

# Body Language in Portraits

Every person that you photograph is unique. As the photographer, you know that before a shoot you ought to do your homework to be able to capture that uniqueness. Of course you get to know them for a short while before the shoot, and you try to match location to their preferences. But there's so much more to capturing a unique personality than just location and clothing. How about posing?

Personality and posing go hand and hand. The way that you capture a person "being themselves" is critical to a seamless and perfect portrait. The question is ,how do you match personality with poses?

It's not a complex science. It's not an incredible challenge. In fact, breaking down posing and personality comes down to one thing: Body language.

**Encarta defines body language as:** the bodily mannerisms, postures, and facial expressions that can be interpreted as unconsciously communicating a person's feelings or psychological state.

A photographer must master the interpretation of body language. Understanding what different poses communicate will enable you to match poses to personality, or even create different "feels" to your portraits (dramatic, subdued, expressive, etc.). Posing then becomes another tool to capture your subjects true "self," and to create the shot you envision.

Of course, your own interpretation of body language - in past experience and personal preferences - will help to guide you, as well. Take a look at magazines and posing books. Ask yourself, "What does this pose say to me?" Create a mental arsenal of poses and expressions to draw from, and pull out different ones based on the look and the feel you aim for.

Here is a glimpse into my personal use of combined body language, personality, and posing.



**The first model** was good natured, expressive, and laid back in an “I’ll take life as it comes” kind of way. We opted for relaxed body language to convey her casual nature, but used the angles of her arms, wrists, elbows, knees and shoulder to give a slightly refined feel to the portrait.

**The second model** had a combination of unique personality traits – an introverted analytical with personable, extroverted tendencies. We wanted the shot to reflect both aspects. Using a stool suggests a studio air, crossed arms express a private stance, but the chin down and piercing gaze speak volumes of personal expression and confidence.

**The third model** was artist, sweet, and very caring in personality, and had an air of quiet femininity. We wanted this shot to express these traits, so we used a less-common pose, slightly formal pose to reflect her femininity. Her facial expression and the arrangement of her hair help to communicate in a more introverted way.

The key to interpreting and posing with body language isn’t over-analyzing people. The key is simply to learn to observe quickly, and respond in kind for the shot.

Study in body language is good practice for anyone who wants to develop their ability to create depth and emotion in the look and feel of their portraits. Check out a book on body language, and explore how different poses communicate different things to the observer. Then explore magazines and posing books. Evaluate how photographers create their shots, and if he or she successfully used all the tools for posing and body language at their disposal.