

# Shutterbug

photography training

Lifestyle Family Photography: Class 3

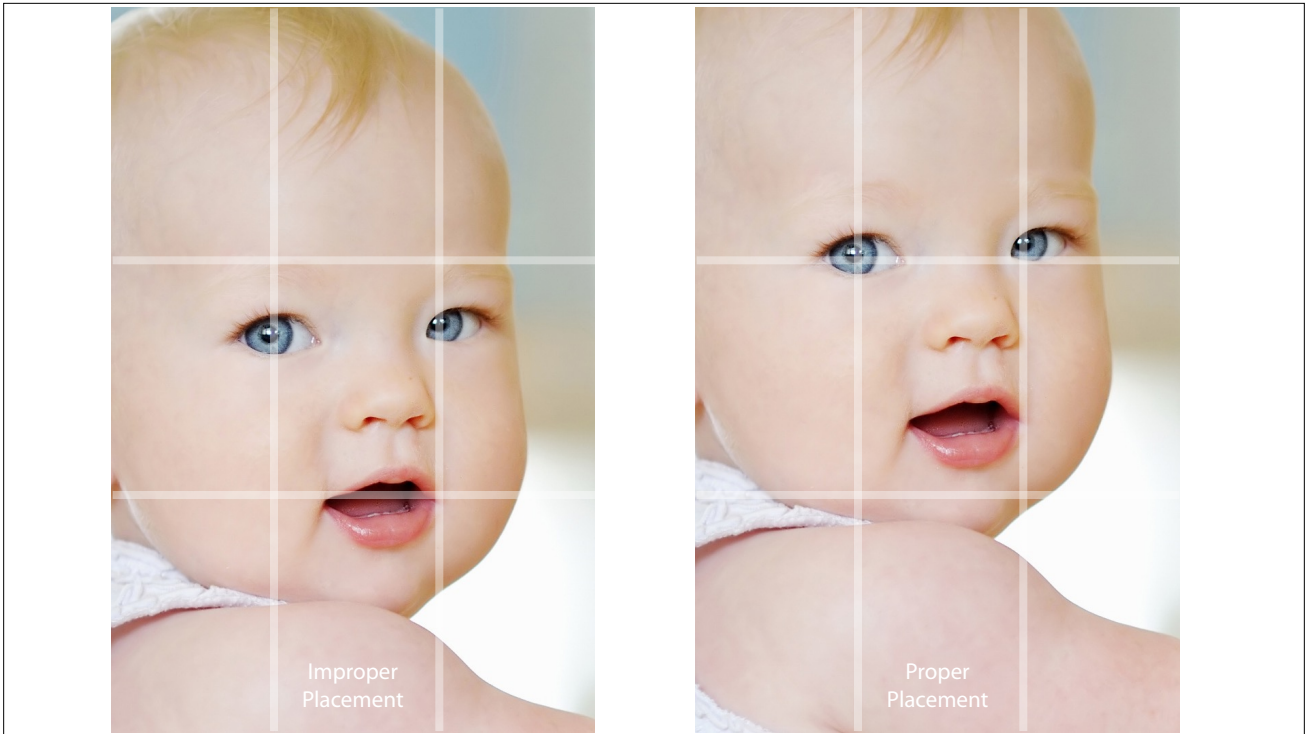
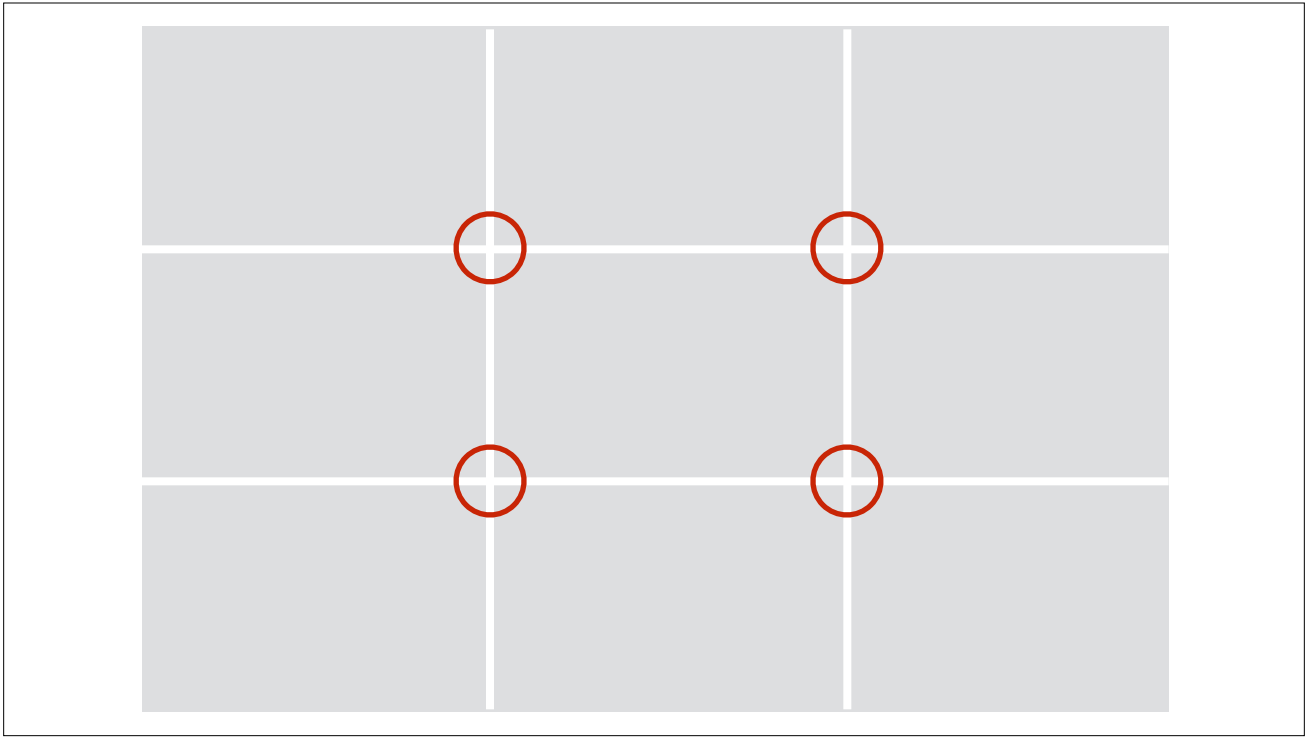
## Offset Your Subject in the Frame

