



## **Working with Models: A Beginner's Guide**





Running a shoot from start to finish can be pretty demanding.

Working with creative staff, managing your camera, adjusting settings, directing, and ensuring that everything is going smoothly.

It can be pretty daunting trying to handle all of this; right?

One of the more challenging aspects when starting out, can definitely be getting comfortable working with the model(s) on a shoot, and ensuring everyone comes out happy and satisfied.

In this presentation we are going to consider:-

1. The principles and attitudes behind successfully working with models from all walks of life.
2. How to talk to models, and how to get over that initial nervousness of being a director on a shoot.
3. How to treat models on and off set to ensure a solid and strong professional relationship can be developed.

So let's go!

## **Part 1 – Fundamental principles of working with models**

Let's lay a solid base here. Having the right attitude and personal principles in place is essential.

The following principles are what you should follow, and make the whole experience of working with a model professional, personal, and fun!

### **Principle 1: Models are people too!**

This is perhaps the most important point I want to highlight. You have to remember that models are people too.

These are people who have hopes, fears, anxieties, and dreams just like you or anyone else. They are not soulless objects, nor items without motivation.

These are people who want to have fun, do the best they can, and be able to showcase some awesome work.

They can get nervous before shoots, worry about whether the makeup looks right, and overthink if they perhaps didn't do a pose completely right. I'm not saying all models are like this at all, but these thoughts are probably more common than you think!

Please remember that! It is also important when we move onto Principle 2.

## **Principle 2: The model's comfort is your top priority, and they deserve your respect at all times.**

I like to make a point of this again and again, and here I go again; on a shoot, the model's comfort should be your top priority.

By that I mean if at any point a model isn't feeling comfortable with what is happening, the shoot should stop, and if the discomfort can't be rectified immediately, the shoot should end.

I say this for a number of reasons. The first is common human decency.

If someone isn't happy, you should just stop!

No photo is worth putting someone through something that could physically or emotionally hurt them.

Some may say that this is being over the top, but I can hand on heart say that I could turn away from any photo and be sure to capture another amazing one with the same team at another time.

The next reason is that if you have a model who isn't feeling the shoot, and who isn't comfortable, that is going to show through the photos.

If you are taking a photo of someone who doesn't want to be there or isn't interested in the shoot, you are going to see it in their eyes, in their posture, and in the end results.

Finally, one point to hammer home is that you should always ensure that everything that happens on a shoot abides by the rules of consent.

That is ensuring that if you agree to do a fashion based shoot, you won't be encouraging a model to remove clothing, or asking them to get into positions which are not in line with what was originally agreed with in the shoot.

This comes down to basic respect, and not exploiting models.

### Principle 3: Realize that photographers have it easier than models in the majority of cases.

This may be a heated discussion point but I'm going to give you my opinion here. Photographers have it easier than models do, in terms of what is expected, and in behaviour.

As a photographer, you have to put your trust in the model being polite, being able to listen and dress as agreed, as well as making sure they credit your work properly post shoot.

Models on the other hand have to trust that the photographer will:

- Conduct themselves in a professional manner before, during and after the shoot.
- Be polite and respect agreed boundaries.
- Take photos that are flattering and suitable for the direction they want to head in with their modelling career.
- Edit the photos to a respectable standard and not overdo the editing so that they look false (unless of course that is the agreed aim).
- Credit the model properly on social media.

As you can see there is a lot more expectation and trust needed from the photographer when it comes to shooting and processing a photoshoot, but consider the above as a mindset for the trust models will put in you.

**Principle 4: Don't be intimidated by the model, and the perceived fame of modelling and the fashion industry.**

I say this in the most respectful way to everyone involved in fashion photography; don't be intimidated by the fame or glitz of the fashion industry.

You will work with models who are incredibly beautiful people, and who you could find intimidating.

Society always puts a lot of weight onto someone's looks and of course you will be working with people who can sometimes be exceptionally good looking.

Why am I saying this? Because I want you to remember Principle 1: models are people too.

You are also a person as well, and the fashion and portraiture industry is open to anyone who has the gall and passion to work professionally and create beautiful artwork for everyone involved.



**Principle 5: You should be aiming to develop a strong, personal, and professional relationship with everyone you come into contact with.**

As with so many art scenes and industries, it isn't always **what** you know, but **who** you know.

There are photographers who do have the technical skills when it comes to shooting as with some of the big name photographers, who have a huge following and people will sing their praises constantly, because they put the effort in to building a strong working relationship with people.

