



# Portraits

Mrs. Bible Digital Photography



# Portraits

***A photographic portrait is a picture of someone who knows he is being photographed, and what he does with this knowledge is as much a part of the photograph as what he's wearing or how he looks.***

*- Richard Avedon*

**Portrait photography** is a style of photography that portrays human subjects. Portrait photography has been around since the dawn of photography, when Louis Daguerre invented the daguerreotype in 1839—the same year that Robert Cornelius aimed the camera at himself and took what is widely believed to be the first self portrait photograph (or “selfie” in modern parlance) ever, laying the groundwork for portrait photography to emerge as its own art form.







Edouard Manet, ca. 1870

## Early Portrait Photography

*Shortly after photography was invented, people became popular subjects for photographs. For most people, photography would replace painting as the primary medium of portraits. As photography became commonplace, first as daguerreotypes and later as tintypes, nearly everyone could afford a portrait.*

*Gaspard-Félix Tournachon (1820-1910) was the first great portrait photographer. Under the pseudonym “Nadar,” he took his first photographs in 1853 and pioneered the use of artificial lighting in photography, working in the catacombs of Paris. With soft lighting and dark backgrounds, he produced formal portraits of the artists, writers, and actors of the time. By creating a good rapport or comfortable working relationship with his clients, Nadar produced what he called a “speaking likeness,” portraits that revealed his subjects’ personalities.*



# Early Portrait Photography

August Sander (Germany, 1876-1946) created some of the first environmental portraits, showing the settings of his subjects' lives and work. From 1892 - 1954, sander produced a great photographic documentary of the German people, photographing them from every walk of life in an effort to create one huge portrait of his entire nation.

James Van Der Zee documented the Harlem Renaissance of the 1920s and 1930s with his portraits of middle-class African-American families and celebrities including singer Mamie Smith, activist/publisher Marcus Garvey, and dancer Bill "Bojangles" Robinson. He also documented each of his photos with his signature and a date, which is now extremely valuable historically. Most of his portraits created in his studio are what we may consider standard commercial photography, but they give us a glimpse into life in Harlem at that time and the people that lived there.