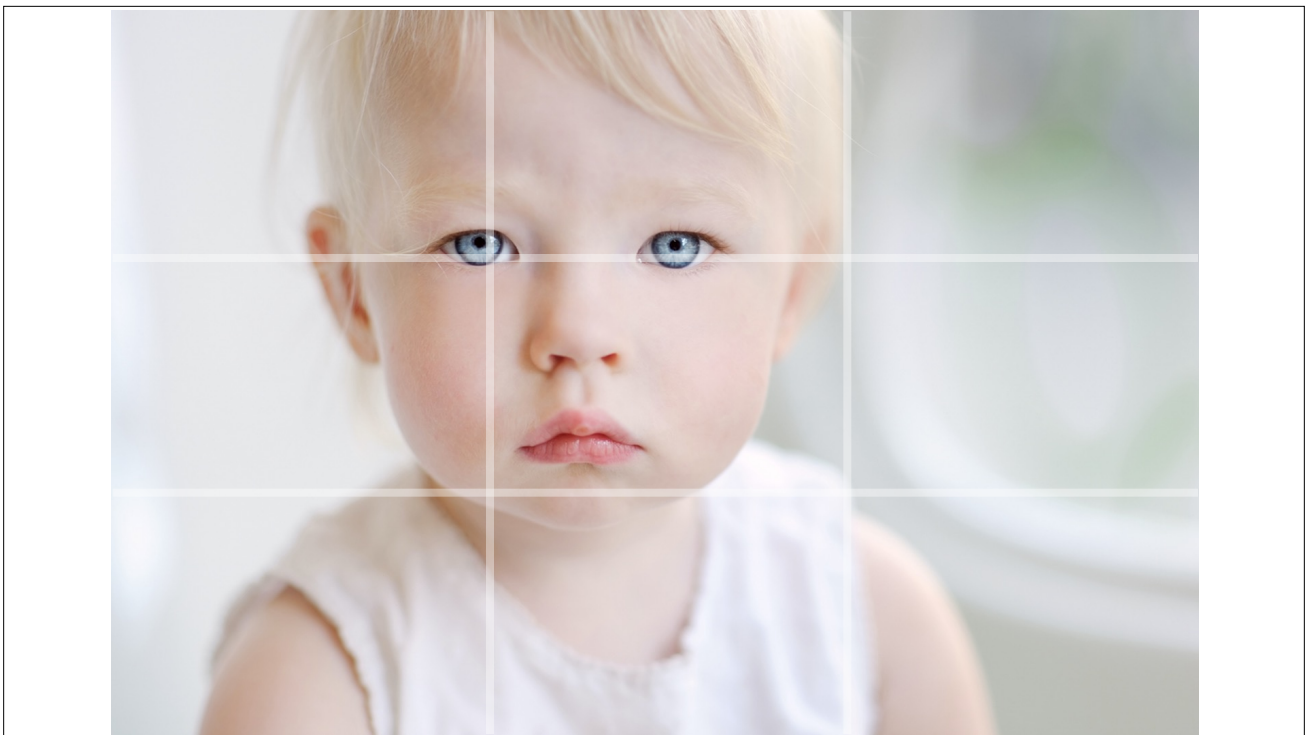
The rule of thirds is a *tried* and *true*, simple way of positioning your subject(s) in a frame so they create a *balanced composition*.

