

A close-up, macro photograph of a young girl's face. Her skin is wet with numerous small water droplets, particularly on her forehead and cheeks. She has dark, expressive eyes looking slightly to the left of the camera. Her expression is neutral to slightly smiling. The lighting is soft and natural, highlighting the texture of her skin and the clarity of the water droplets.

4

ISO 100
1/500 sec.
f/2.8
50mm lens



Say Cheese!

SETTINGS AND FEATURES TO MAKE GREAT PORTRAITS

Photographing people is challenging, rewarding, and fun all at the same time. When you photograph a person, you are capturing a memory, a moment in time. Images of friends and family often become our most cherished possessions. The people you photograph are depending on you to make them look good, and while you can't always change how a person looks, you can control the way you photograph that individual. In this chapter we will explore some camera features and techniques that can help you create great portraits.

PORING OVER THE PICTURE

I love to photograph people, and children are definitely the most fun to work with. It's always a joy when you can capture the happiness in their smiles. Natural light is a good choice when taking photos of children, especially if you can find a shady spot. It's also a good idea to use a fast shutter speed to capture their quick and changing expressions, just as I did in this image.

This image was photographed in a shady area, giving it beautifully diffused light.





Focus was carefully set on the little boy's eyes.

A fast shutter speed was used to capture the boy's expression.

ISO 400
1/400 sec.
f/4
24-105mm lens

PORING OVER THE PICTURE

I used a wide aperture to compress the background, giving it shallow depth of field.

What I love about photographing people is that they are unpredictable, and humor and other emotions can really add a lot to an image. This image was part of a lifestyle stock photo shoot, and these two models were so much fun to work with. Unplanned and spontaneous moments, like the kiss in this image, can often lead to great photographs.



A long lens was used to give this couple some space while their photo was taken.

Capturing emotion and expression is a key element of portrait photography.

ISO 100
1/125 sec.
f/4.5
70-200mm lens

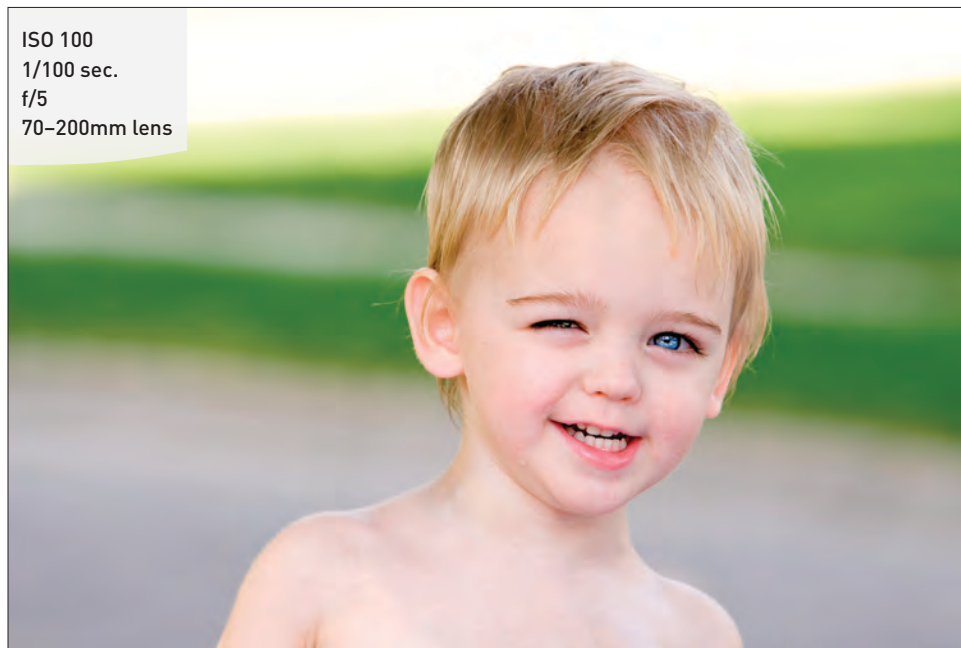
USING APERTURE PRIORITY MODE

In the previous chapter you learned about the different shooting modes, and when photographing people, you're likely to be most successful using the Aperture Priority (Av) mode. With portraits we usually like to see a nice, soft, out-of-focus background, and you can only guarantee that you'll achieve those results if you have full control of the aperture setting (**Figure 4.1**). You'll also be letting more light into your camera, which means that your ISO can be set lower, giving your image less noise and more detail.

