

# Course sample

Please note that due to copyright reasons, some images may be greyed out in this course sample.

Open College of the Arts

0800 731 2116

[enquiries@oca-uk.com](mailto:enquiries@oca-uk.com)



# Photography 1

## People and place



## Level HE4 – 40 CATS

This course has been written by Michael Freeman  
Photographs © Michael Freeman unless otherwise stated

Open College of the Arts  
Redbrook Business Park  
Wilthorpe Road  
Barnsley S75 1JN

Telephone: 01226 730 495  
Fax: 01226 730 838  
Email: [enquiries@oca-uk.com](mailto:enquiries@oca-uk.com)  
[www.oca-uk.com](http://www.oca-uk.com)

Registered charity number: 327446  
OCA is a company limited by guarantee and  
registered in England under number 2125674

Copyright OCA 2009  
Document control number: 2009.1

No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means – electronic, mechanical, photocopy, recording or otherwise – without prior permission of the publisher

# People and place

## Project and tutorial plan

Send your Student Profile straight away and speak to your tutor by phone before you start work on your course.

Approximate time in hours

### Project 1: People aware

Exercise 1: Portrait, scale and setting	6
Exercise 2: Thinking about location	6
Exercise 3: Experimenting with light	6
Exercise 4: An active portrait	6
Exercise 5: Eye-contact and expression	6
Exercise 6: The best of a sequence	6
Exercise 7: Focal length and character	6
Exercise 8: Varying pose	6
<b>Assignment 1: A comprehensive portrait</b>	<b>20</b>

### Project 2: People unaware

Exercise 9: A comfortable situation	6
Exercise 10: Moment and gesture	6
Exercise 11: Standing back	6
Exercise 12: Close and involved	6
Exercise 13: A standard view	6
Exercise 14: An organised event	6
Exercise 15: Public space, public activity	6
<b>Assignment 2: People and activity</b>	<b>25</b>

### Project 3: Buildings and spaces

Exercise 16: Exploring function	9
Exercise 17: The user's point of view	9
Exercise 18: How space changes with light	9
<b>Assignment 3: Buildings in use</b>	<b>40</b>

## Project 4: People interacting with place

Exercise 19: A single figure small	9
Exercise 20: Busy traffic	9
Exercise 21: Making figures anonymous	9
Exercise 22: Adjusting the balance between person and space	9
Exercise 23: Selective processing and prominence	9
<b>Assignment 4: A sense of place</b>	<b>30</b>

## Assignment 5: People and place on assignment 45

## Reading and learning log time 78

**Total time 400**

# People and place

## Introduction

One of the key purposes of this course is to stretch your photographic skills in terms of the subject material you choose. Specifically, to broaden the range of your work by tackling subjects that include people. In this sense there is something of a challenge.

Any comprehensive set of courses on photography will of course embrace a range of subject material, and some of this will be easier to deal with than others. Throughout most of the modules you will usually have a choice in exercises and assignments, and it is perfectly natural to look for subjects that are accessible, nearby and predictable. Too often, however, this means avoiding interesting subjects in favour of safe ones. And arguably, the most interesting class of photographic subject is people.

A second key purpose of this course is to start you thinking in terms of photographic assignments – exercises which must meet certain criteria laid down at the start, and which must also meet a deadline. Photographs to order, in other words.

There is a considerable difference between photographing at leisure and whenever the mood takes you, and photographing to deliver a particular result that you have promised. The former may seem, on the face of it, to be a luxury, but the experience of most photographers shows that the need to fulfil a target, be it creative or practical, is actually a great aid. For professional photographers, for example, shooting an assignment to a deadline is not so much a burden as a blessing – it focuses attention and is a directive for simply getting the work done.

The assignment ethos in photography involves planning and preparation, thinking in advance about what and how to shoot, with constant reviews of the progress as the shoot continues. The deadline itself establishes a cut-off point, and just by existing neatly circumvents a common creative issue – when to stop and say that the work is finished as well as possible.



# Photography 1

## Project 1: People aware



# Introduction

There are many, many ways of photographing people. Perhaps even an infinite number. But what concerns us here is the variety of relationships between the photographer – you – and the subject. Does the person you are planning to photograph know that you are? Do you know them personally or are they strangers? Even if you do know them, and they are co-operating in the shoot, are you directing them or are you hoping to simply record their natural actions – as natural as is possible when they know they are under the eye of a camera? Clearly, there are many of these essentially practical photographic possibilities.

From this practical point of view of setting out to take photographs, the most important division is the one adopted here, between when people are aware that you are taking their picture, and unaware. Many starting photographers have a particular difficulty, or perhaps I should say hesitancy, with the idea of photographing people unawares, which is normal in street photography – passing by, quickly observed, spur of the moment, but with the risk that the person you photograph may notice, and may mind. To ease you through the various difficulty levels of photographing people, we will start with people aware. This of course requires some organising, but once you are through that hurdle, your subject is likely to be amenable.

