

PORTRAIT PHOTOGRAPHY PRIMER

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GA CAMERA CLUB

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PORTRAIT PHOTOGRAPHY

- Sharp focus on the eyes
- Non-distracting background
- Control over light and shadow
- Subject does not compete for eye attention with other elements except for objects that tell us about the subject
 - Musical instruments
 - Sports equipment

PORTRAIT FOCAL LENGTHS

- < 35mm is too wide; unflattering; lots of distortion
- 35mm to 50mm can be ok for full length portraits
 - Use the surroundings to tell a story about the individual
- 85mm is the most popular focal length due to fast lenses sold to professionals for portraiture work
- 85mm - 105mm is the most common range used for portraits
- >135mm begins to have a compressed, paparazzi look

CONTRASTING STYLES

Low Contrast
Soft

High Contrast
High Drama



LIGHTING

- THE MOST CRITICAL ELEMENT!!
- Flashes help, but are not mandatory
 - Use the sun as a primary light source
 - Use a reflector to create a large second light source
- Windows and doors are portals for light to spill over your subject.
- Dark interiors mixed with outside light produce nice soft shadows

REMBRANDT LIGHTING

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- Named after the 16th century Dutch painter Rembrandt Harmenszoon
- Popular style because it's simple setup only requires one or two lights. Reflector can be used for second light.



REMBRANDT LIGHTING

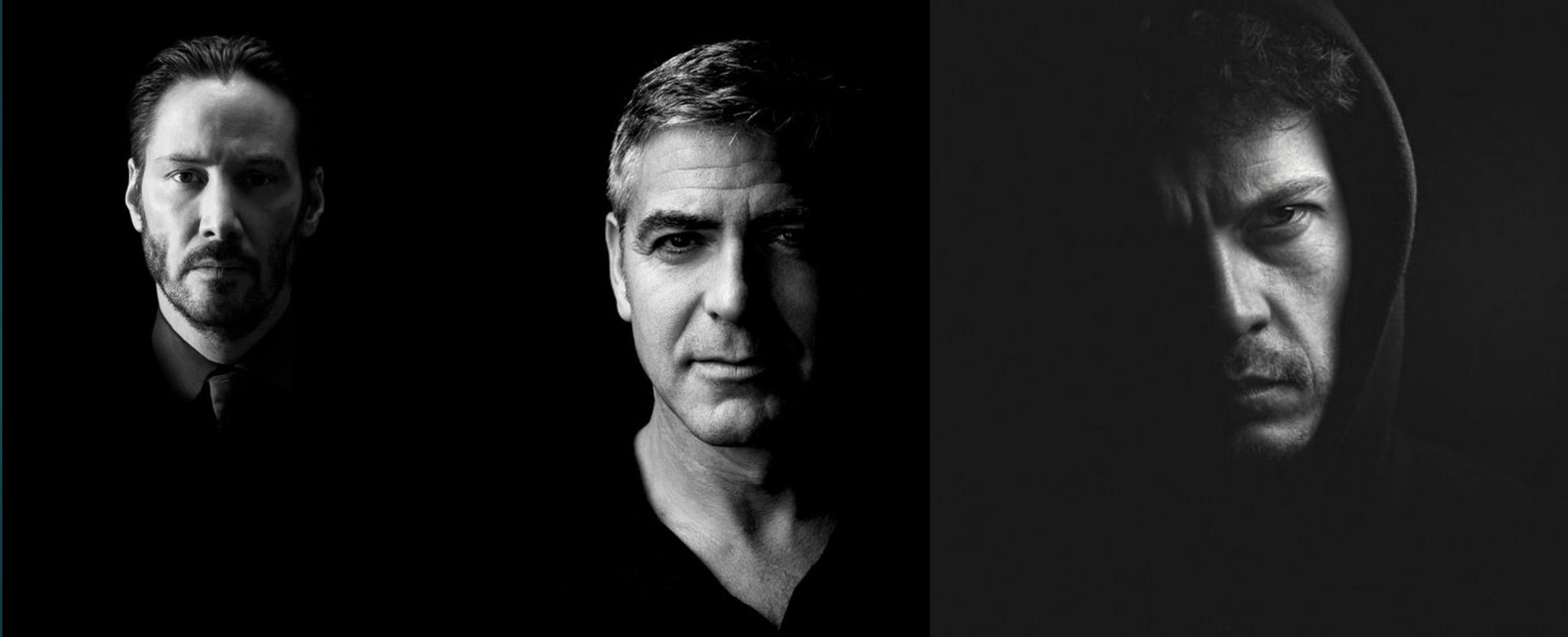
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REMBRANDT LIGHTING



REMBRANDT LIGHTING



BUILDING A LIGHTING SETUP

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- Main Light
- Fill Light
- Kicker Light
- Hair Light
- Background Light

