



### Tip #1 Flash Tips: Turn on Outdoors, Turn Off Inside

This may seem counter-intuitive, but it's often best to turn on your flash for outdoor portraits, then when you go inside, turn it off for natural looking shots.

A trick that wedding photographers have used for years is to turn on the flash for outdoor portraits. They know that the "front light" from the flash offsets the harsh, unflattering midday sunlight and adds twinkle to the eyes. Set your camera to "Flash On" and be sure to stay within its 8-foot effective range.

Once you go inside, ambient light often produces more natural results and does a better job of capturing the essence of the home environment. In this situation, set your camera to "Flash Off" and increase the ISO to 400. By changing your ISO to a higher setting, you make the camera more sensitive to ambient lighting. Try positioning your subject next to a window for added illumination.

Then change the White Balance from "Auto" to "Cloudy" to ensure that skin tones appear warm and healthy. Don't forget to hold the camera steady!

After either type of portrait session is over, return your camera settings to "Auto Flash," "ISO 100," and "Auto White Balance."



### Tip #2 Warm Up with White Balance

Photos captured on cloudy days, in open shade, and indoors with existing light (flash turned off) are often dull and bluish. You can breath life into these compositions by finding your White Balance menu and changing the setting from "auto" to "cloudy." By doing so, your images will look as though they were captured in the warm glow of afternoon light.

If your goal is to have truly accurate color at the moment of capture, use the "custom white balance" setting. The procedure often involves pointing your camera at a white sheet of paper and letting it read the temperature of the light bouncing off it. It will use that measurement to record the most accurate color possible. (Consult your camera manual for more details.)

Two reminders: 1) Make sure you turn off your flash when using custom white balance. 2) Return your camera to "auto white balance" when you're done with the shoot.



### Tip #3 Use Your Sunglasses as a Polarizer

Do you love the way the world looks through your polarized sunglasses, but find yourself disappointed that the pictures you took in the same settings look dull by comparison? Then use sunglasses for your camera too.

For years, photographers have used polarizer filters to add saturation and vibrance to their images. You can achieve similar results by taking off your neutral gray polarized glasses, placing them over the lens of your compact camera, and taking a picture. Be sure to hold your glasses as close as possible to the front of the lens.

The effect is strongest when the sun is aligned with your shoulders — in other words, to one side or the other of the composition. If you want to marvel at the difference your shades can make, then take one shot with the sunglasses on and another without.



### Tip #4 Capture at Your Camera's Highest Resolution

Aren't there times when you wish your zoom lens had just a little more reach? The best way to extend your range without losing quality is to make sure you're shooting at your camera's highest resolution. By capturing every pixel possible, you'll have the option of later cropping your photo and still having enough resolution to make a nice sized print. It's like having a super zoom lens!

Camera manufacturers often label resolution settings as "Large, Medium, and Small." Look for these options in your menu and choose "Large." This enables you to record maximum information with each shot.

Beware of techniques that actually degrade image quality, such as using the "digital zoom" option on your camera. You're much better off shooting at high resolution and cropping later.



### Tip #5 Explore Your Camera's Scene Modes

In a hurry and unsure about how to set your camera for a quick family portrait? Don't forget to explore the Scene Modes menu. You'll find options there such as Portrait, Kids and Pets, Fireworks, and a host of other shortcuts designed to help you capture the perfect shot.

The Portrait scene mode, for example, sets your camera to soften the background and expose for the subject in the center of the frame. The Kids and Pets mode, on the other hand, prepares your digicam for fast moving subjects.

Scene modes are a great way to take control of your camera. It's often a good idea to become familiar with the modes before you're in the heat of action. That way you'll be able to quickly access the settings and capture the shot.



### Tip #6 Get Close then Closer

Often when we photograph friends and family, we stand back to far. We've all witnessed the vacation photo opp where the husband is standing 10 yards away from his wife when taking her picture. Are we being too polite (not wanting to make our subjects uncomfortable) or is this just a bad habit? In reality, most portraits are improved when you get close, while others are better closer yet. And you won't really know which is best until you view the pictures later on computer monitor.

The best approach? Shoot close then shoot closer yet. Capture as much energy as possible, then decide later which is the best for that particular portrait. And if you don't quite nail the shot, then trying cropping too.

Which of these shots do you prefer? Close, or closer yet?.



### Tip #7 Go Low for Kids and Pets

If you want great shots of kids and pets, you have to hang out where they play... on the ground. So you can't be afraid to get a few grass stains on you knees while chasing the little ones.

Sometimes parents make the mistake of "shooting down" on the little ones, missing the opportunity to capture their personality and essence. The same goes for pets. Fluffy might look cute photographed sleeping from above, but she'll be even more adorable if you get down on your belly and position the camera at whisker level.

And if you're not sure how to set you camera for these types of portraits, many compacts have a Kids and Pets scene mode.



### Tip #8 Get in the Picture with Your Self Timer

Just because you're the photographer, that doesn't mean you shouldn't be included in family portraits. The solution? Use your camera's self timer. This setting allows you to compose the shot, trigger a 10-second countdown, then dash to join others in the composition. Take a look at this photo. The photographer (Dad on the right), got everyone in position on the tree. His camera was mounted on a tripod, with the shutter in self timer mode (check your owner's manual to find this setting, but every camera has one.) He then triggered the self timer by pushing the shutter button and joined the others for the shot.

One final tip: Make sure your camera is focusing on your subject and not on a distant element. You can confirm this by pressing the shutter half way before taking the shot. This forces the camera to focus, and you can check on the viewfinder that it is locking in on your family and not the trees in the distance.

So, don't be left out of your family photos. Use the self timer and join the fun.



### Tip #9 Use Your Car Windshield Cover as a Reflector

Natural light portraits on a bright sunny day sometime are not the most flattering. When the sun is high in the sky, the light can create harsh shadows that overemphasize the nose or highlight facial blemishes.

If you'd prefer not to use a fill flash to balance the light, a reflector just might do the trick. Big reflectors are used on professional shoots all the time to help control the light. The problem is that these accessories can be expensive. Chances are you have an excellent DIY (do it yourself) reflector in your car: the windshield cover you use to protect the dash on hot days.

You'll need a photo assistant for this shot. Have your helper hold the white side of the windshield cover just a few feet from your subject so it reflects light back into the subject's face. You might have to play with the position for a minute or two before getting it just right. Then take a series of photos and review them on your camera's LCD viewfinder. If you need more light, use the silver side of the reflector. Just be careful that you don't blind your subject!

With a little practice, you'll find that you can make great portraits with this simple, affordable, photo accessory.



### Tip #10 Shower Cap Inclement Weather Protector

You don't need to keep your camera inside just because there are a few drizzles outside. A standard hotel shower cap is the perfect rain protector for your compact camera. Just poke a hole in the middle of the cap for the lens to protrude through, then put your hands through the "stretchy" opening and let the elastic close tight around your wrists.

You now have a water resistant cover that enables you to work all of the controls — perfect for those shots of the kids splashing water in the gutter on a rainy day.