

FIVE STRATEGIES FOR BETTER PEOPLE PICTURES

Quick Guide
Written by Ľudmila Borošová



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It is widely known that portraits are one of the most difficult genres of photography. The biggest reason for that is that it's dependent on many variables that need to be perfect in order to create something beautiful.

When you're taking pictures of nature, you have to work with what you've got and where it is. But with portraits, you need to choose the location, the outfit, the styling, and interact with the person in order to get the best facial expressions and poses. Portrait photography is hard because all of the ingredients in the recipe need to be perfect to make an extraordinary cake.

I don't necessarily agree, because you, as an individual photographer, can choose to be excellent in any genre you want. You just have to be comfortable with your work and practice to make it perfect! Here are some of the tips that will help you along the way and make photographing portraits more enjoyable and stress-free, especially when you're a beginner!

Today, we'll cover the following:

- The best light for shooting portraits
- One thing that makes posing easier
- Making people more relaxed
- How to work with landscapes
- What to avoid while editing people



Recommended Reading: If you'd like to learn how to create amazing portraits, grab a copy of Photzy's premium guide: [The Art of Portrait Photography](#).

Before we start, remember that people pictures are very subjective. What you think is the most beautiful portrait you have ever taken could be considered unflattering by your model. These tips will help you achieve better results in photography, but don't forget to discuss personal preferences with whomever you shoot.



Photographs by Ludmila Borošová

Three different photography moods, but they all have backlight in common.

1. SHOOT BACKLIGHT

When you're starting out with photography, you need to find the light you will always be comfortable with. For many, that's backlight! Next time you go outside, let your model stand in one spot and rotate to all sides to understand how the light is affecting her skin and how your lens processes it. Maybe you will find that something else suits you better.

But for now, let's focus on why backlight is the ultimate secret of professional photographers:

- **Soft Skin** – Thanks to this secret, you will have an easier time retouching. The face of the model isn't facing the sun, so there are no unattractive and harsh shadows on the picture.
- **Bokeh** – You will experience the most beautiful bokeh shooting backlight! Whoever said that you need to retouch lens flares has never seen how beautiful they can be! This, with the mixture of a soft bokeh, will create a stunning fairytale look that you can later enhance in Photoshop using Curves.
- **Depth** – Using backlight in your pictures will highlight the subject in the picture so that it's easily distinguished from the background. This will help your storytelling and scenery.

Remember, harsh shadows and other results of shooting in different conditions are not a bad thing. They are just the "next step" to master. If you want to start charging money or feel comfortable shooting, master one light condition before moving to another.

So, when is the best time to shoot backlight? You guessed right! It's the golden hour: the time of the day when the sun rises or sets. The reason golden hours are so popular isn't just the beautiful orange sky; it's the position of the sun. As we mentioned in the first step, it is the most pleasing when the light source is coming from the side rather than from above.



