



Anna
I composed this portrait of Anna while she was cooking sausages and got her attention only when I had that right.

Portraits

A key skill

The Idea

Shooting portraits is a really important skill to have as a photographer. I am constantly amazed at the fantastic photographers I find who lack experience in portrait photography. Now that I teach photography regularly, I have discovered that this comes down to an issue of confidence—many photographers don't like to ask people if they can shoot them.

The Ingredients

- ▶ Any camera
- ▶ A subject

The Process

If you do see someone interesting who you would like to shoot, just approach them and ask if you can take their portrait. I find most people are more than happy to have their picture taken, and at the end of the day, the worst that can happen is that they will say no. If people ask why you want a picture, tell them that you think it will make an interesting photograph.

The key thing when you're photographing a person is to help them be relaxed so that they appear at their most natural. You can achieve this in a number of ways. Portraits don't have to be formal, with people looking into the lens, so try to shoot people doing something if you can. If people are performing an action, they will be taking less notice of what you're doing. Of course, if you want your subject to look into the camera, this approach might not work. One way around this is to compose the shot as you want it and then get the subject to look at you. In the instant they make eye contact with the lens, take the shot; that way they don't have time to look uncomfortable. Another good trick is get your subject engaged in conversation. If you have a person mid-sentence, they will not be as conscious of the way they are looking.

Focus can be key when you are shooting a portrait in which the subject's face is prominent. In this case, make sure you focus on the eyes. If a subject's ears or nose are out of focus it's not really a problem—most people viewing a picture of a person will look straight to their eyes—but if the eyes are slightly out of focus and you have a pin-sharp nose, the image will seem odd. (See page 282 for tips on getting perfect focus.)

Choosing the right camera is important. Big cameras can be intimidating. You will probably get the best technical image if you use a DSLR or an even larger medium-format camera, but your subject might be more at ease if you use a smaller, less obtrusive option. I have taken some of my best portraits with my Lomo LC-A and Contax T2. Both of these film cameras are small enough to fit into my pocket. The only drawback with using basic film compacts and zone focus cameras is that you lose a certain amount of control.

A new breed of digital camera includes Micro Four Thirds and hybrid cameras. These offer similar features to digital SLR cameras, including interchangeable lenses and full control over shutter speed and aperture. The added bonus is that they are small enough to fit in my pocket and they are very unobtrusive. At the time of writing, Olympus and Panasonic both have Micro Four Thirds cameras (The Olympus Pen EP-1, Olympus Pen EP-2, and Panasonic Lumix DMC-GF1) and Samsung has a hybrid model—the NX10—which has a sensor slightly larger than the Four Thirds sensor.

Portraits don't have to include the whole person; you can crop in and concentrate on one particular detail. This shows enough of the person without giving away the whole story and so preserves some mystery. In a similar way, you can take portraits where the subject is not the main focus of the image, but a smaller part of it.



← **Left:**
Sangita
I took this photo of Sangita while she was talking, so there is no awkwardness in the shot.

↙ **Below left:**
Matthew
As Matthew is a fashion designer, I wanted to concentrate on his clothes: the scarf, necklace, and T-shirt. I also included his button earring at the top of the frame, but not his whole face.

→ **Right**
Lindy
In this shot of Lindy on the beach she is not even in focus and is a very small part of the composition, but she is still an integral part of the image.



