Some people do well with a reflector key light, while others can't handle it. So before you shine a reflector at anyone you should give them a little heads up and ask them to let you know if the light is too bright.

QUICK SUMMARY

- Use Silver Side of Reflector
- Angle at 30-45 Degrees
- Watch for Squinting
- Avoid Client Discomfort
- Watch for Odd Shadows

BOOK 2 OF 3 | GEAR, SETTINGS & LIGHTING

REFLECTOR AS A MAIN LIGHT PART II

We want this type of light to be coming just slightly downward onto the subjects. So have your assistant place the reflector up and behind her head resting on her shoulders while holding the edges of the reflector with both hands (see image a below). This is the easiest ways for an assistant to quickly figure out how to “aim” the light, even if they’re new to lighting. Simply have her start by pointing the reflector directly at the sun and then shift the hips and look towards the subjects. You should immediately see where the light is hitting at this point.

Once our assistant has found the light and is correctly positioned, we tell him or her to avoid shining the reflector at the subjects until we are actually shooting. Give the clients a rest while we finish setting up the shot and coaching the pose.

We also need to consider the exposure for both the subjects and the background. Make make sure the subjects’ faces are not too bright compared to the background, which may be lit very differently. Once we have our shot, again we tell assistant to rest and pull the light off our subjects.

Why Use This Techinque? This technique allows us to balance our exposures to retain more color in the sky or background. Furthermore, we can also create really nice two light setup looks with just the reflector as the main light and the sun as the backlight (see image above).

We cover this in detail in Chapter 3 of our Workshop.

USING THE REFLECTOR AS A FILL

The next purpose we will often use the reflector for is fill light. As a fill light, the reflector is going to basically bounce just a little bit of soft light back into the shadow areas of the face. This is especially important for anybody with deep set eyes, or prominent wrinkles.

In Shade - When you are in the shade wanting to fill a subtle amount of light into someone's face, you will still want to use the silver side of the reflector in order to catch more light

In Sunlight - However once you step into a brighter area with hard light, you will want to use the white, soft side of the reflector as your fill. Otherwise if you use the silver side of a reflector in direct or harsh light, you will once again be adding too much light which can give you that campfire/uplit look that we definitely want to avoid. Also, your fill light can quickly become too strong and become a main light!

Notice how well the silver side of the reflector acts to fill and soften the shadow areas

of the skin in this scene. There is a huge difference in the quality of light, and the results look totally professional even from a $30 lighting accessory!

Reflector Angle - The main challenge of using a reflector as a fill light in shade is cropping so that the reflector and the lighting assistant are not visibile in the image. Often times, the best place for the lighting assistant is directly below the subject, just below the crop of your image. Keep in mind that if you're taking full-body images, this may not be possible. Also, keeping the reflector out of the image may require that you shorten your focal length and move in closer. Closeup, intimate portraits are perfect for reflector use!

We cover this in detail in Chapter 3 of our Workshop.

FINDING NATURAL FILL LIGHT

This is a great time to introduce the concept of "Natural Reflectors," also know as "natural fill light" or "environmental fill light." Now that we've taught you how you can bounce light off of a reflector's white or silver surface, it's important to note that white, silver, and other light-colored surfaces exist naturally all around us.

It's important to identify the source of the light and position your subjects so that the light is filling in the shadows on their face. Here is a list of common objects to keep an eye out for:

- Sand at the beach
- Sidewalks
- Glass, White, and Other Light-Colored Buildings
- Water (Swimming Pool, Lake, Ocean, Etc)
- Fields and light colored gravel

On the flip side, keep an eye out for darker surfaces that do not reflect light well and colored surfaces that might reflect light with a color tint. Common surfaces that cause this include the following:

- Grass
- Asphalt on Roads
- Dark or Red (wooden) Colored Walls & Buildings

When you're faced with these environments, consider using your reflector as your main light or your fill light. In the images, notice the soft, even light on our subjects without the use of a reflector. This is because the surroundings, the tan stone and the dirt on the ground is reflecting light onto our subjects from below and from the sides.

Try finding these natural reflectors in your scenes. They will allow you more flexibility in your compositions and crops because you won't have to worry about a reflector showing up in the images.

USING THE REFLECTOR AS A GOBO OR SCRIM

The last technique that we generally use reflectors for is to block or sheer direct sunlight off of a subject. Using the reflector as a scrim allows light to still pass through it, but diffused and softer. To change the Westcott 5-in-1 reflector (and most others) into a scrim, un-zip it and pull out the semi-transparent diffuser inside.

This scrim is great when we need to block just a little bit of sunlight shining through trees or when we need to create shade from scratch in broad daylight for our subjects.

A scrim still lets a little bit of light through, however. The other option of course is to use the black side of the reflector to completely block stray light; this would be called “flagging” the light.

UP NEXT... BOOK 3 OF 3 | POSING AND SHOOTING

EQUIPMENT TO BRING

We like to travel as light as possible on portrait sessions, carrying only the tools necessary to achieve our desired style. Since this particular book on Couples Photography is focusing on natural light, our equipment will indeed be minimal. We also own off-camera flash equipment that we use sometimes, of course.

Natural light portraiture is more forgiving than other areas of photography; you can get professional results without necessarily having the most expensive lenses and camera bodies. So, we will go through our own equipment setup and at the same time provide general advice for all budgets.

Camera Bodies - For our camera bodies we will be using the Canon 5D Mark III in this workshop, while the Nikon shooters at our studio mainly use the Nikon D800. However rest assured that any DSLR body will work,
we cannot stress this enough! Cameras like the 5D mk3 and Nikon D800 are only a significant advantage for their reliable performance overall.

This is a significant issue for actual wedding photography, however for portraiture alone we can strongly recommend any full-frame or even crop-sensor DSLR body that has been released in the past few years. In normal daylight conditions, the camera body you choose is not nearly as important as the lens! We will talk more about lens choice in a bit.

Full-Frame Versus Crop-Sensor - One of the most commonly asked questions we receive is regarding sensor size. Is there a professional standard that deems smaller sensors to be unacceptable for serious portraiture? These days the answer to that question is a definite NO for many types of photography, including natural light portraits. The more expensive full-frame DSLR camera bodies do offer an advantage to portrait photographers who are trying to achieve shallow depth of field. (blurry backgrounds) Rest assured that with both types of cameras you can achieve beautiful portraits as long as you understand how to operate the camera, and have the right lens.

If you aspire to be a working professional then you should plan to own the best equipment you can afford, of course. This is why many photographers will invest in good lenses first, and then upgrade their camera body when they can afford to. This has worked for us, and we highly recommend it. When we talk about lens selection in the next few sections and throughout this workshop, just keep in mind that we are using them on full-frame cameras.

OUR LENSES OF CHOICE #1

a

b

c

Our first lens is going to be the Canon 24-70mm F/2.8L Mark II (a), or the Nikon 24-70mm f/2.8 AFS-G (b). This is an extremely versatile lens which is going to be used primarily for wide angle images. Of course it also has the flexibility of a zoom which will allow us to capture more close, intimate candids if necessary.

There are many inexpensive alternatives to this lens, of course. In fact instead of the older name brand versions of this lens, such as the Canon 24-70 f/2.8 mk1 or the Nikon 28-70mm f/2.8, our favorite alternative is the Tamron 24-70mm f/2.8 VC (c) because it is very sharp, relatively sturdy, (despite being plastic) ...plus it has stabilization!

Alternately, you may have tested a 24-70mm range zoom lens once or twice and you find that you hardly ever use the telephoto 70mm end. Yet you wish that the wide end were a little wider than 24mm. In this case, you might want to consider a dedicated wide-angle zoom such as the Canon 16-35mm f/2.8 mk2, or the Nikon 16-35mm f/4 VR.

OUR LENSES OF CHOICE #2

Our second lens is a prime lens, the Canon 50mm f/1.2L (a). Nikon's nearest equivalent will be their 50mm f/1.4 G (b) or the 58mm f/1.4 G. Also, Sigma makes two 50mm f/1.4 which are both incredibly sharp and high-quality alternatives. Lastly, if you don't use 50mm very much but are simply looking to "cover the base," the Nikon and Canon 50mm f/1.8 primes are a good value and they make great backup lenses in the long run. Even if you can some day afford $2,000 lenses, every professional should still have a backup!

Any 50mm is a great all-around lens, however many portrait photographers do prefer a slightly longer focal length compared to 50mm, usually an 85mm prime. Shooting with a slightly longer prime lens will give you very pleasing portraits because it will reduce distortion of your subjects, and it will also increase your ability to achieve shallow depth of field. The professional choice for Canon is the 85mm f/1.2 L series lens, and for Nikon the 85mm f/1.4 AFS-G. However both of these lenses are quite expensive, and for most photographers the best value is found in the 85m f/1.8 prime lenses that both Canon and Nikon make. There is also a fantastic Sigma 85mm f/1.4 that many die-hard portrait photographers love.

Either way, a 50mm or 85mm prime lens is going to be our bread and butter lens for creating beautifully shallow depth of field, or "bokeh." A 50mm prime is very versatile for everything from medium-close to full-body portraits, however we don't recommend getting too close to your subjects' faces with a 50mm focal length. Remember that the closer you get to a subject the more you will distort them. To see the effects of distortion first-hand, us a 24-70mm zoom and try to make a similar headshot at 24mm, 50mm, and 70mm. You will immediately see that foreheads and noses become very un-flattering the closer you get.

a

b

OUR LENSES OF CHOICE #3

a

b

Our third and final lens is the Canon 70-200mm f/2.8L Mark II, or the Nikon 70-200mm f/2.8 G VR II. This 70-200mm lens will be our “go-to” portrait lens. It creates beautiful bokeh in the background which is good for isolating your subjects in the frame. The 70-200mm focal range is also the best lens for candid, natural imagery because we can zoom in close and really place emphasis on our subjects and their expressions.

