U.S. Passport & U.S. Visa Photography

G U I D E

Guidelines for Producing High Quality Photographs for U.S. Travel Documents

Technological advances have changed the way passport and visa photos may be taken *and* the way that the U.S. Department of State processes the photos. This brochure is to help photographers ensure that:

- Customers are accurately represented and
- Photos are free of common defects that cause delays

The brochure is designed to unfold into a small, wall-mountable poster, useful as a practical, professional reference. Please take the time to become familiar with the information provided. With your help producing good quality photos for U.S. passports and U.S. visas, the Department of State can process the applications efficiently. As a result, we will both have satisfied customers!

The Department of State travel information web site (http://travel.state.gov) contains further technical information on passport and visa photograph preparation requirements.

Setup & Production Guidelines

Successful U.S. passport and visa photography begins with careful setup and appropriate production methods.

Proper Lighting Arrangement

Position light sources on both sides of subject to avoid shadows on face.

Use a light source to illuminate background behind subject to avoid shadows in background.

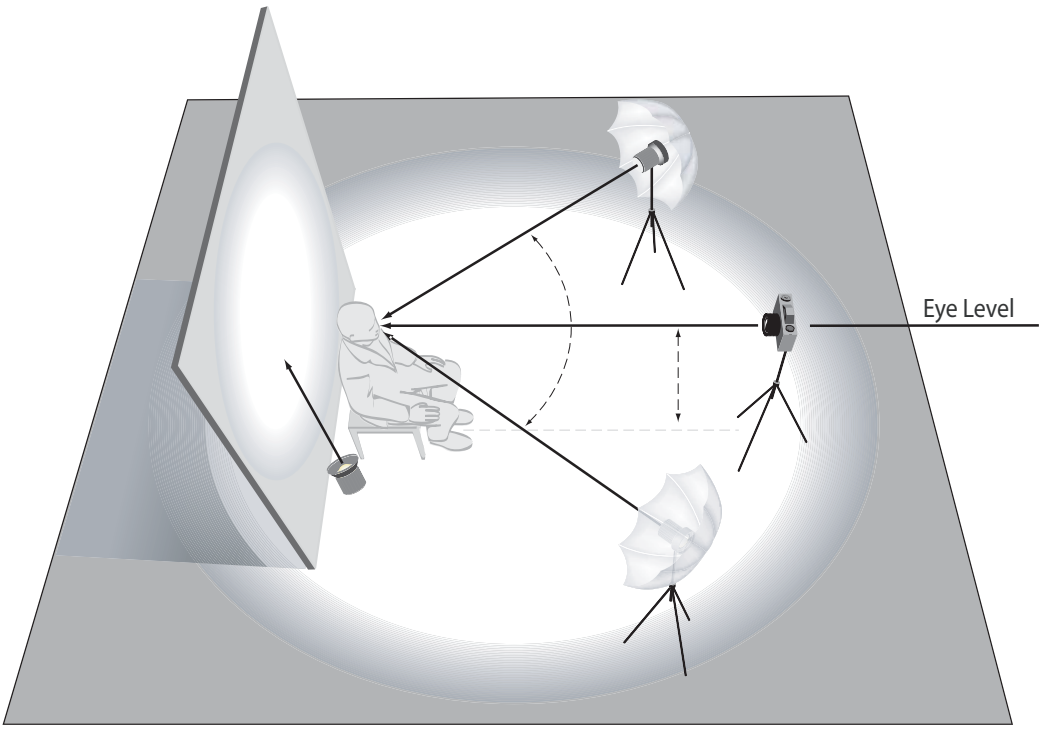

Figure 1. Camera & Lighting Setup

Camera/Subject Position

Place camera approximately 4 ft (120 cm) from the subject.

Have camera at subject's eye level.

Position subject facing the camera.

Photograph Print Properties

Produce 2 inch x 2 inch (51 mm x 51 mm) color photo.

Print photo on thin photo paper or stock.

Ensure the print is clear and has a continuous tone quality.

Do not retouch or otherwise enhance or soften photo.

