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Photographing High School Seniors

by Liddie Deshotel

Times have sure changed since I was a high school senior. Back when I was a high school senior, the contract photographer came to the school with a couple of backgrounds and everyone had their portraits taken with the contract photographer on the same backgrounds with a cap and gown and a black drape, oh the drape, my Mom even had her senior portraits taken with a drape, it was very classic. In some regard that is still holds true if you want the same ole, same ole. But for the senior that wants to go above the normal, classic senior session, the sky is the limit, literally!

Today's seniors want to be photographed as fashion models, well the girls do at least and maybe a few guys too.

I have to admit, it is so much fun to photograph high school Seniors, they will do almost anything you ask of them. You can photograph fun and creative images in the studio as well as on location. I'm located in the Dallas area, so when a senior wants an urban session, I take them to Deep Ellum; it is such a cool place to photograph with walls of every color, graffiti on walls that change frequently and lots of cool alleys.



But if you don't have a Deep Ellum, I'm sure you have something in your area that will work. I recently went home to Louisiana to photograph a few seniors and one of the Moms said, "We don't have any cool places for photography like in Dallas, this is a small town". I was determined to prove her wrong, I took a little drive around town and said, "Ok, I've found some great places to photograph, so let's get started." Here are just a couple of images from one of the sessions.



As you can see, you don't have to be in Dallas to have great backgrounds to photograph against. I know every photographer is always looking for cool places for photography; they are around every corner, maybe even around your corner.

A few tips for a fun and creative senior session:

Talk to your senior about their session before you photograph them, it will make for a fun session and will allow you to create images that will show off their personality. Either; talk to your senior on the phone or in person, a consultation is the way to go. Ask them what they are interested in; sports, books, computers, music, fashion, you get the idea, then use that information and apply it when you photograph their session.

I always make it a point to talk about the clothing choices. You have to tell them what to wear or you will be photographing a senior wearing plaids and stripes all day long. That is what's in style these days and just because it's in style that doesn't mean they have to be photographed in it. Of course style does matter, but you can suggest the proper clothing for portraits, for instance, solids with sleeves will look better for portraits than a plaid shirt will. For girls, I give them things to think about for clothing; a summer dress with cowboys boots, a prom dress, holey jeans, a jacket with a fur hood, scarves, hats, lots of jewelry, shoes and more shoes. For guys, you will be lucky if they bring 2 pairs of jeans and a couple of shirts. You can still offer some suggestions and hopefully they will bring more clothes or talk to their Mom and she will see that they will bring more clothes; solid polo style shirt, button down solid shirt, shorts, sports jersey, nice jeans, holey jeans and maybe even a pair of dress pants. If they are involved in activities at school and they would like to include that in their session, then tell them to bring the uniform and any equipment with them to the session.



I tell them to bring more clothes than they think is necessary, this will give me a variety of clothes to choose from during their session. I will usually select the outfit for them to wear for each background, because I want the background to compliment their outfit, not overpower the senior. They will only bring clothes that look good on them, so they like my suggestions.

During the session to put your senior at ease, play some music and set the mood for the session. You can get a set of speakers for your studio and plug their iPod or iTouch in and play their music. If they don't have an

iPod, then turn the radio on and play their favorite station.

When they arrive for their session it's also important to tell your senior what you are going to be doing during the session; this will start a little chitchat between you and the senior. This is what I say, "I'm going to be staring at you during the session looking at where the lighting is falling on you, looking to see if your clothes need to be adjusted and making sure your hair looks awesome! I will take some close ups, some full lengths, some smiles and some serious images so you will have a variety of great images to choose from." Take a couple of images, then show them one or two images on the back of the camera and be genuinely excited about the image. That should put your senior at ease and make the rest of the session flow.

Be creative during the session, try different lighting set ups, not the same old main light, fill light and a kicker. Try kicking up your ISO and just use your modeling lights in the studio or maybe try getting a meter reading of F11 and set your camera at F8 to purposely, yes I did say purposely, overexpose the image to get a high contrast look. Using colored gels is another fun option to an otherwise plain set up, try different camera angles, stand on a ladder or lay on the ground for a fun new approach, use a fan to put some movement in your image. You can also, tilt your camera; remember the subject does not have to be dead center in the image. Have fun on your session, step outside your comfort zone and try a least one new thing on every session; it just might be your best selling image!

Liddie Deshotel, an awarding winning photographer with over 20 years of experience, is known for her unique style of lifestyle portraiture, which has been a hallmark of "Portraits by Liddie". In 2005 she earned her Photography Certification from the Professional Photographers of America and continues to mold her unique style through photography workshops and classes. She is a member of the: Professional Photographers of America, Texas Professional Photographers Association and Dallas Professional Photographers Guild. You can learn more about Liddie and her work by [visiting her website](#).