When it comes to portraits, placing your *subject in the center* of the frame usually results in a *boring image*.

Conversely, placing your *subject off-center* in the frame encourages the viewer to *look around* the image more, creating a much more *interesting photograph*.

To retain as much of the image as possible, it's always best to *compose your photograph in-camera* whenever possible. This helps to avoid *excessive cropping* in post, which will *reduce the quality* of your photos and *limit the final output size* should you decide to print them.





## Keep It Simple

When it comes to creating *impactful* images, *less is more*. Not only will everything be easier to manage and less stressful, but the resulting images will be more *visually appealing*.

Ideally, *everyone* taking part in the photo shoot should have a *good time*. While there's *no guarantee* that kids will *behave*, nothing will cause a shoot to go south more than *over complicating things*.

Don't be afraid of realizing your vision, just remember to *keep everything*, from the location to the clothing to the props, *simple*.

In addition to the possible frustration, the *excess 'stuff'* can actually *detract from your subject*. Removing any *visual clutter* will help make sure that your subject stays the subject.



ISO 400  
1/125 sec  
f/2.8 @ 135mm

## Focus on the Eyes

Good portraits create a *connection between the subject and the viewer*. They should provoke *thought* and *intrigue*, making you wonder what is going on inside the *subject's mind*. If there is one part of the face that can communicate this the most, it's the *eyes*.

It is well known that lenses in the *80-85mm* focal range offer a more *flattering perspective* for portraits. These lenses provide a *sense of depth* to the face and allow you to use their naturally *shallow depth of field* to draw attention to the eyes.

Beautiful, *sharply focused eyes grab your attention* and hold it there. This can make or break a portrait, and there is a simple technique to getting *tack-sharp eyes*. Remember *selective focus points*?

## Focus on the Eyes

As already discussed, *portraits are less impactful* when the *eyes are soft*, and you need to be able to *control* where the camera focuses to ensure your subject's eyes are in *sharp focus*.

To make certain you get the subject's *eyes tack-sharp*, you simply need to use a *single selective AF point*. Using only one focus point *enables you to decide* what the *camera focuses on* instead of letting the camera do it.

If your *subject is relatively still*, you can *manually position the focus point* within the frame.

Or, if your *subject is moving around* and it's hard to determine where they will line up within the frame, you can *keep the center focus point active* and use the *'focus and recompose'* technique to get the shot.



