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## Capturing Outdoor Portraits (People Photography)

Photographing people outdoors – whether it's casual family photos, lifestyle shots for your business, or portraits of friends – is rewarding and important. The goal is to make your subject look their best while also conveying mood and context of the outdoor setting. In this module, we'll focus on techniques for taking professional-looking portraits with your iPhone in natural outdoor environments.

### Tips for beautiful outdoor portraits:

1. **Choose a Simple Background:** The background can make or break a portrait. Aim for a clean, uncluttered background that puts the focus on your subject. If the background is too busy (lots of people, signs, or contrasting colors), it will distract the viewer's eye away from the person. A "great background is straightforward and simple" – it ensures your subject remains the focal point and doesn't get lost in a chaotic scene. For example, an open field, a plain wall, greenery with uniform color, or a distant blurred landscape can work well. If you're shooting a small business owner for a profile photo, you might choose a background that is relevant but not distracting – say, a blurred interior of their shop or a solid-color wall with maybe their logo out of focus. Also, watch out for anything directly behind the person's head (like a pole or tree) that might look odd in the photo; you may need to reposition to avoid "growing" a tree out of someone's head in the frame. Finally, consider color contrast: if your subject's clothing blends into the background (say they wear green in a green forest), they might disappear. Encourage them to wear a color that stands out against the setting, or find a backdrop that contrasts with them. The result should be that your subject pops against the background.
2. **Find Flattering Light:** Lighting for portraits is crucial. When outdoors, avoid harsh sunlight on your subject's face. The best lighting for outdoor portraits is often open shade or the golden hour light. If you can, take portraits in the early morning or late afternoon/evening when the sun is low – the light is soft and warm, which is very flattering for skin tones. Golden hour light can give a lovely glow to hair (if backlit) and a nice even illumination on faces without hard shadows. If shooting when the sun is higher, find a shaded area (like under a tree or on the shadow side of a building) to place your subject – this avoids the "raccoon eyes" dark shadows and squinting caused by direct overhead sun. Overcast days are excellent for portraits: the cloud cover diffuses sunlight, creating gentle, even light that flatters faces. You can shoot all day on an overcast day and get consistent results. The soft light wraps around the subject and

avoids shiny skin or harsh contrasts. On such days, colors might appear a bit cooler or muted, but you can correct that slightly by tapping the screen and raising exposure a tiny bit if needed to brighten faces. Importantly, avoid bright mid-day sun directly on the face: it causes unflattering, sharp shadows and makes people squint – not a good look. If you have no choice but to shoot under midday sun, try positioning the person with the sun behind them (backlit) and use HDR/flash to brighten their face, or have them step into a full shade. You'll get a much more flattering portrait in gentle light than in harsh light.

3. **Position and Pose the Subject:** How you position your subject relative to the background and light can improve the photo. First, have them face the light source if possible (except when the sun is too harsh). For example, in open shade, have them face toward the brighter side (toward where the light is coming from) so their face is well lit. If the sun is low, you can have them angled toward the sun for a warm glow on their face or put the sun behind them for a halo effect – but again, you'll need to adjust exposure for their face in backlight. Next, consider the angle and pose: Eye-level shots are standard for portraits, but don't be afraid to shoot slightly from above for a slimming perspective (have them look up at the camera) or from below if you want a more powerful look (this can make the person appear a bit larger or more authoritative – use carefully). Guide them into a natural pose – for instance, shifting weight to one leg, tilting their head slightly, or interacting with the environment (leaning on a railing, sitting on steps) can relax the vibe. Focus on the eyes – always tap on the person's face or eyes to ensure they are in sharp focus, since eyes are the critical focal point in a portrait. If your iPhone has Portrait mode, it will usually detect a face and focus on it automatically but double-check by tapping if needed. Also, watch out for mixed lighting (like half the face in sun, half in shade); try to have consistent lighting on the face for the best result, or use fill flash on the darker side if needed.
4. **Compose the Portrait:** Use the same composition principles you learned, adapted for portraits. Often, a portrait is more pleasing if the subject is not dead-center. Try an off-center composition by placing the person to one side of the frame, following the rule of thirds. For example, if your subject is looking toward one side, leave some space in front of them in that direction – this is called “looking room” and it feels natural. If it's a full-body portrait, you might place them on the right third of the frame with space on the left showing the environment they're in (this can be great for environmental portraits that tell a story about the person and the location). Frame the subject if possible: use elements like a doorway, a window, or tree branches to frame around them. This adds depth and draws the eye to them. Leading lines can also work in portraits – perhaps a fence or railing leading to the person, or the lines of a path. Keep the background simple as we discussed, and watch the edges of your frame – try not to cut the photo at awkward points on the subject (e.g., avoid cropping exactly at someone's joints like knees or elbows, which can look unnatural). For close-up headshots, you might center the face more, but still consider having the eyes on the upper third line of the frame rather than dead center vertically. Taking a bit of time to compose thoughtfully will yield more pleasing, professional shots.

