



THE HEAD AND SHOULDER PORTRAIT

Some Tips on Camera Technique and Posing, from John Marshall

Camera Techniques

The lens used for this type of close-up portraiture should be a short telephoto lens (35mm equivalent of about 85mm to 135mm). This enables the distance between the photographer and model to be more comfortable for the model. If the camera is too close to the model the image can become distorted giving, for example, a large nose or chin – not to be recommended if the photographer does not wish to be rewarded with a knuckle sandwich!

As we normally look directly at a person's eyes, the camera should be at about eye-level. However, if the model has a "double chin" it is good to have the camera higher so the model has to look up and stretch the neck. If the model has a long nose, a lower than eye-level position for the camera will appear to shorten the nose.

Posing Techniques

It is better to seat the model on a stool rather than a chair so that the chair back cannot intrude into the picture.

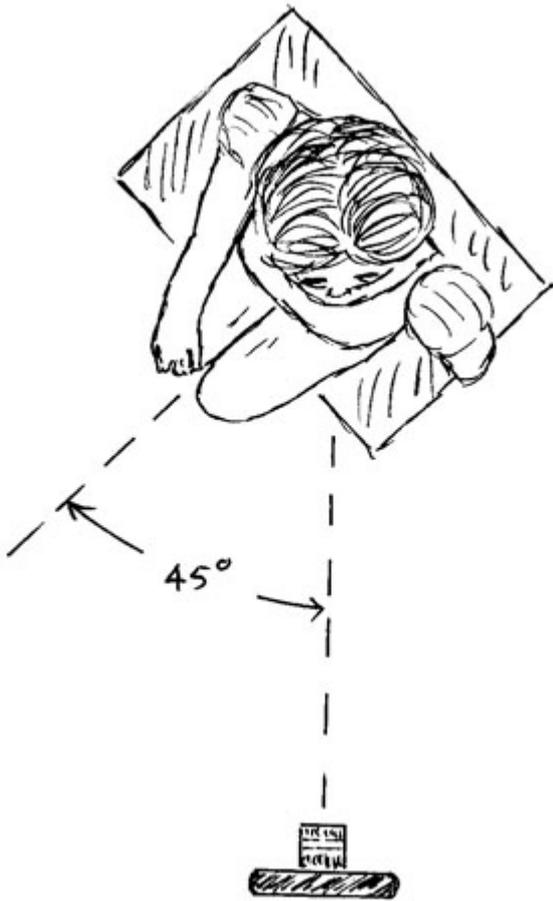
If the model directly faces the camera (square-on!), the shoulders will appear unnaturally broad and any body shape (such as the female figure) will be hidden.



(Fig. 1)

The model should therefore be seated with the body at about 45° to the camera axis and facing the key light.

The model should then be asked to turn their head to face the camera.



(Fig. 2)

This creates a much better shape to the body and the shoulders appear narrower.



(Fig. 3)

Asking the model to place the hand farthest from the camera gives a better position for the far shoulder and, if they hold the seat slightly behind them with the nearest hand, the arm will be clear of the body.



(Fig. 4)

If the model is asked to tilt their head the line of the eyes will be more dynamic.



(Fig. 5)



(Fig. 6)

This can be achieved by tilting the camera rather than the model's head!

Sometimes a pose can be dramatic if the model sits at right angles to the camera axis or even with their backs partly towards the camera. The model is then asked to look over their shoulder at the camera. However, this tends to create creases in the model's neck of which judges tend to disapprove! (Judges have very little understanding of human anatomy!)



(Fig. 7)

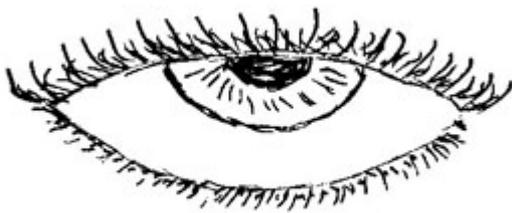
To avoid this, the hair can be draped over the neck – if the model has long hair! Another way is to ask the model to raise the near shoulder up to the chin to hide the creases.



(Fig. 8)

It will be noticed that, in all the illustrations, the nose has not been allowed to protrude beyond the far cheek. It is better to go for a full profile if the shape of the nose is required to be shown.

Young lady models can be given “sexy eyes” (as the old Dr Hook song says!) by getting her to drop her chin, facing down slightly, then to look up with her eyes. The camera level may also be raised slightly. This has the effect of making the eyes look larger and puts a white “canoe” shape under the iris.



(Fig. 9)

As with all photography, these are not rules but just guidelines to help getting started with the portrait. Once the basics have been mastered then it is time to experiment – but don't forget about that “knuckle sandwich”!

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