Once again, alternatives to the expensive flagship 70-200mm lenses include the Canon and Nikon “Mark I” versions, which are also great lenses, as well as the 70-200mm f/4 lenses from both Canon and Nikon. Although the f/2.8 versions will give you more pleasing and soft bokeh than f/4 versions, this may not bother you if you prefer an 85mm or similar prime lens anyways.

In other words, find which lenses are your absolute favorites, invest the most money you can in those lenses, and then do what we call “covering the bases” with the remaining focal lengths that you simply need in order to accomplish each job.

See more gear recommendations in our gear guides.

We cover this in detail in Chapter 2 of our Workshop.

THIRD PARTY LENSES

a

b

c

d

e

f

While some veteran pros will speak very negatively about third-party lens makers such as Sigma, Tokina and Tamron, we have found that recently all of these three companies have been producing some very high quality primes and zooms that rival the name-brands. Some of our favorites include the Tokina 16-28mm f/2.8 (a), the Tamron 24-70mm f/2.8 VC (b), and the Sigma 35mm f/1.4 ART (c), 50mm f/1.4 EX (d), 85mm f/1.4 EX (e), and for crop-sensor shooters the 18-35mm f/1.8 ART (f). Sigma and Tamron also make fantastic 70-200mm f/2.8 lenses, the newest models even include stabilization and silent, USM-style autofocus.

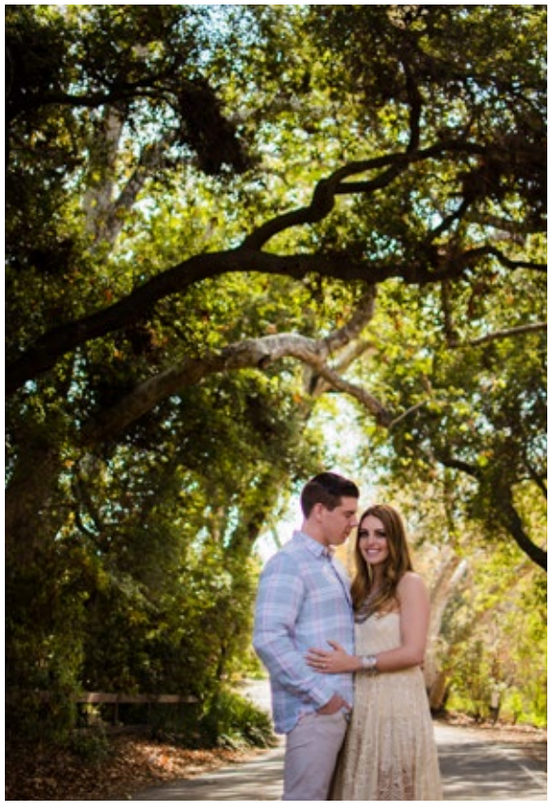
If you're considering buying a third-party lens, simply ask yourself two questions: Do you heavily abuse your lenses, and/or do you plan to sell any lenses in the future? If so, stick with name-brand lenses because they are usually more rugged and will hold their value. However if you take good care of your gear and plan to keep it forever, third-party lenses are a safe investment even for working professionals.

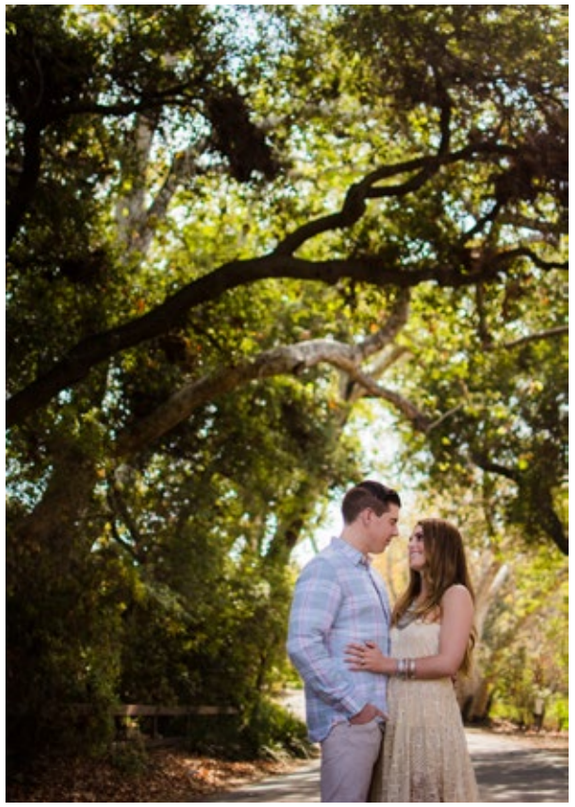
MICRO-POSES

Rather than trying to completely change a pose or create a new one from scratch every time, we use what we call micro-posing to create several options that create a variety of images. The slightest adjustment to hands and facial expressions can take an image from highly formal to totally candid!

Small changes and varied types of images are especially important at the beginning of a photo shoot because you need to quickly find out how to best flatter your subjects. We have found that it is helpful to show our clients one or two images right away, on the back of our camera.

Demonstrate What You Want - Again, we pay attention to the words and directions that we give our clients. Some instructions are rather complicated so we simply act out exactly what we want our clients to do. Not only is this rather comical to watch, it is also much easier for the clients to follow rather than trying to listen and follow a whole slew of directions about head angles, posture, weight shifting, etc.





THE V-UP

A V-shaped standing pose is the most simple starting point for any portrait of a couple which is why it is our first foundation pose. We call it the V-Up and we use this pose to begin almost every portrait session from engagements to families and weddings.

As you might imagine this pose consists of the subjects facing each other at an angle and connecting their bodies at the shoulders and hips. We often instruct our couples to imagine that they are joined at the hip and act as a hinge, opening and closing like a door.

Open And Close Like A Hinge - So, if we ask for the male to "open up towards the camera" he'll simply turn his whole body to face the camera more, without messing up the pose. Or if we ask him to "close" he'll know to turn in the other direction, again without negatively affecting the pose. Giving them a simple reference point makes posing adjustments very simple to communicate.

The subjects' arms that are touching can either remain hidden behind each other, or the girl can place her hand on the guy's near shoulder and/or the guy can place his hand around the girl's waist.

The "outside" arms and hands are where most of our micr-pose variations will come from. For guys, try having him put his fingers into his pocket with his thumb out, and then vice versa, or try having him put his thumb in his back pocket. Different people will look more relaxed in one pose yet awkward in another.

We are going to have our female subjects pay even more attention to keeping her arm in a position other than flat at her side. Start with placing her hand on her hip as we described previously, and then progress from there. Sometimes she will not care for this pose if it seems too "sassy" for her, in which case she can just leave her arm at her side as long as she always keeps her elbow at least slightly bent.

We cover this in detail with live examples in Chapter 4 of our Workshop.

Remind your subjects to keep their hips and shoulders in contact with each other, have them relax their shoulders, and you should be ready to go! This will be a great portrait that gives a good balance of appearing formal, yet warm and happy.

You can quickly turn this pose into something much more candid by simply having them glance at each other and laugh. You could also have them gaze into each others' eyes romantically, or kiss if they are comfortable with "PDA." (Be sure to ask your subjects beforehand about the amount or level of intimacy that they are comfortable with!)

Tip 1: Look at Eyebrows - When we want photos of our subjects looking into each others' eyes, we often find that they should actually look at each others' eyebrows instead sometimes. This opens up the eyes!

Tip 2: Watch the Pucker - When we ask our subjects to kiss, by default we remind them not to pucker up too much, or to "make out," but to just be natural and romantic.

Tip 3: Reciprocate - There are plenty of other options to capture as well, before you change anything about their bodies' foundation pose. One thing we like to do is to have each person trade off doing the same micro-pose. For example, have the guy turn to look at the girl while she continues to smile at the camera, then have them switch and do the opposite. Or maybe have them take turns kissing each other on the cheek.

Experiment And Review - Have your subjects do a few different variations so that you can see which pose flatters them more. Guys shouldn't have their hand in their pocket for every single photo, of course. Some girls might feel that the hand-on-hip pose is a little bit too "sassy" for their taste. In this situation, for example, simply remind her to keep her elbow slightly bent and her arm slightly apart from her body. Then, try having her tuck her hand behind her body and see how that looks.

Most importantly, show your clients a few images soon after you start, and see how they like them. Get your exposure and white balance looking good first, and then go through a few images to show your clients the different changes in posing. It's even okay to point out one or two micro-pose options that don't work, or minor mistakes that you'd like to avoid during the rest of the photo shoot. As long as you can show them a few images that they really like, this will help put them at ease! In fact our clients will often tell us exactly how they feel, saying things like "I thought I wasn't going to like being in front of the camera, but now I'm okay!"

THE OPEN-UP

From the V-Up pose, the easiest thing to do is to have both subjects “open up” to the camera so that their whole bodies are facing almost straight forward while the shoulders and/or hips remain connected.

From this second Foundation Pose we will generally want to have the couple focus more on the camera, and just hang onto each other or hold hands to show emotion. Once again from this main pose, capture a few straightforward images and then try different micro-pose variations.

If you have given the “door hinge” analogy to your clients already, then they should know to stay connected at their hips / shoulders and leave their close arms either hidden from sight or around each others’ waists.