Now, don't think that you have to use a crazy-fast lens (such as $f/1.2$ or $f/2.8$) to achieve great results and get a blurry background. Often an f -stop of 4.0 or 5.6 will be sufficient, and you might even find that having an extremely wide-open aperture gives you too little depth of field for a portrait, since you want most of the face to be in focus. I shoot the majority of my portrait photographs with a lens that has a maximum aperture of $f/4$, and I always achieve the results I'm looking for.

FIGURE 4.1

For this image I used a large aperture combined with a long lens to decrease the depth of field and make the background blurry.



GO WIDE FOR ENVIRONMENTAL PORTRAITS

Sometimes you'll find that a person's environment is important to the story you want to tell. When photographing people this way, you will want to use a smaller aperture for greater depth of field so that you can include details of the scene surrounding the subject.

Also keep in mind that in order to capture the person and their surroundings, you'll need to adjust your view and use a wider than normal lens. Wide-angle lenses require less stopping down of the aperture to achieve greater depth of field. This is because wide-angle lenses cover a greater area, so the depth of field appears to cover a greater percentage of the scene.

A wider lens might also be necessary to relay more information about the scenery (**Figure 4.2**). Select a lens length that is wide enough to tell the story but not so wide that you distort the subject. There's nothing quite as unflattering as giving someone a big, distorted nose (unless you are going for that sort of look). When shooting a portrait with a wide-angle lens, keep the subject away from the edge of the frame. This will reduce the distortion, especially in very wide focal lengths.



FIGURE 4.2
A wide-angle lens and a small aperture allowed me to show as much detail as possible in the room.

LIGHTING IS EVERYTHING

Photography is all about capturing light, so the most important thing in all of your images is the quality of the light on your subject. When you photograph people, you typically have a lot of control over when and where the image is taken, so you can manipulate your environment and find the best possible light for your subject.

Before I get into what you should do, let me first talk about what *not* to do. It's a common misconception that bright sunlight is great for portrait photographs. Of course, this is not entirely untrue, since there are some creative and amazing ways to use harsh natural sunlight and make great portraits. The problem is that when the sun is at its highest point, in the middle of the day, it's going to cast some very harsh shadows on your subject and probably make them squinty-eyed as well.

There are several easy ways to achieve beautifully lit portraits in an outdoors setting, and here are my two favorites. The first is to find shade. It might not seem like it at first, but on a sunny day an extraordinary amount of light fills shaded areas, for example, on the side of a building or underneath a covered patio. This light is diffused sunlight and will give a very soft, even light on your subject's face (**Figure 4.3**).

FIGURE 4.3

The light was diffused evenly across the little boy's face in this image, taken in a shady area on the side of a house.



The second way to light your images outdoors is to use the light that occurs during the “golden hour” of the day. This is the time period that occurs one hour after sunrise and one hour before sunset (many photographers are more likely to use the evening light since it’s more convenient). The quality of this light is soft, warm-toned, and very pleasing for portraits.

WHEN TO USE THE POP-UP FLASH

I’m not usually a big fan of using the pop-up flash or any type of on-axis flash, which is a light source that comes from the same direction as the camera. It usually results in lighting that is very flat, and often adds harsh shadows behind the subject. But you won’t always have the perfect lighting situation for each photograph, so keeping an on-camera ready-to-go flash on-hand can be very practical. It’s also good for those moments when you just have to get the shot and there’s not a lot of light available, for example, if your baby takes his or her first steps in a dark room. You wouldn’t want to miss that, and the pop-up flash is a handy tool to help capture those moments.

