



Portraits:

7 Tips on Approaching Strangers for Photographs

by Lindsay Adler

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I was photographing a ship 'graveyard' in Sicily when I saw this man fixing his boat. I came up to him and made the clicking motion with my finger on the camera. He nodded and smiled. I started off further away and slowly made my way toward him as I photographed. This image was made when I realized he could speak Spanish (as well as Italian) and I used my basic Spanish skills to introduce myself and my purpose.

they too should be uncomfortable.

2. Explain Your Purpose

People are often more willing to pose for a photo if they are helping to achieve something. If you are taking a photo class, tell them it is for a class assignment. Otherwise, tell them it is for a personal portrait project you are working on. This gives you some validation.

It can be difficult to get up the courage to approach someone for his or her photograph-- especially a stranger. Over the years I have developed a few tricks for positive reactions from my subjects.

Try these tips and I think you'll be pleased with the outcome:

1. Smile

Smiles are international. Smiling shows your good intentions and helps subject feel more comfortable. If you approach someone with a frown or visibly show you are uncomfortable, this gives off the vibe that you are doing something wrong and that

3. Offer to Email

Give your subject your business card (with your email address) and tell them if they contact you, you can give them a copy of the file. People are more willing to pose if they are getting something out of the photo themselves.



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In this image I was at the Tower of London in England. This is one of the guards of this fortress. In this situation I saw that the guard box was nicely framing the man. I approached him and told him what I saw in the composition of the image. After a bit of friendly chatting about British-American history, he was happy to let me take my photograph.

7. Language Barrier

I have found that when I am in other countries, I basically have to smile and look confident. I then approach someone, hold up my camera and make the clicking motion with my finger. People understand what I am asking and usually with a friendly smile, they will agree. *Be sure to watch body language. You can usually tell people who don't want to be bothered by their expression and body language.*

4. Compliments

People love to be complimented, so flattering someone is a sure way to get a positive reaction. Don't tell a lie, but tell them truthfully why you'd want to take their picture.

5. Tell Them What You See

Tell the subject what has attracted you to take this image. Is it the light? The color of their clothes? The environment and their general appearance, etc. If you explain artistically why you are driven to make a portrait of them, they will realize you are an artist and may be willing to help you with your work by posing.

6. Avoid Large Groups

If you are traveling with a photo tour or your family, try to hang back behind the group. A subject may feel overwhelmed and uncomfortable if too many people are watching them and may feel that if they allow one photo, they will have to allow everyone to take their photo.



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I discovered this man in a park in Ireland. We struck up a conversation (basic things like the weather and how I was enjoying my visit) and I was always smiling. I then told him that I was a photographer and that the light was very good... and proceeded to ask to take his picture. He was uncomfortable and tried posing. I encouraged him to just act naturally, so he lit up a cigarette and this is the resulting image.

Whatever you do, just smile, be confident and have fun. And you never know, you may just meet a new friend.

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To learn more about portraiture and photographing strangers, join Lindsay's **"People & Portraits...." online class through the [Apogee Photo Online Campus](#). I hope to see you there.**

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Lindsay Adler is a professional photographer and photo lecturer living in New York and London. She teaches workshops and classes through her business, Adler Photo Workshops (www.adlerphotoworkshops.com). She enjoys all types of photography, including fashion, travel, nature, and photojournalism.

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