

The Big Shoot

OK, if you are going to be a professional model and work in front of a camera, what goes on when you are working? Here is a photographer's perspective on how a model should handle a photo shoot. The photographer has to make sure everything goes right. It sounds a little dramatic, but if you heed these points now, it makes everything smoother later. Again, when you're a famous super model you can forget all about this and let every one wait on you hand and foot. The first rule is to make the photographer's life easy. We can take anyone off the street and make him or her look good (that is what glamour portraiture is all about) but a model who knows what she or he is doing will allow us to get the job done in less time and with a lot less hassle. That's why we pay you the big bucks.

Before the Shoot

Get a good night's sleep and stay healthy. If you are tired it will show both on your face and in your attitude. Please do not party the night before a shoot. The photographer, ad agency, and client will have invested a lot of time and money in a shoot and will depend on you to arrive ready to do the job. It is part of being a professional. In Milan or New York they may put up with partied out super models but in a secondary market, if you arrive for a shoot only half-there, you will not be there again.

Get your items ready and packed up. Unlike the big fashion scene you may need to provide items of wardrobe and props for a shoot. This should all be discussed and worked out before the shoot. If you have talked about bringing certain items please be sure they are packed and ready to go the night before. This avoids last minute running around and forgetting. Reliability again is part of being a professional.

You may need to put on a base make-up before leaving for a shoot. In a secondary market you may need to do your own make-up as there usually isn't a budget for a make-up artist or there isn't one available. By taking care of your contouring and base items before the shoot it helps speed matters along. This is not meant to cheat you out of billing time at the studio, we would expect to pay more per hour for someone who can do their own make-up and who comes prepared.

You may need to have no make-up on at all before you arrive for a shoot. Confusing isn't it? There may be times when the make-up has to be done at the shoot and not having any make-up on speeds the process. This is why a photographer appreciates a model he can communicate with so that all these things can be worked out ahead of time.

At the Shoot

Arrive on time. Studio time is often based on an hourly fee. If time is being wasted waiting for a model to arrive it either costs the photographer in time that can't be billed or it costs the client in time they are paying for nothing. In either case you just made the photographer's life less easy and you may not be asked back.

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After your arrival and pleasantries are done, you will review with the photographer how to proceed with the shoot (The game plan). Next it is off to finish your make-up and change clothes. This part may vary a lot depending on budget and purpose of the shoot. In the meantime the photographer will be making last minute lighting and set adjustments, schmoozing the art director, making sure the client is happy, trying to find out why something that was promised hasn't arrived yet, rechecking the cameras, directing the photo assistant, checking on how things are going with the model, and, oh yeah, trying to have fun. Now you see why rule number one is 'make life easy for the photographer'?

Ok, now it's show time! You are ready to get in front of the camera. Communication is very important at this point. You need to follow the verbal instructions of the photographer and give feed back. As a model and a photographer work together more, this give and take becomes easier, but the first time out it can take a while to develop a rapport. Also, it is important to establish a touch-or-don't-touch understanding up front. When working with large format cameras the posing can be very slow and precise. It may be quicker and easier for the photographer to physically move you and your arms, head and legs where they want them. If you are uncomfortable with that or other posing issues, please state it up front. This is one time it is better not to make the photographer's life easier if it is going to make your life miserable. All of this should get worked out and become part of the professional working relationship.

Another challenging part of the photo shoot process is trying to stay relaxed and comfortable. The photographer may be telling you where your main light is, where your posing spot is, the expression they want, having your arms and legs going in different directions while you're trying to hold the product so you don't cover the label, while a crowd of folks look on, and through this all you have to stay relaxed so the tension doesn't show on your face. If only it was all rock music playing and dancing around in front of the camera like they show on TV. In secondary markets it is a lot of product, illustrative, and catalog. But in spite of it all this you can still get a lot of excitement and electricity going.

We still find it strange, how this electricity and excitement can build between a photographer and a model. And it is even stranger when it suddenly stops during a shoot. It's like a switch is turned off or you run out of gas. One minute everything is really happening and you are doing great work and the next minute, for no reason, the energy drops. Some try to work through that energy drop and keep going but it just doesn't work. If it happens in the middle of a shoot, it means, "It's break time". Time to recharge, brake for lunch, socialize, change sets, change wardrobe, or something. This part is always hard to explain to a client though sometimes they can feel it as well. If it happens close to the end of a shoot you may as well just call it a day. You hope you have all of the primary shooting done and you are just working on the extras so it is a good time to wrap up.

After the shoot

When the shoot is over it is time to clean up, pack up and go. When you're starting out you may want to stay and ask questions about modeling or if there is more work, or where else you can

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find work. A little of this is fine, but remember time is money and the photographer may need to move on to another project, so don't stay too long and wear out your welcome. Also, don't be too quick to dash off. The photographer may indeed have another project coming up, but does not want to talk about it until the client and art director have left. More confusion! Also, try not to leave things behind. Again, part of being professional is being organized.

Lastly, the inevitable question, when will the pictures be ready? You know you want to see them. Try to work out a time when you might be able to return to look at them