

Back to School Portraits

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The start of the new school year is just round the corner, and that first day is a momentous occasion for both pupils and their families. Try our ideas for capturing really special back to school shots.



- The age of your subject will generally dictate what you can draw from them. While four to nine-year-olds tend to be natural performers in front of the camera, once they hit ten they'll generally be more self-conscious about how they look and how they come across, so one of your main jobs will be to make them feel good about themselves, and to make them look good, too. Give them a bit of direction – get them posing with one hand on their hip or in a pocket, arms folded confidently across their chest, shoulders turned slightly – and you'll get far better results.
- Children tend to get bored easily when it comes to having their photographs taken, so you need to work fast. With mere milliseconds to capture expressions, maybe a little longer for

poses, you need fast lenses and [high shutter speeds](#), and complete familiarity with your gear. A [shorter lens](#) can be helpful as it keeps you physically closer to your subjects – if you're shooting from the other end of the garden with a super-telephoto, it's going to be that much harder to keep their attention.

- When you're framing up the shot, the more distractions you can cut out, the easier it is for the viewer to focus directly on what matters. It's not just a matter of 'unclutter your background'; it's more like 'unclutter everything in the frame that takes your eye away from what you want to see'. That may mean physically moving things or changing the angle, even if it means the lighting won't be as strong and you have to add illumination with a burst of flash.
- If your composition isn't what you'd perfectly envisaged, as long as the subject is sharp you can later crop as a way of recomposing to get the look and feel you really want. The higher your camera's resolution, the easier this is to do, as you have far more scope for cropping in using say, 24MP instead of 12MP.

Quick tips

- Take the same 'first day' portrait every year – same pose, same location, both full length and portrait close-up – it's a great way to record how they grow up so quickly!
- To totally avoid those 'first day' nerves, why not do your shoot a day or two beforehand at the end of the summer holidays – it will be much less stressful for both photographer and subject!
- Make sure everything is ready for the big day – memory cards empty and working, batteries charged, uniform spotless and shoes polished.