MAIN LIGHT

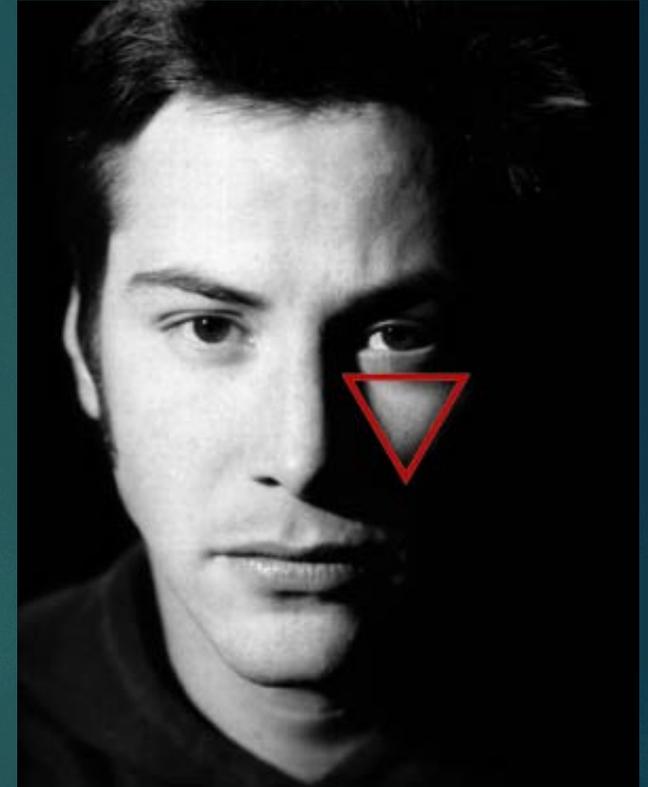
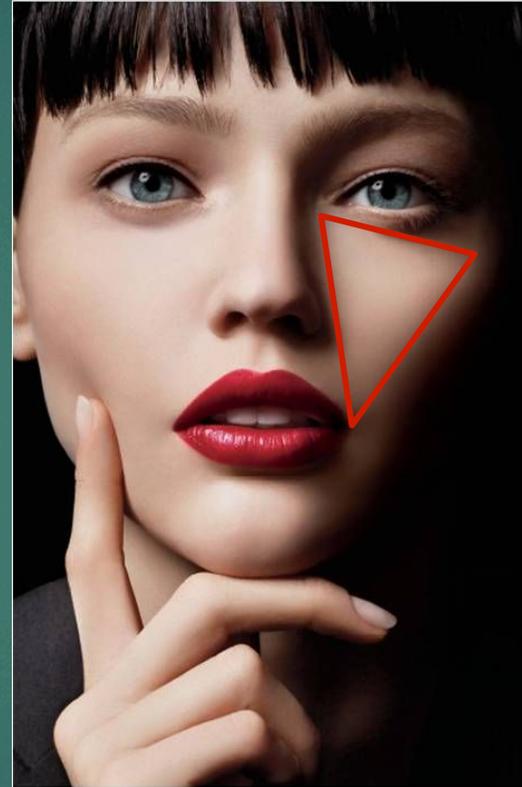
- High and to the right or left of the photographer
- 45 degree angle
- Small light source
 - Shadows have hard edges
 - Accentuates skin texture
- Large light source
 - Shadows have soft edges
 - Softened skin texture

KEY TRIANGLE

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“Key Triangle” can be a helpful guide

- If key triangle is too large: The main light is too close to the camera.
- If key triangle is too low: The main light is too high
- If key triangle is too narrow: The main light is too far to one side



MAIN LIGHT: RIGHT or LEFT?

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- If the subject has a dominate eye, or one eye that is more open than the other, then light that side.
- If the subject has long hair parted to one side, light from the opposite side to avoid creating a hard shadow
- Otherwise, it doesn't matter

HEAD TURNER

If you have the subject turn their head 45degrees and looking off camera, you now have to choose between positioning the main light on the far side opposite of the camera's view (called short lighting), or putting the light on the same side as the visible ear (called broad lighting).

- Choose broad lighting position if your subject has glasses so you can avoid reflections and glare

FILL LIGHT

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- Positioned to provide light, at a reduced intensity, from the opposite 45deg position of the main light
- Used to brighten up and soften shadows on the face
- Don't make fill light too bright or you will lose contrast and make your subjects face flat... unless that is what you are going for!
- Doesn't need to be a flash! A properly positioned reflector or white bounce card can make a good large fill light source
 - Fill intensity control controlled by angle with main light and its distance from the subject

KICKER/RIM LIGHT

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- Produces a rim of light along the edges of the subject
- Separates the subject from the background
- Positioned behind and to the side the subject
- Try to use a gobo to keep rim light from hitting your camera



