



TAKING ANIMAL PHOTOS FOR HORSE AND PET PORTRAITS

If it is not possible for me to take the photos of your animal, the following guide should give you all the information you need to take photographs that are suitable for me to work from.

EQUIPMENT

A 35mm or digital S.L.R. camera is essential to get the clarity of photograph that I need. Very few compact cameras are up to the task, especially for close-up shots.

Set your digital camera to the highest resolution setting.

If using film, 400 ISO/ASA is best, as it will allow more of the dog to be in focus.

When getting the film processed, go for the larger set of prints (5" X 7"), as these are easier to work from.

PREPARATION

The Photographs must be taken outside in natural light, without a flash. Choose a bright day, but try not to take pictures in full sunlight as the animal might squint. We want the eyes to be open and bright. Full sunshine also gives too much contrast between the light and dark tones. This is especially true for black animals.

GETTING INTO POSITION - DOGS

Firstly ensure your dog is looking it's best. Washed and Brushed? For long haired dogs, can you see their eyes?

To get your dog's head into the right position, the following method works really well:

Tie your dog to a dog stake or suitable post.

Get your dog to face the direction that allows the brightest light to fall on the side of the head you are photographing, and then get your dog to sit.

Kneel down so the camera is just above the level of its eyes. An angle somewhere between a front and side view works well, but a front on shot allows the dog to be looking out of the portrait at you.

If it's not a front-on shot you want, get your dog looking forward with its head level and ears up, by asking someone to stand about twenty feet away, and attract its attention with a dog treat, squeaky ball, calling, or holding a favourite toy. Playing "peep-ho" around a corner often works like a charm.



GETTING INTO POSITION - HORSES

Firstly, decide how you wish your horse to appear in the portrait. Bridle on or off? Mane plaited? Ensure your horse is looking it's best; mane and forelock brushed? Whiskers clipped? Make sure the straps of the bridle are in their keepers!

To get your horse's head into the right position, three people are needed, but the following method generally works well:

Get your horse to face the direction that allows the brightest light to fall on the side of the head you are photographing.

Generally, portraits have the horse facing to the right, with the mane falling on the side of the viewer but the choice is up to you.

If you wish to include the bridle, have someone sitting on the horse with the reins even and slightly loose which allows an attractive curve to the reign line.

For portraits without a bridle, stand on the opposite side from the photographer.

Loop a rope around your horse's shoulders, low down the neck trying not to mess up too much of the mane.

For head portraits, an angle somewhere between a front and side view seems to look best. Try to be at a level at, or just below their eye, you may need to stand on a box for this.

To get your horse looking straight ahead with its head level and ears forward, ask the third person to stand about thirty feet in front, and attract the horse's attention by calling, whistling, or rattling a food bowl etc. Sometimes walking away from, or straight towards the horse works really well.

GETTING INTO POSITION - CATS

Firstly ensure your Cat is looking it's best.

Cats are by nature the hardest animals to photograph, as they do not generally sit to command.

If you just want a head shot then getting someone to hold the cat in their arms is fine. Hold your cat upright, facing the direction that allows the brightest light to fall on their face. An angle somewhere between a front and side view works well, but a front on shot allows the cat to be looking out of the portrait at you.

If it's a whole body picture you prefer it will take a great deal of patience to be in the right place at the right time. You could get someone to attract their attention by calling, or holding a favourite toy. Playing "peep-ho" around a corner often works like a charm.



TAKING THE PICTURES

The closer you are to the animal the more the camera will distort their features, so try to be at least 6 feet away. (Cats can be a lot closer, perhaps three feet.) You will probably need a zoom lens to fill the frame with the animal's head.

Ensure your animal is as large as possible in the viewfinder, so I can see as much detail as possible.

Take as many pictures as you can, (I usually take around 60) and send them all to me as I usually work from more than one photo.

If the animal is black, it is best that the camera is set so that the photos are slightly over exposed; this is so that I can see into the shadows, and see which way the fur is growing. Try to take the photos on a bright but overcast day, as this gives a very even lighting.

If you want a drawing of the head, please take some close-up shots of the nose, eyes and the mouth if it is open, (and the bridle and bit for a horse) from the same angle as your other shots.

If you want a drawing of the whole animal, please take some close-up photos of the head as well.

Make sure you get the exact pose you want, ears forward? Mouth shut? Right angle? etc. as it is difficult for me to change much without seeing the animal myself, and I cannot draw what I cannot see.

Lastly it is very important that the photos are in sharp focus, you might need to take some photos focused on the nose and some focused on the ear, this means that between the two photo's I can see the whole animal in focus.

Good Luck!

Aron Gadd