*Master Mason, 1926  
August Sander*



*James Van Der Zee*

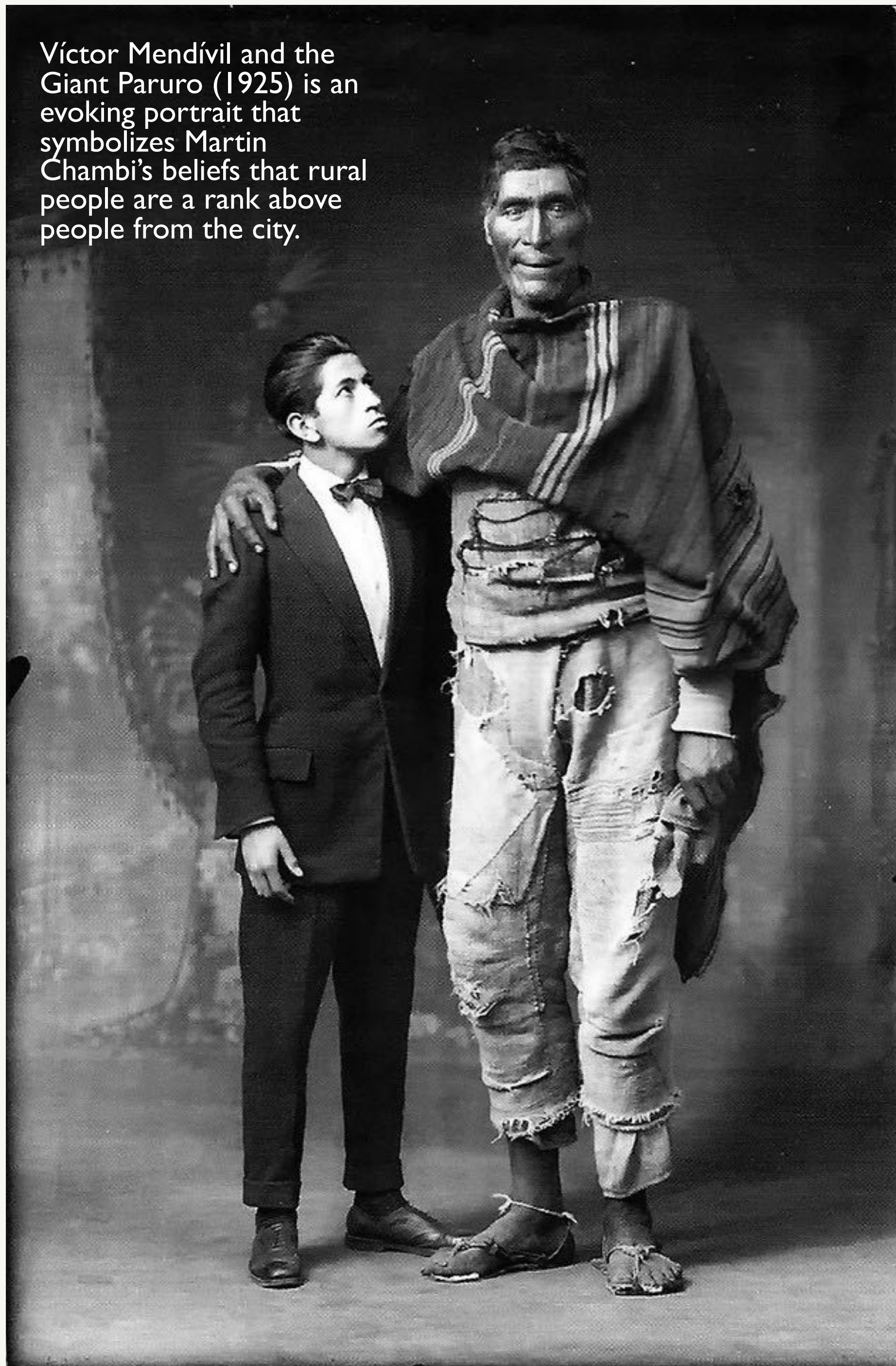




Portrait of a young  
woman, Ethiopia  
(1885-1888)



Víctor Mendívil and the  
Giant Paruro (1925) is an  
evoking portrait that  
symbolizes Martin  
Chambi's beliefs that rural  
people are a rank above  
people from the city.



Ansel Adams 1965.  
©Arnold Newman







Wild Priest – Stranger

# Creating Portrait Photos

**Value** is an important design element to consider when creating a portrait. It refers to *the range of light and dark areas in a photograph*. The lightest and darkest areas of an image attract our attention and help to move our eyes through an image.

Keep in mind the location of the light source in an image so you can take advantage of the light values, the highlights and the shadows of your subject. *Textures and shapes become more or less visible as the values change*. Since our eyes perceive three-dimensional forms by seeing highlights and shadows, subtle changes in value can provide a sense of depth in an image, creating the illusion that the subject comes forward or recedes into the background.

Values can also bring emotional content to a photo. Lots of shadowed areas suggest a darker, more melancholy mood while brightly lit scenes convey an upbeat positive feeling.



# Balance and the Rule of Thirds

Balance is an important consideration in portrait photography. **Balance** is the appearance of equal visual weight within a composition. With portraits, you can choose **symmetrical balance** with the subject located in the center of the image.

**Asymmetrical balance** places the subject on one side of the frame, looking toward the center. Radial balance, as in a group portrait, positions the subjects around a central point in the composition.

The **Rule of Thirds**, you divide your picture space into equal thirds, both horizontally and vertically, which results in a grid. Objects that appear at the intersections of the vertical and horizontal lines look most pleasing to the eye. Can help maintain the balance in an image while creating a dynamic aspect.