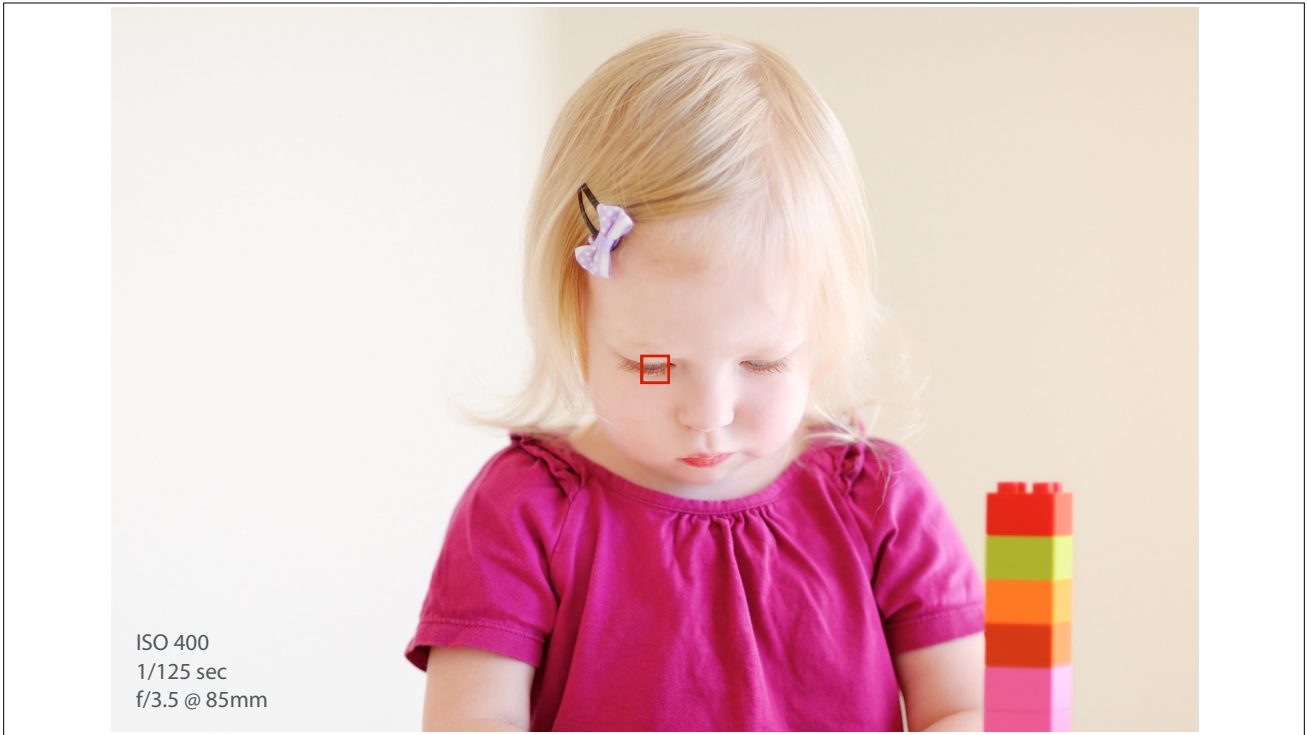
## Focus and Recompose

Focus and recompose is a technique that is useful when *shooting in low-light conditions* where your camera doesn't want to focus and/or you want to *quickly compose for a moving subject*.

An easy way to use this technique involves your camera's *Single Servo* or *AF-S* mode. It *will not work* with a *continuous focus mode*.

When your camera is set to *Single Servo* mode, it will *lock* and *hold focus* once when you *depress the shutter button halfway*.

Now, with the *center focus point active*, point the camera at your subject and *lock focus* by half-pressing the shutter button. Once the camera has locked focus, *recompose to take the picture*. This works great when used in combination with *AE-L*.



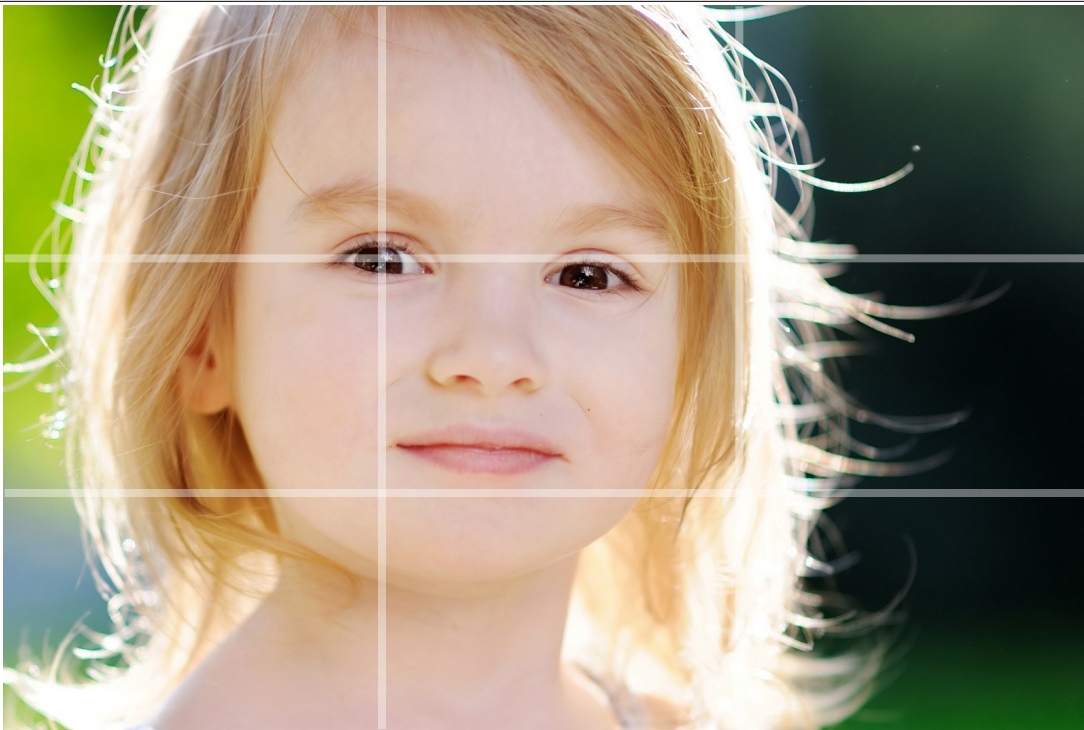
## Fill the Frame

A common *mistake* made when shooting portraits is to leave *too much space above the subject's head*. Portraits tend to look better when the subject *fills the frame*.

