
AUTHENTIC PORTRAITS

The Guide



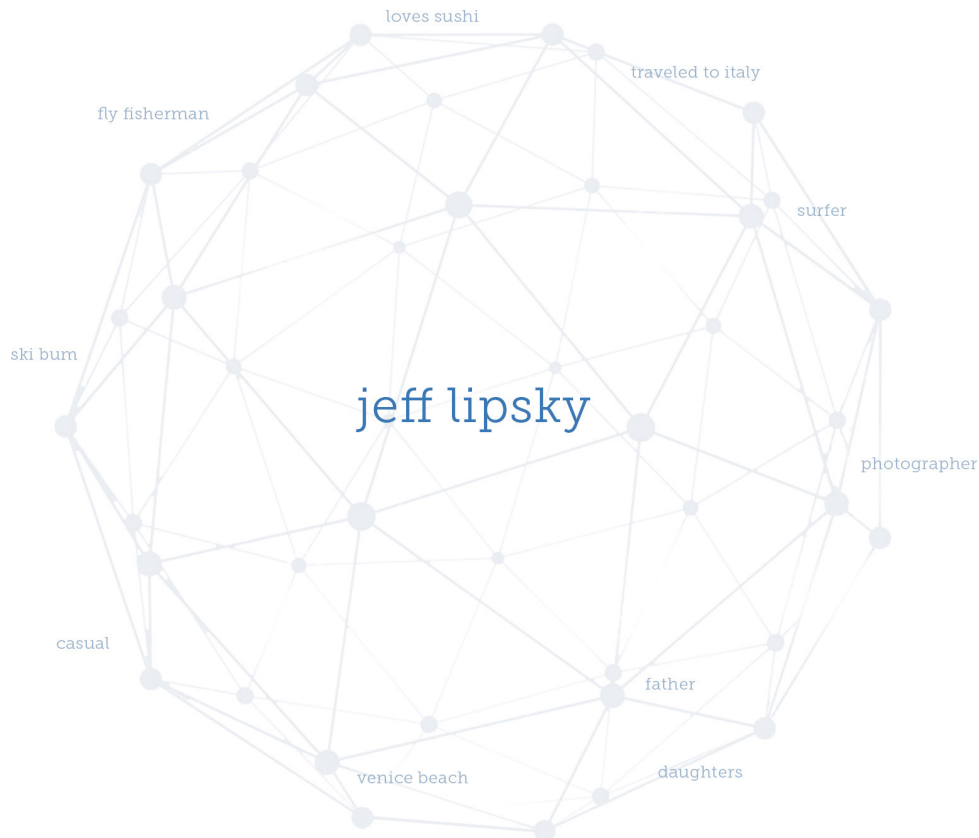
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PREPARATION Guide

THE SECRET TO AUTHENTIC PORTRAITS IS SIMPLE: *interest, empathy, kindness, curiosity, compassion* and *soul*; plus a dash of technique. Care deeply about the subject and you increase the odds of someone else caring themselves. Keep in mind that being authentic is the secret to making more powerful frames. Be authentic yourself and capture it in others as well.

STEP 1 · Brainstorm

Before your next shoot, create a **VISUAL MAP** related to the subject of your shoot. Think about details like: interests, likes, dislikes, descriptive adjectives, geography, and etc. Below is an example of one I created for shoot myself:



STEP 2 · Clarify your Vision

CLARIFY your vision by answering the following questions:

What are your **STYLISTIC ASPIRATIONS**? Write out a few descriptive words:

Here are a few ideas: *clean, simple, graphic, warm, thoughtful, deep, complex, edgy, beautiful, fun, happy, placid, serene, inspiring, hip, modern, classic, energetic, kinetic, fun, funny, emotional, emotive, melancholy, contemplative.*

What is the **MAIN GOAL** for your shoot? Write out a few phrases or ideas:

Here are a few ideas:

Connect with _____ in a natural way. Build rapport.

Create an iconic and timeless portrait that reveals _____'s wit and charm (or mindfulness and humility, or athleticism and presence...).