Symmetrical



Asymmetrical









### **Rule of Thirds**

*you divide your picture space into equal thirds, both horizontally and vertically, which results in a grid. Objects that appear at the intersections of the vertical and horizontal lines look most pleasing to the eye. Try placing your subject's eye on one of the intersections to create an engaging composition.*





# Working with People

A **portrait** is usually a *collaboration between the subject and the photographer*, who has to gain the subject's trust and cooperation. They must work together to create an image that says what both people want it to say about the person in the photograph.

A successful portrait photographer learns to become comfortable in front of people and interact with them. Talk to your subjects and make them feel at ease. A good portrait depends on building a relationship with your subject, even if it's only temporary.







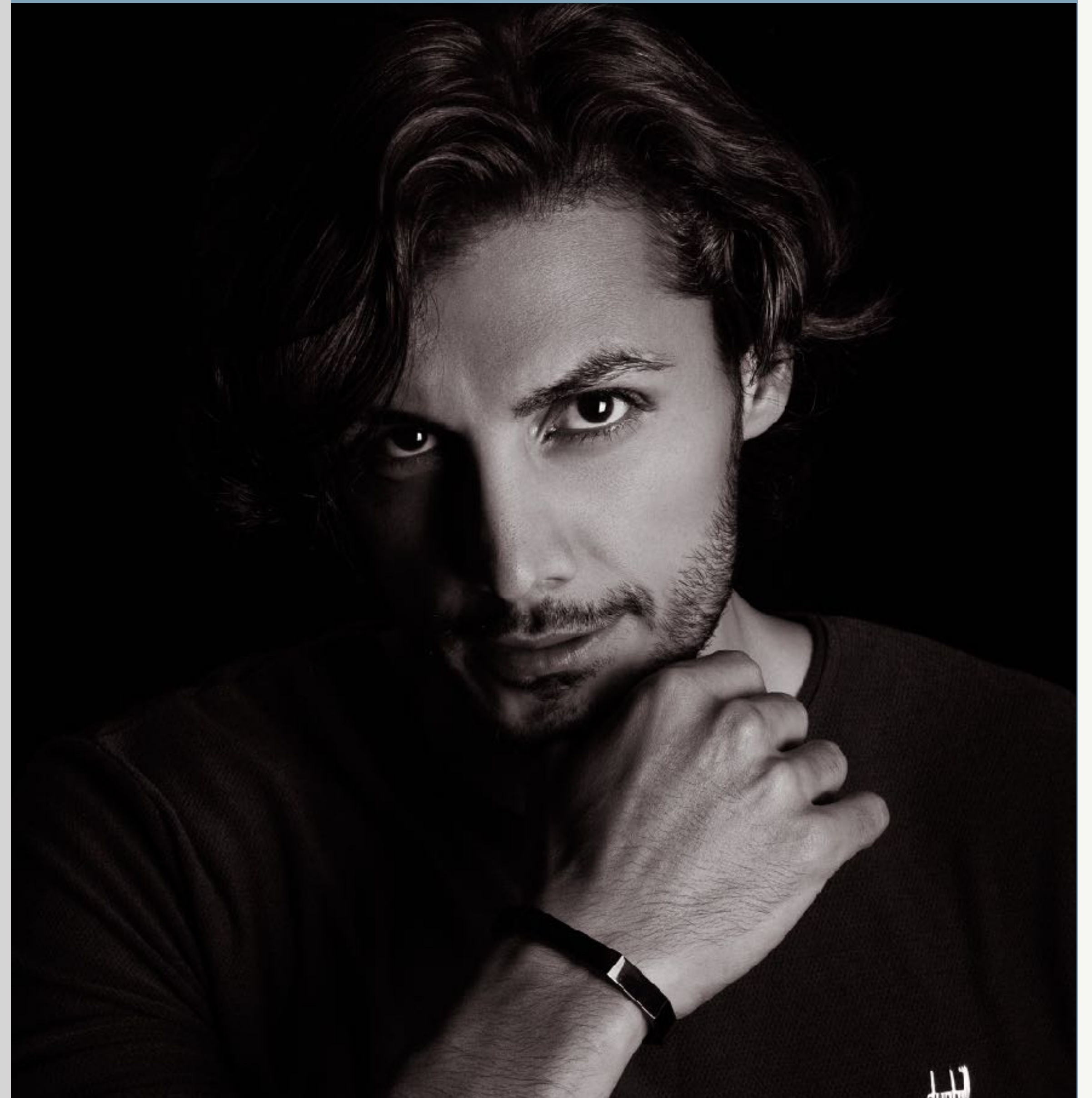


# The Formal Portrait

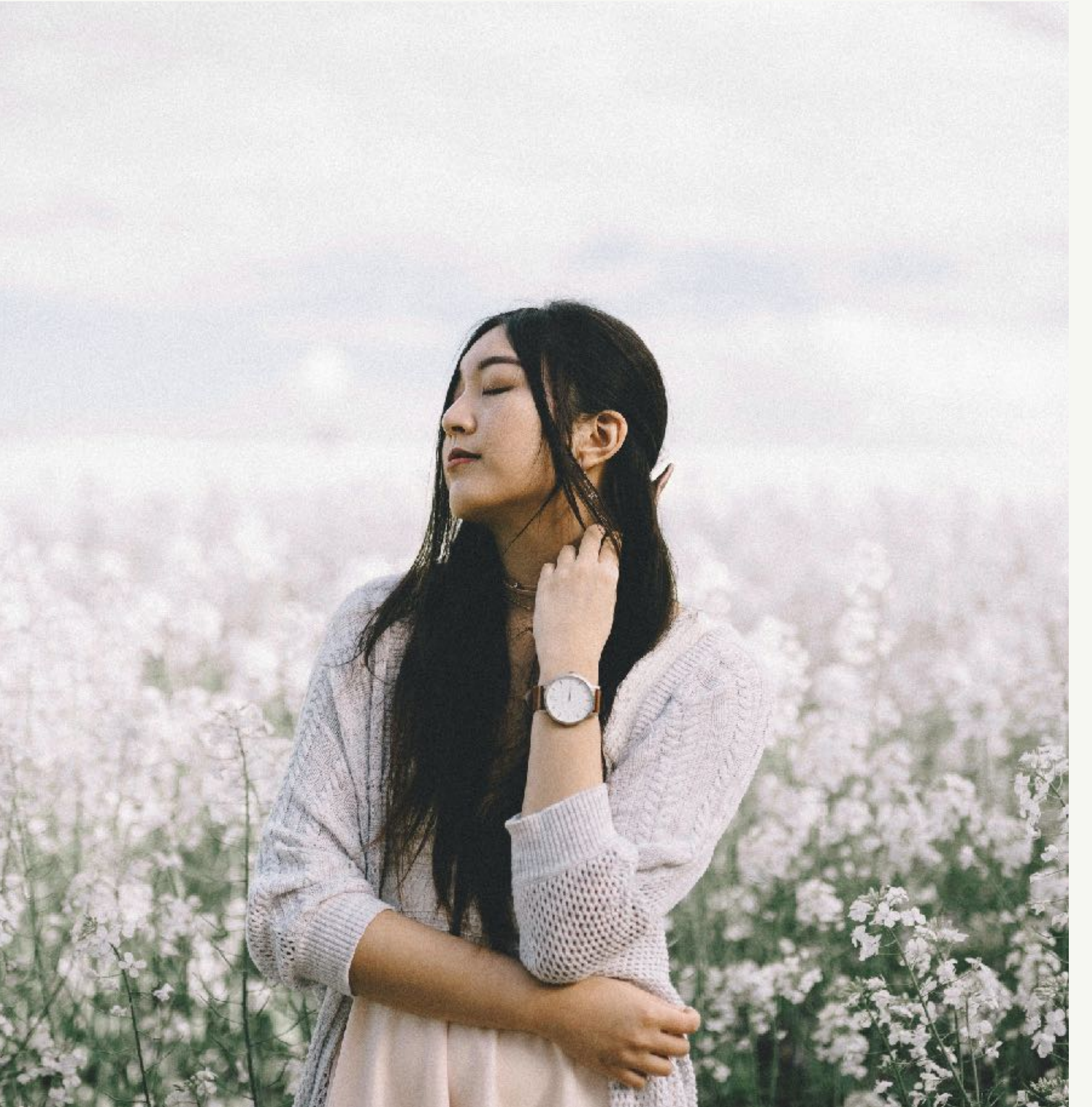
The **Formal** portrait is the simplest portrait style and should emphasize the person and nothing else. To do this, place the person in front of a neutral background.

