

How to Take a Digital Portrait

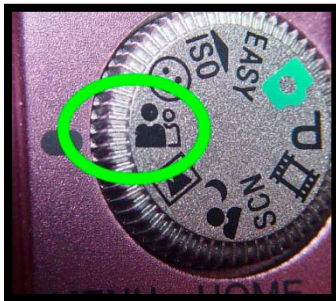
Need a headshot for your business card? Taking a good portrait doesn't have to be hard. An average digital camera can take great portraits if you keep a few simple guidelines in mind. No special equipment is required and the features discussed are widely available on most point-and-shoot cameras.

The Great Outdoors

To take a great picture you need more than just the light from your camera's flash. Go outside in the daytime. Sunny, cloudy, it doesn't matter. Indoor light isn't very good for a nice portrait. It's best to step outdoors.

Place your subject so the sun is behind and to one side of them. If the sun is in front of them they will squint. If you put the sun directly behind them you may get direct sunlight in your lens causing lens flares in your photo. Having the sun behind the subject and to the side usually works well.

Camera Settings



Most digital cameras have a "portrait mode" built in. Activate it by turning the mode dial to the portrait icon (usually a person's head). What this setting does, basically, is blur the background which will draw attention to your subject.

If your camera has a zoom lens you can further blur the background by using maximum telephoto. That is, step back from your subject and zoom all the way in. don't, however use "digital zoom." That "feature" should be the first thing you disable on your camera, never to be turned on again. It ruins picture quality. Just use Optical Zoom! (They should call it "Real Zoom")

Next, you want to set the flash to fire no matter what the lighting conditions. Do not just let the camera make the decision whether to flash or not. In our outdoor setting, with plenty of light, it probably won't flash on its own but we are going to want it to. You will want to literally force the flash to fire. Doing this will soften the shadows on your subject's face and add a gleam to his/her eye. You'll find that the sunlight from behind, combined with the light from the flash in front, make for a nicely lit subject.



To force the flash to fire push the flash mode selector button until the flash mode indicator displays the "always flash" icon (probably a lightning bolt) instead of the "will flash if necessary" icon (a lightning bolt with an "A" next to it). Or, if available on your camera, set the option to force the flash in red-eye reduction mode (a lightning bolt plus an eye but no "A").

Composing and Shooting

Frame your shot so you get just the subject's head and shoulders. The tighter you frame it the nicer it will look. Remember to stand back and zoom all the way in and then compose your shot. You may need to step in or out to get the framing just right. Do not frame the shot by adjusting the zoom; leave it at maximum telephoto. Try to shoot where the background is as far away as possible. This also helps blur it and draw attention to your subject.

Now, with your camera properly set, good light and your subject framed properly, it's time to shoot. Hold your camera steady and push the shutter release button only halfway down. This will tell the camera to auto-focus and auto-expose the image. Once the camera tells you that it's ready (usually with a green light, a beep or both) you can push the button the rest of the way down - or not. This is where you can direct your subject to "say cheese".

Take at least 3 pictures. You've gone to all the trouble to set this up so take advantage and make sure you get a good one.

Just Remember

- ◆ Use portrait mode
- ◆ Use max telephoto (zoom)
- ◆ Force the flash
- ◆ Go outside

OK. Well...

If you absolutely must shoot indoors use the same approach. Keep your subject away from the walls by at least six feet, more if possible. Try shooting down a hallway. Still use the zoom at max telephoto to force anything in the background out of focus. Also, standing too close to the subject with the harsh light of the flash will create a "mug shot" look. Stay back!

It really is best if you shoot outdoors, though.

We hope this is helpful.

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