Quickly progress from something simple into other variations. The girl can hug the guy’s arm with one or both of her arms, either while staying in the open position or by turning her body slightly towards his. Or they can give each other a little bit more space, hold hands, and get into a few micro-pose variations along those lines.

Like any other, these open types of poses have risks to be aware of. Any person who is self-conscious about their body shape overall is not going to want very many photos of them while they face the camera straight-on, so you may need to be brief and pay close attention to “creating curves” that flatter the subject(s).

To see this pose in action, including the set up, communication, and interaction, take a look at the Natural Light Couples Photography Workshop.

OPEN UP - MICROPOSE VARIATIONS

Here are few examples of some micro-pose variations that you can move to from the standard Open Up pose.

a - The first image is the starting point for this pose. With hands on the hip (Jackie) and pocket (Ryan), this is a nice casual pose.

b - Having the couple glance over at each other quickly changes the pose.

c - Having Jackie hug onto his arm adds another variation, with her looking into the camera and Ryan looking at Jackie.

d - We add another quick variation by having the couple look at each other again.

e - Having Jackie take a step forward adds variation and movement into the pose.

f - And again, having her look in a different direction changes the pose again.

Notice how these slight variations in hand placement, face direction, and body position change each pose. Keep in mind that these are just a few of the many variations you could potentially use.

We cover this in detail in Chapter 4 of our Workshop.

a

b

c

d

e

f

THE CLOSE-UP

Our third foundation pose is going to be called, naturally, the Close-Up. Close as in, “close the door hinge” and have your clients face each other almost directly. Once again this pose is simple to get to from the V-Up, all we have to do is direct our couple to "close towards each other” until you get them at the angle you want. At this point they should be perpendicular to your camera so that you are essentially shooting their profiles or seeing in between them.

Once again, just like any other pose this may not be your clients’ favorite view of themselves, however there are many different options you can quickly get into that will offer flattering images.

The Close-Up Foundation Pose is wonderful for depicting a little more emotion and intimacy between the couple. Since they are facing each other completely or almost completely, there is a strong sense of "involvement" with each other, rather than the camera, which adds more of a candid and relaxed nature to the images.

Variations - Micro-pose options include: each person wrapping both arms around the other, (remember to put her arms outside of his), holding hands on one side and hugging on the other, or having her put a hand and forearm on his chest or holding his upper arm.

You can have the girl rest her head on the chest or shoulder of the guy, or have them both in a restful pose, even sometimes with their eyes closed. As always, try different options with each client and see what flatters them.

Be forewarned, if you have a couple smile directly at the camera from this closed, hugging pose, it will run the risk of looking un-original, or at the very least overly traditional. So in order to keep this pose from looking boring, generally we focus on micro-poses that emphasize the interaction of the couple where they are intimate, smiling at each other, laughing, kissing, and so forth.

Or, we can go in the opposite direction and do something more dramatic, such as having the guy “dip” the girl, or pick her up, etc.

CLOSE UP - MICROPOSE VARIATIONS

Here are few examples of some micro pose variations that you can move to from the standard Open Up pose.

a - In this micropose variation, our couple is gazing at each other with a soft smile. Ryan's hand is in his pocket and Jackie's hand is on his chest.

b - Having the couple hold hands establishes another point of connection and adds to the intimacy of the pose.

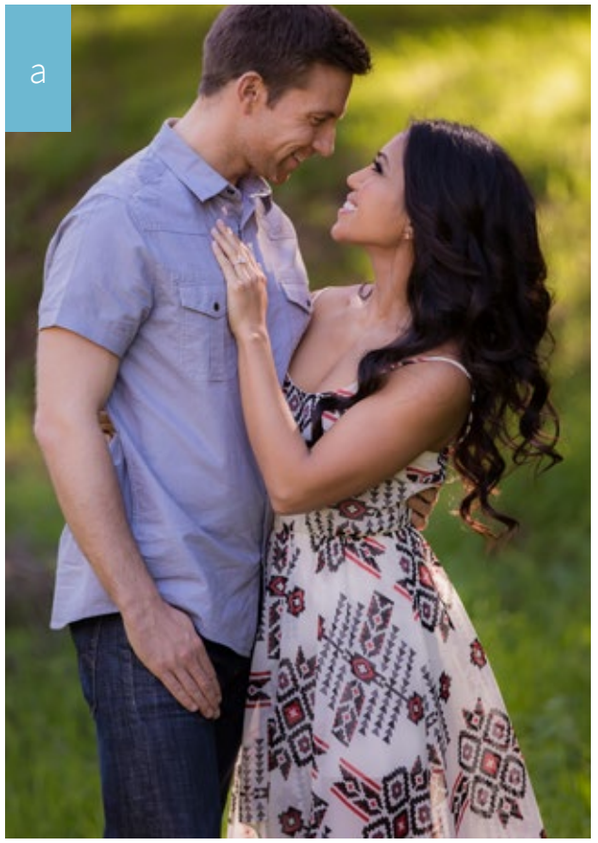
c - From the close up, you can move to action poses like the swing up, Jackie kicks up her legs while Ryan lifts her up.

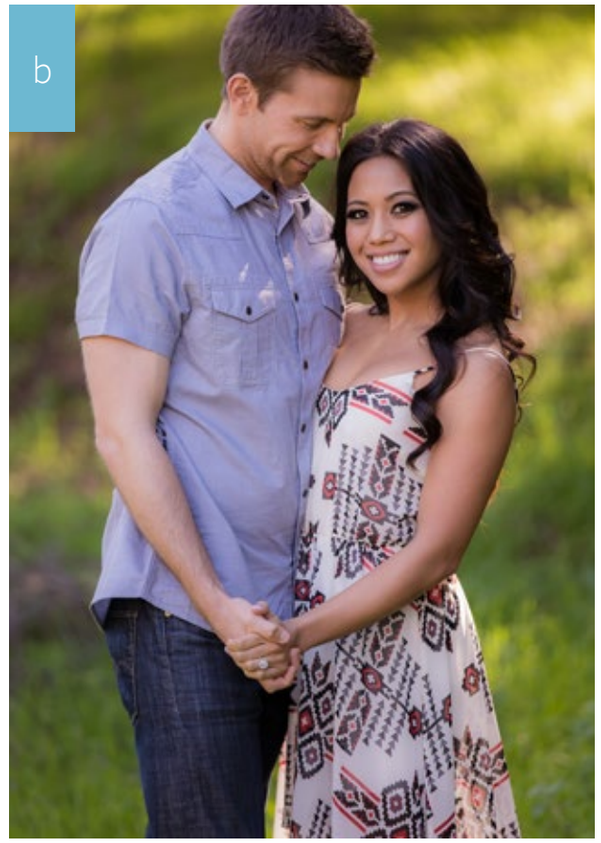
d - We add another quick variation by having Ryan throw his arms around Jackie while Jackie rests her arms on Ryan's arms.

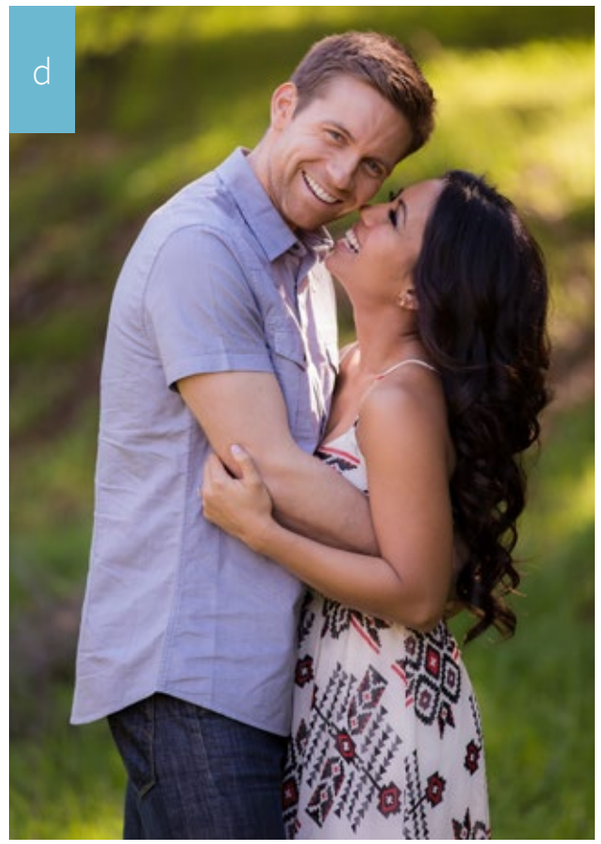
These small variations can go on and on with different combinations of face direction, hand placement and body position. Within these micropose variations, let their personalities and interaction shine through in the images.

Find tricks and methods to getting great expressions. For example, in image d below, Jackie is whispering something silly into Ryan's ear, causing him to give the camera that big, genuine smile.

We cover this in detail in Chapter 4 of our Workshop.







THE STACK UP

A very classic and traditional pose that we shouldn't forget about is what we call the Stack Up. There are two versions of this pose. When standing, generally the female's back is going to rest on the chest of the male subject. The male subjects arms go around the girls torso either below or above the bust. Think of the movie "Titanic" and you'll get the idea.

Stacking Order - We are now starting the poses that can be reversed for an entirely different set of options. A great variation of this pose is to have the male subject in front, sitting if necessary, while the female subject hugs him from behind, arms crossing just over his chest.

