



THE FIVE·MINUTE FIX

200 Tips

for Improving Your Photography
and Growing Your Business

DALE BENFIELD

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The Five-Minute Fix:

200 TIPS FOR IMPROVING YOUR PHOTOGRAPHY AND GROWING YOUR BUSINESS

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Peachpit Press
www.peachpit.com

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Project Editor: Valerie Witte
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ISBN-13: 978-0-134-28966-3

ISBN-10: 0-134-28966-8

9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

Printed and bound in the United States of America

*If he had his way, I'd never mention publicly how he influenced me.
Tough, Daddy-O, my editor says this is my book, and I can say whatever I want.
I love you, Pops. This one's for you.*



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A LITTLE THANKS...

It's not often I undertake something as big as a book. I spent every morning for a year developing this book, sometimes questioning why I'd taken on such a big project but always sure I wanted to help photographers. I want to thank my friends and family who put up with me during this year of writing. I appreciate your support and encouragement more than you know.

I have to thank Valerie Witte from Peachpit Press, who took a shot on me, believed in me and my content, and held my hand through writing my first book. I'm really grateful for this experience, and for having such a kind and knowledgeable teammate.

Lastly, I have to thank my clients, who not only let me use their images, but who believe in Benfield Photography and continue to hire us and share our name with their friends and family.

I'd love to dedicate this book to my daughters, Ellie and Cece, who have endured me writing publicly about them all of their lives. They are my biggest fans, add entertainment to my life, and love me more than words. I spend most of my life trying to be the dad and person they think I am.

Lastly, I'd also love to dedicate this book to my dad. My dad's main objective when I was growing up was not only to make sure I was provided for, but that I also learned independence and the value of hard work. He gave me a job at his photo lab and studio while I was in high school and college, and during my time there I processed thousands of rolls of film and printed more than a hundred thousand prints. Similar to a prep cook chopping onions and peeling potatoes all day, every day, I didn't realize he was grooming me to be my own man with my own unique vision with photography. It was my time working for my father that taught me there is no substitute for hard work and that nothing is more important in business than truly caring for your clients.

INTRODUCTION

I've never thought of myself as a writer. The fact that I have a book is absurd to me. On the other hand, I've always viewed myself as a teacher. Growing up, I attempted to teach my younger brother the ways of the world, how he should live life, and Spanish. As I transitioned from boy to adolescent to adult, teaching became more and more of a passion of mine. I taught high school journalism and English, and I taught photography in college. It had occurred to me that teaching was my calling for that time in my life, and I loved sharing knowledge with those who needed it. During my teaching years I also concentrated on growing my photography business on the side. When the demand for my photography clients reached the point where I was spreading myself too thin, I left teaching to pursue professional photography, which was a quick success.

I say a quick success, but that's not actually true. You've probably heard the saying, "It took me years to become an overnight success." As soon as I heard that, I said, "That's me!" Laying a strong foundation over the course of seven or eight years of running a small side business was, for me, the perfect formula to turn Benfield Photography into the thriving business it is today.

Over the course of those years, I figured out hundreds of little things—building blocks—that collectively have contributed to the success of Benfield Photography. I've tried to think of as many as I could and included them in this book.

Again, I've never thought of myself as a writer, but I've always wanted to teach. I've always wanted to share knowledge, and I've enjoyed giving back to the photography community that has been so helpful to me over the years. I hope that you take these little building blocks and not just read them, but apply them to your business and your photography. May you find success, too!





FOUR

POSING

I've thought for a long time that photographers should possess proper communication skills to be successful. Aside from the technical aspects of photography, talking with clients about how to pose and making them feel comfortable are vital to capturing the best images of your subjects. In this chapter, you'll find posing techniques and a couple ways to make your subjects feel comfortable in front of the camera.



FIGURE 4.1 Canon EOS 7D with Canon EF35mm f/1.4L USM lens, f/1.4, 1/800 sec., Aperture-Priority mode, ISO 800.

54 Chin Up, Buttercup!

Ever wonder why most selfies are taken by holding the camera way up high? The reason is that pretty much everybody looks their best from that above angle, partly because it eliminates the double-chin effect. Take advantage of this fact on your next shoot by encouraging your clients to lift their chins while extending and elongating their necks (as the couple is doing in **Figure 4.1**) for the most flattering portraits. If you do ask your subjects to raise their chins, it's important for you to be taller or above them, or else the pose will start looking silly.

