What to Wear

Tips On Clothing Style And Accessories

Memorable portraits take careful planning, and the clothing you choose is very important to your portrait's success. These guidelines will help you make important decisions about the clothing for your portrait.

- Very simple garments always photograph best for creating timeless portraits with the focus on facial expressions.
- Solid colors are always best; avoid patterns such as stripes, plaids, florals, logos and bright colors.
- Light colors are best with light backgrounds and fair complexions.
- Darker colors look better with deep backgrounds and dark hair or complexions.
- White, ivory, khaki, or pastels are best with a white background.
- Shoes and socks or hose should match the tone of the outfit, no white socks with dark pants.
- Turtle necks or V-necks are flattering provided that neither is exaggerated in style. Avoid very wide or particularly deep V-neck garments as well as bulky cowl neck sweaters that completely hide the neck.
- Avoid colored shirts with a white collar as the white next to the face pulls attention away from the face.
- Remember, when viewing an image, the eye is drawn to the lightest area of that image.
- Long sleeves are essential for teens and adults, as bare arms call attention to themselves and will overpower the face.
- Women being photographed in full length should wear long skirts, pants, or dark stockings in order to keep the eye from being directed toward the legs and away from the face. Dresses or skirts are usually more flattering for women.
- Men should have their hair cut about one week before the portrait session. Women should be photographed whenever they are happiest with their hair.

About Clothing, Color, Tone, and Style ...

The goal of any fine portrait is to direct the viewer's attention to the face or faces in the portrait. Simple long-sleeved garments in medium to dark tones of brown rust, burgundy, green, or blue are pleasing choices when photographed against a dark background.

- Proper clothing allows the face to dominate the portrait. All other elements should be secondary. Bold stripes, plaids, checks, and prints are confusing and do not photograph well.
- Especially bright colors, such as red and orange, will completely overpower the face and ruin a portrait. However, red clothing can work if the background is colored to match. If one person in a group wears red, they will dominate the image.
- Light-colored clothing calls attention to itself and away from the face. Avoid light colors that approximate flesh tones such as beige, tan, peach, pink, white, and yellow. Darker shades are more flattering and slimming.
- Light colors are appropriate against a white or pastel background or with a dark background when an interpretive "pictorial" study is planned.

Clothing for Couples

With only two subjects in the portrait, it is especially important to dress in the same color(s) to capture the relationship. With business attire, a white shirt or blouse with a dark suit jacket emphasizes your neck rather than your face. Pastel, thin striped, or soft patterned shirt with subtle tie is preferable. You may want to bring extra clothing and accessories, and we will help you choose what looks best.

- Couples or small groups should choose simple garments within the same tonal ranges.
- Light and dark tones together create visual confusion, as one subject comes forward and the other recedes.
- Light colors add weight against a dark background.
- Busy patterns are distracting to the eye.

What to Wear

Clothing for Families

In a family group, proper clothing coordination is critical. When decorating a home, a major concern is to coordinate the colors and tones of the walls, carpets, draperies and furniture. This kind of coordination also is necessary when selecting clothing for a group portrait. Choose clothing in the same tonal ranges to create a unified look, so that no single member of the family stands out because their clothing is too light or bright as compared to the rest of the group.

Outdoor backgrounds are very busy, so it is important to choose only one or two theme colors, with your subjects wearing shades of those colors. While blues are excellent all year, white, ivory, khaki and salmon are great against such lush green foliage. Burgundy, brown, tan, and gray are nice late in the season.

- The visual statement made by a coordinated dress portrait is "Here is a family in which each individual holds a place of equal importance," whereas an uncoordinated dress portrait says "Here is a group of seemingly unrelated individuals.
- Clothing that blends harmoniously creates timeless portraiture because the viewer's eye goes directly to the faces.
- Clothing in medium shades complements portraits made in outdoor environments. Solid colors are best with the foliage texture.
- The simplicity of two colors helps separate family from the scenery.
- A busy background and busy clothes result in hard to find faces.

Clothing for Children

Fine portraiture captures facial expressions and mood, while clothing, accessories, and props are secondary and shouldn't create any distractions. Careful selection of these will avoid a dated look to your portraits.

A white background will show off skin tones best when white, ivory or pastels are worn. Be sure to select props that match clothing color. While the colorful pose is a great secondary portrait for a child's playroom, it may not be suitable for a timeless quality portrait. Solid color clothing is most recommended to keep the focus on expression. Avoid logos or busy patterns for a more effective portrait. If families or groups of children are being photographed together, please have everyone dress in similar toned clothing for a more unified look. Bare feet are preferred over shoes, and children often find this more fun as well! Children also look great in bare skin, which is the preference for newborns and most children under the age of one.

- A child will become lost among colorful clothes and toys
- A timeless portrait can be created with well chosen clothing and props.

Clothing for Beach Portraits

The most important issue is to choose solid colors, no patterns, no plaid shirts. Dressing in all white looks great on the beach. Khaki or denim pants, capris, shorts or skirt with white or cream shirts also works well. Blue jeans with light to medium blue or soft green polo shirts look great. Think neutral colors found in nature. Dresses and skirts for women are more flattering than pants or shorts. A flowing dress is pretty as long as it is a solid color or very tiny pattern, no big florals please. All subjects should be dressed in similar tones. For example, avoid dressing one person in blue jeans and navy shirt and another in khakis and white shirt - that's too much contrast. Keep in mind that when viewing an image, the lightest area is what attracts the viewer's eyes first. Match the shoes to the pants or skirts. Be prepared to go barefoot on the beach and even roll up the pants to wade in the water.