To capture the keen sparkle in _____'s eyes.

A warm, authentic and revealing portrait that _____'s spouse/partner would appreciate.

What type of **ANGLES, COMPOSITION** and **CAMERA HEIGHT** do you plan to use?

What **CAMERA/LENS** combo would be **IDEAL**?

What **CAMERA/LENS** combo might you like to **EXPERIMENT** with?

STEP 3 · Preflight Check

GO THROUGH these steps at home and right before the shoot begins.

- CF/SD Card cleared and formatted (*make sure you previously downloaded all images*)
- Batteries and backup batteries are fully charged
- Camera and lens element cleaned
- Camera strap secure
- Camera test - capture and review an image and settings
- Non-essentials emptied from camera Bag
- Camera bag arranged for quick and easy access to your gear
- Photo Release prepared
- Personal wardrobe matches the task ahead
- Personal needs accounted for: food, water, etc.
- Thank You note (or gift)
- Open and positive point-of-view
- Mindful attitude

STEP 4 · Mapping Out the Flow

Most shoots tend to **FOLLOW A PATTERN OR FLOW**. The more familiar you get with this, the better you can operate within it. From a 20,000 foot view, my shoots tend to look like this:

1. Meet and Greet
2. Make the initial shot
3. Conversation
4. Shoot and direct the subject
5. Wrap and goodbye

Take a closer look and you'll discover even more subtle steps along the way:

- Take the initiative to set the tone with your movement, mindfulness and tone
- Meet and greet with a smile, strong handshake, kind eyes. Shake hands then step back. Be open, accepting and warm. Have camera slung casually on your shoulder
- Express gratitude and affirm their “look”
- Establish rapport by finding common ground and/or asking questions. (i.e. How was your drive? Mention a mutual friend, etc.
- Before too much time passes, take the first photograph in a natural way
- Walk to the location for the shoot and keep talking. Ignore your camera as much as possible
- Look and listen in a refreshing way
- Establish and share the vision for the shoot. Is this fashion, artsy, portrait, personality... tell them (your ideas)?
- Explain what you are looking for, i.e to be a model or to be yourself
- Shoot photos and provide feedback
- Ask questions
- Let them know when the shoot is nearing its end
- Keep shooting
- Wrap the shoot with a high five or handshake
- Spend a few minutes talking about life
- Like a good host, walk the subject back to his/her mode of transport and say goodbye
- Follow up with a thank you the next day

While the details above provide one road map, now it's time to map out **YOUR OWN FLOW** in a more focused way. Use the space below to map out how you anticipate the shoot to go:

In addition, write out a few ways to gain rapport and to get the momentum going. Jot down a few ideas below:

Here are a few suggestions of what I might try:

How was your drive over this morning from _____

I think we have a mutual friend. Her/his name is _____

How did you get into _____

What are your interests outside of _____

What's your story? / What do you do?

What is inspiring you these days?

What's the passion project you're pursuing right now?

Tell me about the most significant people in your life.

Any high or low points of the day so far?

Have you traveled anywhere interesting lately?

What's one of the most beautiful/interesting/exotic places you've traveled to?

What's your secret to staying so _____ in spite of all the stress/distractions of daily life?

How do you stay fit?

Reading anything interesting lately?

How is your family (spouse/partner/kids)?

Where are you from? What was it like growing up there?

When it comes to art/music/food what style do you prefer?

Last but not least, don't forget to set your camera down. It's hard to connect with someone when a camera is blocking their face. When you ask questions remember that **EYE CONTACT**, supported by a **WARM SMILE** can transform how you are received. BE **WARM**. BE **REAL**. BE **YOU**. It opens the door to connecting in a natural and honest way.

----- **STEP 5** · Post-Shoot Reflection -----

After the shoot and before you process the images, take a few minutes to reflect by answering the questions, “What worked?” And “What could have been better?” for the following aspects of the shoot:

Building Rapport

Providing Feedback/Encouragement

Camera + Lens Combo

Light and Location

----- **STEP 6** · Plan the Next Shoot -----

Take advantage of your creative momentum and jot down a few ideas about the portraits you would like to make next. Think about who you'd like to photograph and why. Include ideas about composition, locations and light.