From either "stacking order," you have many micro-posing options. You can of course borrow from the V-Up pose and have the guy put his fingers or thumb in his pocket while the girl puts her hand on her hip. Be careful though because this is another pose that can look odd if the subjects don't relax their bodies and display natural expressions.

Alternately, ask the couple to interact with each other and then simply capture a few moments candidly as you would with the previous poses. If you get to this pose and you feel you still haven't broken the ice with your couple, have a little extra fun with it. Demonstrate the pose with your assistant, or feel free to do whatever else you think it will take to coax some relaxation and enjoyment out of your subjects.

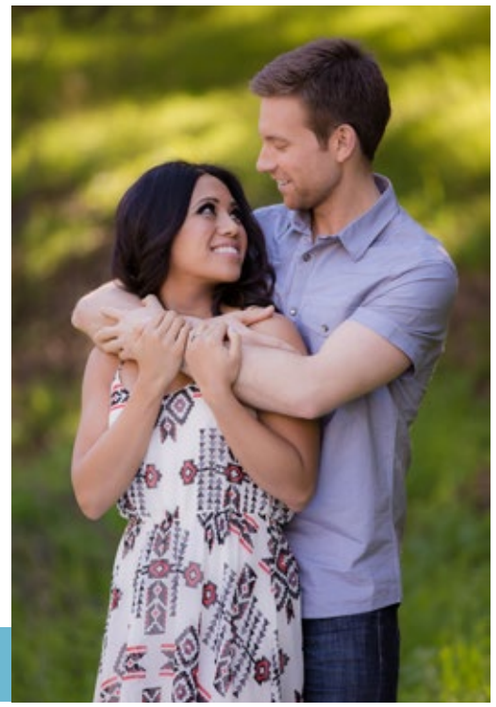
Aside from hand and arm placement, the other main issue to be aware of is your subjects' head angles. We have found that the success of this pose depends highly on the relative height of your subjects. In other words, you'll be hard pressed to make this pose work at all when placing the taller subject in front.

Even if your subjects seem to be the right height to "pull it off" and make the pose work, we have still found that this is one of the most common poses in

which head angles seem to be very difficult to manage. So remind your couples to not tilt their heads too much, and remember to show the couple a few images on the back of your camera to see how they feel about them.

As we mentioned before, wording is everything. If your subjects naturally tilt their heads to one side or the other a little too much, it might be too vague to merely say “please angle your heads away a little.” Instead, try to first describe what they’re already doing and then ask them to change it a little bit. For example, it might be much more effective to say “I like how you two are naturally tilting your heads towards each other, but I think it is just a tad too much. Can you straighten up for me, just a little bit?” This technique is usually far more effective than simply trying to verbalize small, incremental adjustments to their heads or arms or legs. Remember that your subjects are not mannequins, they are human beings!

Avoid Awkward Details - Because this pose involves quite a bit of contact between your subjects, you want to make sure that both subjects aren’t pressed against each other in an awkward fashion. While heads may be leaning and touching each other, you won’t want to have them press their faces against each other as it will create a very unflattering look.



We cover this in detail in Chapter 4 of our Workshop.

BOOK 3 OF 3 | POSING & SHOOTING

OTHER POSES AND CATCHING THE DETAILS

The 4 Foundation Poses are the basis for many types of portraits, however there are still plenty of other options out there. As we discussed, your couples' preferences may vary greatly. Some clients want their portrait session to be a candid love story about their relationship, and other clients want to feel like they are part of an editorial fashion shoot.

So, we encourage you to expand on this foundation and explore. Being creative and defining your style should be a lifelong processes!

In addition to portrait images, remember that part of creating a well-rounded product for your clients is in noticing and capturing the details. If there is an engagement ring, there are many opportunities to get close-up detail images of it (see image a on the right).

When your couple brings out props, get close up shots of the items. If they step into an ice cream shop for example, capture some images that establish a sense of place. A close-up of a logo or a menu, or a wide-angle image of the environment. If they set up a picnic on the beach or something, capture the details of them sharing the wine, or the chocolate, or whatever they've brought. If they ride a bike, get close-ups of their feet on the pedals, and their hands on the handle bar.

Or even without any props, there are still many opportunities to create images that "add to the product" so to speak. Focus on details of their environment, their outfits, whatever elements are important to the couple (see image b on the right).

When you start each portrait session, be sure not to ignore or rush through your foundation poses. Obviously, you don't want to spend the entire session creating highly similar images. However don't hesitate to go back to one foundation pose or another if you enter a new lighting condition, or location and you think that a basic foundation pose really fits the scene.

a

b

ON LOCATION IN THE PARK

REMEMBER YOUR JOB AND SLOW DOWN!

We're now going to get into shooting within different scenes. But before we do, let's take a step back. Your primary job is to make people look good. This comes before everything else! You can find the perfect scene at sunset, you can take 30 minutes to set up all your equipment, but if your clients do not appear flattering in the photo, you will not have accomplished your goal. If you can make your clients look good, (to themselves, that is!) then they will never complain and you will never be hungry for work.

This is why we recommend slowing down and paying attention. The phrase "quality over quantity" could not be more true in this situation. Trying to cover too many locations, too many poses, or too many wardrobes in a single photo shoot will result in images that are rushed and potentially poor quality from a technical and/or creative standpoint.

Shoot Decisively - Consider all the small details in a scene before you fire off ten or twenty clicks, not after! Nothing eats your time in post-production like having to sift through twenty slightly different images before getting to the one or two that you actually meant to take.

Make sure that your pose is flattering the subjects, and pay attention to things like hair and wardrobe. Look at any areas of skin in the images, especially faces, and make sure light is falling on them nicely. Check to make sure all your camera settings make sense, mind the edges of your compositions, and then you can begin to shoot.

If you take your time to mind all of these details, you will find that overall your images look better right out of the camera, your clients look and feel great in more images, and consequently your workflow will run smoother while your business grows!

Prioritize - It is easy to forget all this and rush if your clients arrive late to the photo shoot. This is bound to happen every now and then, and it's not the end of the world. If a client shows up 30 or even 60 minutes late to a shoot, however, don't speed your way through all the locations and things you had originally planned. Let them know that due to the late start you will have to cut a location or a wardrobe from the shoot. Ask them what they prefer, which scenes or outfits are the most important to them, and let them make the decision. Then, approach the shoot at the same pace you originally would have. Take the time to perfect each scene, pay attention to details, and above all, stay positive! Remember that it is still your job to make them look good; if you do this then the client will have nothing to complain about.

On the other hand, of course, maybe some photographers find that they actually shoot too slowly. However this is usually a matter of building good shooting habits, "practice makes perfect" as they say. So if you feel that you shoot too slowly, simply get out and practice, grow both your technical abilities and your creative vision.

THE WILLOW SCENE

In this chapter we are going to walk through our first scene with our couple, Jackie & Ryan.

If this is your first session ever, or if you have never really thought about posing techniques until now, then the entire set of Foundation Poses that we just covered might seem like an entire session by itself! However keep in mind that all four of those basic poses are really just a warm-up exercise to set the stage for the rest of your shoot.

With practice, you should be able to move from pose to pose without too many breaks or pauses during the first 15-20 minutes of your session. In fact if you encourage your clients to arrive a little early to their session, you might be able to run through most of the Foundation Poses before your session really gets underway!

Transitioning smoothly from pose to pose is important, however it is also important to get from scene to scene quickly as well. We recommend scouting out all of your locations in advance of a shoot, especially if a client is suggesting a location that you have not been to yet. Consider traffic and parking conditions. Consider crowds and holidays, as well.

It also helps to look for locations that are shoot-able for longer periods of time, just in case a client arrives late. Especially in canyons and similar locations, sometimes just 30 minutes can cause the sun to hide behind a hillside, or come out from behind a building, thus completely changing the nature of the scene.

We cover this in detail in Chapter 5 of our Workshop.

SITTING POSES AT THE WILLOW

Our first pose at this location with Jackie and Ryan is actually going to be a sitting pose. With both subjects sitting, we want to draw from both the V-Up and Open-Up foundations to create our various different poses.

Remember that the key to foundation posing is to set up the main body positions and then run through a handful of potential micro-pose options.

In just one or two minutes, you can run through slight variations such as: both subjects smiling at the camera, both subjects smiling at each other, and each subject taking turns looking at the camera and each other.

As long as you double check all of your important details first, (things like flyaway hairs, wardrobe wrinkles, etc.) then every single image in a sequence will be a potential keeper. Also, the entire set of images can be edited in one batch.

If you need to correct something about your subjects pose that you don't like, remember to choose your words carefully and stay positive.

Only after we felt that we had exhausted our micro-pose options for each subject's head, hands and arms are we going to change up the pose more significantly.

We had Jackie sit across Ryan's lap, which once again gave us a combination of foundations: V-Up and Closed posing options.

This let us create images that were more intimate and journalistic. One of the major factors that you will want to keep in mind for a romantic portrait is finger placement. Having Jackie place her fingers gently on Ryan's cheek / jaw was a great choice, however one thing you'll want to remember is that if any fingers are going to be this prominent in a portrait, they need to be arranged very carefully. This goes for both the guys and the girls!

Also remember to periodically show your clients a few images, and watch their reactions. The sooner you do this, the sooner you can begin customizing the photo shoot to their specific style and needs!

We cover this in detail in Chapter 4 of our Workshop.

THE PICNIC SCENE

Next, we'll add props to the same scene and change things up a bit. This is where a shoot becomes much more personalized and candid, giving you many opportunities to break away from your Foundation Poses and try different things. Ryan and Jackie chose to create a picnic scene, and we picked this specific location based on the partial shade and the position of all the background elements.