Photographs by Ludmila Borošová

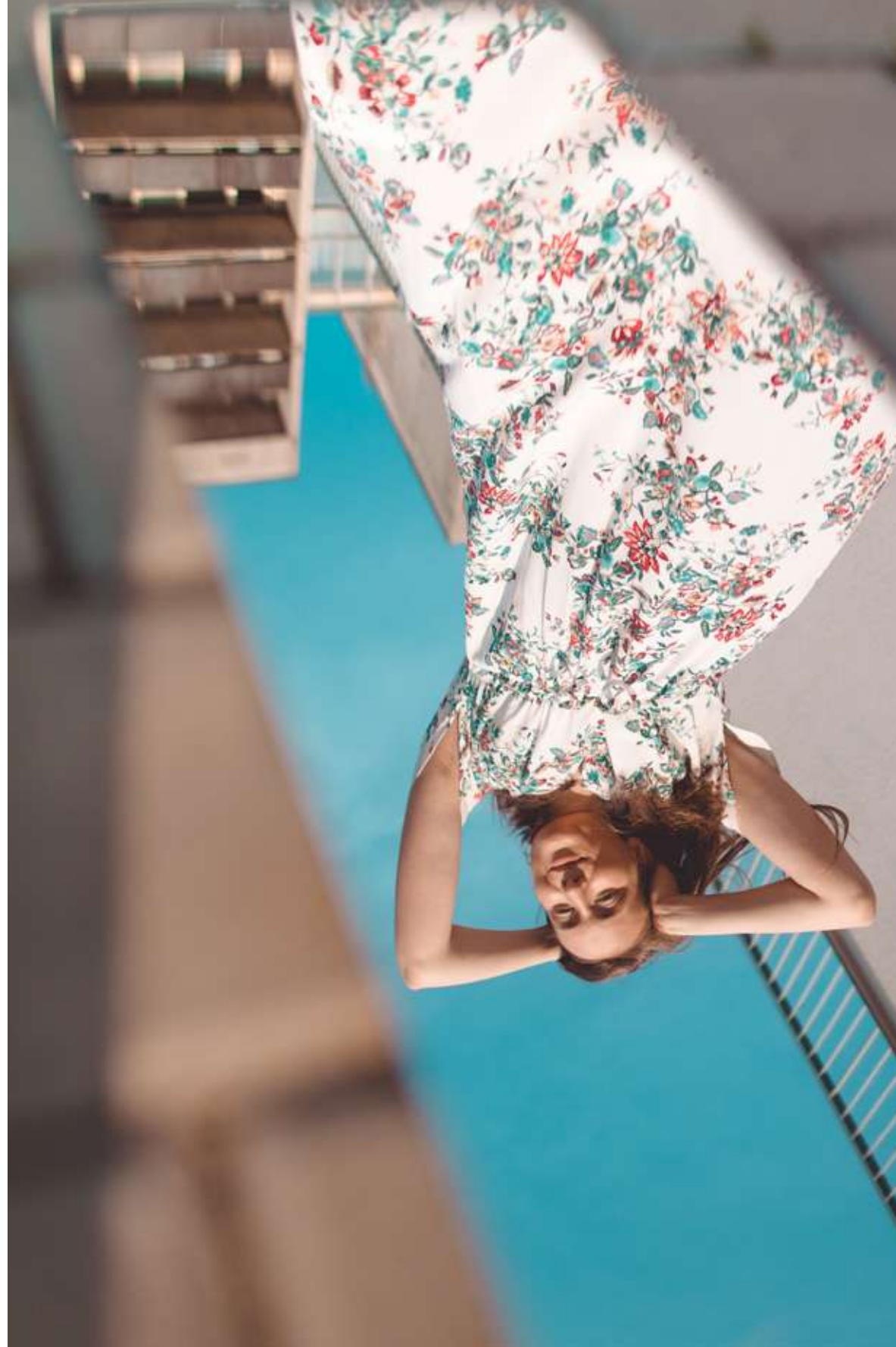
Poppy flower used three times differently as a prop.

2. USE ACCESSORIES

It's probably happened before: you're on a photoshoot and your client isn't very experienced in posing. Do you remember the last time you experienced this? Can you imagine how different it would be if you brought a bunch of props with you? Trust me, they are a life saver!

- **A portrait isn't just a headshot** – When taking portraits, some photographers tend to only shoot the head. It's natural to think this way, but in most cases, it can remind us of rather rigid ID photographs. We need to incorporate something else into the frame, and even if you forget your props at home, you can still use models' hands! Let your model play with their hair, lean on their hands, or put their hands behind their head. There are dozens of poses you can learn using just that! What other natural props come to mind?
- **Accessories don't need to be expensive** – Experiment with anything you find outside! You can play with different colors of flowers or tree leaves. Just make sure that you're not ruining any surroundings!
- **Buy a prism** – This cheap piece of glass will turn your photos into next-level art! It refracts light and creates different sun flares and fun ornaments on your photographs.
- **Tell a story** – Sometimes, holding just one prop can tell a whole story. Imagine a man sitting in a field. There is no deep meaning behind it – maybe he is just chilling. Just by adding one chair as a prop into the photoshoot, you might express a feeling. Is he alone? Does he want to be alone? Is he waiting for someone? What is the story?