It's perfectly *acceptable* to *not include the top of your subject's head* in the shot (but, *keep the hairline*.) It isn't necessary because we connect to people's faces, not the tops of their heads.

If you crop at the *hair line*, there is no *visual end to their forehead*, which will make it look *huge*, or worse, make them look *bald*.

Also, cropping out the top of the head (either in camera or in post) brings the *eyes higher in the frame* and helps you achieve *better compositional placement* of the face in the frame.





# Perspective

Another common *mistake* you can make is to photograph your subject from the *same perspective*, which is usually your *eye level* while standing. Varying your perspective *breaks the pattern* and adds another *dimension* to your photos.

**Eye level:** shooting at the *subject's eye level* helps to create a *stronger connection* between the subject and the viewer. The *smaller your subject*, the *lower to the ground* you need to get. If you are capturing *babies*, be prepared to *belly crawl* to get the shot.

**High level:** shooting from *high above your subject* is another way to add *variation* and capture some unique photos, especially of kids. Shots from high above *emphasize a child's small size* and reinforce their *vulnerable nature*.





## Get Really Close

Getting *super close* to your subject is another variation on *changing your perspective*. For obvious reasons, this is considered to be a form of *macro photography*.

Your current camera and lens may have a *'macro' setting* that allows you to get a *little closer* to your subject, but unfortunately that won't cut it. You will get better results using a *dedicated macro lens*.

Dedicated macro lenses allow you to get *ridiculously close* to your subject, and are ideal for capturing intimate photos of *newborn baby fingers and toes*.

A macro lens is *unforgiving* in terms of sharpness, especially when using a crazy *shallow depth of field*, so consider using a *tripod*.



ISO 100  
1/125 sec  
f/2.8 @ 100mm

## Shoot Down on Your Subject

While not as extreme of an angle as shooting from a high level, shooting *slightly down* on your subject is more *flattering* than doing so *straight on*, or even worse, *shooting up* at them.

As we've covered, the *eyes* should be the *prominent focal point*, however, when *shooting up* at your subject, *facial features* such as their *chin* and *nose* become the prominent feature.

You don't need to be *a lot higher* than your subject to get good results, *just a few degrees*. If your subject is *taller than you*, simply find something to stand on to *elevate your position*.

Kids aren't generally a problem unless they are *climbing* on something, which effectively puts them at a *higher vantage point* than you.



## Backgrounds

Don't just concentrate on your subject – look at what's ***happening in the background***, too. Is there something ***growing*** from the top of your subject's head? Is there a trash can ***photobombing*** the scene?

You can't usually ***exclude the background*** completely, but you can ***control it***.

You'll often find that ***changing your position*** is enough to replace a cluttered background with one that ***complements*** your subject. Or, you can use a ***wide aperture*** and a ***longer focal length*** to throw the ***background out of focus***.

It all depends on whether or not the ***background*** is ***part of the story*** you're trying to tell.



## The 1/125 Second Rule

Remember the *Reciprocal Rule* where your *shutter speed* should not be *slower* than the reciprocal of your *effective focal length*? Well, here's another 'rule' surrounding shutter speed when *capturing kiddies*.

Children are *fast* and often *on the move*, which means you will need a shutter speed *fast enough to capture them sharply*. The *slowest speed* recommended is *1/125 second*, otherwise, you'll have a bunch of blurry images to deal with.

Depending on your *lens* and *available light*, you may find it *difficult* to achieve a *shutter speed this fast*, even if your *aperture* is at its *widest setting*. If so, the only alternative is to *increase your ISO*.

**TIP:** just increase the ISO *enough to reach 1/125 sec*.

# Cropping

What you have *showing* in an image is *just as important* as what's *not showing*. Certain elements are *visually acceptable* to be left out of the frame, while others are not.

If you are capturing your subject from *head to toe*, then you only need to concern yourself with *composition*. However, when *only including portions* of your subject, *cropping* becomes important.

Always try to *avoid cropping* your subject at an *area of the body that flexes*, such as an *elbow* or *knee*. When you do this, it creates the appearance of a possible *lost appendage*.