HAIR LIGHT

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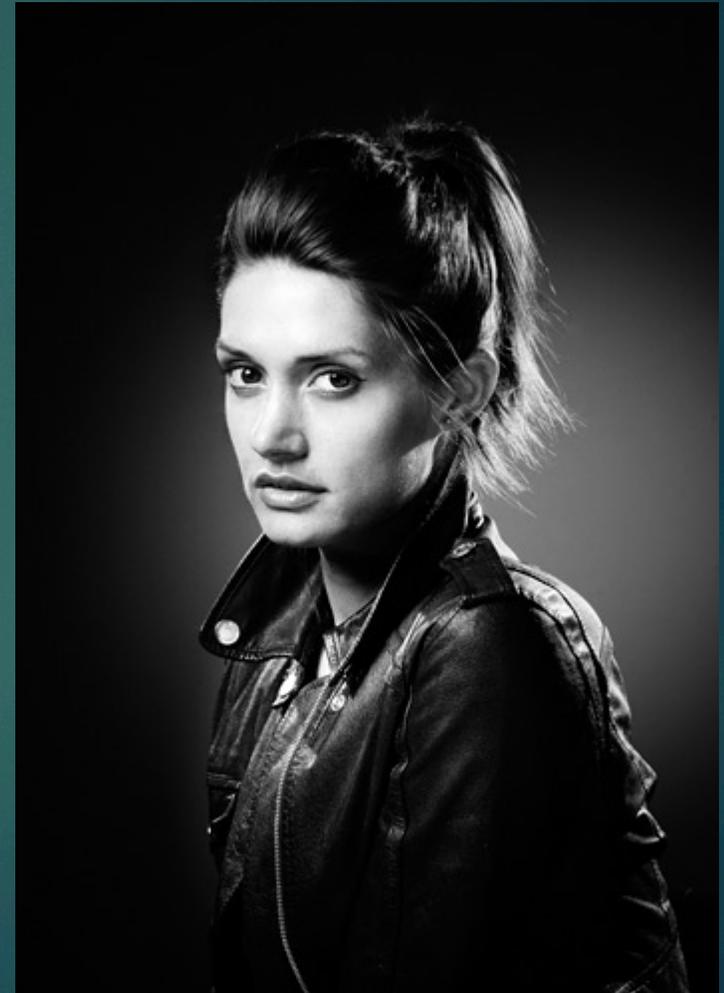
- Mounted high and behind the subject and is pointed towards the back of the subjects head
- Adds a nice highlight to the subject's hair
- If possible attach a grid to control spill light



BACKGROUND LIGHT

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- Produces a halo of light against the background
- Adds contrast along the subjects perimeter
- Adds perception of depth between the background the subject
- Use a grid or snoot to control the spill light and make the light intensity have a quick roll off to the edge of frame



CLAMSHELL LIGHTING

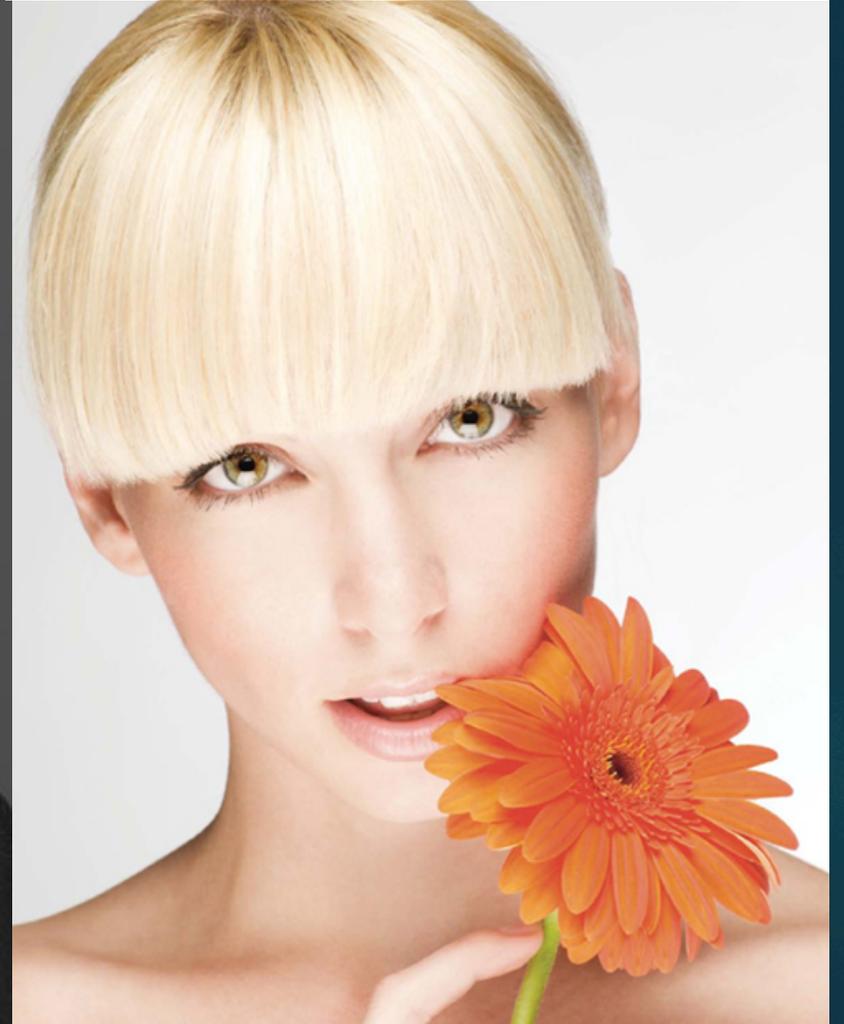
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- Main light in front and above
- Second light below
- Shoot through the gap in between
- Flatter look, reduced shadows