The flash can also be useful if you are in a situation where the afternoon sunlight is the only light available and you need to use a fill light. A fill light will “fill in” the areas in your subject that are not already lit by the main light, in this case the sun. When photographing people outdoors in the direct sunlight, you don’t want them to face directly into the light. Try to position your subject so the sun is off to their side or behind them. This is a good situation in which to use a fill light, such as the pop-up flash on your 7D, to properly expose their face (**Figure 4.4**).



FIGURE 4.4
I positioned this family with the sun out of their faces and filled in the shadows with a flash.

SETTING UP AND SHOOTING WITH FILL FLASH

1. Press the Flash button to raise your pop-up flash into the ready position (A).
2. Press the ISO/Flash Exposure Compensation button (B).
3. Turn the Quick Control dial to change the flash exposure (this is similar to exposure compensation, but you are only affecting the amount of light that your flash will generate for each shot).
4. Take a photograph and check your LCD Monitor to see if it looks good. If not, try increasing or reducing the flash meter in one-third stop increments until you get the correct amount of fill-flash for your shot.



A



B

There are other options for filling in areas of your image that need additional light. A reflector is a very common and inexpensive accessory that you can use to bounce light back onto your subject (Figure 4.5). You can buy these at any camera store, but you could even use a large piece of white foam core or anything that is reflective (like a sun shade for the windshield of your car) to get similar results.

METERING MODE FOR PORTRAITS

Your camera gives you four different metering modes that tell it where and how to meter the light. Each mode has a unique way of reading the scene, and which mode you use will depend on the environment you are shooting in.

I use the Evaluative metering mode for the majority of my work, and this mode is ideal for portraits. However, sometimes you'll run into situations where the background is much darker or lighter than the person you are photographing, which could give you an incorrect exposure. In these cases you'll want to use Partial metering, which will meter a smaller portion of the center of the frame (Figure 4.6). The great thing about digital SLRs is that with instant feedback on the LCD, you are able to make adjustments as needed if the metering mode didn't measure the light properly.

ISO 100
1/1600 sec.
f/4
18–50mm lens



FIGURE 4.5
A reflector was used to bounce light back onto this woman's face.

ISO 100
1/60 sec.
f/2.8
24–70mm lens



FIGURE 4.6
The shaded circle in the center represents the area in your image that the Partial metering mode will meter from while you are looking through the viewfinder.

SHOOTING WITH THE AE LOCK FEATURE

Once you select your metering, you can lock that setting in your camera temporarily if you want to recompose your image—for example, if you are in an environment where there is sufficient light on your subject but the background is significantly brighter or darker. The metering in your camera is continuous, meaning it will change depending on where the center of the viewfinder is pointed. If you have composed the image so that the person is off-center, the camera will meter the wrong part of the scene.

To correct this, you can meter for one part of the image (your subject), lock those settings down so they don't change, and then recompose the scene and take your photo. Here's how to use the AE Lock feature on the 7D:

1. Find the AE Lock button on the back of the camera and place your thumb on it (Figure 4.7).
2. While looking through the viewfinder, place the center focus point on your subject.
3. Press and hold the AE Lock button to get a meter reading.
4. Recompose your shot, and then take the photo.
5. To take more than one photo without having to take another meter reading, just hold down the AE Lock button until you are done using the meter setting.



FIGURE 4.7

FOCUSING: THE EYES HAVE IT

When you look at a person, probably the very first thing you notice is their eyes—it's just natural to make eye contact with other people, and we even do this with pets and other animals. This is extremely important when taking photographs because you want to be sure that your focus is on your subject's eyes (Figure 4.8). Also keep in mind that if the person is positioned at an angle, it's best to focus on the eye that is nearest the camera, since that's where we naturally tend to look first (Figure 4.9).

ISO 100
1/125 sec.
f/2.8
24–70mm lens



FIGURE 4.8
It's important to set your focus on a person's eyes when photographing portraits.

ISO 100
1/125 sec.
f/2.8
Lensbaby lens



FIGURE 4.9
I focused on this little boy's left eye since it was closest to my camera.