55 Chin Down, Charlie Brown!

When you don't have the possibility of double chins with a subject, you can try a few extra poses without the results becoming unflattering. As long as you're above them, don't be afraid to have your clients turn their chins down to create new moods for your photos. Suddenly you're shooting sexy or sultry as opposed to happy and lovely, as seen in **Figure 4.2**.



FIGURE 4.2 Canon EOS 5D with Canon EF85mm f/1.2L USM lens, f/1.2, 1/640 sec., Aperture-Priority mode, ISO 50.

Listen to Your Clients

56

If you're anything like me, you typically turn your nose up at your clients' posing suggestions. Aren't we the artists being paid tons of money? Yes, but we photographers are here to *serve* our clients, not just photograph them. Talking to them and listening to their ideas is part of that process—an important part!

Before every shoot, often weeks before, I ask the couple if they want to shoot, try, or do anything specific. I also ask if they want to feature any specific locations or ideas. I admit, I dread shooting those ideas, but I never let on to my clients. No frustrated creativity on my part is worth an unhappy client.

Sometimes, the clients' ideas make an amazing image I'd not imagined. One couple had an adorable habit of her kissing his nose. So, for the rest of the day we'd try that from time to time, and the image here is one of my all-time favorites! I wouldn't have such a beautiful shot as **Figure 4.3** had I not listened to my clients.

FIGURE 4.3
Canon EOS 5D
Mark III with
Canon EF85mm
f/1.2L USM lens,
f/2.0, 1/800 sec.,
Aperture-Priority
mode at +2.3,
ISO 1000.





FIGURE 4.4 Canon EOS 5D Mark III with Canon EF85mm f/1.2L USM lens, f/1.4, 1/4000 sec., Aperture-Priority mode at $-2/3$, ISO 125.

Play Games with Your Couples

57

One way to make your subject feel comfortable or to have a little more fun during your shoot is to have them “play games.” Models are trained to pose perfectly, but most people are not, so photo sessions often begin to look awkward. Playing games will help get their minds off their nerves and pose. The Kiss Game is one example: When you tell the couple “Kiss!” he must grab her waist and try his hardest to kiss her while she must try her hardest to keep him from kissing her. This is always super fun for the couple and gets them easily interacting with each other in a way that doesn’t look too staged or awkward (**Figure 4.4**). The game also gets them laughing and shows a bit of their personalities. With this one game you get silly shots, laughing shots, and the perfect kiss shot.

58 Pop That Shoulder

Popping a shoulder doesn't refer to a knuckle-cracking alternative, but to a pose that can add drama to your shoot. By moving her shoulder in toward her chin, the subject automatically accentuates her collarbone and slims her figure. If a subject has difficulty with this, I'll ask her to put her hand on a hip, but place the thumb forward on the front side of her hips, which turns her hand and naturally pops her shoulder, as shown in **Figure 4.5**.

FIGURE 4.5

Canon EOS 5D Mark III with Canon EF85mm f/1.2L USM lens, f/1.2, 1/1250 sec., Aperture-Priority mode at +1/3, ISO 100.





FIGURE 4.6 Canon EOS 5D Mark III with Canon EF50mm f/1.2L USM lens, f/2.2, 1/500 sec., Aperture-Priority mode at +2/3, ISO 2000.

Posing Newborns

59

The more educated you are about the subject you're photographing, the better your images will be, which is especially true when you're photographing newborns.

For example, newborn babies like to be very warm. They're used to a cozy 98-degree womb and don't enjoy being naked in a 70-degree room. They cry. So, bring a heating pad with you to the photo shoot and use it to keep the baby warm and happy. Turn off ceiling fans, and, of course, minimize time away from warm mama.

When posing that warm newborn, mold and hold the baby in the position you want to him or her to be in for your photograph. Be patient with this, as it might take a while for the baby to accept this new position. If you are, your patience will be rewarded with a cute little baby in a cute little pose.

Finally, if Baby won't hold your pose, Adobe Photoshop can help. In post-production you can composite and mesh multiple shots together and even remove supporting grown-up hands, as I did for **Figure 4.6**.