CLAMSHELL EXAMPLES

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POSING

- Head should be pressing forward slightly towards the camera to eliminate unsightly chin flab
- Slight lean forward towards the camera
- Arms should not be against the body; hold them out a few inches to slim them
- Do not have long hair sitting on shoulders
- Ponytails provide a clean look at the face

POSING - SHOULDERS

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- Don't pull shoulders back as it will tighten the clothing in the front
- Want the subject to look big and imposing?
 - Square the shoulders straight towards the camera
- Want the subject to have a thinner, slimmer profile?
 - Turn the shoulders

POSING

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- In angled poses, keep the nose from breaking out from the profile edge of the face



POSING – FULL BODY

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- Wider and full body portraits require you to consider the rest of the body
- Ask your subject to:
 - Pivot their weight from one foot to the other
 - Put a little sass and dance into their lower body
 - If hands are not touching hip, then float them delicately
 - Never one palm on top of the other

PHOTOGRAPHING OUTDOORS

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- Place your subject in the shade
- Place the sun behind the subject
 - The sun can be used as a hair light
- Use a reflector or flash as main light
- Work your angles to get a clean pleasing background
 - Keep vertical poles away
 - Soft not harsh out of focus elements
 - Consider the background color



POST EDITING TIPS

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- De-noise (Luminance in Lr) will soften skin
- Negative values in clarity will soften skin
- High frequency separation techniques in PS can address skin blemishes
- Ruddy skin tones can be improved greatly with color specific saturation and luminance adjustments

BABY PORTRAITS

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- Room should be warm, 80°F, use white noise generator
- Maximum happiness is after baby's first nap
- Keep light bright, soft, and diffuse
- Neutral soft blankets, muslin wraps, swaddles
- Save shots with hats for the end, in case they make the baby fussy
- Fingers and toes can make for nice details
- Avoid over sharpening. Consider negative clarity values

CHILD PORTRAITS

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- New environments inject excitement
- Give lots of praise to keep attitudes positive
- Get low and find perspectives
- Costume props and capes bring out personality
- Bubble machines can add fun foreground or background elements
- Look for natural interactions with family
- Keep both wide full body shots AND tight portraits in mind
- Put people to work behind you making silly faces and noises
- Try not to over direct

CHILD PORTRAITS, CONT'D

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- Using Objects in the Environment
 - Chairs, benches, or other objects can help keep <4year olds together, like planets orbiting around a sun
 - Leaning against a building
 - Sitting on stumps or rocks
 - Climbing trees (crouch down and make them look elevated)
 - Standing on benches
 - Peaking out from behind trees, bushes, cornstalks
 - Music instruments

CHILDREN W/PARENTS

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- Bring the parents down to the children
 - Or the children up to the parents
- Use the kids to cover portions of the mom that she may not want photographed
- Have parent(s) wrap arms around child and take a tight shot of just the arms and child's face
- Hugs and heads touching make for tender moments

GROUP SHOTS

- Taller people in the back/short people in front
- Grandparents and parents in the middle
- Position older kids first for group shots of children, they have more patience
- Keep the group tight; telling a story

PORTRAIT ANGLE

- Do not shoot from a low position
- Exception: Children
 - Get down to their level
- Try to have the camera position be level with the subject's head.

CLOTHING

- Avoid busy prints
- If loud colors, have everyone match
- White can look nice
- Shoes on sand is strange because its not normal
- With children, experiment with their shoes off

POST PROCESSING RESOURCES:

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<http://www.lightstalking.com/create-perfect-portraits-in-lightroom-using-these-6-classic-retouch-techniques/>

<http://www.lightstalking.com/5-effective-ways-to-achieve-smooth-skin-in-your-portraits-using-photoshop/>

https://fstoppers.com/originals/how-make-sure-your-pictures-are-clean-possible-60014?utm_reader=feedly

THE END!