

# Six Steps to Taking a Good Portrait

## **1. Arrange the lighting**

- Place your subject in an area with lots of reflected or ambient light
- Avoid bright sunlight which produces harsh shadows and is unflattering
- Avoid using a flash, especially in a dark room, as it can drown your subject's features or background
- When inside, position your subject in a room with light from several directions. Your subject's face should be evenly lit
- Never shoot against a window or light source instead face your subject into a diffused light source (i.e. window covered by a white curtain)
- Improvise lighting gear by using a desk lamp as a light source

## **2. Select a simple and non-distracting background**

- The background should be non-reflective, neutral, simple, have some texture, and color that is neither too light nor too dark
- Look for a repeating pattern that isn't distracting like columns or stairs
- The background can show what the person or story is about (i.e. lab instruments, stacks of books and papers, a computer)

## **3. Prepare yourself and your subject**

- You may feel you're intruding your subject, or using the camera simply to record your subject. Don't let this come across to your subject. Focus on the purpose of the photo (i.e. to represent the important work your subject is doing)
- Talk with your subject prior to the shoot to discuss the purpose of the photo and establish an agreement
- Bring a face blotter or tissue to minimize shine on the face and check for crooked collars and distracting I.D. badges

## **4. Frame your subject**

- Bring a tripod if you can for low light situations
- Hold your camera in a vertical position
- Fill the frame with your subject's face and upper body and a balanced margin of the background. Try not to use the camera at its widest angle lens setting. Zooming in will cause less distortion
- Your subject's eyes should be an inch above the halfway mark of the picture, never in the center of the frame
- If you include your subject's hands in the frame, ensure that they are not cut off by the edge of the frame and that they are in an appropriate position
- If you want to include elements of the environment in the photo, hold your camera horizontal. Your subject can be off-center and take up 2/3 or 1/2 of the frame

## **5. Consider your subject's expression**

- Your subject's expression should match the purpose of the headshot (i.e. laughing shots are great for some press stories or personal use, but not usually good for academic publications)
- Guide your subject through conversation that complements the purpose of the photo (i.e. serious conversation or lighthearted conversation)

## **6. If at first you don't succeed try, try, again**

- Take as many shots as you can
- Try different angles and expressions. Ask your subject to tilt or turn their head slightly while keeping their eyes on the camera
- Look at the results and discuss them with your subject. It often helps people relax in front of the camera if they know they have some control over the results