

The Engagement Session Portrait Tips

This is a record of the beginning of a special time. You want the emphasis on both of you – your faces, your expressions, your love for one another.

Clothing Style

The photo session is about you, not today's fashions, so don't try to be something you are not. It really does not matter if you choose formal or casual clothing, but try think about how natural you will feel in what you are wearing. If you normally wear jeans and T-shirts, you should probably wear jeans and maybe slightly dressier shirts. If you normally wear more business attire, then keep wearing that. The portrait is about who you are, how you live, your personalities and passions.

Certain clothes do take the viewer's attention away from where it should be, which is, again, you. A simple outfit in a solid color is by far the best to keep the focus on you and for flexibility in backgrounds. Having both of you (or, in case of a family portrait, all of you) wearing a similar color adds a cohesiveness that is positive in the image.

Colors

While a mid-tone such as medium blue, red, or green for clothing is ideal, I will be able to deal with white or black outfits or any color chosen. After all, I will likely have to deal with black tuxedos and a white wedding dress on your wedding day.

Coordinated, vs. the same colors are also acceptable, although it takes a bit more work to ensure that they actually complement one another. It can also lend to a "unified" couple or family look. In the case of a large group, for example a blended family, you can use specific colors to show smaller family groupings within the large group. Again, just make sure someone coordinates the colors so they don't clash.

As an aside, tanning a lot before your portrait or wedding, or using bronzing powder, is not recommended as a deep tan on fair skinned people almost always looks muddy in print.

Posing

The photographer will direct you to achieve specific poses. But following are a few simple things that can make for a more successful and relaxed session.

A tip most people think is odd, is to push your face towards the camera so that you rather feel like a turtle sticking its head out of its shell. The effect, however, is that the skin under the chin and neck is tightened. While on strange actions, try placing your tongue on the roof of your mouth as you relax. Don't worry that it will look odd in print, because cameras only see in two dimensions. Thus your face being closer than your chest won't be

noticeable in your finished portrait. To be comfortable and refine the move, I suggest you try this in front of the mirror.

In fact, practice in front of the mirror for a while before the shoot to get comfortable with "posing."

Hands are always a concern for people because they don't seem to know what to do with them. But the photographer will help with that detail when everything else is right. Put your concentration into presenting your face.

Simple things we will do with your hands include just hanging them at your sides, fingers slightly curled rather than stiffly straight. Typically you will rotate your hands so your thumb is towards the camera instead of the backs of your hands. A slightly more relaxed look is to hook your thumbs into your pockets or into your belt. You can also put your hand in your pocket, but leave the thumb out and pointing down instead of across your waist. Try to have your hands on two different levels, such as one hanging loosely at your side and the other hooked in your belt. Or, one hand up on a shelf, partner's shoulder, or against a wall. You can also practice at home in front of that mirror to decide the look you prefer.

In my opinion, the worst thing to do with hands is hold them together in front of your body. Perhaps it is comfortable because it is "defensive", but it's not attractive.

Don't worry too much as your photographer should direct you for the best placement of your hands. Tell your photographer about any ideas on poses you may have because a simple request can be a window into your personality -- something I will work towards recording for you.

Smiling

This can often be the most difficult part of the session. So come relaxed and happy and ready to have fun with the session.

First, put on a smile with your eyes. The eyes are the most important place to smile. If the eyes aren't smiling people look like they have a plastered on grin with sad or tight eyes. Interestingly, the inverse isn't true – even if your mouth is *not* smiling, a twinkly in your eyes can bring a lot of personality to a portrait.

So how do you achieve that twinkle? Try it in the mirror a few times. Try to look blankly at yourself, then think about something amazingly fun or funny and try to add the twinkle.

Martha Stewart once explained how to get a great "camera" smile. She raised her eyebrows a touch and smiled with her lips apart bringing her cheeks up. This makes one look slightly surprised and very happy. Of course this is another one to practice in the mirror.

A note to you guys, do your best to relax and enjoy the occasion. Treating the experience like a trip to the dentist will show in the results. Give it your best. It is easy, I will do my best to make you feel comfortable.

For the totally camera intimidated, the best thing you can do is get a friend or family member to take lots of pictures of you -- with no film or memory card in the camera. Take lots and lots of shots that way so that you get really bored with having the camera in your face. Do this a few times if you have to. That way, when you're actually getting your picture shot – the camera won't be a big barrier to expressing your joy. I read years ago about a fashion photographer who did this with professional models. He wanted them to get past their initial reactions to the camera and just "be," so the first two "rolls of film" were not in the camera. If it works for models, it will work for you.

Summary

So, the "cramming for a test" version:

- Wear the same or similar colored clothes in the style you're used to;
- Push your face slightly towards the camera;
- Relax your hands at whatever position you like and is comfortable;
- Smile with your eyes first;
- Think about Martha Stewart's "slightly surprised" look;
- Practice in front of the mirror
- Practice with an empty camera if needed.

Lastly, plan to have fun! Remember the results of my work are timeless. You and the people you love today and in the future will look at these images as the start of your life together.