60 “What Do I Do With My Hands?”

One of the most popular quotes from *Talladega Nights*, which apparently every groomsman in the U.S. has seen, is “What do I do with my hands?”

The answer is simple. For couples, put their hands on each other. It hardly even matters where!

For kids, seniors, and everybody else, arms crossed or hands in pockets work. Really there is only one rule to always follow: Don’t let hands hang down, because that always looks super uncomfortable. **Figure 4.7** shows a good hand position example, or you can scroll through many more at thebenfieldblog.com.

61 Look Away

Why does everybody think they have to be looking at the camera? Maybe it’s because those old-school cameras couldn’t take good action shots, so the photographer would have everyone stop and look at the camera. But those days are gone. I do only one or two “look-at-me” poses in each outfit during an engagement session. The rest is of the couple looking at each other, or at least toward each other. Or maybe they’re not looking anywhere at all because their eyes are closed! I get a lot more *feeling* in a shot when the bride’s eyes are closed than if she and the groom stand there looking at me. (“What are you doing here, dude?”)

So, they can look at each other, they can close their eyes, or one can look at the other while the other looks off—there are so many combinations. If you start telling your couples where to look, the rest will fall into place. You can even start by just saying, “why don’t you just head over there and hang out with each other for a bit.” It works, trust me!



FIGURE 4.7
Canon EOS 5D
Mark III with
Canon EF85mm
f/1.2L USM lens,
f/2.0, 1/250 sec.,
Manual mode,
ISO 100.

62 The Almost Kiss

Remember back in science class when you learned about potential energy? Potential energy is energy that's just waiting to happen; think of a ball sitting on top of a slide, right there on the brink of plunging down into awesomeness. Potential energy is the buzz of what's about to happen and can add energy and drama to your images. For instance, everyone photographs the wedding or engagement couple kissing; instead, try capturing the instant before—the Almost Kiss (**Figure 4.8**)! The almost kiss is that mini-moment right before the actual kiss happens and is jam-packed with potential energy. Either ask your couple to hover with their lips just a centimeter apart (which couples often find is more fun than it sounds), or have them do a bunch of little kisses, then shoot for that moment right before one. Here's to reaching your potential!

FIGURE 4.8 ► Canon EOS 5D Mark III with Canon EF85mm f/1.2L USM lens, f/1.2, 1/2500 sec., Aperture-Priority mode at -1/3, ISO 400.





FIGURE 4.9 Canon EOS 5D Mark III with Canon EF50mm f/1.2L USM lens, f/1.6, 1/640 sec., Aperture-Priority mode at +1/3, ISO 100.

63 Posing by the Book

Stuck in a posing rut? Look no further than the latest Nicholas Sparks book. Seriously, you'll find some really good poses on there! A quick Google image search will do the trick. What do you notice the cover models all have in common?

- They're not looking at the camera.
- They all seem to be in some "moment."
- You can feel love in them.
- The Almost Kiss is in full effect in most.
- They're close to each other.
- They make good use of their hands.

I have a little image folder on my iPhone of screenshots to pull up if I'm ever at a loss for a good pose. **Figure 4.9** shows a shot that reminds me of the cover of *Message in a Bottle*.



FIGURE 4.10 Canon EOS 5D Mark III with Canon EF50mm f/1.2L USM lens, f/1.2, 1/1000 sec., Aperture-Priority mode, ISO 100.

The Universally Great Pose

64

This trick isn't a new one, and I wasn't the first to discover it: Everyone looks great when photographed from above, so ask your subject (couples too) to squat down and look up. Even if your subject has five chins, they won't show (people love that). As a bonus, your subject is normally looking up toward some type of light, which puts a little catch light in their eyes and makes them pop and sparkle. I like to shoot at f/1.2 or f/2 when I capture these, so the depth of field is nice and shallow. Notice in **Figure 4.10** that even their arms fall out of focus. There is no breathtakingly creative, punch-you-in-the-face moment when you look at a squat-down pose, but there is a classic and beautiful and flattering aspect to the photograph. Memorize this pose (and the others in this chapter) to make it automatic when your brain starts going frantic for something to try on a shoot.

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