Whether you are cropping in-camera or in post, be sure to *zoom in or out* on your subject as needed to *avoid cutting a person off at a joint*.

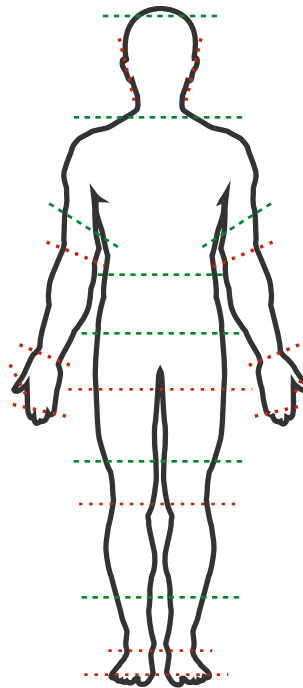
## Cropping Okay

Areas with a **green dashed line** indicate where it is acceptable to crop.



## Cropping Not Okay

Areas with a **red dotted line** indicate where it is not acceptable to crop.





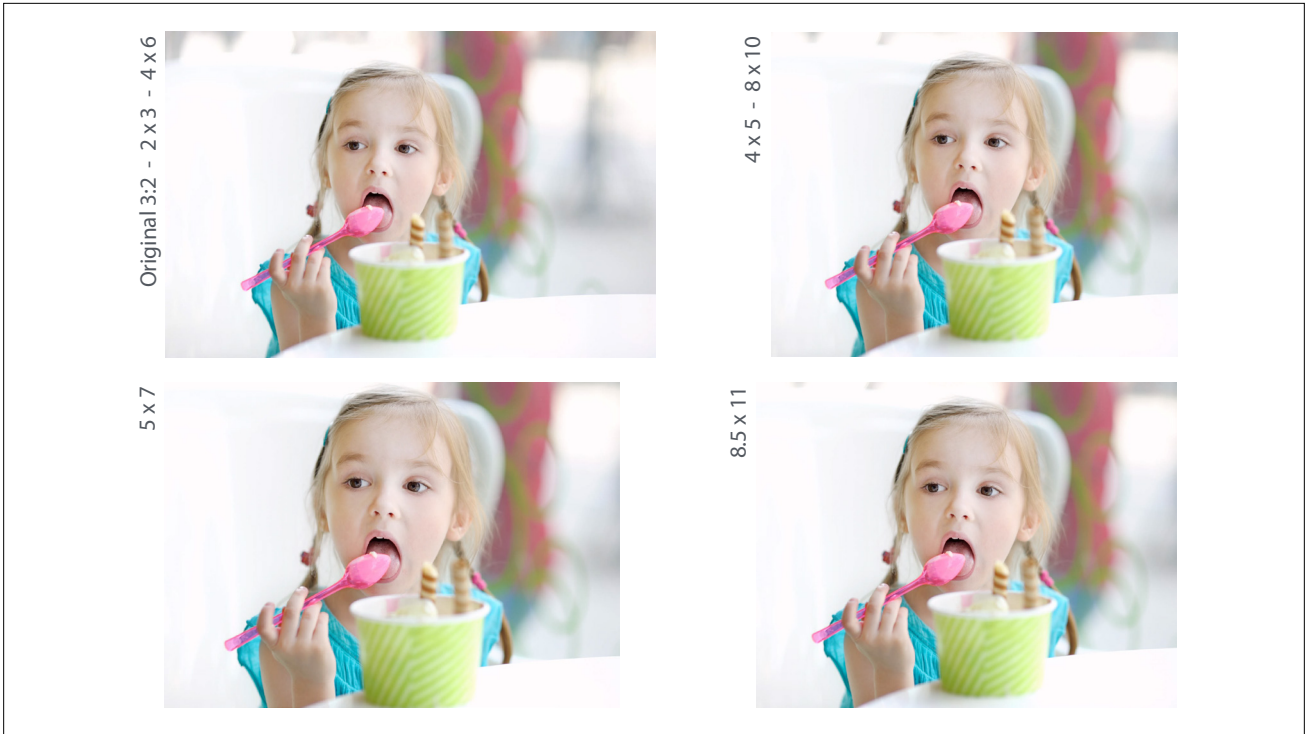
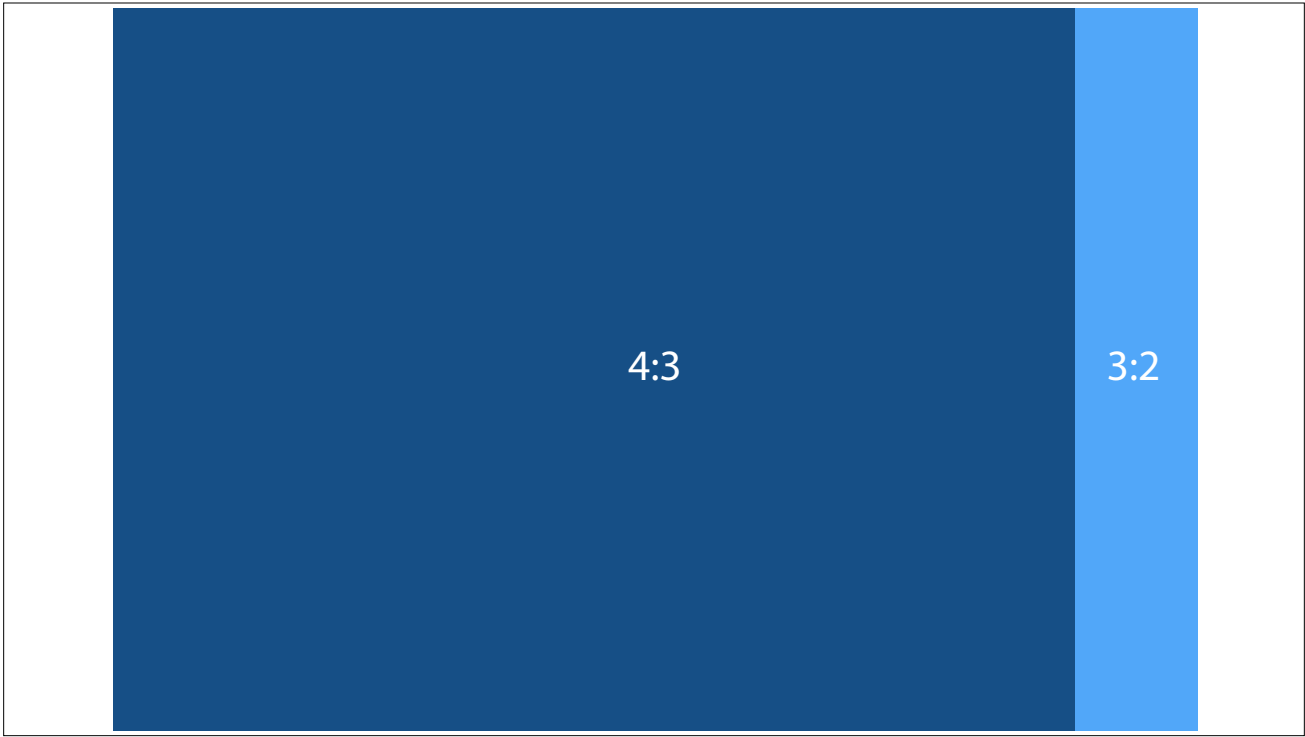
## Aspect Ratio