In Chapter 1, I discussed the different focusing points you can use with your 7D. In my experience, the best option for portrait work is Single-Point AF. You can move the focus around within your viewfinder to find the eye, ensuring that you are focusing on the proper part of the image before taking your photo. Leaving the focusing decision up to the camera means you could end up with an in-focus nose and blurry eyes, or, even worse, it might try to focus on the background instead of the person.

FOCUSING TIP FOR PORTRAIT WORK

When focusing on your subject's eyes, do your best to focus on the iris—the colored part of the eyeball. This is especially important if you are doing a very close-up portrait where the person's face fills most of the frame, since the focus area will be much more noticeable. Sometimes, if you're shooting with a large aperture and have shallow depth of field, it's easy to miss focus and instead have the eyelash in focus and the eyeball a bit blurry.

SETTING YOUR FOCUS TO A SINGLE POINT

1. Press the AF Focus Point Selection button (A) and look in your viewfinder.
2. Press the M.Fn button on the top of your camera, located next to the Shutter button (B), until you see the setting with one small red-square inside the viewfinder.
3. Use the Main dial, the Multi-Controller, or the Quick Control dial to set the location of your focus point. I prefer to use the Multi-Controller because it acts like a joystick, and it's easier to place the focus point where I need it.



I typically set the focus point location in the middle, find my subject's eye, and press the Shutter button halfway to set focus. With my finger still holding the shutter halfway down, I recompose and take my photo. I find that the "focus and recompose" method is a much quicker way to photograph people. Speed is important because people tend to move around during the shooting process, and keeping the focus point in the middle simplifies my shooting.

CATCHLIGHT

A *catchlight* is that little sparkle that adds life to the eyes (**Figure 4.10**). When you are photographing a person with a light source in front of them, you will usually get a reflection of that light in the eye, be it your flash, the sun, or something else brightly reflecting in the eye. The light reflects off the surface of the eyes as bright highlights and serves to bring attention to the eyes. Larger catchlights from a reflector or studio softbox tend to be more attractive than tiny catchlights from a flash.



ISO 100
1/125 sec.
f/2.8
24-70mm lens

FIGURE 4.10
The catchlights in this image add a sparkle to the little girl's somber expression.

COMPOSING PEOPLE AND PORTRAITS

When photographing people it can be easy to get carried away with focusing on their expressions and checking your exposure, but it's always crucial to consider how the photo is composed. The placement of the person, as well as the perspective and angle you are using, can make or break the shot. Here are a few simple tips to help you create some amazing portrait compositions.

RULE OF THIRDS

One of the most basic rules of composition, the “rule of thirds” is a very good principle to stick with when photographing people. It states that you should place the subject of your photograph on a “third-line” within the frame of your viewfinder. Imagine a tic-tac-toe board, with two lines spaced evenly down the center of the frame both horizontally and vertically (Figure 4.11). Your goal is to place the subject on one of the intersecting lines—you’re basically trying to keep the person off-center without pushing them too close to the edge of the frame.

FIGURE 4.11

The woman’s face in this photo was positioned on one of the intersecting third-lines for a pleasing composition.



Another thing to keep in mind is that you want to fill the frame as much as possible with your subject. This doesn’t mean that you should get in so close that you have nothing in the shot but their face, but rather that you should be close enough so that you aren’t adding anything to the image that you don’t want to see. This is usually done by sticking to the third-line principle of framing the head near the top third of the frame. When I hand my camera to a friend to take my photo, I always chuckle to myself when I look at the image afterwards and my head is completely centered in the frame. I usually just go into editing software and crop out the excess headroom, making it look like it was properly composed. However, it’s much easier and more efficient to do as much of the work in-camera as possible.

The great thing about the 7D is that you can add a grid overlay to your viewfinder and LCD (when shooting in Live View) to help you with the composition. You'll need to set up each one individually, but if it's something that you find useful, it's worth taking the extra steps.