Using props will help your model relax and feel more natural. They will know where to put their hands, or what kind of gesture is appropriate for the prop they're using. It's not only practical, but very artistic!



Photograph by Ludmila Borošová

Mirror placed on the ground to reflect the model.



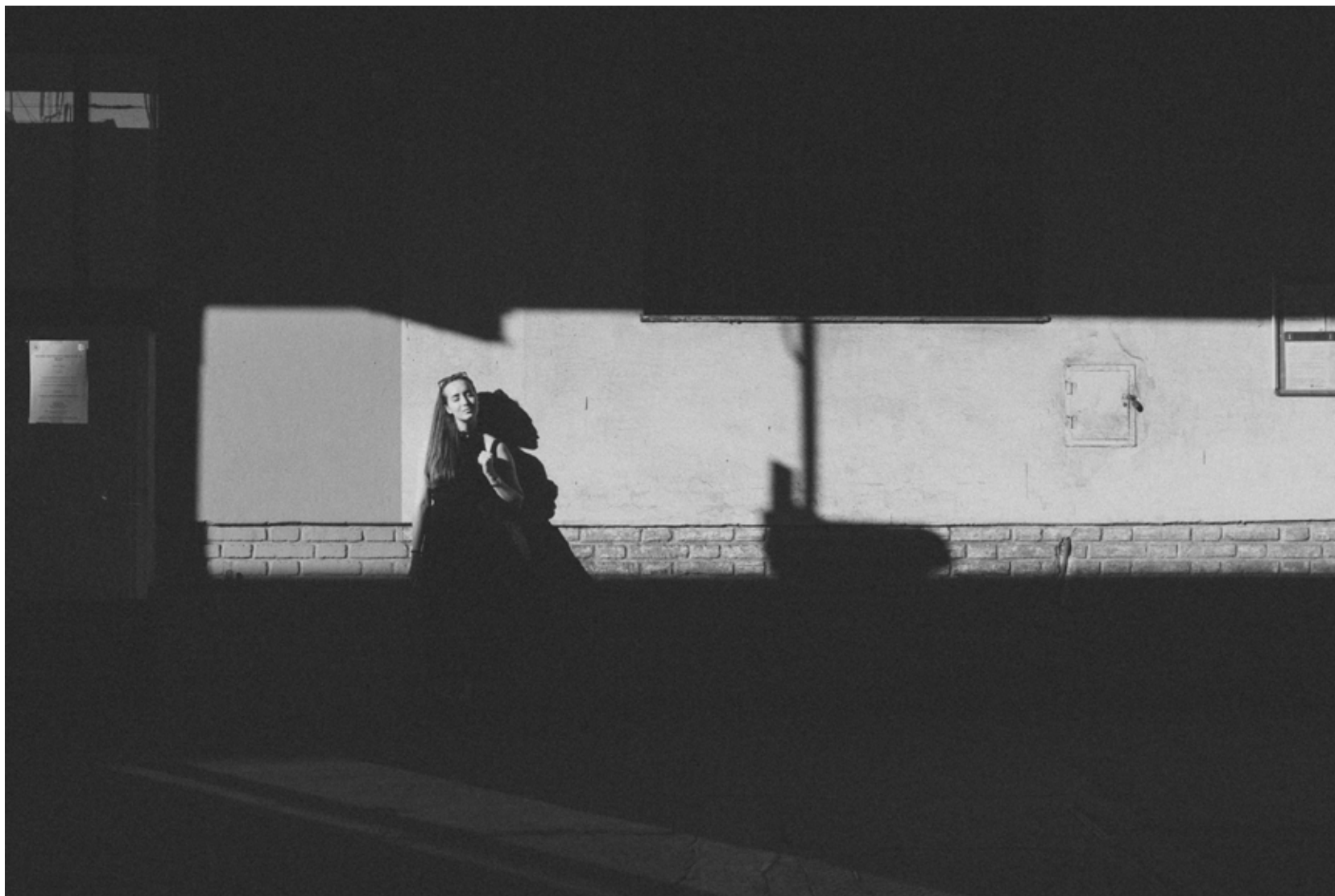
Photograph by Ludmila Borošová

Remember, all it takes for someone to smile is a beautiful whisper!

3. PRACTICE TALKING

The most difficult part about photographing people is to make them truly relaxed. The best photographs are often taken when the client doesn't even know about it – they are just being themselves showing a natural emotion. Of course, this can only happen when they are comfortable with you as a photographer. But 99% of the time, you are a stranger to them. How do you evoke the right emotions?

The talking rule helps the most with romantic couple pictures and on weddings in general. Let's say that you are aiming for the couple to show happiness, love, and appreciation. Do not explain these aloud – just ask the couple to take a moment to stand next to each other and look into their eyes. Nothing but the significant other exists. Now, ask them to whisper each other a story of how they met for the first time. If you want to make them laugh, make them whisper the most embarrassing story. Trust me, this works!



Photograph by Ludmila Borošová

Playing with the shadows and the landscape.

4. IN HARMONY WITH LANDSCAPES

If you're more of a nature photographer, you don't need to start with close portraits of people. As we are talking about the best strategies for people pictures in general, we can create beautiful synergy with nature. This style is becoming more and more popular among travelers and bloggers, but also conceptual and artistic photographers. So, what do we mean?

People photography can coexist with landscape photography. In fact, people make a huge contribution to landscapes, because they emphasize the proportion. When you have a photograph of a canyon, it's hard to tell the depth without anything else near the scenery. And the reasons to put people into natural photography aren't only practical, but also spiritual. One of my most favorite photographers with this exact style is Martin Faltejsek, who mastered the art of self-portraits in wild nature.