Aspect ratio describes the *relationship* of an image's *width to its height*, and is usually expressed as *one number* followed by a *colon* and then followed by *another number*.

*ASP-C* and *full-frame* cameras come with a *sensor* that has an *aspect ratio of 3:2*, which means the sensor is *1.5 times as wide as it is high*. Micro four-thirds and compact cameras have an aspect ratio of 4:3.

Why does this matter? Depending on how *tight your shot is*, you may have part of your photo *unintentionally cropped* when printed.

Some cameras allow you to change the aspect ratio, but this isn't necessary. If you want to *change your image's aspect ratio*, it's much better to do so *in post* with applications such as Adobe PS Lightroom.





## No Cheese Please

One of the *easiest ways* to get a *fake expression* is to *ask your subject to smile*, which usually sounds like the familiar, 'Say Cheese!' bit. This applies equally to *adults* and *children*.

A *true smile* involves smiling with the *eyes and mouth*, and a forced smile will never *light up the eyes* like a real smile would.

If you must use some kind of *word-cue*, try having them say '*Yesssss!*' really big. This causes the *lips* to take on a more *natural curve*, whereas saying '*cheese*' usually causes a *forced grimace*.

If you have a child that *won't smile*, a good way to crack that tough exterior is to say something like, '*Whatever you do, don't smile!*' More often than not, a *true grin* will emerge giving a *natural expression*.



## In-Between Moments

Some of the best shots you will take are the ones *right after (or before)* the shot that your *subject was expecting*... the candid shots.

When they're *not expecting* a photo to be taken, their *body relaxes* and assumes a *more natural position*. A *real smile* is also likely to emerge instead of a possible *forced one*.