SETTING UP THE GRID DISPLAY IN YOUR VIEWFINDER

1. Press the Menu button and go to the second setup menu tab (fourth tab from the right).
2. Use the Quick Control dial and scroll down to the last menu item, labeled VF grid display (A).
3. Press the Set button and select Enable (B). You will now see a grid overlay when you look through your viewfinder.



SETTING UP THE GRID DISPLAY FOR LIVE VIEW SHOOTING

1. Press the Menu button and go to the fourth shooting menu tab (fourth tab from the left).
2. Use the Quick Control dial and scroll down to the menu item labeled Grid Display (C).
3. Press the Set button and select Grid 1 (D). I prefer this grid because it clearly shows the third-lines on the frame. Press the Set button to lock in this change.
4. Next, press the Live View shooting button, located on the back of your camera, and you'll see a grid overlay on your LCD Monitor.



PERSPECTIVE

When taking photos, it's very easy to take all of your images from a standing position. This of course will vary in height from person to person, but so will the people you are photographing. I usually carry a small stepladder with me when I go on location so I can vary my height with the people I'm photographing, especially since I'm shorter than most other people. The basic rule to follow is to try to stay eye-level with your subject, which could mean flopping down on your belly to photograph a child or baby (Figure 4.12).

FIGURE 4.12

It's often a good idea to get down to a child's level when taking their picture—I got down on my belly in the sand to photograph this adorable baby boy.



Another technique I like to use is to shoot my photos three different ways—vertical, horizontal, and slanted. I will often do one of each with the subject I'm photographing, and these are all very good ways to angle your camera for portraits. Sometimes you don't realize what will make a pleasing image until you try it out, so it's good to experiment a little bit to see what works best. My favorite angle to shoot at is a slanted angle, also referred to as "Dutch angle" (Figure 4.13). I find that doing this gives my images a sense of motion and uniqueness, since our eyes want to see things straight up and down.

ISO 100
1/125 sec.
f/4
70–200mm lens



FIGURE 4.13

This image was photographed from a position sometimes referred to as “Dutch angle.”

BREAK THE RULES!

So now that I’ve given you all of these great rules to follow when composing your image, the last rule I’m going to tell you is to break all of them! Don’t think that you always need to keep an image off-center or that you have to photograph children at their level all the time (**Figure 4.14**). Experiment and find new ways to capture your images—you just might find that breaking the rules was the best thing you could have done for your image.

ISO 100
1/320 sec.
f/2.8
50mm lens



FIGURE 4.14

Breaking rules can sometimes yield great results—this image was photographed from high up, a perspective that you usually would not photograph children from.

THE PORTRAIT PICTURE STYLE FOR BETTER SKIN TONES

In Chapter 1 I discussed the different picture styles the 7D has to offer, and as you have probably guessed, the Portrait style is best for photographing people. The default Portrait settings give your images a softer look, but the neat thing about the styles in general is that you have the ability to change the settings to increase or decrease the amount of sharpness, contrast, saturation, and color tone to your preference.

SETTING THE PORTRAIT PICTURE STYLE

1. Wake the camera (if necessary) by lightly pressing the Shutter button.
2. Press the Picture Styles button on the back of the camera (A).
3. Use either the Main dial or the Quick Control dial to scroll through to the Portrait style (B).
4. If you would like to make any changes to the style, press the INFO button and use the Multi-Controller or Quick Control dial to select the setting you would like to adjust (C). Then press the Set button and use the same dial to change the setting (D).
5. Press the Set button to lock in this change, and then press the Menu button to go back to the Picture Style screen.



A



B



C



D

BEAUTIFUL BLACK AND WHITE PORTRAITS

Sometimes a portrait just looks better in black and white—we see more of the person and their expression rather than their surroundings or the color of their clothing (**Figure 4.15**). You can change the picture style to Monochrome in your camera so that you are photographing the image in black and white, but when you do this, you are only giving yourself one option. If you decide you liked it better in color, you have no way to change it back.

I prefer to do all of my black and white conversions while editing the photo on my computer, and I encourage you to do the same. You can make black and white conversions, along with many other types of adjustments to your images, by using the Canon Digital Photo Professional software on the disc included with your camera.