FINDING SUBJECTS

BEGIN by generating ideas about **WHO** you would like to photograph. Use the questions below to guide your brainstorming flow. After you have completed answering the questions, select 3 subjects that you'd like to photograph next.

WHAT?

What are your interests? *Hike, bike, surf, swim, camp, read, write, create, etc.*

WHO?

Who would you like to surround yourself with? Who would you like to learn from? And Why?
Artists, poets, parents, athletes, Olympians, actors, academics, authors, celebrities, surfers, fishermen, farmers, musicians, mountain climbers, spiritual seekers, old souls, teachers, travelers, speakers and anyone committed to their craft. Positive, hopeful, humble, organic, authentic, happy, optimistic, gritty, gutsy, integrity, inspiring, wise, encouraging, humble, risk takers, achievers, dreamers, survivors, underdogs, amateurs, enthusiastic, thoughtful and kind.

WHERE?

Examine your life as if you were an alien visiting your location for the first time. What's unique about where you live?

California, Pacific Ocean, Santa Barbara, Beaches, Mountains, Islands, Creeks, Piers, Point Breaks, World Class: Wine Country, Waves, Mountain Biking Trails, Back Country, Culture, Performing Arts, Thought Leaders, Actors, Musicians, Craftsman.

STYLE?

What is your personal/shooting style?

Down-to-earth. Substance. Strength. Warmth.

APPROACHING SUBJECTS

HOW TO YOU APPROACH SOMEONE THAT YOU WOULD LIKE TO PHOTOGRAPH?

How to most effectively ask if you can photograph that person? These are two of the most important questions for anyone who wants to grow as a portrait photographer. Most importantly, *you need to be yourself*. Don't try to imitate anyone else's style as it will come off as fake. Below are a few strategies to keep in mind:

- **BE EMPATHETIC.** Think about the situation from their perspective.
- **BE CASUAL.** Don't overdo the pitch.
- **BE CLEAR.** Explain who you are, your work you and what type of portrait you would like to make.
- **BE THOUGHTFUL.** Honor and respect the person's response.
- **BE BOLD.** Take a deep breath and take the risk. Great portraits won't happen any other way.

Next, consider what you might say in order to make a quick connection and to ask for the honor of capturing their image. Below are a few ideas. Remember, these aren't scripts to follow, but conceptual ideas to learn from. After reading the ideas below, write out a few of your own.

I'm working on a photography project photographing people I admire and respect. You're one of those people. If you're up for it, it would be an honor to be able to photograph you in your workshop. If you don't currently have the time, no big deal. I completely understand.

I'm wondering if you might be able to help me out? I'm a photography student and have a homework assignment to photograph musicians. Your music resonates with me and I was wondering if I could capture a few portraits of you with your cello.

I'm in the process of developing a new photographic portfolio where I'm photographing surfers at the edge of the sand during low tide at sunrise. The idea is to capture portraits in this inter-tidal zone as the sun begins to rise.

I was talking with a mutual friend of ours about a photo project I'm working on. He passed on your name and suggested I reach out. Long story short, it would be amazing to have the opportunity to photograph you some day.

I'm taking an online photography class and the instructor has given us some assignments to help us get over our fears of photographing people. I'm super nervous about doing these shoots and was wondering if you could help out?

After the loss of my friend, I've been thinking a lot about what matters most in life - people. So I'm setting out to photograph people who have made a positive impact on my life. You are one of those and it would be an honor to capture a portrait of you.