It is definitely important to consider the movement of the sunlight when setting up static scenes like this one. If you are going to be shooting in this spot for quite a while, where will the sun be in 40 minutes? Your clients may need to scoot over once or twice, however this is also a great opportunity to have your assistant(s) use a scrim to block any stray sunrays so that you have a little more freedom to let your couple interact naturally.

If sunlight falls onto hair it's usually a good thing of course, however keep an eye out for sunlight that falls onto cheeks, foreheads, and noses.

THE PICNIC SCENE PART II

This is a good time to remind you all to remember to take a step back and capture all of those little details in the scene. An engagement session is an experience for the couple and if they've put a lot of thought into planning props and activites, these can make wonderful scene-setting images that help complete the story.

For engagement albums and blog spreads, these images look great next to the other images from the same scene. Focus on crisp imagery and clean backgrounds. Also consider setting up the details so that they look natural. For this picnic scene, this meant actually pouring the wine and cutting the bread. Lastly, consider having the couple's hands in the scene to add to the overall story.

THE PICNIC SCENE PART III

Revisit The Mood Board Often - A change of scene or theme is a great opportunity to revisit the couple's moodboard and check to see if they have any specific images that you can capture. Shoot some close-up images of the table setting, or other details. These types of images are great for rounding out a "final product" such as a photo album or book, or of course a slideshow.

Some settings may lend themselves to playing around and having fun with the props, while other settings might be more romantic and intimate. Gauge this as you shoot and think about how to capture your subjects' personalities.

Get A Variety Of Angles - Remember not to fixate on a single camera angle or crop; be sure to get both close-up and wider angle compositions, and move to the left or right to emphasize his or her face if you can.

Verify Before Moving On - Before you try something totally different, remember to show the couple an image or two and get their approval. This avoids the potential issue of having a perfect shot ruined by something that you may not have noticed like an awkward expression, makeup blemish, or issues that have to do with specific client preferences or insecurities.

THE LOOK-THROUGH

The last concept that we will attempt before moving on to another location is a look-through composition, one that has foreground elements that are out of focus.

This type of scene must be handled carefully, because a large foreground element can quickly subtract from your subjects' emphasis, instead of adding to it. The best thing to do is to move around and get multiple compositions with varying degrees of foreground elements. Then, of course, critique yourself later and work to develop a style that works for you.

Foreground elements are one thing that some clients really seem to love, while others don't care much for it. One thing to keep in mind is that, for the most part, look-through poses are meant to be more interactive or intimate. If your subjects smile directly at the camera, any foreground elements that are near their faces can start to create a sort of tunnel vision for whoever views the image.

Look for creative compositions that give a sense of place. Also, now is a good time to consider switching lenses if you haven't already. All of the foundation poses can be accomplished with our "bread and butter" portrait lens, however the slightly blurred background and medium-close feel is not something we want to replicate in every single image! It's time to change things up and add variety to the final product that you're delivering.

POSING & COMMUNICATION

The majority portrait photography clients are not going to be models or actors who have years of experience knowing exactly what to do in front of your camera. This simply means that your job will require you to ease them into being "on camera". Always remember that for most people, being in front of the camera is not easy at all. In fact, for many people it is downright terrifying.

Connect and Communicate - A very talented portrait photographer, Peter Hurley, once said that as a photographer: "I am 90% therapist & 10% photographer."

Of course it may not always feel this way, but you get the idea. Learn to accept that you will need to be much more than just a "camera operator", and you will always succeed as a portrait photographer!

To be an effective portrait artist, of course you need to have a mastery of photography, lighting and posing.

However, if you want to capture their personalities and emotions, you need your clients to become relaxed and let their guard down. At the same time, as the photographer, you need to do the same! Open up to your clients, let them see you as a person and even as a friend so that you can both establish a connection. The clients' experience cannot be an "all business" one, it needs to be personal and open.

Have Fun! - Many great photographers, and many great artists in general, are not very outgoing and prefer to stay behind the camera. We understand that it can be difficult, however it is important to work at this if you want to reach your full potential as a portrait artist. Smile often, breath, remain calm, and try a few jokes here and there. Remember that the clients will reciprocate the vibe that they feel from you. So if you're having fun, they'll have fun as well! In general, be positive and treat your clients as if they were lifelong friends.

Express Confidence - Similarly difficult is being able to effectively direct your clients to do what you need them to do in front of the camera. Even in the worst-case scenarios, with tough lighting, ugly backgrounds, or equipment issues, you have to exude a calm confidence in what you're doing. Having a strong foundation in posing and lighting is only half the battle. The other part of this is learning how to properly communicate what you want your subjects to do.

Keep It Simple - Often times, the geniuses of the world are actually quite terrible at teaching others what they know. Why? Because they can't communicate effectively, they can't find the right words that get a point across without confusion. Thankfully, this is the reason we developed our concept of Foundation Posing. Foundation Posing helps to educate your clients about the main types of poses right from the start of a shoot, which makes it extremely simple to communicate poses throughout the rest of the shoot.

Learn From Others - One of the best ways to learn effective communication is to watch others do it. To see Pye coach his clients, make them laugh and more, be sure to check out the workshop.

ON LOCATION
TANDEM BIKE RIDE

ACTIVE SHOOTING SCENES

Our first scene was diverse but very static, so next we will transition into something very active: a tandem bike ride. These types of activities can offer fun, candid images as well as traditional and intimate photos.

Control Your Light - When subject motion is involved, the first thing to do is find a location where the lighting will be as consistent as possible. Otherwise we'll find ourselves either missing moments as we adjust our exposure, or having to throw away too many shots because of patchy light on people's faces.

Shooting in direct sunlight might be okay, since these poses will be mostly interactive, however you simply need to make sure the lighting is consistent.

Plan Ahead - Before getting started, it really helps to talk it through with your subjects and explain to them which direction you want them to face, where you want them to walk or ride to, and where to turn around of course. Bicycle riding is a pretty fast activity so you may want to pay extra attention to focus accuracy for such an activity, however if the subjects are just walking they will be pretty easy to lock focus on. We will also be limited to images of them approaching us.

TANDEM BIKE RIDE PART II

One thing to keep in mind when you start to get into these personalized sections of the shoot is to double-check the moodboard again, or ask the client if there is any specific detail or concept that they were hoping to get from this particular theme.

Often times a client has a great idea, but they might be intimidated or too shy to suggest it. We always encourage our clients to share their ideas no matter how they feel, because often with just a slight tweak to the concept we can make the lighting and the angle come together perfectly.

In other words, don't rain on their parade, simply ask for slight changes to their pose when necessary, and show them how they look on the back of the camera.

Lastly, even if a prop or activity mainly involves motion, don't forget to consider static images again! Just like before, consider switching lenses for a wider view that gives a greater sense of place, or getting closer and focusing on micro-poses or other details.

We cover this in detail in Chapter 7 of our Workshop.

GRASSY HILLSIDE - WALKING

THE REFLECTOR CHASE

Although it might not be possible with bicycle riding, with walking subjects you can have your assistant carefully walk along side your subjects to light them with a reflector. This allows you to not only get shots of the couple laughing and looking at each other, but also smiling at the camera from time to time.

Just make sure that your assistant does this safely! Also, remember to have them stay at an angle to the subjects so that the reflector light isn't hitting them right on the side of the face.

Don't get locked into an order of events, either. From sitting poses to walking poses, and other activities, it helps to change things up from session to session.

HILLSIDE SITTING

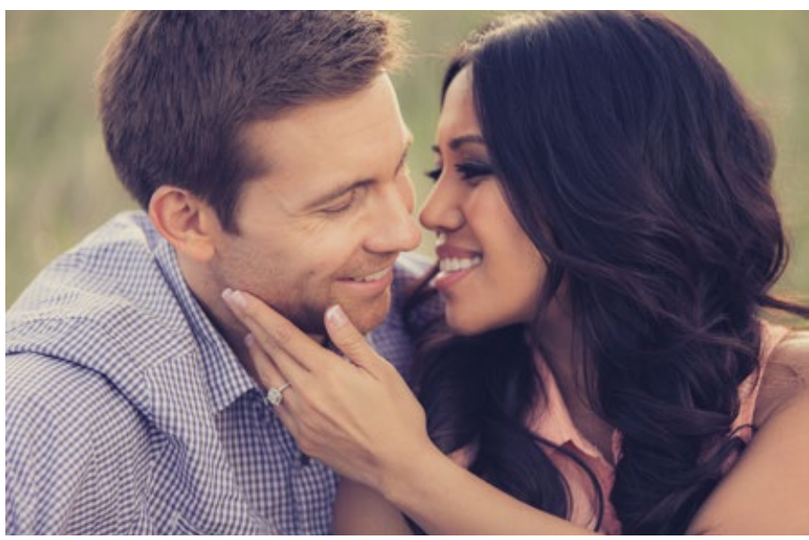
Now that the sun is getting closer to the horizon, we don't need to "run for the shade" as much. In fact now is a great opportunity to practice using a reflector as a key light or main light source. With the late afternoon sun acting as a rim light on our subjects' hair it creates an overall "light and airy" feel which is what we really like, compared to the shaded trees.

New Wardrobes - Keep wardrobe changes in mind as well. If a couple has changed then it is important to re-capture a few of the original foundation poses, instead of just continuing with creative images only. As a rule of thumb, we like to get at least one solid foundation pose after each new wardrobe change.

For this seated, open-air location we're going to create something along the lines of a Stack-Up Foundation Pose.