Indoors, this would be a background cloth, seamless paper, or a plain wall. Outdoors, this could be a hedge or leafed out tree, the sky, a lake, or the ocean. Just be careful not to have the sun in the picture behind the person, because this will throw off the camera's meter and turn the person to a dark silhouette.

Use a **reflector** (A light colored or reflective coated surface that bounces light from a source to a subject) to even out and add light on your subject.









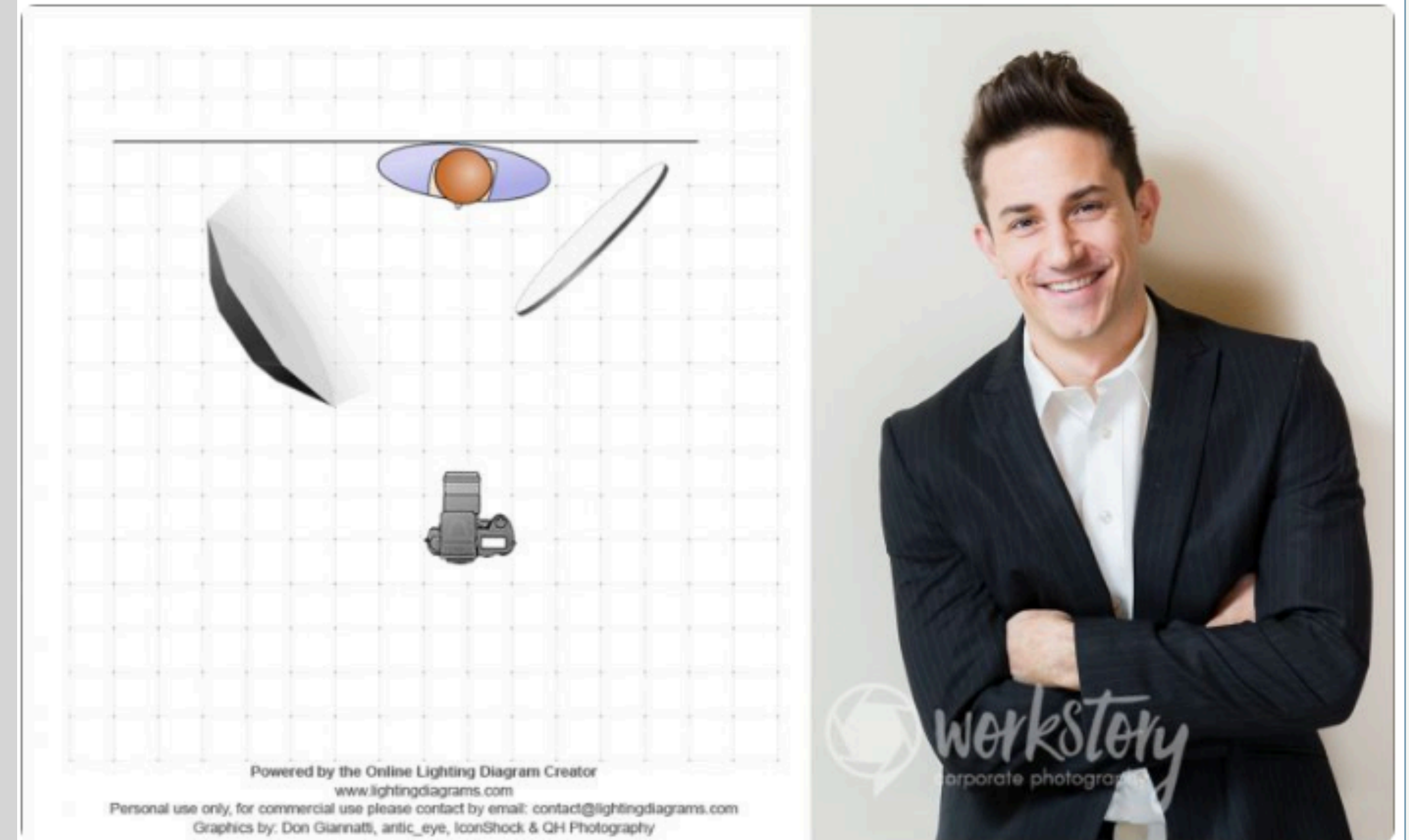
# Shoot a Formal Portrait

You should make a list of needed items and set up your shoot prior