Write out some sample scripts of your own:

DIRECTING SUBJECTS

GREAT PORTRAITS AREN'T MADE BY CAMERAS ALONE. Without the chemistry, collaboration and connection that happens in between the sitter and photographer the camera sits still. The kinetic energy of the camera is activated when the photographer searches to see the hidden light, strength, beauty, mystery, humanity or grit that is hidden by exterior things. The photographer must learn to listen, look and direct in a way that is patient and kind. And such if she is fortunate, the photograph might just capture that *“thing, essence or soul”* that rarely appears. To capture such images is a gift. But it's a gift that doesn't appear by itself. The photographer must learn to direct in an honest and open way. Below are a few directorial tips you might try:

- Explain to the subject, “There's nothing you can do that's 'wrong'. Trying out any ideas, posture or composition helps lead us to find the right way to make the photograph work.”
- Express the idea, “I don't need you to be a model. I need you to be you.” Suggest that this less of a photo shoot and more of a portrait sitting. You don't have to bring a persona, just you.
- Too much eye contact becomes glassy and tired. Ask the subject to look away for a few shots, then look back.
- Ask the subject to take a deep breath. Roll his or her shoulders. Stretch.
- Ask the subject to imagine a time when they faced a great difficulty and overcame.
- Ask the subject to think of someone they care about most.
- Encourage the subject in a specific way - i.e. “Leaning against the wall like that is perfect.” Or “That jacket reads really well on camera. Good call on bringing it along.”
- When you're excited about the light, environment or look, let them know about it. Share your enthusiasm.
- Resist the temptation to show the subject the LCD screen unless you feel it will help.

Lastly, the gift of capturing a deep portrait isn't guaranteed. We have to hope and believe against all odds that with our limited skill and this strange mechanical device (called a camera), we can capture something that transcends. And remember, be yourself. If you're shy and observant or charming and witty or....whatever you are, channel and utilize those skills. That will help you find and develop your voice.

GEAR GUIDE

Creating authentic portraits requires equal amounts of expertise with “making the connection” as it does with **SELECTING, HANDLING** and **USING** your gear. The more gear expertise you gain, the less the gear will get in the way of making the connection and capturing more interesting frames. Below are a few gear essentials:

CAMERA BAG/CASE

Ideally, you will want to have multiple camera bags (backpacks, case or whatever style you choose). When preparing for a portrait shoot, use a bag that is just big enough. If you only have 1 camera body and 2 lenses, don't use your full size bag. Select a smaller one and bring that. Bulky and excessively large bags just get in the way. It's best to keep things light and small so that you can be nimble and work quickly. I've tried out so many different bag or backpack options, it's ridiculous. Here's my conclusion: **It's best to have 1 backpack and 1 shoulder bag.** This is the ultimate combo. What brand? I use *Lowepro* and *ThinkTank* but any brand will do.

CAMERA

These days, almost any camera will do. The technology has come that far. What am I using? I'm shooting most with the **Canon 5DMiii, Sony A7Rii, Sony A6300, Hasselbad 503c.** I rotate between all of these cameras. Yet, choose a camera that fits your budget and don't forget about the lens.

LENSES

The gear that most directly affects the outcome of the portrait is the lens. Because of that, I've created an entire course on the topic (it's called, **“Finding the Perfect Portrait Lens”** - do a quick Google search on the title and my name and you'll find it right away.). There is a lot that can be said about lenses, for now keep in mind the following ideas.

35mm

This is a moderately wide angle lens. It's great for pulled back or environmental portraits. Be careful not to get too close to the subject or he/she may look distorted. Keep the subject near center for less distortion. As a side note, this is the approximate focal length of most camera phones.

50mm

I think of a 50 as an honest and normal lens. It doesn't exaggerate like a wide angle lens and it doesn't

doesn't flatter like a longer focal length. This focal length is good for $\frac{3}{4}$ length portraits. If you get too close (say like with a face close up) the subject will look distorted. This lens isn't easy, but it is a good teacher. And it's great for creating natural and authentic frames.

85mm

Many portrait photographers consider this focal length as the ideal for portraiture. It provides a look that makes people often look their best. But it isn't overly-flattering. It still provides a strong and natural look. The best portraits I have ever made, were captured with this focal length lens.

70-200mm

This lens has energy and life. It is dramatic in a good way. The look that it renders is one that helps to make people look their best. Yet, it doesn't mean you always need to use it. For example, let's compare lenses to instruments. If the 50mm is an acoustic guitar, then the 70-200 is the electric guitar. It's loud exciting and fun.

