
Photos by Jim Franco

Picture Perfect

You don't have to look perfect to take a perfect picture. "The most photogenic people are not necessarily the most attractive," says wedding photographer Denis Reggie. "They're just not intimidated by the camera." How do you overcome intimidation? Whether you're nervous about wrinkles or a double chin, here are eight common photo problems — solved.

Camera Crew: *Real Simple's* panel of experts.

- **Michael Calas**, Los Angeles-based head-shot photographer.
 - **Chuck DeLaney**, dean of students at the New York Institute of Photography, in New York City.
 - **Jennifer Dupont**, Miss Louisiana 2004 and first runner-up, Miss America 2005.
 - **Kendall Farr**, author of *The Pocket Stylist*, www.barnesandnoble.com (Gotham Books, \$20).
 - **Jim Janis**, Walgreens photo-finishing specialist in Chandler, Arizona.
 - **Patrick McMullan**, celebrity photographer and author of *InTents*, www.barnesandnoble.com (PowerHouse Books, \$75).
 - **Suzy Drasnin Orduna**, owner of the Beach Ambience Studio & Gallery, in Sag Harbor, New York.
 - **Denis Reggie**, celebrity and society wedding photographer. He took the wedding photos of John Kennedy Jr. and Carolyn Bessette.
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Problem: Looking Too Posed

Solution: "Engage the photographer in a conversation about some topic you both may find of interest," says photographer Michael Calas. If your mind is focused on something other than the photo, you'll appear less rigid. You can also lean against something, interact with a pet or a child, or intertwine your arms with someone else's. Also, never keep your hands right by your sides, says New York Institute of Photography dean Chuck DeLaney. Clasp them in the front or in the back, or hold on to a glass or your eyeglasses to help relax your body.

Problem: Visible Wrinkles, Shiny Skin

Solution: Foundation and translucent powder are quick fixes, but it's equally important to get as much light on the face as possible. If you're indoors, pose near the closest light source, like a window. Also, use a flash inside and outside because "the light of the flash will bounce off the skin, illuminate it, and conceal facial imperfections," says Walgreens photo specialist Jim Janis. Finally, make the most of your scenery. "Photographs taken on a white sandy beach or a snow-covered surface tend to be more flattering because the reflective qualities of those surfaces help de-emphasize wrinkles and pockmarks," says Reggie.

Problem: Double Chin

Solution: Pay attention to the camera position. "If the lens is at your eye level or above, you're in the right frame," says Calas. "If the lens is below your eye level, then you run the risk of looking like you have an extra chin." Bend your knees so you're at least on an even plane with the photographer (assuming it's not a full-body photo). If you're significantly taller than the photographer, sit in a chair and look up toward the camera. Finally, project your chin out an inch or so more than you normally would. You may feel a bit awkward, like a giraffe, but "you'll have a long, thin neck in the photo," says photography-gallery owner Suzy Drasnin Orduna.

Problem: Closed Eyes

Solution: Close your eyes and have the photographer count to three. On three, open them. “Works every time,” says Janis. If you’re outdoors, remember that noon is the worst time to take a photo, because that’s when the sun is harshest and you’re more likely to squint. Head out at 4 or 5 p.m., when the light is more amber.

Problem: Exaggerated Facial Features

Solution: Turn your head. Most people have asymmetrical features (for example, one eye is larger than the other or the right ear is a bit higher than the left). Therefore DeLaney suggests posing with two-thirds of the face in view and the remaining third turned slightly away from the camera. That way, facial asymmetry is not as obvious. This particular angle also has a slimming effect, as it draws the eye up and down (forehead to chin), not left to right (eye to eye).

Problem: Deer-in-the-Headlights Look

Solution: Don't look straight into the lens. "Focus your eyes just above the lens instead of staring directly into the camera," says Patrick McMullen, a celebrity photographer and author. "I usually look past the lens, over the photographer's shoulder," says Miss America runner-up Jennifer Dupont. "And show some personality. Sometimes all it takes is the slight raise of an eyebrow."

Problem: Fake Smile

Solution: Don't say "cheese," which usually conjures an artificial smile. Instead, ask the photographer to throw out an unexpected word, like "money." This will usually elicit a genuine laugh, and your expression won't look forced. "I always think of something funny, like my disastrous attempts at cooking, to achieve a natural smile," says Dupont. "If you're self-conscious or critical of your smile, practicing before a photo shoot might be helpful, too."

Problem: Red-Eye

Solution: Avoid appearing possessed in your next photo by affixing your eyes on a lamp or the nearest light source right before the photo is taken. (Red-eye usually occurs in a dim room when the irises have opened up so much that the retinas, which are red with blood vessels, light up when the flash hits them.) When the pupils fix on something bright, they shrink, reducing the potential for red-eye.

Does the Camera Really Add 10 Pounds?

Not unless your brunch consists of a Canon PowerShot G6. But there are some positions and patterns that can make you appear larger on film than you actually are. Here's how to avoid them.

- **Take a cue from stars on the red carpet.** As most paparazzi shots reveal, celebrities rarely face a camera head-on. "If your shoulders are perpendicular to the camera, you will look broader," says wedding photographer Denis Reggie. Instead, turn sideways. For example, if the camera is north, your torso should be facing east or west. Once you've hit this position, turn your body slightly and look toward the camera.
 - **Lean back.** Place your weight on the rear foot while keeping the other foot forward, facing the photographer (or, in ballet-speak, keep your feet in fourth position, with most of your weight placed on the back foot). "Whatever is closest to the camera will look the largest, so if you were to thrust your hips toward the photographer, they would appear larger," says Jennifer Dupont.
 - **Choose your clothing wisely.** Avoid large prints or patterns, as well as white and bright colors, as they will only accentuate weight. "A majority of people benefit from dark colors, because they are slimming, flatter most skin tones, and don't draw attention from your face," says head shot photographer Michael Calas. V necklines work well on everyone, especially heavier women, because they draw the
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says Kendall Farr, author of *The Pocket Stylist*,
www.barnesandnoble.com

- **Lobby for a position in the back row.** “In group shots, this positioning will create the illusion that you’re smaller than, or closer in proportion to, the others in the photo who are closer to the camera and thus appear larger,” says studio owner Suzy Drasnin Orduna. And if Aunt Ethel insists that you squat in front of the group in the annual family photo, don’t bend at the waist and stick your rear out to the side, says Dupont. Instead, bend at the knees so that one prominent feature (your rear end) doesn’t demand the camera’s attention.

- **Beware the wide-angle lens.** The closer this lens is to you, the more exaggerated and out of proportion your features will appear, most notably the nose and chin. To avoid this, make sure the photographer steps a few feet back, then zooms in from a distance. This will make use of the longer lens and create a more flattering photo, says Reggie.

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