to your subject's arrival. You want to be well prepared and relaxed so your subject will be relaxed as well. You may want to have someone assist you, they can adjust lights, or hold the reflector so you can concentrate on positioning and posing your subject.

Place your subject in front of a neutral background: a plain wall, a leafed out shrub, a fence, etc.

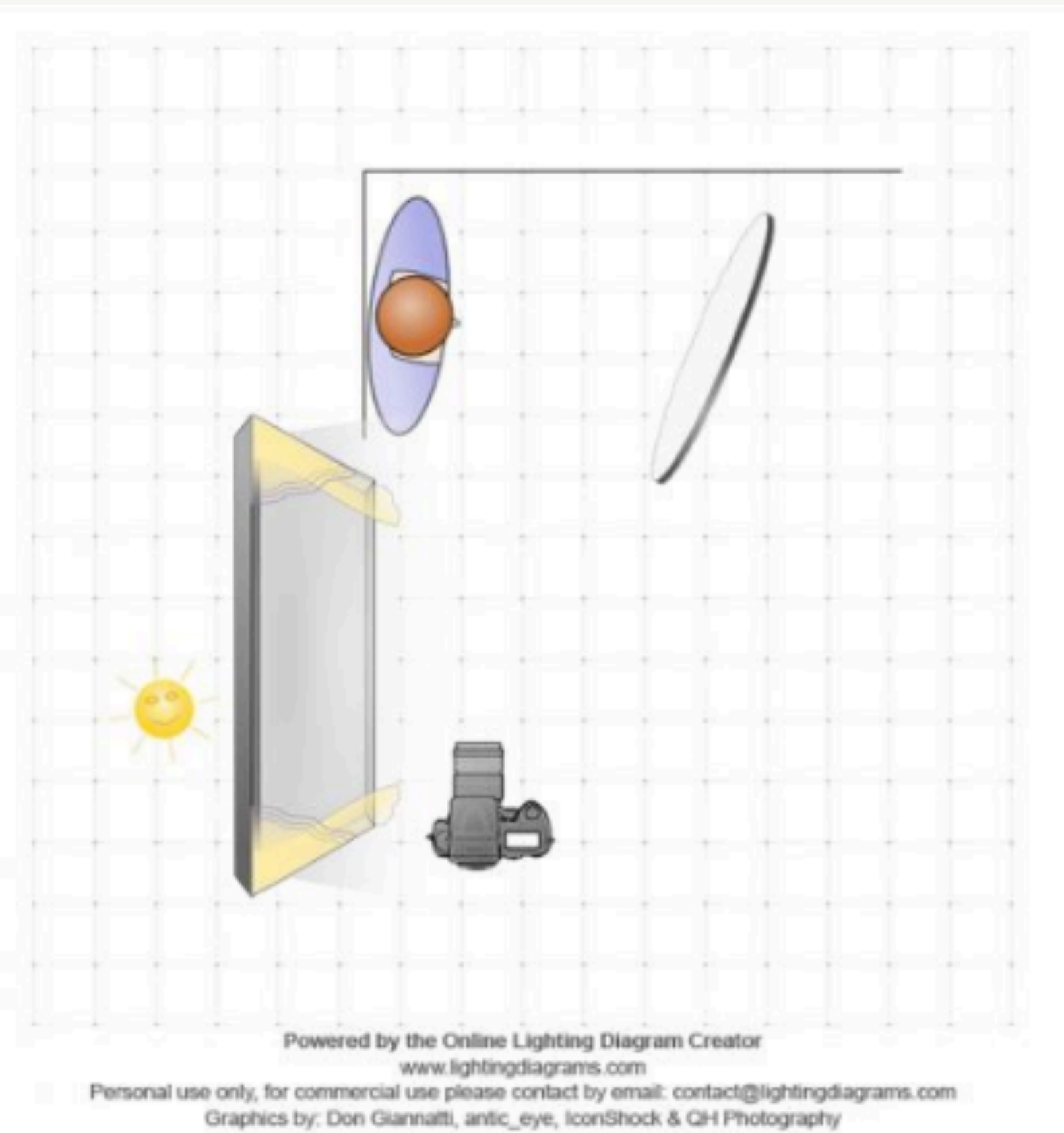
Place a light at about 45° to the right side of the subject. Have an assistant hold the reflector on the subject's left side, about 3-4 feet from the subject, to bounce light into the shadows on your subject's face.