GEAR WISH LIST Getting more gear isn't always the solution, but it can help. Good photographs are made with the combination of heart/mind/soul, plus technique and gear. Put together a short wish list of gear that you'd like to use for capturing authentic portraits. Write out a few ideas:

5 EXERCISES

IT IS PART OF OUR HUMAN NATURE to be interested in and drawn to others. It's part of being alive. And many of the most compelling photographs of all time have been of people. Portraiture has been of profound interest for thousands of years and its course has been as diverse as its subject matter. And there's no better time to practice portraiture than today. Use the words and exercise below will get your creative juices to flow.

As portrait photographers, whoever we are or wherever we are, we have something to contribute. Because at their core, portraits are photographs of individuals created by individuals. And that individuality, really matters. The world doesn't need another Annie Leibovitz, Richard Avedon, Jeremy Cowart or _____ (fill in the blank). **THE WORLD NEEDS YOU.** And it needs you to be as authentic and idiosyncratic as possible. The more **"YOU"** that you are, the better your pictures will become.

It doesn't matter how young, how old, how introverted, how extroverted, how inexperienced, or how experienced you are. All of that "YOUness" is what makes you wonderfully unique. And when you make portraits from a place that taps into and honors your life story, your core and your essence; you bring to light something that no one else can. Herein lies one of that great secret to portraiture. It isn't about the gear, light or technique. It's about you, your vision, your voice and your hope for connecting with another human soul. In the space below, write out a distilled version of your vision for the type of portraits you'd like to make.

WHAT IS YOUR AUTHENTIC PORTRAIT VISION? Write it out below:

1. IT'S ALL ABOUT THE LENS

As I've mentioned above, the lens has the power to shape the portraits that we make in a strong way. And the only way to learn how to be expressive with the lenses that you have is to try things out. So this assignment is about getting familiar with the lenses that you use by way of experimentation.

For this exercise I want you to break the rules so that you can discover the "sweet spot" for the lenses that you use. For example, if you have a wide angle lens begin by photographing from a distance and then move closer and closer until you are right next to the subject. In addition, experiment with camera height. Shoot from low and high angles. Tilt the camera. Think of yourself as a scientist trying to discover the best way to utilize a lens. Go through this with at least 2 lenses. Of course, for this assignment you'll need to find a trustworthy subject as well. Ideally, find a friend or fellow photo-enthusiast. Explain that this isn't about creating, "the best portrait ever", but about trying to understand the lens.

After you've captured the photographs, spend some time reviewing and analyzing what you see. Draw your own conclusions and make some decisions on what you like best.

GOAL: A series of experimental portraits

OUTCOME: A discovery of the best and worst ways to use a lens

2. REDUCE AND SIMPLIFY

One of the quickest ways to create stronger photographs is to simplify the frame. Too often, amateur photographers included unnecessary and irrelevant information in the composition. This confuses the viewer and makes for a weaker image. So for this assignment I want you to create as simple, clean and open photographs as possible. Start off by finding a subject to photograph. Then find a location that is not complex or cluttered. Your goal is to create 5 simple images that feel less like chore and more like poetic verse. What the novelist says in 20,000 words, the poet says in 10. Make that your goal.

In preparation for this assignment, do a Google search for the top portraits of all time. You'll soon discover that the best portraits; whether painted, photographed or drawn, are those that are simple and strong. And consider the great photographer Robert Frank's intent, "When people look at my pictures, I want them to feel the way they do when they want to read a line of a poem twice."

GOAL: 5 Poetic Portraits

OUTCOME: Learning how to say more with less

3. EYES

As the saying goes, “The eyes are the window to the soul.” And it’s true. The eyes reveal so much about who we are and who we desire to become. The eyes rarely mislead. You can partially fake a smile but you can’t fake what your eyes reveal. For this assignment the subject is the eyes. Ignore everything else. Focus completely and wholeheartedly on the eyes. To capture an image where the eyes are sparkling and alive, photograph someone in open shade near the edge of a shadow. Think of it this way: have someone stand in the shade provided by an open garage door looking out toward the sky. Or have the subject illuminated by a window that is facing north. Or find another situation that you like even more. Most importantly, look for the light being reflected in the eyes.

