



the PORTRAIT
CHEAT SHEET

LUKE CLELAND

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*The BEST PHOTOS happen when your subject is having A GOOD TIME.
Awkward subjects, mean awkward photos.*

1 | DON'T START WITH PHOTOGRAPHY CONNECT AS A HUMAN, AND BEGIN TO DEVELOP TRUST

- > Set down your camera, look them in the eye and convey that you're excited to take their photo.
- > Sometimes I'll break the ice by saying, "Don't worry it can feel awkward in the first few minutes but you'll feel great in no time".
- > Throw in a joke and set them at ease. A CLASSIC for me is I'll take one photo and then say "WOW it's perfect - I guess we're all done here!" It's cheesy I know, but something like that really helps loosen everyone up.

2 | BE CONFIDENT (even if you don't feel it) MAKING A PLAN AHEAD GIVES YOU CONFIDENCE

- > Decide ahead of time what gear you'll be using. I like using primes when taking portraits because it cuts down on the possibility of getting distracted with different focal lengths. How your subject interacts with you is much more important than having a slightly different focal length. (say 50mm vs 53mm on a zoom lens). Keep gear simple. The more simple your gear, the less distracted you will be, and the less your subject will be intimidated.
- > Decide locations ahead of time. Anytime I'm taking portraits somewhere, I make a mental list of where I will be shooting. Often I'll make sure to spend time ahead of the shoot to take sample shots in the areas that I like to see if the locations are a good fit.
- > Decide on what photos you need. And don't get greedy. Especially when you're starting out, it's easy to keep shooting forever. But really try to limit your shooting time to what you really need. I find that there's a sweet spot of when I get the best out of my subject. There is always a beginning warming up period, and then an ideal time where the subject feels comfortable, and the shoot is going great. You want to make sure you finish before they finish. If they ask you "how much longer", you know you've gone too long. People evaluate you not only on the photos you take, but on their experience of how you take photos.
- > Practice! Try to replicate the shoot ahead of time and practice how you will do it. Get a friend, and run through what you will do, what you will say, how you will take the photos. That way, on the real day, you'll feel like you've done this before!

3 | CLEARLY COMMUNICATE YOU ARE THE GUIDE, TELL THEM YOU'RE PLAN

- > Communication should start right at the beginning. I will start by telling my couple what we will be doing. I'll tell them where we're going, what kind of photos I'll be taking, and roughly how long they can expect it to take.
- > If your subject asks "What should I be doing?" You've failed them. If they ask that, that's a good indication they are feeling unsure, and probably feeling a bit awkward. It's not the end of the world though, just get ahead of them, and make sure you are leading them through the shoot instead of leaving them to read your mind.

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> Tell them to take a break! If I need a moment to think, look around the corner to see if there's better light, or change a battery, I make sure to tell my couple "Let's take a break for a second. I'll tell you when we will start again, until then just chat with each other." PRO TIP: when the break is coming to an end, this is a great time to snap a quick candid photo. They will be not be expecting it, and you'll get a great authentic, candid moment.

4 | TELL YOUR SUBJECT THEY ARE DOING GREAT THEY ARE DOING EXACTLY WHAT THEY NEED TO DO

> You are the guide. It's up to you to guide your subject into great photos. And one of the most important ways to do that is to tell them they are doing a great job, even if they are not. They are doing great, they are trying, they are attempting to follow your directions, and some positive affirmation goes a long way in building confidence in your subject.

> If its bad - it's you're fault. When I ask a client to do something and they do it incorrectly, or in a way I don't like, I NEVER, NEVER, NEVER say, "Oh no that's wrong" or "Your not doing it right" I will say, " My bad, I did not explain that properly, let me try explaining it again, and then try it"

> I always lay the blame on me during a portrait session. They are always doing great, and if anything goes wrong, weird, or awkward, that's my fault.

5 | BE CONSTANTLY AWARE LEARN HOW TO READ YOUR SUBJECT

> I know how hard it is to do; you're trying to take photos, get the exposure right, make sure their eyes are in focus, BUT you can't forget about your subject. You can't miss their emotional cues.

> Give your couple a break by asking them to walk away from you as you take photos.

> I'll take a far away photo, where the subject is small in the frame, and this gives them an opportunity to regroup.

> If they are getting tired STOP. You can't get good photos when your subject is over it. If they are done with the shoot, so are you.

> If your subject starts to feel uncomfortable MOVE. Walk, dance, jump, shake. Movement helps people not to overthink themselves.

> Don't CONSTANTLY take photos. One great way to regulate your subjects feelings and fatigue is to take regular breaks in taking photos. Take some shots, walk together to the next location, and chat while you go, keeping your camera down.

6 | HAVE FUN ENJOYING THE PROCESS YOURSELF WILL SPILL OVER TO YOUR SUBJECT

> It's hard not to smile when someone else is smiling. It's hard not to laugh when someone else is laughing. Have a good time, even if you need to pretend to because that energy will translate to your couple and will in turn make it enjoyable for everyone!

> Don't take yourself too seriously. It's okay to make mistakes, it's okay to be silly, don't be a photo diva, because....

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