Set the camera directly in front of your subject, 6-10 feet away depending on the lens you are using. The more telephoto the lens is, the further away you'll have to be (50mm - 300mm). Talk to your subject, guide them on how to pose, and take the photos.



No Studio? No Problem:  
5 Simple Lighting Setups for Portraits On-location





Photograph near a large window, against a plain wall using a reflector (large white pasteboard or paper).

Photograph with two lights, against a plain wall.

## No Studio? No Problem: 5 Simple Lighting Setups for Portraits On-location



# Shoot an Outdoor Formal Portrait

The most popular method of focusing all the attention on the subject is to throw the background out of focus, especially if you can not find a plain or neutral background. This is achieved by using a large aperture, such as  $f/2.8-4$ . If your camera has a portrait mode (the camera icon is usually a picture of a head), this is what your camera is doing when this is selected. Alternatively, set the camera to aperture priority and choose a wide aperture.

The direction from which the light is coming and whether your subject is against a dark or light background is also important. As a general rule, if the subject is well lit and bright, it works well to contrast this with a dark background. Alternatively, if the subject is in shadow, a lighter background will place more emphasis on them. In any case, a soft, or even a non-directional light, will be more flattering to a subject than a harsh direct light. Shooting with the sun behind you, where it strikes your subject face on, will cause a lot of squinting. When the sun is behind your subject, lens flare is a risk as well as there being a harsh contrast between the bright sky and your shadowed subject. If you are working in these conditions, try to keep the sun at approximately a  $45^\circ$  angle to the face of the subject.

You can use a reflector to bounce light onto the shadowed areas of your subject.