This can be anything from offering help to another photographer, trying their best to assemble a team, so that they can get a model published in a magazine, or giving a recommendation to other photographers.

The fashion and portraiture industry is stronger as a community, and people who take the time to help each other do not go un-noticed.

For example I once was contacted for a professional paid shoot because a model I worked with had told her friends that I gave her free advice on how to improve her iPhone photography.

People will always value others who are honest, genuine, and passionate. Do not expect anything in return and help because you want to.

## **Part 2 – Best practices and techniques for working with models**

With the above principles in place, you should now have a good mental base for learning how to actually set up a shoot, and most importantly, how to communicate and work with models effectively.

### **Arranging a Shoot.**

I'm not going to go into heaps of detail on where to find models here, but I will tell you that one of the most common ways to arrange a TFP (Time For Print) photoshoot, is by joining your local Modelling Facebook Group. Trust me, unless you live out in the wilds, there should always be a local one, if you search on Facebook, and cannot see one for your local area, set it up!

TFP - Time for print or Test for print, an arrangement between a model and photographer, whereby the photographer agrees to shoot an agreed number of photographs of the model and provide the model with a limited license to use the best photos chosen from the shoot. In exchange for the photos, the model provides his or her time.

TFCD – Time for CD or Trade for CD. Works in the same way as above except images are put on a CD or USB Stick

Here is how it usually works; you will go onto the Facebook group, and post something like:

Calling all models / MUA / creatives!

I'm new to the fashion and portraiture world and am looking to set up my first shoot with some willing creatives!

I'm 30, have previously shot real estate and wildlife but I would be really excited to get into the fashion world!

I'd like to arrange a shoot with a natural boho theme in the local park this weekend.

Please find below my recent work, and inspirational photos for the shoot!

My Facebook page is [www.facebook.com/whoshothim](http://www.facebook.com/whoshothim)

if you want to check out some more of my work and a bit more about me.

Looking forward to hearing from you!

This instantly lays a good base for you to then arrange a shoot with people who will DM you in response, or reply to the request.

From there you will want to see who replies, and if you feel the model is a good fit, you can get them on board for the shoot.

So just some basic pointers for when you do talk to models for the first time:

1. Use correct spelling, grammar, and punctuation. I cannot stress this enough. Please. If you cannot be bothered to spell the word 'there' properly, how can you assure someone that you can be bothered to edit their photographs properly?

1. Do not be demanding. Remember that people have busy lives, and the majority of people who do TFP shoots are not able to supplement their entire income with modelling. If a model says they want to shoot but when you send them a message they do not get back to you, leave it.

Archive the message and move onto who is interested. This isn't being mean but they may have changed their mind, or something has come up. Do not blame, persecute, or harass people. This is unprofessional, rude, and just not appropriate.

3. You can find out a bit more about a model in terms of what they have done previously, but keep it based around the job in hand.

By this I mean do not start asking personal questions about their private life, not everyone is comfortable about that. Remember this conversation is about working on a photoshoot, not about how long they have been with their partner.

4. A model may want to bring a chaperone. Just remember, they have not met you and do not know you.

5. If a model does not want to work with you, or is not available for a shoot, do not take it personally.

So if it turns out that it just does not work with a model, do not take offence, there may be a whole myriad of reasons you do not know about as to why they do not want to do the shoot, or arrange the shoot with you.

6. Stick to the prior arrangements, that way there are no misunderstandings.

## **The Day of the Shoot**

So now that you've set up the shoot, here comes the big day, shooting and directing the model. It can seem pretty daunting; right?

Well I have a great series of points which showcase exactly how to operate, and how you can direct a comfortable, fun, and awesome photoshoot.

These little points are all based on basic politeness and decency. These are some of the key things

### **1. Chat with the model**

As previously mentioned, you have to remember that at the end of the day, models are people too. When you first meet up with a model on location, just ask "How has your day been?". This is a simple opener to help everyone relax and get into a chilled conversation.

### **2. Remember to compliment the model**

Models will go to a lot of effort to get ready for a photoshoot, and there is nothing more flattering than a simple "you look amazing!" from the photographer. Do not be false about it. This will give the perfect confidence boost!

### **3. Ask the model thoughtful questions about their experience with photoshoots.**

People love to talk about themselves. This has been proved by a mountain of scientific studies, and of course every day life! You love to talk about yourself when asked a question; right? I am not going to lie, I do!