GOAL: 3-5 portraits of 1 subject where the emphasis is illuminated eyes

OUTCOME: Discovery of how to capture the essence of someone via their eyes

4. SMILE

Mona Lisa’s smile is interesting because she isn’t smiling very much. It’s the mystery and subtlety that draws us in. When emotion or expression is overdone, it’s like overcooked food. Take a deeper look into the fine arts and it will be impossible to discover an image where the subject has a cheesy grin. The famous portrait photographer Annie Leibovitz has often said, “I never asked a subject to smile.” The reason is because asking for the smile makes it fake. Yet, in her photographs you will occasionally see a grin - that’s always the result of capturing authentic emotion rather than asking someone to “Say cheese!”. The goal for this assignment is to create a portrait where the subject is smiling in a subtle way. To do this, create a warm connection, have fun with the subject and explain the goal. See if you can get the subject to collaborate with you.

GOAL: 1 portrait with a subtle and natural smile

OUTCOME: Explore how to elicit and capture emotion in a more subtle and authentic way.

5. SIGNIFICANCE

One of the biggest challenges in photography is to get other people to notice and care about your photographs. There are so so soooo many images being made that it's hard to break through all the noise. Yet, as I've said before, one of the quickest ways to stand out is to make photographs of people that you care about in a deep and honest way. Because if you care about the subject; that will show through. And chances are that it will make me care about the subject as well. One of the biggest mistakes aspiring photographers make is to photograph models instead of their family, colleagues and friends. Models may look good, but those images usually lack any substance that goes beyond that.

For this assignment, I want you to begin by brainstorming a list of the most important people in your life. Then decide who you would like to photograph. Approach this with gravitas and as if it's your chance to create one of the most important photographs of your life (because who knows, maybe it will be). Create photographs that are not contrived but simple, stoic and strong.

Capture not just how the person looks but who they are. And not just who they are to the world, but who they are to you.

GOAL: A set of portraits of someone you admire, respect or love

OUTCOME: A rediscovery of the power of portraiture

IN CLOSING

I hope you enjoyed these assignments! If you want more, here are a few options:

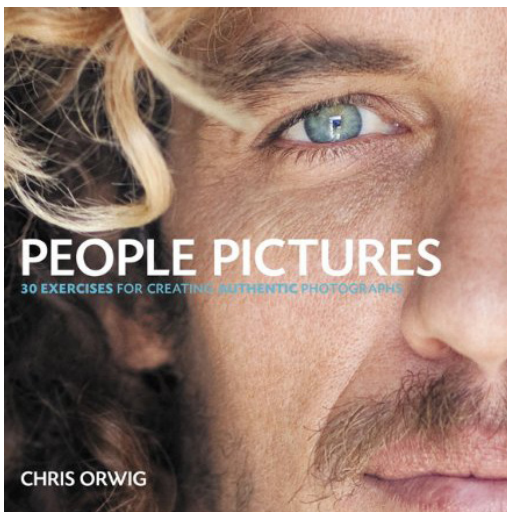
- Check out my best-selling book, **PEOPLE PICTURES: 30 Exercises for Creating Authentic Portraits**
- View my online **5-DAY PORTRAIT CHALLENGE** on [lynda.com](https://www.lynda.com)

Looking for some creative inspiration?

- Check out my latest book, **THE CREATIVE FIGHT** (You can find it on [amazon.com](https://www.amazon.com)).
- Or visit my creative inspiration resource site: **CARPEDIEMSUPPLYCO.COM** for unique and engaging audio/video courses. Currently, I'm running a CREATIVE LIVE 75% discount. Visit the site to learn more.

Last but not least, it would be great to keep in touch. **SUBSCRIBE** to my newsletter and I'll send you a **FREE audio version** of my latest book, **THE CREATIVE FIGHT**.

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Thanks for joining me in this journey to become more creative, capture better photographs and live a more meaningful life. **Feel free to reach out or follow up! Cheers!**

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