As we're approaching the final hour or minutes of our session, now is a good time to double check and make sure we have incorporated a few detail images that are important to this particular client. If it is an engaged couple, for example, a close-up image of an engagement ring is always a must!

We cover this in detail in Chapter 8 of our Workshop.



ADDITIONAL CREATIVE IDEAS / CLIENT SUGGESTIONS

Often times, towards the end of a photo shoot when the clients are having a good time and are finally excited about taking pictures, they may start to suggest all kinds of photos that they think might be cute or fun.

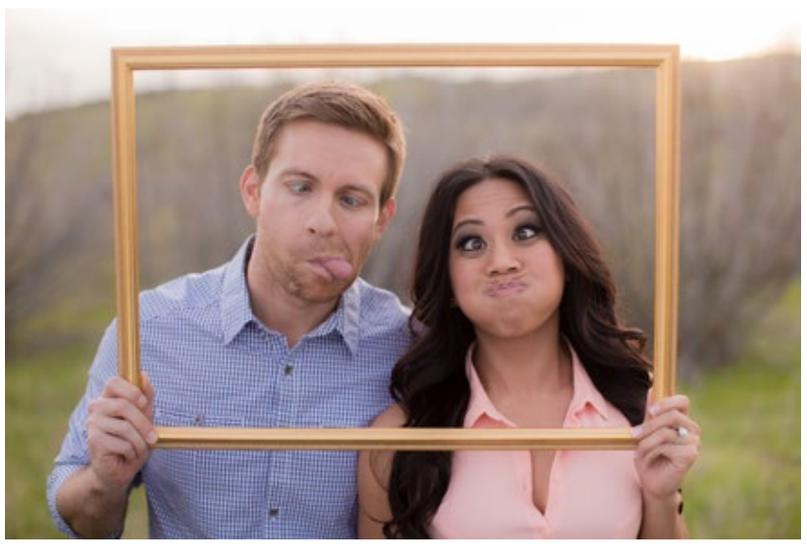
This is a great indicator that your clients are really happy and that you've done a great job of connecting with them, however for some reason we see a lot of portrait photographers frown upon "taking suggestions" from clients.

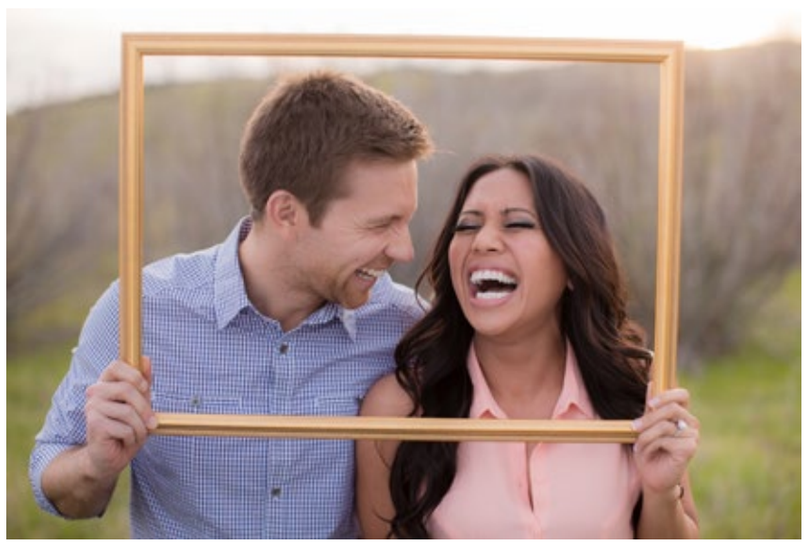
Once again, remember your original goal as a professional? To make your clients look (and feel) good. So if a couple suggests something that you think is "overdone" such as a piggyback ride, or the "empty picture frame prop," now is the time to smile and happily accommodate their requests! Many times, these turn out to be some of the client's most expressive moments, because they take ownership of the pose and really get into it. With our couple Ryan and Jackie, they are both quite active and into fitness, so after we did a "regular" type of piggyback ride pose, we switched it up!

FUNNY FRAMES

You might be tempted to rush through as many final ideas as possible as the session comes to a close, however it is important to continue your decisive, detail-oriented shooting pattern throughout the entire shoot. Remember to pay attention to wrists, fingers, arms, and wardrobe details. Remind your assistant to keep an eye out for stray hairs, especially if it starts to get windy.

Similarly, don’t slack off with your previously high standards for lighting and exposure. It may be a simple client request, but using a reflector to create a sparkle in their eyes will still make a difference.





POSE GUIDANCE FOR HIM

Before we even begin, we like to start with some posing guidance for him and her. This is also our first chance to goof around with the couple a bit, by jokingly demonstrating the right (and wrong) ways to pose. You shouldn't expect a client to remember everything perfectly the first time, however it is still a great way to break the ice and get them comfortable in front of your camera.

For male photographers it usually gets a few laughs to demonstrate female poses, and vice versa for female photographers. As long as you are complimenting your clients, you can joke with them about the awkwardness of this or that pose, or demonstrate which poses are more unflattering and show how to avoid them.

First let's start with male subjects. For guys there are a few key posing tips to remember: it is always good to breathe deep and stand tall. Also, have them find something natural to do with their hands. Remind them to never just leave their hands hanging at their sides. If anything, by default his free hand can go in his pocket or around his fiancee's waist. Males can usually get away with standing normally, however it is still good to shift one's weight just slightly to one foot or another, whichever looks better for the particular pose.

There are other poses and variations that guys can get into, however we've found that it is important to start off by simply putting them at ease, relating to them, and focusing on the girls' posing for a little while until the guy is relaxed and ready for something else.

We cover this in detail with live examples in Chapter 4 of our Workshop.

ON LOCATION
SUNSET RIDGE

THE SCENIC GAZE AT SUNSET

The final scene for a natural light portrait session is usually sunset. However, most photographers make one or two mistakes when shooting portraits at sunset.

Of course many natural light photographers who are “afraid of the dark” may pack up and head home the minute the sun dips below the horizon; as if some unspoken rule says that there couldn’t possibly be anything more to capture. However this couldn’t be further from the truth! The natural light following a sunset is often times the most beautiful light of the entire day.

The other mistake that many photographers make is that they always try to shoot into the sunset, since that is usually where the “excitement” is. Believe it or not, but the last few minutes of sunlight actually make a beautiful light source if you turn your entire composition around, and let the sun illuminate your subjects’ faces. Of course a silhouette or two is always beautiful if the sunset itself is nice and firey, however other than that you will want to look for compositions on the opposite horizon.

If you haven’t yet, this is definitely a good time to reach for your widest lens as well as your longest lens!

We cover this in detail in Chapter 9 of our Workshop.

THE SCENIC GAZE AT SUNSET

As the light fades and it gets truly “dark”, don’t forget to practice good hand-holding technique, or of course reach for your tripod! If you plan to shoot at sunset or especially for a few minutes after sunset, we do highly recommend using a tripod. Even if you’re confident in your hand-holding skills or you don’t mind turning your ISO way up, shooting from a tripod will help your images stay consistent and more manageable in post-production.

One thing that beginning photographers often do is confuse “shoot a lot of different options” with the “spray and pray” mentality. Remember, just because the learning curve is steep doesn’t mean you should shoot carelessly and that “something is bound to work out.” Shooting a lot of photos is a great way to learn, but always remember to be decisive and thoughtful about what you “click.”

When your shutter speed is getting very slow (1/10 sec. or ½ sec) and you are unable to raise your ISO any higher, you’ll want to check focus more frequently and shoot extra images. Even if you’re shooting from a tripod, subject motion can also become an issue at extremely slow shutter speeds.

Scenic, wide angle images will capture a sense of place and a dramatic look, making a great conclusion to a Couples Session.

These types of scenes work great for both the Stack-Up types of poses as well as closed, intimate poses. And again, don’t get tunnel vision and shoot the same composition for every shot, zoom in and out, move around, and critique yourself afterwards.

CONCLUSION & FINAL RECOMMENDATIONS

We have gone through so much instruction from start to finish; by now if you've followed along then you should be a very strong portrait photographer!

The most important piece of advice that we will leave you with is that you should never allow something to get in the way of your own creativity. This workshop has given you a framework and foundation in Natural Light Couples Portrait Photography.

Take what you have learned here and build on it using your own unique approach. Don't be afraid to fail here and there along the way. In order to develop our collection of go-to poses, we worked through every manner of possible "wrong" poses that looked terrible. However once that foundation is set, you should be confident enough to try new things on a regular basis even if you often fail. Personally, we actually find this very exciting! Allow your failures to simply make your successes feel that much more rewarding!

Whether you are a complete beginner, advanced amateur, or aspiring / working professional, improving your craft always comes down to one thing: Breaking up your largest obstacles into small, specific tasks that you can challenge yourself to overcome. Maybe you have difficulty communicating with certain types of clients, or you lack confidence to shoot in certain lighting conditions. Either way, everything can be broken down into "bite-sized chunks". Once you feel confident that you have a go-to technique for accomplishing good, solid imagery in every type of condition, that is when you will begin to see your true creativity flourish.