So when you are working with a model and in between shooting, ask them questions about what they enjoy about modelling, if they have done any shoots lately with any other photographers, and if they have been published before. I do genuinely find these kind of chats interesting and have learnt a lot about the local fashion photography scene as a result!

If you are on good terms with the model, then feel free to ask other questions about how they are finding work, and if they have been busy, but only do this if you are on good terms as it can sometimes wander into the realms of 'too personal'.

### **4. Do not touch the model or their clothing without first asking permission.**

Another key philosophy when it comes to working with models is that you should not touch a model on a photoshoot. It is inappropriate and opens the possibility of photographers breaking boundaries and acting inappropriately.

Directing can be tough sometimes, and it does take time to get comfortable. However one thing I will always say is that if you are having a hard time trying to direct a model into a pose, do the pose you want yourself (yes, yourself!) and then get the model to mimic you. Not only does this work well, but also this will probably bring on a laugh or two which eases the pressure off even more.



## **5. Tell everyone on set that you will need five minutes to scout out the next shot before setting up**

With so much rushing around and perceived pressure, it is so incredibly easy to rush around and try to get a hundred shots in ten minutes.

Simply stop and tell everyone that you need five minutes to get an idea together for the next shoot, and they can relax. People will be more than happy to be given a few minutes to relax.

## **6. When it comes to directing, if you try something and it doesn't work, don't stress**

Directing is a big challenge, especially if it is your first experience with moving a model into place, and setting a scene up, so do not get stressed or worried if something doesn't work out.

## **7. It is not working**

So what do you do if you pose someone and it does not look great?

Simply tell the model to 'relax'. This will put them at ease, stopping the pose, and hitting the reset button allowing you then to take a few minutes to reassess what you want to do next.

You may end up with posing directions which did not work before getting that one pose which did work. Do not let it get to you, and above all just take your time.

## **7. If the model is going to be changing half way through the shoot, respect their privacy and give them time and space to change**

If a model is going to be changing outfits during a photoshoot, you need to give them privacy. Studios and Halls normally have a spare room or toilets.

If not use a screen or pop-up changing tent which you can get on eBay; it works like a charm.

Alternatively, if you are shooting in an urban area see if there are any toilets nearby.

If none of these options are available and the model needs to get changed out in the open (for example in a forest or in a car), then tell them you are going to give them privacy and leave the immediate area until they say they are ready for you to return.

Bottom line: **be respectful.**

## **8. Welcome partners, friends, and family on the shoot.**

Do not be afraid to offer the opportunity for family members, friends, and partners to come along on the shoot.

**There are a few reasons for this:-**

Firstly, models may want to bring along a family friend or partner for support.

It can be a pretty nerve wracking experience sometimes, and that moral support may mean a lot to the model.

It is a legal requirement for any shoots with under 18 year olds, that a parent signs the model release form. This means that the parent must accompany you and the model on the shoot.

A chaperone should always be encouraged.

## **9. Remember to do your model release forms**

A vital necessity for all TFP shoots is that a model release form is completed. Model release forms are needed from a legal point of view. You must ensure that the model agrees that all images taken are your copyright, and this also acts as evidence that you did a TFP shoot. If you want to get published, Magazines will require this.

## **10. Do not drink before or whilst on a shoot.**

Do not drink before a shoot to give you “Dutch courage” to get over your nerves.

The same goes for models as well, you should never encourage the consumption of alcohol on any part of a shoot.

It is not only potentially dangerous, but also unprofessional.

## **11. Have fun**

At the end of the day, you want to make sure everyone who is on the shoot has some fun!

We do not do photography because it is a chore (well I don't!), but because we love to create beautiful images and experiences for people!

Photography is about being creative, having fun, producing great results and everyone working together.

## Final Comments

Working with models can be challenging.

Directing can be challenging.

However, life is just a series of challenges to overcome, and you know deep down that once you get over a challenge, you can revel in the satisfaction of perfecting your craft.

In summary, you should now have the idea that:

1. Models are people too, and may be equally, nervous at a shoot.
2. The model's comfort is your top priority, on and off set.
3. People love to talk about themselves, and having a relaxed atmosphere can help everyone on set feel much more comfortable, so chat and encourage your model.
4. Directing can be tough but there are ways to deal with it – remember the 'take a break' rule which eases off the pressure from yourself so you can reevaluate what you want to do next in the shoot.
5. Encouraging and being part of a strong community is the best way to build professional working relationships with creatives.