

Portrait Outfit Suggestions

TL;DR (summary)

- Solid colors enhance the visual appeal of portraits more than complex patterns or graphics.
- Glasses should have their lenses removed to avoid glare and reflections in photographs.
- Choosing familiar and loved clothing can enhance comfort and confidence during the session.
- It is advisable to wear well-fitted clothes for a flattering silhouette.
- Long-sleeved garments are recommended to create an elegant look in portraits.
- Ripped clothing, such as jeans, should be avoided to maintain a polished appearance.
- Bringing a variety of outfits allows for flexibility and diversity in portrait styles.

1. Solid Colors are Better

I recommend solid colors for portrait sessions because they focus more on you, AKA the subject. Selfishly, solid clothing also makes it easier for me to edit stray hairs or wrinkles in the fabric.

When picking colors, be aware that darker-colored clothes will make you appear more slender on camera. If you want to POP out and draw attention, wear a vibrant color for one of your primary pieces: a jacket, shirt, or scarf.

2. Avoid Patterns, Logos, Graphics, and Illustrations

It's pretty straightforward here; they can be distracting. Also, cameras do weird things with tight patterns and produce a funky pixelation effect called moiré. Plus, you may hate that logo/company 20+ years after your session. Don't ruin a good picture with a bad symbol.

3. Simple is Better

A T-shirt with jeans, a dress, slacks, and a jacket; these are all clean and easy outfits. The more complex your outfit, the more you'll fidget with it during the session to ensure it looks exactly right. Please keep it simple so you can focus on having a good time during your portrait session!

4. Remove Lenses From Your Glasses

If you usually wear glasses, you should wear them for your portraits. The lenses of glasses make taking pictures tricky, though. Clear lenses occasionally reflect light, distracting and blocking your face.

Alternatively, transition lenses reflect light, but if it's bright outside, they'll effectively act as sunglasses. I'd recommend removing the lenses and wearing contacts simultaneously for the best images if you can.

5. Stick With What You Already Own And Love

Be comfortable, dress like you would every day, and you'll feel at ease. There's a significant emphasis on being comfortable and relaxed during a photo session; I'm telling you, it makes all the difference. There's no need to buy something just for the photoshoot. You've got everything you need in your closet.

6. Wear Clothes That Give You Confidence

Here's how to feel confident in front of the camera: pick an outfit that makes you feel unstoppable when you put it on! For instance, I always feel confident in my blue-checkered button-down shirt, so you can bet I wear it whenever I have a big meeting.

If you've got a pair of jeans, a shirt, or a dress that makes you feel like a rockstar, try to make it part of your ensemble. Dressing with confidence helps influence your mood during a portrait session. If you feel confident, it'll show up in your images.

7. Wear Reasonably Fitted Clothes

Loose, baggy clothing may be the comfiest thing ever, but I'd avoid it for your photos. Clothing that fits your figure is more comfortable to pose and looks more flattering.

8. Dress Comfortably

Dress for the weather

Don't torture yourself! Wear a jacket and maybe even a sweater if it's cold outside. If you're miserable and uncomfortable, your face will reflect that in the images. It's hard to smile happily when your socks are soaking wet. At a minimum, bring the appropriate clothing and wear it when you're not getting your picture taken. If it's super hot outside, try to shoot early in the morning or late afternoon/evening.

Match your surroundings

Unless you live for irony and juxtaposition, a tux and a ballgown do not fit well with a forest. If you're shooting in downtown Atlanta, dress it up a bit. And if it snows, don't be afraid to layer it up with a jacket, vest, or sweater!

Match your activity

This goes with the above tips — if we're trekking to the top of a mountain, you may want to leave the heels or all-white kicks at home. At the same time, if we're going to a farm or field, don't be afraid to pull out the jeans and cowboy boots!

9. Longer Sleeves Are Better

In my opinion, long sleeves seem to work better for photos. Too much skin can be distracting from your face. And even if you have thin or toned arms, long sleeves tend to make all arms look better.

10. Avoid Ripped Jeans or Clothing

Unless your style encompasses ripped jeans or you're doing a model shoot where holey clothing is the look, try to avoid clothing with rips, tears, or holes. Depending on your pose, these can look unflattering.

11. Mind Your Underwear

Something to keep in mind is the color and fit of your undergarments. Ladies, if you're wearing a white shirt, don't wear a hot pink bra underneath it. The safe option is to go with nude-toned garments.

Guys, make sure your boxers don't bunch up underneath your pants. It could look odd or suggestive. Double-check your outfits with your selected undergarments to make sure nothing is visible.

12. Mind The Neckline

When selecting a shirt or top, be aware of how it fits. Most of the time, you'll want to avoid that plunging neckline that shows off any cleavage. I'd also make sure not to wear a loose turtleneck or a shirt with a collar that's too loose or tight.

13. Bring Multiple, Diverse Outfits

It would be best if you always had multiple outfits ready for your session. Your photographer may notice something that makes one piece better than another or an outfit that fits a specific location better. Try to do variations in lengths, textures, and colors.

I also recommend bringing outfits that are a mix of casual, formal, and in-between. It's wise to have multiple outfits just in case you spill something or brush up against some dirt or paint. Back-ups are handy.

14. Minimize Jewelry

Jewelry can be a big distraction from you, the subject. I typically recommend not wearing jewelry, but if you do, try wearing small and minimalist pieces.

15. Take Stuff Out of Your Pockets

Guys are the worst offenders here. Take your phone out of your pocket and put it into a separate bag. Phones create weird bulges in pants pockets and are not flattering at all. Keep the focus on your face!

