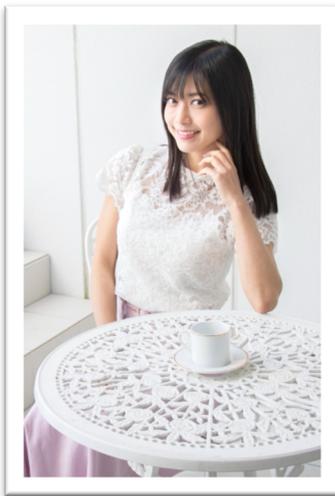


Techniques for Posing and Directing Portrait Subjects



Portrait photography is the art of expressing a subject's personality in a still image. This can be surprisingly hard—think of all the shots you took where the person appeared stiff or awkward. The first step to showcasing someone's personality is the posing. There could be an entire book about it, but in this article, we share one basic concept behind posing—the lines of the human body and how to portray them in a flattering manner.

1. The sit-down pose

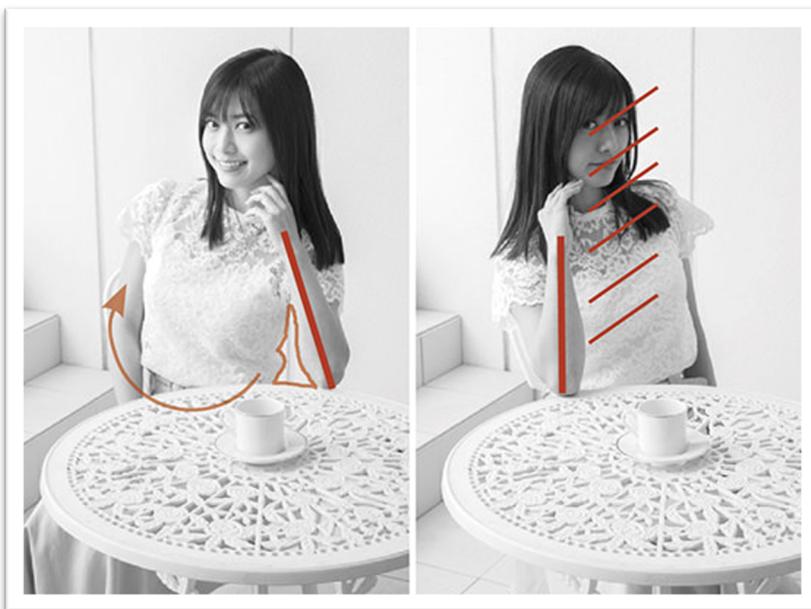


Ideal (Technique applied) Left Side

The outlines of the model's upper torso are depicted clearly.

Not ideal (Technique applied incorrectly) Right Side

The model's arm covers part of her body, making it look wider. She faces away from the light source, which causes half her face to be in the shadow.



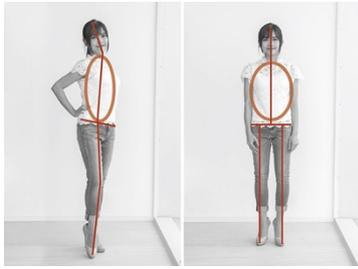
Description of pose

Left: Ideal; Right: Not so ideal

What's wrong with the "Not so ideal" pose?

1. The forearm hides the side of the model's body. You can't see the natural body line, and this makes the model look broader than she really is.

2. The forearm forms a vertical line, which makes the pose look a little stiff and awkward.



How to fix it

- 1. Put space between the forearm and the body.** That way, the body's natural outline can be seen and the subject looks slimmer. In the 'Ideal' example above, this makes the model's waist look slimmer.
- 2. Make sure the line that the arm creates is at an off-vertical angle.** This makes the image look more dynamic and natural.

To achieve this, get your model to...

- Angle their body towards the light source, so that their face is well illuminated.
- Place their elbows on the table, and lightly place a hand against the side of their face.
- Move their forearm so that the waistline is not covered.
- Puff up their chest (or pull their shoulders back) to make their posture look better.
- Angle their faces in such a way that the light does not fall directly on it.

Tip: Turning the body slightly away from the camera makes the waist and upper body look even slimmer.

Pro tip: Make sure the model's body does not form a vertical/horizontal line

In visual composition, vertical and horizontal lines help to stabilise shots. However, when it comes to posing, they can make the human body look stiff and awkward. Avoid them where possible, especially if you are trying to showcase feminine curves. Get your model to twist, bend, tilt or angle parts of her body where necessary. For example, for the 'Ideal' shot above, besides angling the forearms, I got the model to tilt her upper body slightly towards the camera, which suggests softness.

The same concept works for other parts of the body, such as the hands and the legs. (For legs, see Technique 2 below.)

2. The S-shape pose:

Flatters anyone's figure

Ideal (Technique applied) Left

Legs look longer and waist looks slim.

Not ideal (Technique not applied) Right

Shot from head on. Not very flattering to the figure.



Description of pose

Left: Ideal image, Right: Not so ideal image

What's wrong with the "Not so ideal" pose?