When we think of a portrait, what we normally have in mind is this – the sitter, positioned and lit, looking out through the camera's lens to the viewer. It is a kind of statement in which the person being photographed is saying, 'This is who I am, and this is what I look like.' It is deliberate and considered, and stands in a long line of tradition from the earliest portrait painting. Underlying such portraits is an arrangement between the sitter and the photographer. As we will see, there are other, more fluid and less formal ways of arriving at the same end, but in the case of a planned and posed likeness, the two of you are in some sort of agreement to make it work.

Who to photograph for these exercises? The simplest answer is, the people you know best and who are nearby and available. This is just the first of many actions that this course will encourage you to take, that have more to do with social relationships than with photography. When we come later to street photography and the potentially embarrassing decisions of how to photograph a stranger without upsetting them, then too the skills needed are beyond just photography.

## Types of portrait framing

Over the years, the 'classic' portrait composition has come to be a framing that includes the torso, head and shoulders. The angle of the subject's shoulders in relation to the camera is important. If the shoulders are too square to the camera then the photograph may look static and formal, too much like an identity photo. The tilt of the subject's head also makes a difference. Upright and straight into the camera presents a look of honesty and solidity. If the head is slightly tilted to one side, it can look coy. Tilted the other way it can look slightly quizzical. Consider the height of the camera in relation to the subject. Safe and sensible is a few degrees above the subject's eye-line. In this moderately tight composition, your subject's clothing and hair will be highly visible, and play a part. The background should be relatively unobtrusive unless it has a constructive role to play in the photograph.



The most common formal portrait framing includes the head and upper torso, but note the closer variation of head-and-shoulders.

Cropping in on just the face can produce the most intimate of all kinds of portrait, but demands the most care in technical matters of lens, lighting and depth of field. Inevitably, you will be working with a relatively short depth of field, making it important to keep sharp focus on the eyes. If these are sharp in the photograph, softened focus elsewhere (such as the ears) is conventionally acceptable. The background, naturally, hardly appears.



Tight framing on the face alone usually involves some cropping. The eyes gain in attention.



A full-length portrait, whether the subject is sitting or standing, necessarily involves decisions about the setting.

Pulling back for a full-length portrait allows you to show your subject in an entirely different way to the more classical, tighter compositions. By pulling back you lose the detail of expression but you gain greater freedom to explore stance, posing and body language. The arrangement of your model's limbs, the angle of their shoulders and their position in the frame all assume the same level of importance that facial expression has in closer compositions. In almost the same way that we all learn to read facial expressions as children, we all have a basic knowledge of body language. Legs can be straight or crossed, hands can go into pockets or behind the back and arms can be stretched out or folded. Experiment with the transfer of their weight from one leg to the other and then equally between both legs. You can also try asking your model to lean against something – walls, door frames and posts all make good supports and your model can lean with their shoulder, back or hands. The list of possible poses and variations on those poses is almost endless.

# Exercise 1: Portrait, scale and setting

This exercise will help you to consider both composition and the weight of attention to place on the face of your subject. Also, how at different scales, different parts of the body need to be taken into account. You will need to find a suitably interesting and attractive setting for a portrait, and then vary the distance (or the focal length). Prepare by studying a number of examples of portrait, from books and magazines.

Unless you have a strong preference not to, it will help to keep your composition steady and consistent if you use a tripod for this exercise. It will also help if the subject is positioned comfortably. Begin with a tight framing on the face in which at least part of the outline of the head is cropped by the frame, take a number of pictures until you feel you have a satisfactory expression from the subject, and then pull back for the second framing. This should include head and shoulders in view. 'Pulling back' can be either by physically moving the camera if you are using one fixed lens, or by shortening the focal length if you are using a zoom, or by a combination of the two. Be aware that shooting very close with a wide-angle or even standard lens can exaggerate the perspective on prominent parts of the face, with less-than-flattering results; we will examine this in more detail in Exercise 7.

Pull back again for a third framing that includes the torso. You will have to decide whether to crop above or below the waistline, and also what to do with the subject's hands. Notice how these tend to catch the eye in certain positions, and so alter the way in which a viewer's attention will be affected. Also, at this point in the exercise, the background may begin to make itself noticed, and you may have to take it into account in the composition.

Finally, pull right back for a full-length portrait, from head to toe. The framing will depend, among other things, on whether you have decided to have your subject sitting or standing. In either case, the setting will dominate attention much more.