5. **Use Portrait Mode (and Know Its Limits):** iPhones 12 and above offer Portrait Mode, which uses software to blur the background, simulating the shallow depth of field of a professional camera lens. This can really make your subject “pop” against a creamy background if used well. To use it, open the Camera and select Portrait mode. Make sure you’re within the recommended distance – usually about 2 to 8 feet from your subject. If you’re too close or too far, the camera will prompt you (e.g., “move farther away”). Once it says “Natural Light – Ready” (or similar) in yellow, it means it’s achieved focus and depth effect. Take the shot. You’ll get a photo with a blurred background. You can even adjust the level of blur after taking the photo: in the Photos app, edit the portrait and use the *f*/ slider to change the aperture effect (lower *f*-number = more blur, higher = less blur). On newer iOS, you can also do this before taking the shot by tapping the “*f*” icon and using the slider. Generally, an *f*/1.4 or *f*/2.0 setting will give a strong blur (sometimes too much, making it look obviously fake), while *f*/4 to *f*/5.6 gives a more natural background blur. Feel free to adjust to your taste. Portrait mode is fantastic for single subjects and even for objects (newer iPhones can do portrait mode on pets and objects as well). However, be aware of its limitations: in very low light, Portrait mode might struggle or not activate (because it needs to detect depth and there may not be enough light/data). Also, fast-moving subjects can confuse it. If you’re finding it not working well (maybe the edges of the person’s hair or glasses are getting blurred incorrectly, or the subject is moving too much like kids or pets), you might switch back to regular Photo mode. Sometimes a crisp non-blurred background is better than a badly cut-out blur. Use your judgment – Portrait mode is a tool, but not always necessary for a great portrait. Even without it, you can get lovely portraits by simply using good lighting and composition.
6. **Capture Candid Moments:** Staged portraits are great, but often the most memorable photos of people are candid shots – natural expressions and interactions. Don’t hesitate to shoot a mix of posed and candid images. For small business owners, candid shots might show them “in action” – laughing with a customer, working on their craft, etc., which can feel more authentic. With your iPhone, you can take advantage of its quick shooting to grab moments in between poses. Use Burst mode for capturing a series of expressions or an action (like a child twirling, or a friend tossing their hair and laughing). Later, you can select the best frame. If photographing groups or children, bursts can help ensure at least one shot has everyone with eyes open and smiling. Another feature to consider is Live Photos – if enabled, it records 1.5 seconds before and after the shot; you can select a different frame if someone blinked at the exact moment. It’s like a safety net. Encourage your subject to move a bit – walking toward you, turning their head, etc., and shoot continuously; among those shots you may find a gem that feels spontaneous and lively.
7. **Use a Tripod for Self-Portraits or Group Shots:** If you as a photographer also need to be in the photo (for instance, a small business owner who wants a portrait of themselves with their storefront, or a group photo of a team), a tripod is extremely useful. Mount your

iPhone on a tripod or a stable surface at the right height. You can use the camera's timer function (3 or 10 seconds) to run into the frame after you press the shutter. Another handy trick is using an Apple Watch as a remote viewer/shutter if you have one – it can preview the camera and take the photo. Or use a cheap Bluetooth remote (they're basic accessories that pair with your phone). This way, you can ensure the composition is good and then capture the shot without someone else behind the camera. When doing this, take multiple shots (you can set the timer to take 10 burst shots on the iPhone when using the timer) to have options. A tripod also keeps the camera steady so the image will be sharp. Even for one-on-one portraits, using a mini tripod or phone stand can free you up to interact more with the subject (especially if you set up the shot and use a remote shutter). It's not always necessary, but it's a useful technique to have in your toolkit for certain situations.

8. **Direct and Engage Your Subject:** Lastly, remember the human element – engaging with your subject will yield better expressions and comfort. Talk to the person, make them laugh, guide them with simple instructions (“chin up a bit,” “look over my shoulder,” “think of something that makes you happy”). For non-models, feeling at ease is important; candid prompts can help, like “smile at the camera as if you just met an old friend” or asking them to tell a story while you snap a few shots. As a photographer, even if you're a beginner, taking this initiative will result in more natural and appealing portraits. Small business owners photographing their staff or clients, for example, should encourage a fun, relaxed atmosphere so the photos don't look stiff. The beauty of iPhone photography is it's less intimidating than a big camera, so use that to your advantage to keep things light and fluid.

By implementing these tips – finding great light, composing thoughtfully, using Portrait mode appropriately, and connecting with your subject – you'll be able to create outdoor portraits with your iPhone that look truly professional. Practice with friends or family in different outdoor settings: a park, an urban street, a backyard. Review your shots and note what worked (e.g., “the soft light under the tree made their skin look great” or “the off-center composition looked more interesting”). Over time, you'll develop an eye for flattering poses and lighting conditions.