1. The model's entire body is facing the camera head-on. It's not as flattering: The body looks larger when viewed directly from the front.
2. The pose looks stiff. The model's arms are straight by her side, and she's also standing with both legs straight. (Recall the 'Pro tip' about avoiding horizontal and vertical lines)

How to fix it

- 1. Get the model to turn slightly away from the camera.** (About 45° should be sufficient). This is the golden rule for looking slimmer in photographs!
- 2. Get the model to lift the hip nearer to the camera slightly.** This not only makes the legs look longer, it makes the pose look more dynamic by breaking the horizontal line made by the hip bones.
- 3. Get the model to roll the shoulder that is nearer the camera slightly forward.** This makes the body look shorter (and the legs longer in comparison), and also has a waist-slimming effect.

Bonus technique: 3 simple steps for the perfect S-shape pose

The S-shape pose flatters the figure. When done right, the subject looks taller and leaner with longer legs and a slimmer waist. However, unless you are working with a professional model, the correct pose can be harder to achieve than it seems. Here's a simple but sure-fire 3-step technique to get anyone into the perfect pose.



1. Stand at a 45° angle to the camera

Standing at this angle emphasises the curves from the bust to the hip, as well as the jawline.

2. Shift all the weight to the leg further away from the camera

For the S-shape pose to look good, all the body weight has to be on one leg. To make sure, get the model to try lifting the other leg. She should be able to do so easily. The axis of the shoulder and hips will naturally shift to maintain the body's balance, resulting in the entire body forming an S-shape line.

3. Point the foot of the front leg

Point the toes on the free leg onto the floor directly in front of the supporting leg. The model should be able to do this quite easily without losing balance if step 2 was done correctly. When she is done, she can turn her face towards the camera.

3. The K-shape pose: For the illusion of dynamism

Ideal (Technique applied)

There is a sense of motion in the model's limbs. The pose creates visual tension with the background.



Not-so-ideal (Technique not applied)

The vertical lines created by the pose emphasises the lines made by the window frames in the background. The pose looks stiff and the entire image feels very tense.



Description of pose



Left: Ideal image, Right: Not so ideal image

What's wrong with the 'Not so ideal' pose?

While the model herself is facing about 45° away from the camera, her head and upper body still form a vertical line. This is further emphasised by the vertical lines in the window frames. All these overpower the curves in the image (such as that created by the bustline), and the resulting image has a stiff, stilted feel to it.

The solution: The stretch-all-you-can K-shape pose

In contrast to the S-shape pose and how it emphasises soft, feminine curves, the K-shape pose is bold, open and dynamic.

To achieve the required shape, the model needs to stretch her leg out and open her arms. The key is to stretch all she can: In this pose, almost every part of the body is either stretched, arched or bent. It might feel over the top, but don't worry about the pose looking too fake: The tension from "exaggerating" the pose creates amazing, dynamic lines in the resulting image.

With its boldness and dynamism, the K-pose also helps to create contrast and visual tension with the many vertical lines in the background. This not only further emphasises the lines of the body, but also makes the image look more compelling.

To achieve this, get your model to...

- Put all their weight on one leg and stretch the other leg as far out to the side as possible.
- Point the foot of the stretched leg. Rotate the entire leg so that the knee faces the camera. This makes the legs look longer.
- Tilt the upper torso from the waist up in the direction of the stretched leg. This creates a nice line.
- Stretch the neck in the opposite direction from the upper body. This makes the neck look longer.
- Touch a shoulder with one hand and/or the waist with the other hand to add some variation to the pose.

Lastly, remember that communication is crucial. Your portrait subject is human, too!

Communication is very important when you are working with a model. Your portrait subject does not know how she (or he) looks like through the viewfinder, so make sure you give detailed instructions.

At the same time, it is important to establish a good connection with the subject. This helps them to relax and open up, which in turn makes for better portrait photos. Here are some tips for doing so.

1. Don't criticise. Phrase things positively.

Even if their poses do not look good, there is no need to put them down. Stay calm and guide them on how they can improve their posing. Always put it across in a respectful manner.

2. Praise them as much as you can.

Everyone likes to be complimented, even if it is for the most trivial things. Do it as much as you can—it helps to make the atmosphere of the shoot more pleasant and gives the model more confidence.

3. If you want a shot of them smiling, make them smile.

If there is a certain expression that you want to capture, try to evoke that emotion in your subject through conversation. For example, if you want a shot of your subject smiling or laughing, you could tell them a funny story.

4. Show your model the results, feedback is key.

Part of working with models is to provide visual feedback as quickly as you can, should you not be getting the desired results. Show the back of your screen, take time to indicate how it may look better, thus giving an easy visual prompt or cue to the model.

5. No Touching Rule.

Simple: direct with your voice, never touch a model.

6. Amateur Photographers: Give the model(s) copies of your best work

This is where TFP (Time for Prints) comes into play. They are helping you practice, you need to help build their portfolio. Send them high-resolution copies of your produced work and copies that are Social Media ready (2048px on the long edge).

7. Make sure you give the model(s) credit/recognition.

When you put any of your images up on Social Media, you should endeavour to provide credit to your model by tagging them into your post and also specifically naming them (and their agency should they come from one). This is regarded as an absolute minimum for the TFP trade.