You should complete four scales of portrait in this one session:-

- Face, cropped in close
- Head and shoulders
- Torso, taking into account arms and hands
- Full figure

When you have processed the images, and selected what you consider to be the most successful from each of the four, review the images and consider how a viewer will react to each portrait – in terms of the weight of attention to different elements. The face will, in at least the first three, be the main attractant, and within the face the eyes.

## Settings, backgrounds, locations

A portrait does not have to be restricted to depicting the face alone, or even the person alone. There are times when it makes sense to bring the location into the photograph, and even to let it play a leading role. With the single exception of the 'pure' studio portrait, in which the canvas is a blank backdrop for the sitter, all photographs of people take place in some definable setting, and if this is particularly interesting or relevant to the person, you may want to consider stepping back and making something of it.

The more that you make of the setting, inevitably the relative size of the person in the frame will be smaller. You can organise this either by shooting from further away or by using a wider-angle lens focal length.

Photographing people on their own home ground helps them to relax and be themselves, and so eases the occasion



A very simple, clean and contrasting background (the subject is the owner of this hotel built entirely of ice)

### A short checklist for a setting

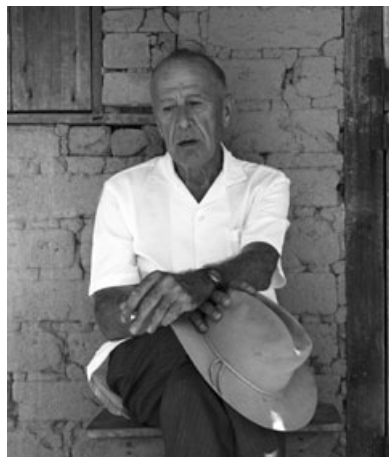
- Is it reasonably consistent in tone and features
- Does it complement or contrast with the person. Either can work
- Does it need tidying and or cleaning? Look for scraps on the floor, anything obviously disordered, drawers left open, doors ajar, and so on.
- Are there unnecessarily distracting objects in view? Look for strong clashing colours, images (posters, photographs, paintings) and words (posters, book covers, signs). Do they add or detract?

## Exercise 2: Thinking about location

For this exercise you will play the role of a location hunter. The brief is to find 6 very different settings or backgrounds which could be used effectively and attractively for either a whole body or torso portrait. You will need to take into account the lens focal length and camera position, and the lighting. Many things can work together to make an attractive backdrop, so there is no simple formula, and ultimately your choice will be on what you like. This said, tonal and textural simplicity from edge to edge is a reliable quality when you come across it. Take reference pictures of the locations as you come across them (an example of the advantage of carrying a camera with you as often as possible), without people. Finally, choose one of them and return with a portrait subject and photograph them. The aim of this exercise is to give you practice in translating a real-world setting into a useful element in an image.

### Light

Lighting for portraiture can, in a professional studio, be a complex and expensive business, but with some care and effort you can find locations in natural light that will be perfectly adequate. Moreover, at this course level, photographic lighting can be too much of a distraction. Here, we need simply to ensure that the lighting is neither harsh nor too flat.



Three very different uses of mainly natural light.

Beware of using on-camera flash; this has its uses, but used as the sole illumination is rarely flattering or acceptable for portraits. If you do decide to use on-camera flash, two techniques will help: one is to aim the flash head upwards at a steep angle towards a ceiling, in order to give a broad, diffuse light from above; the other is to reduce its contribution to the overall ambient lighting to about  $1/4$ . These options depend on the particular flash unit.

The face and head are highly responsive to changes in the quality of light. A face has several important planes that can catch or block the light, at times casting some key area (especially the eyes) into shade, and at times casting shadows that confuse the composition (especially the nose). There is, therefore, a big difference in effect between sunlight and shade.

On the plus side, sunlight has sparkle, good contrast and can produce catchlights in the eyes; against this, it can appear harsh, cast unattractive shadows across the face, and cause squinting. In favour of shade, there are no shadow problems and the overall effect is soft, which is good for downplaying skin blemishes; against this, there may be no modelling effect, so that the effect is flat and the face lacks volume. The middle ground of soft directional light, as with hazy sunlight or a photographic lamp that is spread through a broad diffuser, is for most photographers a dependable option, although not one to be followed slavishly.

Added to this is the matter of whether you are trying to go beyond the basic aim of making a recognisable portrait. If you are trying to flatter, a common request from sitters ('please make me look good'), then there are well-honed lighting techniques that can help, although most require controlled studio lighting. One such basic technique, which can be used anywhere with a close portrait, is to reflect light up from beneath, to lighten the shadows that fall naturally below the chin and below the nose and lower lip. There are custom-made photographic reflectors, in silvered fabric and collapsible, but you can improvise easily with aluminium cooking foil.

A Chinese artist famous for his caricature faces (based on self portrait).  
The background is complex, distracting, but very powerful.