Photograph by Ludmila Borošová

Creating people photos with an interesting background and taking a step back.

The point is, if you ever feel uncomfortable taking pictures of another human, step back and imagine the model as a part of the surroundings. Think about the composition, and capture! It doesn't need to be a natural landscape; it can be anything from a city to someone's apartment. Just let them blend in!



Photograph by Ludmila Borošová



Photograph by Ludmila Borošová

Even though this is a retouched photo, her birthmarks are clearly visible.

5. RETOUCH NATURALLY

Last but not least, if you are just a beginner and you want the most beautiful natural-looking pictures, then don't go too hard on retouching. It's very thin ice, and, especially at the beginning of your career, it's best to master the raw photograph before making extensive changes. Here are some common things you should avoid when retouching:

- **Do not retouch birthmarks** – Even though extensive retouching is becoming less and less popular, it is still somewhat expected to get rid of a few imperfections on the skin. Do not fall down the rabbit hole, though. Know where to stop! Do not retouch away any birthmarks and things that make the person unique. It isn't beneficial for anyone, and the photos look less realistic. Embrace the differences!
- **Do not retouch wrinkles** – There are many natural wrinkles that show on your skin, whether you're 18 or 99 years old. They are usually under your eyes or at the side of your mouth when you're smiling. And it's natural! Retouching these can make your model look like an unrealistic doll, so be very gentle with your tools.

- **Do not retouch the body** – It is very hard to use the liquify tool, and to be honest, it is not necessary. The best strategy for your portrait photography is to stop relying on technology! If you know that some clients are very insecure about their looks, learn how to comfort them and make sure that you did your best in guiding them how to pose. Learn how different lenses affect the body, the height, and embrace it!