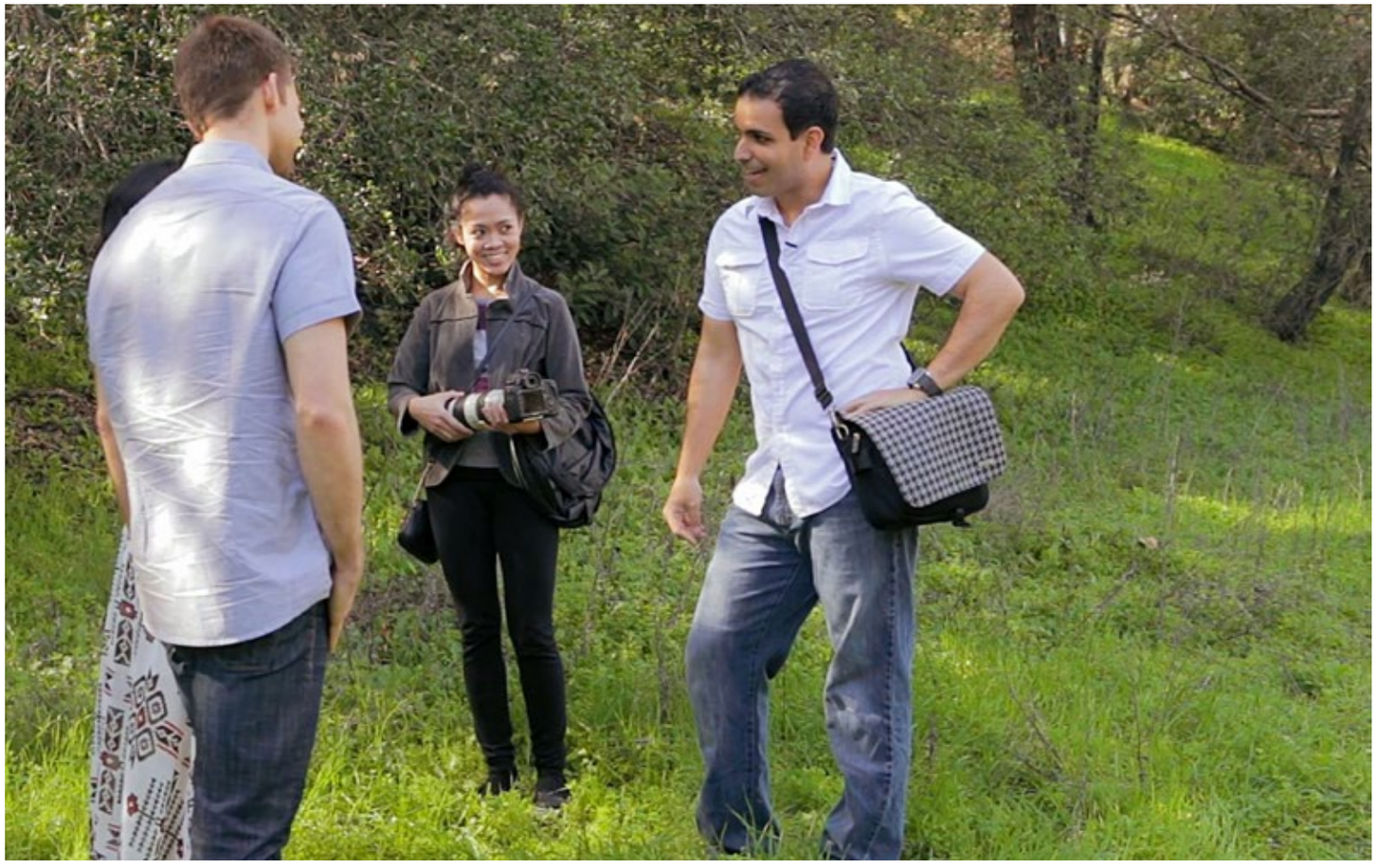
Also, if there was one thing we could recommend that we haven't mentioned yet, it would be to collaborate with others! Connect with your fellow photographers, and critique each others' images together or simply talk about what inspires you and why. Keep in mind that having a few close friends who are highly supportive is far more beneficial than "being popular" online among other photographers.

During your sessions, encourage your assistant(s) to speak up when they have an idea or they see something they would like to "tweak" in a pose. Finally, if possible, find a mentor whose work you admire and who is willing to answer your questions. Like we said, if you approach someone with a very specific question about a single challenge, the likelihood of getting a knowledgeable answer is very high!

Thank you again for supporting SLR Lounge, and we wish you all the best in your photographic endeavors!

POSE GUIDANCE FOR HER

Now in all honesty, posing for females is more complex and can present any number of challenges. In general girls are going to be more self aware and self-conscious in regards to how they look, when compared to the males. So we want to direct and pose our female subjects without bringing attention to things that would make them feel self-conscious. This requires you to be sensitive and aware of what you say and how you say it.



As with any client or any subject, start with compliments and be positive. Regardless of a woman's body type, your goal is to create a pose that has flattering curves yet looks comfortable and realistic. In other words, you want to avoid the contorted, uncomfortable poses that fashion magazines often use, while still applying the same principles of accenting curves and finding flattering angles. Unless of course your client specifically requests more dramatic, fashion-inspired posing, however that is more of a studio or editorial environment type of situation usually.

Weight Distribution - Start with the subject posed with her weight on one leg. In classical portraiture this known as Contrapposto, by the way, in fact you can even see this technique applied to sculptures and iconic portraits such as David by Michaelangelo. Shifting the body's weight more to one leg is often referred to as "kicking the hip", and you want to have your subjects do the shifting of weight in a direction that is away from the camera, or that slims their figure.

Another major objective is to help a female subjects' arms appear flattering. Upper arms especially will appear bigger if they are tucked against the body, so the first thing we like to do is remind our female subjects to keep their arms just slightly distanced from their bodies.

Raising a hand to the hip works great for this situation. Have her place her thumb back and fingers forward, and relax her wrist. (A forward-facing thumb on a hip is more of a maternity, belly-accentuating pose, while a stiff or straight wrist with downward facing fingers can make a subject look like they're experiencing back problems! Stand up and try it yourself, and you'll see just how such minor details can make a significant difference in an overall pose!)

Lastly, with your female subjects' feet, always do something that looks natural and casual. Specifically, mind the leg and foot that is opposite the one where weight has been shifted. You can lift the foot a bit and point the toe to the ground, or drag the foot or tuck it behind the other a little bit; anything is better than just letting that foot stand flat on the ground.

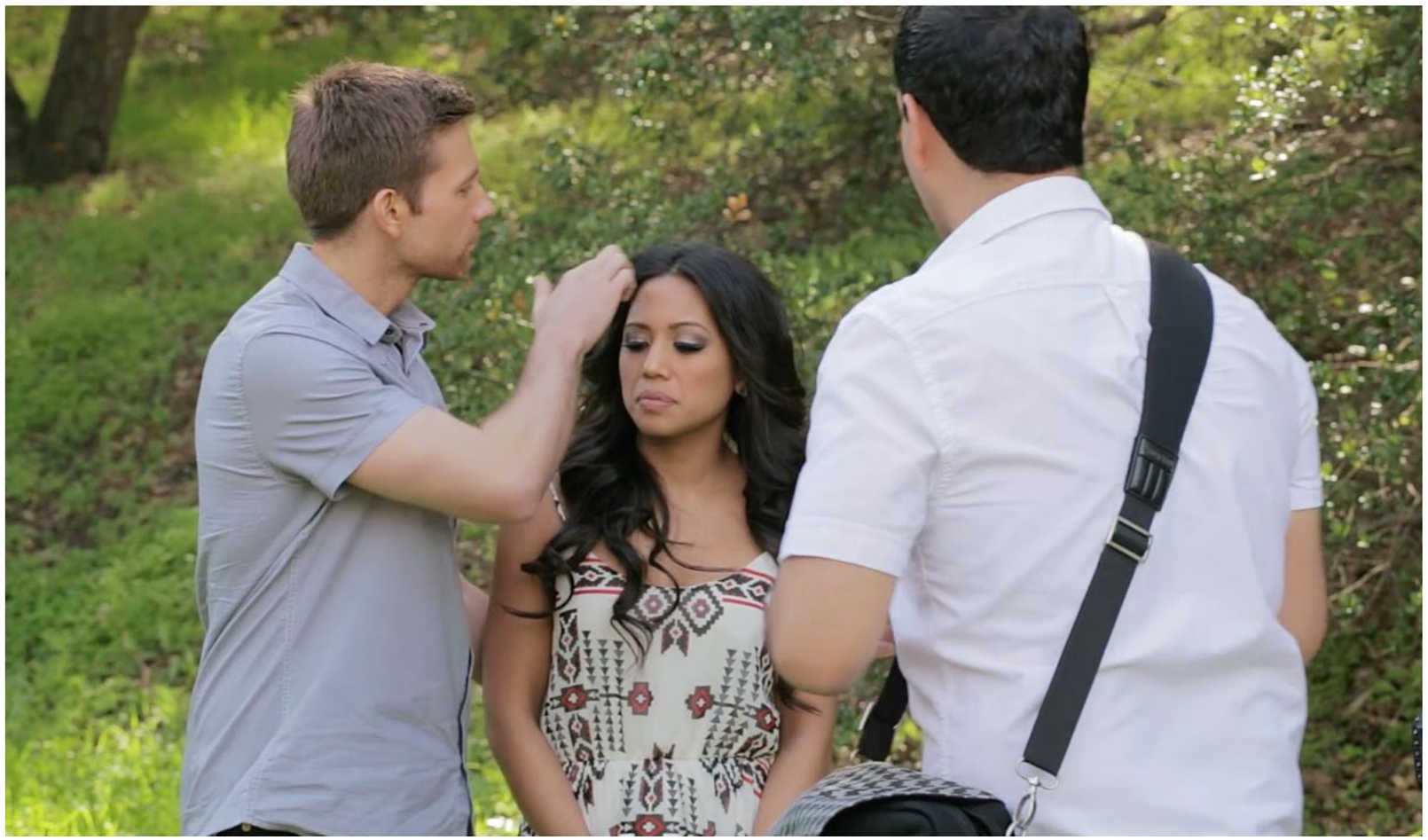
We cover this in detail with live examples in Chapter 4 of our Workshop.

