

Posing for Portraits

Dont's

General Guidelines:

1. Make sure the face is never turned away from the main light.
2. Make sure the shoulders, waist, and hips are never squared off to the camera, i.e. the shoulders and/or hips should not be perpendicular to the line between the subject and camera. That means that one shoulder and/or hip should be closer to the camera than the other.
3. Make sure the arms are never posed in contact with the side of the body.
4. Make sure the chin is never lowered to a point where it diminishes the catchlights in the eyes from the main light. The catchlights are very important.
5. Make sure the spine never forms a vertical line and the shoulders never form a horizontal line in the frame, i.e. the spine and the shoulder line should be on a slight diagonal.
6. Make sure to never have an expression on your face you don't want on the client's face in the portrait.

Types of Poses:

1. Traditional--Posing is more linear with only slight changes in the angles of the body. Standing rather than seated. Subtle expressions.
2. Slice-of-Life posing--These are resting poses. The arms rest on the legs, the chin rests on the hands. The back is posed at more of an angle.
3. Glamorous Posing--Self explanatory.

Do's

Posing the Face:

1. For traditional portrait lighting styles, have the face turned more toward the main light. For Butterfly lighting, have the face look directly at the camera.
2. Positioning the eyes--With the face turned toward the main light, have the eyes look at the camera. This allows the center of the eye to be positioned toward the corner of the eye opening, which enlarges the appearance of the eye.
3. The subject should always be looking at someone, not something. Put your face directly over the camera or on the main-light side of the camera.
4. For reflective poses (eyes looking away from camera), eyes should follow the same line as that of the nose. For a semi-profile, both eyes should be showing.
5. As you rotate the subject's face away from the camera, the main light should move with it.
6. To reduce a larger nose, turn the face more toward the main light source.
7. To reduce the prominence of large ears, turn the subject's face toward the main light source to hide one ear and prevent the outline of the ear showing on the side of the head.
8. Smiling photographs outsell non-smiling photographs. To relax a subject's expression, ask them to breathe through their lips.
9. A problematic neck or double chin can be hidden by having the subject rest their chin on their hands, arms, or shoulders. Or use clothing to hide the neck. Or use the 'turkey neck' pose: have the subject extend their chin toward the camera (to stretch out the double chin) & then bring the entire face down to further hide the neck area.
10. Raising or lowering the chin can create a different mood. When the chin is lowered, the eyes become bigger making them more attractive.
11. A slight tilt of the head in the direction that feels most natural can enhance a portrait.

Shoulders, Arms, and Hands:

1. The line of the shoulders shouldn't form a horizontal line through the frame. A diagonal line makes the portrait more interesting.
2. Be careful of ladies undergarments cutting into the skin giving the appearance of fat.
3. Arms often have problems that can only be hidden by clothing. Long sleeve clothing is always suggested.
4. Arms should be posed away from the body, not against it. Posing arms carefully can hide problem areas such as the neck, waistline, or hips.

5. Hands--show them all or hide them completely (as in pockets). Hands are clear indicators of aging. Better to show the *sides* of the hand rather than the back or palms.
6. A bent wrist is more feminine and a straight wrist is more masculine. Generally, if the hand is above the waist, the wrist can be bent slightly upward. If the hand is below the waste, bend the wrist slightly downward.
7. Hands are best shown holding onto something rather than just dangling.
8. Fists are OK occasionally for guys, but not for women.

Bustline and Waistline:

1. To enhance the bustline, increase the surrounding shadows by turning the subject away from the main light. To minimize it, eliminate the shadows by turning the subject toward the main light.
2. To minimize an unsightly waistline have the subject straighten their back almost to the point of arching it. Or you can use the arms, crossed legs, or even part of a chair to hide the offending area. A 3rd possibility is to have the subject lie on their stomach and use the head & shoulders & a lower camera height to hide much of the body.
3. If the client is seated, position the chair so that it is off-square to the camera and have the client sit toward the front of the chair with their back arched.

Hips and Thighs:

1. If the hips and thighs are a problem, first avoid full length poses.
2. Never square off the hips to the camera (see #2 Don't above). Rotate the hips to the shadow side of the frame.
3. Legs (at the thighs) should never be posed next to each other in standing poses. A slight separation can be obtained by having the client put one foot on a step, prop, or set. Or have the client put all their weight on one foot and cross the other leg over, pointing their toe toward the ground.
4. In a lying down pose with client on their side, have the leg closest to the ground extend straight out, while the upper leg bends at the knee and then comes down in front of the lower leg to touch the ground. This thins the hips.
5. If needed, use obstructions, props, or other body parts to hide the offending thighs or waist. If you are photographing outside, there are many natural elements that can serve this purpose.

Feet and Legs:

1. Like other parts of the body below the waistline, if there is a reason not to show, then don't.
2. Bare feet can be made to look smaller by pushing up the heels of the foot.

3. In lying down poses the bottom of the foot is more attractive than the sole of a shoe.
4. If a woman has unattractive ankles or legs, have them wear pants, or if outside, use tall grass for camouflage, or photograph from the waist up.
5. If the legs are being photographed, have the client wear high heels and hosiery.
6. Choose which leg will be 'grounded' (weight bearing) and which will be the 'accent' leg. The grounded leg will support the subject's weight while the accent leg can cross over, extend out, bend, or be raised up. The accent leg never duplicates what the grounded leg is doing.
7. In a seated pose one leg is grounded, and the other leg becomes the accent leg. The accent leg can be accented by crossing it over the other, or by bending it to raise the knee.
8. In standing poses it usually looks best when the subject shifts their weight to the leg away from the camera.
9. If a subject is leaning against a wall, be sure their hip is against the wall and not their shoulder.

The Five Deadly Sins of Leg Posing:

1. In a standing pose, never put both feet flat on the ground in a symmetrical perspective to the body.
2. Never position the feet so close together that there is no separation between the legs/thighs.
3. Never do the same thing with each leg (with a few exceptions, like when both knees are raised side by side).
4. Never have both feet dangling; one must be grounded.
5. Never bring the accent leg so high that it touches the abdomen.

Unofficial Rules for Full Length Shots:

If the client is of a normal weight to no more than 20 pounds overweight, start off with full length standing poses. If the client is 20 to 30 pounds overweight, the full-length images will be sitting. If the client is more than 30 pounds overweight, the only pose that will be salable is a lying-on-the-stomach pose where the lower camera angle will hide much of the body behind the head and shoulders.

References:

- Smith, Jeff, "Posing for Portrait Photography", 2nd edition, Amherst Media, Inc., 2011
 Cleghorn, Mark, "Portrait Photography", Lark Books, 2004