FIGURE 4.15

A black and white portrait eliminates the distraction of color and puts all the emphasis on the subject.

TIPS FOR SHOOTING BETTER PORTRAITS

Before we get to the challenges for this chapter, I thought it might be a good idea to discuss some tips on shooting portraits that don't necessarily have anything specific to do with your camera. There are entire books that cover things like portrait lighting, posing, and so on. But here are a few pointers that will make your people photos look a lot better.

AVOID THE CENTER OF THE FRAME

This falls under the category of composition. Place your subject to the side of the frame (**Figure 4.16**)—it just looks more interesting than plunking them smack dab in the middle.

FIGURE 4.16

An off-center image creates a pleasing composition.



CHOOSE THE RIGHT LENS

Choosing the correct lens can make a huge impact on your portraits. A wide-angle lens can distort the features of your subject, which can lead to an unflattering portrait. Select a longer focal length if you will be close to your subject (**Figure 4.17**).

USE THE FRAME

Have you ever noticed that most people are taller than they are wide? Turn your camera vertically for a more pleasing composition (**Figure 4.18**).

ISO 100
1/125 sec.
f/4.5
70-200mm lens



FIGURE 4.17
I used a long focal length to keep my distance from this couple while taking their picture.

ISO 400
1/60 sec.
f/2.8
24-70mm lens



FIGURE 4.18
A vertically composed image is a good choice for many portraits.

SUNBLOCK FOR PORTRAITS

The midday sun can be harsh and can do unflattering things to people's faces. If you can, find a shady spot out of the direct sunlight (**Figure 4.19**). You will get softer shadows, smoother skin tones, and better detail. This holds true for overcast skies as well. Just be sure to adjust your white balance accordingly.

FIGURE 4.19

A shady area will give you beautiful, diffused lighting for portraits.

ISO 100
1/80 sec.
f/2.8
24-70mm lens



KEEP AN EYE ON YOUR BACKGROUND

Sometimes it's so easy to get caught up in taking a great shot that you forget about the smaller details. Try to keep an eye on what is going on behind your subject so they don't end up with things popping out of their heads (Figure 4.20).

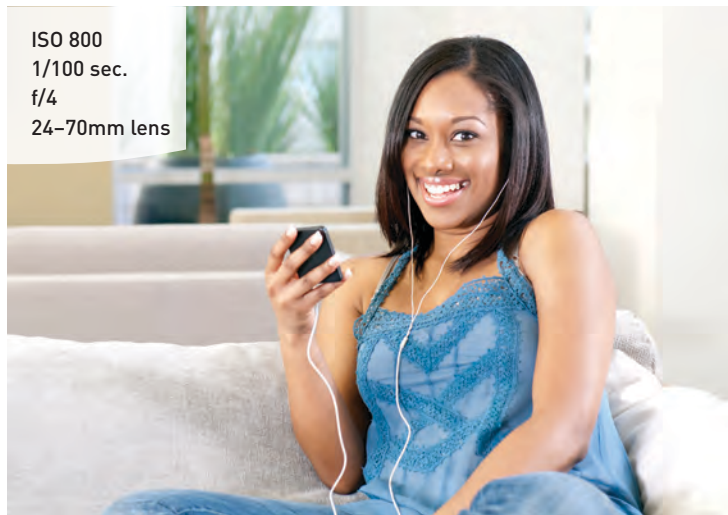


FIGURE 4.20

I positioned this model so that there were no distracting elements directly behind her.

MORE THAN JUST A PRETTY FACE

Most people think of a portrait as a photo of someone's face. Don't ignore other aspects of your subject that reflect their personality—hands, especially, can go a long way toward describing someone (Figure 4.21).