MAKING THEM YOUR ADVOCATES

There are so many minor details that can make or break a portrait, so it is unrealistic to assume that you alone can monitor each and every one of them while also focusing on your camera, the light, etc. We recommend having your assistant keep an eye out for some things such as strands of hair that look out of place, fingers and wrists that don't look natural, and other things from your camera position.

Make your clients into your advocates as well. Since they are the closest to each other, remind them to keep an eye on smaller details such as "flyaway" hairs, odd wrinkles in clothing, and any other wardrobe or makeup issues. Once again, communicate with your clients in a positive, collaborative way. Get a feel for your clients' personalities and gauge whether or not you may want to adjust your behavior in order to make them feel more at ease. This will ensure that they not only help you get the best possible photos, but they also have a good experience being in front of your camera which is critical for referral business!

One final important thing is to create a mental list of which terms work well at communicating your instructions, and which ones seem to be confusing. For example there are a hundred different ways you can say "turn your head", yet if you say "turn your face" specifically, you might get better results more often! Or for example saying "pick up your foot" is extremely vague, yet "bend your knee and point your toes" is very specific. Of course this type of experience takes a lot of time to develop, and totally varies based on your own personality and verbal skills.



THE FOUNDATION POSES

WHAT ARE FOUNDATION POSES?

In portraiture, posing is what many photographers spend most of their time learning. In our study of the subject, for portraits of regular people in natural light especially, we have found that the majority of poses are based on four basic positions for your subjects' feet and shoulders. We've dubbed these four basic positions our Foundation Poses. From each position we can achieve several different variations rather quickly, which we call micro-poses. We created the Foundation Posing methodology for a few reasons:

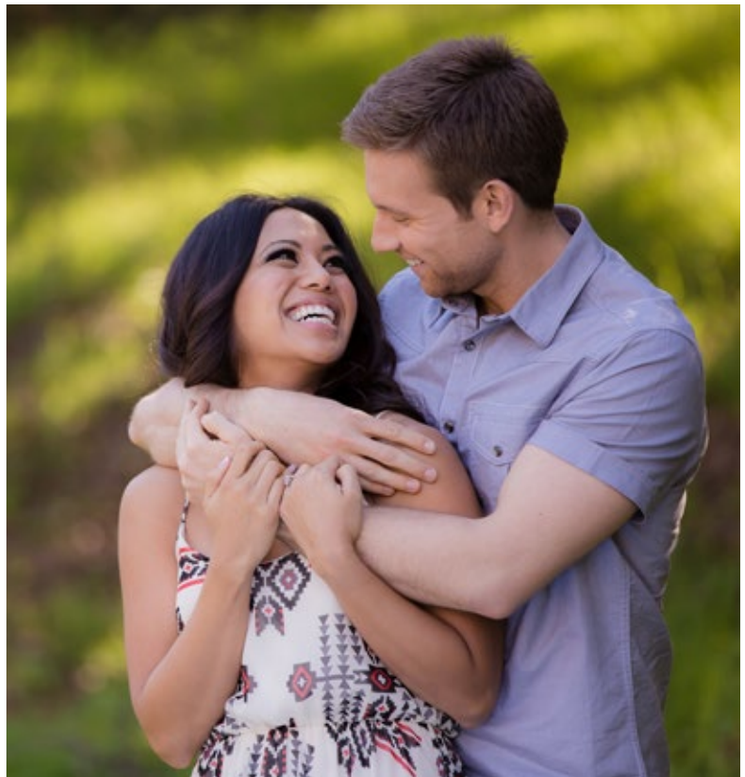
Simplicity - For people who aren't very experienced with posing (either photographer or subject), Foundation Posing provides a simple system that they can use to create several different looks quickly and consistently.

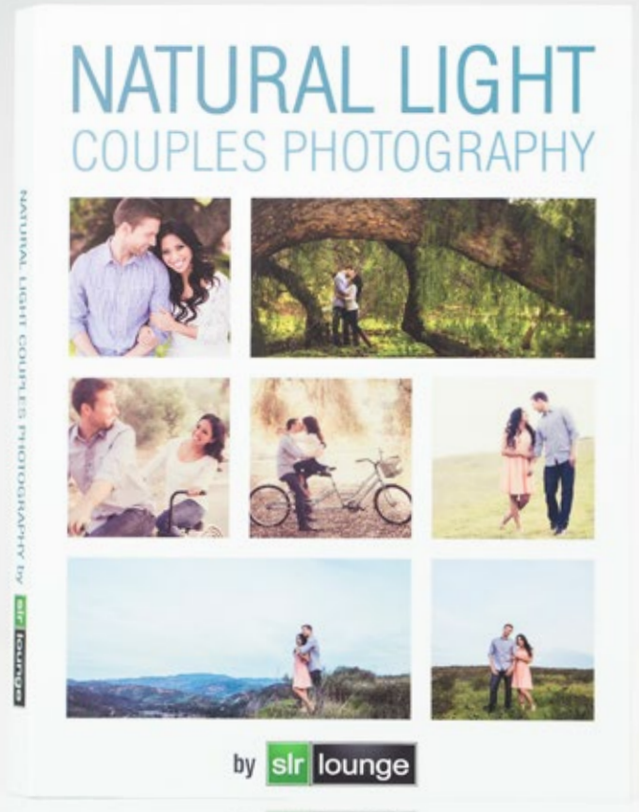
Framework - Foundation Posing creates a framework that will prevent the photographer from overlooking common mistakes in posing. Instead of just diving right into something random each time and then running out of poses, you can structure your portrait sessions in a manner that progresses from your Foundation Posing to the more advanced or creative ideas.

Client Comfort - Foundation Posing breaks the process down so that your clients aren't overwhelmed right away. If you explain to them that you are going to teach them a foundation and then build on it slowly, they will do much better at remembering each step. After a little while in front of the camera you will even find your clients anticipating exactly what you want. They will naturally begin to do everything you need just by saying a few simple phrases like "close up towards each other" or "open up towards me."

Consistency - Mastering the Foundation Poses will give you a strong set of consistent images that you can deliver on each shoot. Regardless of someone's body type or comfort level in front of a camera, as a professional it is your job to deliver photos that match whatever standard you present in your portfolio.

Creativity - As the term "foundation" implies, these poses are meant to be just a starting point. However if you do the foundation poses first during a session, you will find yourself much more confident and ready to think creatively and make more unique images!





As mentioned, this book is based on the information found in the Natural Light Couples Photography DVD. Here is more information about the Workshop.

Title: Natural Light Couples Photography | Master Engagement Photography
Run Time: Approximately 8 Hours
Format: Digital Download or DVD-ROM
Primary Topics:

- Master Natural Posing and Learn Hundreds of Poses for Any Situation
- Learn Lighting and Composition
- Learn How to Plan Shoots, Props, and Ideas
- Learn post production techniques for engagment sessions using Lightroom
- See sample videos on our Youtube Channel (youtube.com/slrlounge)

(click here to purchase)

PHOTOGRAPHY 101
MASTERING MANUAL MODE
an SLR Lounge workshop

If you're interested in strengthening your foundation of photography, we highly recommending our Photography 101 DVD.

Title: Photography 101 | Mastering Manual Mode
Run Time: Approximately 7 Hours
Format: Digital Download or DVD-ROM

- **Live Examples with Great Imagery** - We get out of the classroom setting and teach photography in real-life situations. Watching this workshop is the equivalent of taking a week-long, in-person workshop that we have charged thousands of dollars for in the past. And more importantly, we are creating amazing imagery all along the way.

- **Great Images with Basic Gear** - Every image in this Workshop is captured with either a Canon Rebel or Nikon D5200, basic sub-$500 cameras, along with standard kit lenses and inexpensive prime lenses. We show you how to create beautiful light using a simple $30 reflector and $10 fabric from any local fabric store. The result is the most accessible and practical Photography 101 workshop on the market.

- **Learn a Variety of Photography Types** - We teach you all of these photography concepts while exploring a wide variety of shoots. Each shoot is designed to hammer home a different element of photography and camera mastery, and for each shoot we show you how to light, expose and compose a fantastic image.

(click here to purchase)

In this book, we are teaching you natural light priciples. However, if you're interested in applying flash photography to improve your imagery, consider watching the following workshop:

Title: Lighting 101 | Foundation and Light Shaping
Run Time: Approximately 9 Hours
Format: Digital Download or DVD ROM

Amazing Images with Basic Gear – We create all the images you see on this page and in the workshop with just an on-camera flash. This allows us to focus on the foundation of lighting, light shaping, and light modification.

Focus on Techniques, Not Gear – All you need for this workshop is a camera, on-camera flash, and basic, affordable modifiers. This makes it the most accessible workshop for learning flash.

Slides Included – We include all of the PDF slides for you to review and study after watching the workshop. This should solidify your understanding and get you ready to continue on to Lighting 201, where we start to use multiple flashes.

Variety of Styles Created – We teach you how to create a variety of looks, from natural looking imagery (for portraits, family, etc) to dramatic imagery (for fitness, fashion, etc).

Creative Techniques – We teach you how to use mixed white balance and different colored Gels to create interesting and creative imagery.

(click here to purchase)