While there's nothing wrong with a posed photo, a *natural capture* is always *more revealing* of your subject's *true self*. And, more often than not, you can find these photos in the *'in-between' moments*.

So, keep the camera to your eye *after the expected shot* and be on the look out for these *natural expressions* to show themselves.





## Distractions

It can be hard to get young children to stay still for a photo, and working some distractions into the shoot can help you get the shot.

A favorite trick used by professional photographers is to put something goofy on their head, like big fuzzy rabbit ears. This gets their subject's attention and *increases the chances* of them looking at the camera.

Another fun trick is to ask children if they can *see your eye through the lens*, or if they can see a puppy or other kind of cute animal. When they are looking at the lens intently, snap your shots.

Try to distract your kids by being silly; make funny faces, jump around, and basically act like a fool. Keeping it fun will help them forget they are having their photo taken and give you natural expressions.

## Shoot, Shoot, Shoot!

Getting the *perfect shot* on the *first capture* is nothing short of *luck*. Sure, it happens from time to time, but the odds of you nailing the mother of all photos on the *first attempt* are slim.

Shooting digital doesn't involve the *time and cost* associated with film, freeing you to *shoot as much as you like*. This is a great way to try *new approaches* and get *instant feedback* for works and what doesn't.

So, *the more you shoot, the better you will get*... but there's another benefit to shooting a lot of images.

Everyone is a little *self-conscious* to some extent, and most people are *uncomfortable* when a camera is pointed anywhere near their direction... that's normal.

## Shoot, Shoot, Shoot!

*People's faces change* the moment a camera is pulled out. You know this isn't the *real them*, but something *everyone does* in an attempt to put their *best face on*. But, you're not after those kind of images.

Sessions are usually *awkward* at first; children will initially go into a *show-off mode*, making faces and vying for *attention* if other children are present, and *adults* begin *dealing with insecurities*.

But, you will find that as the session progresses and *the more photos you take*, the *more your subjects* will tend to *loosen up*. When their masks come off, you can capture the real them.

Get a *big*, or *multiple* memory cards, some *extra batteries*, and shoot, shoot, shoot... you can always *delete the bad ones* later!

## The Flow

Shooting *'in flow'* is a technique that is best used when shooting in an **organic environment** where your subjects are **behaving naturally** and **unscripted**.

When your subjects are in **constant movement**, it's difficult to nail a compelling photo with just a **shot or two**. What you usually end up with are **poorly composed images**, subjects having closed (or semi-closed) eyes, and/or **unnatural expressions**.

The process of shooting in flow involves capturing **multiple frames of the moment**, which could number anywhere between 10 to 30. Out of this **burst**, you should have at least **one image that stands out**.

**TIP:** use **continuous drive** mode and **AF-C**, or **AI Servo** for best results.

## Keeping it Positive

How you **interact with your family** will go a long way in helping the shoot go **smoothly**. This is true for **non-family members**, too, especially the **little ones** who may not know you.

When photographing kids, **resist the urge to direct them too much**. It never works. You'll find that you get much more **natural-looking candid**s if you just **let them do their thing** and have fun.

If your subjects aren't having a **good time**, that will be **painfully obvious** in the images. Not only will their **expressions be forced**, or show downright contempt, it will be that much more **difficult** to get them to **participate in any future shoots**. And on top of all of that, you will be frustrated, too. Remember to **keep it fun!**

## Be Prepared

Those *magical moments* you want to capture tend to happen when you *least expect it*, so it's a good idea to *keep a camera out* and close by *at all times*. If your family is used to *seeing the camera* out, they will be *less resistant* to having their photos taken.

Children's *expressions* are here one second and gone the next, so to be sure you don't *miss the moment*, watch what's happening *through the viewfinder* (or LCD screen) as much as possible. Also, shoot *short bursts* on *Continuous mode* (flow) to capture the action *frame by frame*.

Don't get too *hung up* with getting *tack-sharp* photos all the time; *kids move around* a lot and it's not going to happen anyway. Occasionally *capturing a bit of blur* in your photos is a *good thing*.

## Give Yourself a Break

Even when you have *lots of experience* with a camera, you will still take *bad photos from time to time*... that's just the way it goes. This is especially true when you're shooting in an *'organic' environment* where the conditions are *constantly changing*.

Whenever you see a *professional's* body of work, keep in mind that this is their *very best work*. What they *don't show you* are all the *hundreds of frames* taken that were necessary to get these *coveted few*.

A typical *1-hour* family session can easily exceed *200-400 images*, possibly even more depending on the conditions.

So, *give yourself a break* and don't think that you're *not any good* because a *masterpiece isn't created* every time you take a photo.