Of course, if you have time to learn and master your Photoshop skills, go for it! Make sure that you are only using them when necessary.

In the end, the best strategy for portrait photography is to make yourself comfortable with the process. If you remember all of these steps, you will become more confident in solving the problems quicker. Trust me, it does magic. Why? Your confidence will be reflected on a more relaxed model.



Recommended Reading: If you'd like to learn how to create amazing portraits, grab a copy of Photzy's premium guide: [The Art of Portrait Photography](#).

Self-Check Quiz:

- 1) Why is portrait photography considered the most difficult photography genre?
- 2) What is the most flattering type of sunlight for portraits?
- 3) How can you try out different types of light on your shoot?
- 4) What are the benefits of each specific light?
- 5) Why are accessories important for portraits?
- 6) What kind of accessories can you get for free?
- 7) How can you create the right emotions when shooting couples?
- 8) Can you use landscapes to your advantage? Why?
- 9) What are some of the things you shouldn't retouch?
- 10) Where will your confidence be positively reflected?

Assignment:

- Arrange a portrait photoshoot with your friend or a model. Let them stand in one spot turning their body to different kinds of sunlight. Take a picture on each side and compare them.
- Take one portrait just as a simple headshot, and one using any accessory you have. Compare them and the emotions they evoke.
- Create a laughing picture of your model using one of the talking techniques. What will you ask to create a smile on someone's face? Remember, it's important to be polite; consider your relationship with the person before asking anything too personal.
- Find an interesting landscape and make your model a part of it: try to make her blend in. Was it a different experience? How did you think about the composition?



Hey there!

Let's get real for a minute... Learning photography can be super challenging! But we're here to help you every step of the way! Here are 3 of our most useful (*and FREE!*) photography resources:



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ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Ludmila is a Slovak photographer focusing on portraiture. She does photography while finishing her Master's degree in Business Administration, specializing in Entrepreneurship. She is based in Prague, Czech Republic but loves to travel around the world and share her stories, as well as her photoshoots, on her blog.

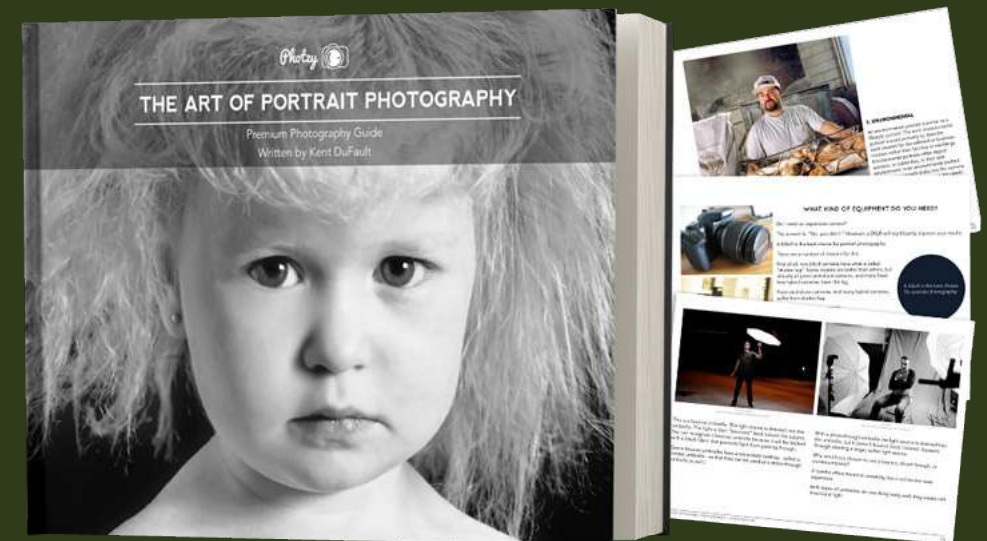
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