**HOW TO SHOOT OUTDOOR PORTRAITS**





Outdoor in open  
shade



Indoor by a  
window no  
reflector

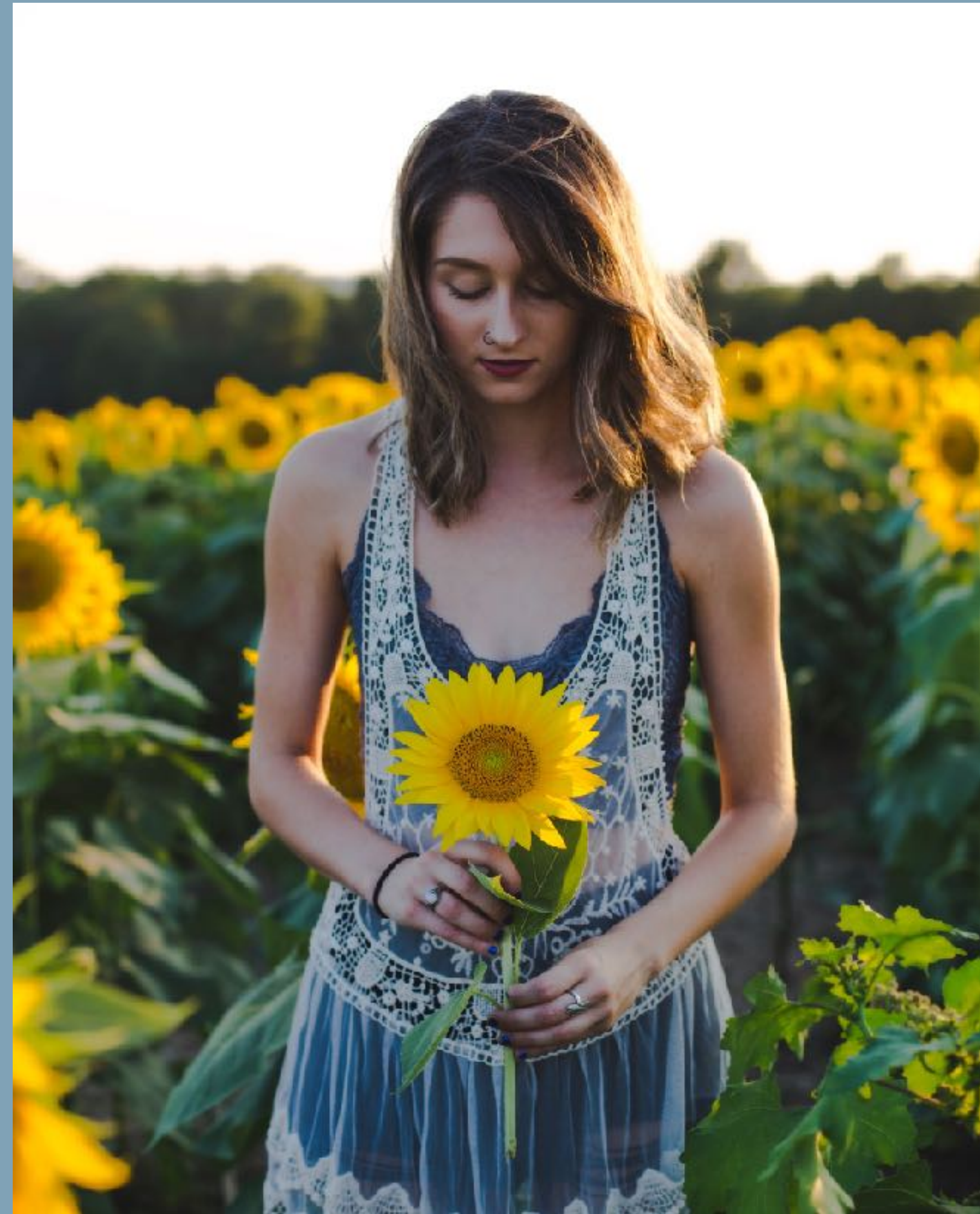


Outdoor



# Key Terms

- **Portrait photography** is a style of photography that portrays human subjects.
- **Value** the range of light and dark areas in a photograph.
- **Balance** is the appearance of equal visual weight within a composition.
  - **Symmetrical Balance** is best described as a mirror-image composition, what is found on one side of the image is found on the other.
  - **Asymmetrical Balance** still looks balanced, but objects are not centered in the frame.
- **Rule of Thirds**, you divide your picture space into equal thirds, both horizontally and vertically, which results in a grid. Objects that appear at the intersections of the vertical and horizontal lines look most pleasing to the eye.
- **Formal portrait** is the simplest portrait style and should emphasize the person and nothing else.
- **Reflector** is a light colored or reflective coated surface that bounces light from a source to a subject.





## To Do:

- Take Google Quiz.
- **Assignment:** See worksheet