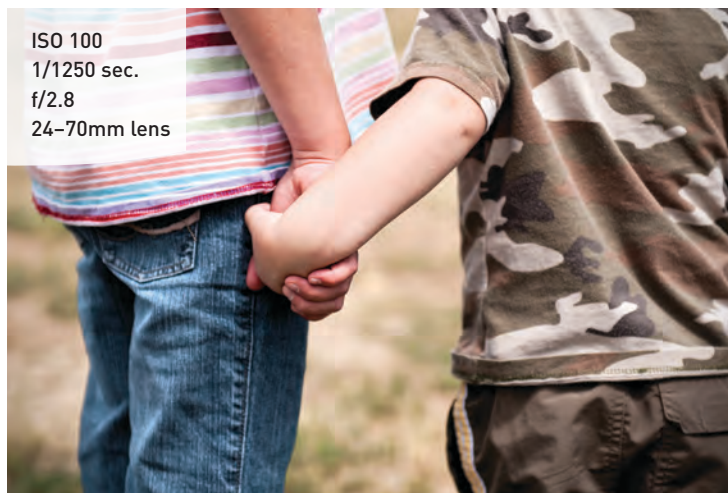


FIGURE 4.21

Find other ways to photograph people—this image of children holding hands tells a story without having to show their faces.

GET DOWN ON THEIR LEVEL

If you want better pictures of children, don't shoot from an adult's eye level. Getting the camera down to the child's level will make your images look more personal (Figure 4.22).

FIGURE 4.22

Children look their best when photographed from their level.



DON'T BE AFRAID TO GET CLOSE

When you are taking someone's picture, don't be afraid of getting close and filling the frame (Figure 4.23). This doesn't mean you have to shoot from a foot away; try zooming in and capturing the details.

FIGURE 4.23

Fill the frame to focus the attention on the person rather than their surroundings.



FIND CANDID MOMENTS

Sometimes the best images are the ones that aren't posed. Find moments when people are just being themselves (**Figure 4.24**) and use a faster shutter speed to capture expressions that happen quickly (**Figure 4.25**).

ISO 100
1/800 sec.
f/3.2
70–200mm lens



FIGURE 4.24
Sometimes the best photos are the ones that weren't planned—find these moments in your models and you can capture their true selves.

ISO 100
1/320 sec.
f/2.8
70–200mm lens



FIGURE 4.25
A fast shutter speed will help to capture moments that pass quickly.

SHOOT HIGH AND LOW

Portraits don't always need to be photographed at eye level. Try moving up, down, and all around. Shooting from a high angle is a flattering way to photograph most people (**Figure 4.26**), and sometimes it can be fun to get down on the ground and shoot up at your subject (**Figure 4.27**).



FIGURE 4.26

Try photographing portraits from different angles and perspectives.



FIGURE 4.27

I shot this from a lower perspective to include the kite in the image without introducing any distracting background elements.

Chapter 4 Challenges

Depth of field in portraits

Let's start with something simple. Grab your favorite person and start experimenting with using different aperture settings. Shoot wide open (the widest your lens goes, such as $f/2.8$ or $f/4$) and then really stopped down (like $f/22$). Look at the difference in the depth of field and the important role it plays in placing the attention on your subject. (Make sure your subject isn't standing directly against the background. Give some distance so that there is a good blurring effect of the background at the wide f-stop setting.)

Discovering the qualities of natural light

Pick a nice sunny day and try shooting some portraits in the midday sun. If your subject is willing, have them turn so the sun is in their face. If they are still speaking to you after blinding them, ask them to turn their back to the sun. Try this with and without the fill flash so you can see the difference. Finally, move them into a completely shaded spot and take a few more.

Picking the right metering method

Find a very dark or light background and place your subject in front of it. Now take a couple of shots, giving a lot of space around your subject for the background to show. Now switch metering modes and use the AE Lock feature to get a more accurate reading of your subject. Notice the differences in exposure between the metering methods.

Picture styles for portraits

Have some fun playing with the different picture styles. Try the Portrait style as compared to the Standard style. Play with the different adjustment settings within the styles to see how they affect skin tones.

Share your results with the book's Flickr group!

Join the group here: [flickr.com/groups/canon7dfromsnapshottogreatshots](https://www.flickr.com/groups/canon7dfromsnapshottogreatshots)