



Lenses for portraiture

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Although most lenses can be used for portraiture, fast telephoto lenses with moderately short focal lengths have long been the first choice of professional portrait photographers. Focal lengths typically considered ideal range from about 70mm to 135mm in 35mm format, with a bias in favour of the 85-105mm section.

There are several reasons to choose short telephoto lenses for portraiture:

1. They provide a good working distance, enabling the photographer to fill the frame with the subject's face (or head and shoulders) without imposing on their personal space.
2. The slight compression of perspective provided by a telephoto lens is usually flattering. With careful posing of subjects, prominent noses and chins appear smaller in relationship to the rest of the face.
3. Fast maximum apertures (f/1.8 to f/4) provide optimal depth of field control, making it easier to draw attention to key features like the subject's eyes or profile, while allowing the rest of the scene to drift gradually out of focus.

LENS REVIEWS



Nikkor Z 24-70mm
f/4 S lens



Nikkor Z 35mm f/1.8
S lens



Fujinon XF 18mm f/2
R lens



Recommended cameras and
lenses

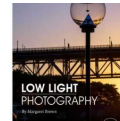


Wide aperture settings (f/2.8 in this case) with a short telephoto lens provide the classic recording tools for head-and-shoulder portraits. (Source: Tamron.)

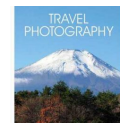
However, that doesn't mean other lenses can't be used for portraiture; just that they need to be used more thoughtfully. Longer lenses will generally be preferred for candid portraits, while wide angle lenses can produce attractive environmental portraits, particularly when the shots show people at work or engaged in an activity that doesn't require them to look straight at the camera.

Backgrounds can make or break portrait shots. Longer focal length lenses will make blurring away a distracting background easier, as will wide aperture settings. Longer lenses also make it easier to fill the frame with the subject's face, creating a sense of intimacy. It's important to achieve an optimal balance between depth of field and background blur, bearing in mind that the subject's eyes and mouth should always be in focus.

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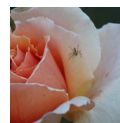


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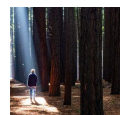
COMPETITIONS



Skateboarder



Spider on a Rose



In the Spotlight



A portrait taken with an 85mm lens on a camera with an APS-C sized sensor, which provided the equivalent to a 135mm lens in 35mm format. This allowed a good working distance for photographing this type of subject.

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NEW ISSUES



A 250mm equivalent focal length and f/5 maximum aperture have been used to isolate the subject from a potentially distracting background. The camera was focused on the subject's eyes.

Zoom or Prime?

Prime (single focal length) lenses are usually preferred by photographers who are serious about portraiture. As well as offering superior image quality, their main advantage over zoom lenses is their significantly greater speed (light transmission).

All leading manufacturers offer 85mm lenses for the 35mm format with maximum apertures of f/1.4 and f/1.8, which is considerably (two to 2½...") f-stops faster than the typical f/3.5 maximum aperture for a short telephoto zoom lens. Fast lenses require less stabilisation in low light levels and can be used with lower ISO settings. In addition, the faster the lens, the greater the potential for it to produce attractive background blurring ("bokeh") that makes potentially distracting objects behind the subject less noticeable.

However, prime lenses tend to be relatively large, bulky and expensive and when the focal length isn't ideal for the subject you must change to a different lens. This takes time and can create potential for dust



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Zoom lenses are much more versatile than primes "" and usually more affordable, although their prices are dictated by optical speed and build quality. One zoom lens will take up less space and weigh less than several prime lenses that cover the same range of focal lengths.



A 'convenience' zoom lens made it easy to compose and take this candid portrait shot without attracting the subject's attention. Photographed with a focal length of 185mm on an APS-C DSLR camera using a relatively wide f/6.3 aperture to produce background blurring.

Focal Length Analysis

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