What to Wear for Women's Portraits

16. Layers are Great

Layers like jackets, scarves, vests, and sweaters are great additions to an outfit because they add texture and dimension. They're subtle pieces that can add touches of your personality and style to your portraits.

17. No Spaghetti Straps or Strapless Tops

Strapless or tube tops may look flattering in person, but they tend to make your shoulders look wide in photos. Keep this in mind, depending on how you feel about your shoulders.

Also, avoid wearing spaghetti strap tops because they make hiding bra straps impossible. Sleeveless works great but keeps some material up there.

18. Avoid Shorts

Same deal as sleeves. Something about exposed elbows and knees makes it tricky to pose them well. This rule isn't rigid, but it is something to consider.

19. Avoid Pure Black or White

These colors are excellent, but I suggest you add a little bit of texture to them.

20. Bring Hair Ties or Hair Clips in Case of Wind

There are few things more annoying on a photoshoot than the wind blowing hair all over the place and ruining all the hard work your makeup artist put in. Hair clips, bobby pins, and a hair tie (as a last resort) will make pictures in the wind more manageable and keep you looking put together.

21. If Wearing a Dress, Have Leggings Handy

This isn't necessary, but leggings can keep you comfortable in cold or windy weather while wearing a dress. As a bonus, they can add a fun flash of color too!

22. If Wearing Heels, Bring a Set of Comfy Shoes Too

If you plan on wearing heels for your images, I suggest changing into them when you get on location. After 45 minutes of standing on your feet, you'll be grateful for a pair of sneakers, especially if you're walking between locations. Change back into your comfy shoes until it's time to shoot again.

What to Wear for Men's Portraits

23. Plain, Heavy Cotton Shirt or Polo Works Great

I'm a big fan of guys wearing business casual for their portrait sessions. If you're looking for a more relaxed look, a plain shirt or a polo will do great. Make sure your shirts are made of a heavier material to avoid wrinkling and seeing any skin underneath.

24. Jeans or Casual Trousers Look Best

Jeans are pretty universal and go with almost anything. They're an excellent base for most outfits and look super casual or semi-formal. A casual pair of trousers like beige jeans or even a pair of slacks is perfect if you want to dress up a bit.

25. Avoid White Button-Down Shirts

White button-down shirts are a staple for most business settings, but they're boring for photoshoots. They also look super uptight. Button-down shirts are great to wear for portrait sessions, but go with something not white!

What to Wear for Family Portraits & Groups

26. Match Formality of Partners

What should you wear for family photos to make sure those portraits will look spotless and cohesive? Well, for couples, families, and groups, try to dress up as much as the others. If one of you is in a suit, it'll look weird if the other is in jeans and a T-shirt. I prefer a semi-formal or business-casual style, at a minimum, for group portraits.

27. Use a Similar Color Palette

There isn't a rule of thumb about the best colors to wear for family portraits, as every color could work well. However, try to have everyone in the group wear similar color tones, such as all neutrals or all-natural tones. That will make everyone in the group look consistent and like they belong together.

If one person wears something different, like a highlighter orange shirt, when everyone else is wearing muted blues, all the attention will go to that individual. Try to be cohesive. Oh, and leave the matching white shirts and jeans at home, please.

What to Wear for Brand Portraits

28. Dress For Your Clients

Thinking about what to wear for your branding photoshoot seems like a hassle, but it's actually pretty easy. If you wear suits to your client consultations, I would not recommend wearing a T-shirt for your brand session. It creates a mental disconnect with your audience, and, as we all know, clients work with people they trust.

There are moments when you're not client-facing in your job, and you may want to look relaxed and casual, but try to keep it within reason. Make sure that the pictures people see on your social channels reflect who they see in person. What you wear on Instagram should be what you wear for your portraits.

29. Colors Should Pair With Your Brand

That electric pink shirt should probably stay in the closet if your brand's colors are primarily muted blues and soft off-whites. You can dress strategically to pop out from the background but try to wear a color palette that sticks to your brand.

BONUS – How to Prepare Clothing for Your Session

30. Test Your Outfits Before The Session

There's no point wearing something if you can't walk in it. Test the clothes you want to wear for your portraits before the session. Stand, sit, kneel, and walk. Make sure you can do all of that. And check that nothing pops out (like bra straps) or that you can see any undergarments.

31. Launder and Iron Your Clothes

Nothing feels better than a clean and comfy shirt. Get rid of any wrinkles or minor stains and show up in clothes that look 100% mint.

32. Bring Clothes on Hangars

Keeping your clothes on hangers will minimize wrinkles and help you sort through the pieces when looking for the next outfit during your session. Plus, it keeps clothes off the ground.

33. Don't Wear Session Clothes While Traveling

If you can help it, wear an outfit in the car that you won't be wearing for your portraits. It'll cut down on wrinkles, crumbs, and spills from that last-minute Starbucks run.

34. Game Plan Your Clothing Changes

If you plan to wear multiple outfits for your portraits, work with your photographer to figure out where and when you'll change your outfits. Especially if you're shooting on location, bathrooms are not easy to come by.

It really helps to know which coffee shops you'll stop at for a tea break and to use their bathroom to swap clothes. You'll keep your clean clothes off the ground, get a refresh, and remove any chance of flashing random passersby.

I bring a portable changing tent to eliminate the search for a private changing area, but I am also happy to stop for a coffee anyway.

Wow! That was a lot of information.

I know there is a lot to think about so if you have any questions please reach out to me via email at trevor@portraitsanywhere.com or text/call me at 412-977-7866