Composition Checklist

7 Steps to Successful Photos

- ☑ Frame subject with full face, front view, eyes open
- ☑ Make sure photo presents full head from top of hair to bottom of chin; height of head should measure 1 inch to 1⅜ inch (25 mm to 35 mm)
- ☑ Center head within frame (see Figure 2 below)
- ☑ Make sure eye level is between 1⅛ inch and 1⅜ inch (28 mm and 35 mm) from bottom of photo
- ☑ Photograph subject against a plain white or off-white background
- ☑ Position subject and lighting so that there are no distracting shadows on the face or background
- ☑ Encourage subject to have a natural expression

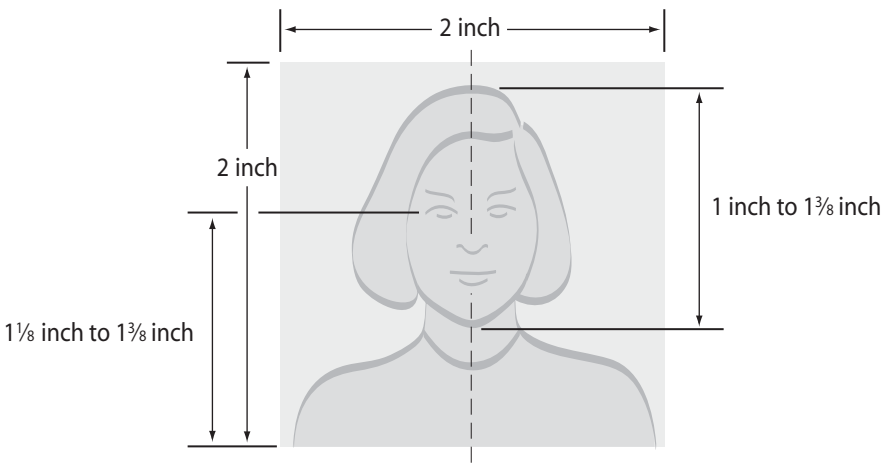

Figure 2. Head Position & Placement

Well-Composed Photos

Brightness, Contrast, & Color

- Brightness and contrast should be adjusted to present the subject and background accurately
- Photos without proper contrast or color may obscure unique facial features
- Color should reproduce natural skin tones
- Fluorescent or other lighting with unbalanced color may cause unwanted color cast in the photo
- Appropriate filters can eliminate improper color balance

Photo Too Dark

Correct Brightness

Contrast Too High

Correct Contrast

Improper Color

Natural Color

Head Position & Background

- Head should be positioned directly facing the camera
- Photo should capture from slightly above top of hair to middle of chest
- Eyes should be open and looking at the camera
- Eyeglasses should be worn if normally used by the subject
- Glare on eyeglasses can usually be avoided with a slight upward or downward tilt of the head
- Background should be plain white or off-white
- Include headpieces if worn daily for religious purposes; they should not obscure or cast shadows on the eyes or any other part of the face

Head Not Facing Camera

Head Facing Camera

Glare on Glasses

No Glare on Glasses

Background Not Plain

Plain Background

Exposure & Lighting

- Over- or under-exposure may render the photo unusable
- Three-point balanced lighting is strongly recommended (see Figure 1)
- Facial features should be clearly evident in the photo
- Lighting should be adjusted to avoid shadows on the face or background
- Diffuse sources of light, such as umbrella lights, are preferable to point sources

Over Exposed

Correctly Exposed

Shadows on Background

Background Uniformly Illuminated

Shadows on Face

Face Uniformly Illuminated

Resolution & Printing Quality

- High-resolution photography and printing are strongly recommended
- Both conventional and digital photography are acceptable, and conventional or digital printing methods may be used
- Resulting print should exhibit a continuous tone quality regardless of the print method used (dye sublimation, ink jet, laser, etc.)
- Digitally printed photos should be produced without discernible pixels or dot patterns
- Fine facial features should be discernible
- The entire face should be in focus

Low Quality: Discernible Pixels

High Quality: Non-Discernible Pixels

Low Quality: Visible Coarse Dot Pattern

High Quality: No Visible Dot Pattern

Poorly Focused

Properly Focused