

Perfect Portraits Made Easy



By Michael Zelbel &
**GOOD LIGHT
ACADEMY**

In Cooperation with
Good Light! Magazine

GL!

Quickstart Guide: The GL Method
For Flash Photography

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The GL Method

Welcome to the GL Method for Portrait Photography Beginners. This method is about becoming excellent at portraiture in record time. You will use 20% of the options that bring you over 80% of the results. It's about:

- using only one lens, one flash, one modifier with our camera
- adjusting only one camera setting, shutter speed, for ambient exposure
- adjusting only one flash setting (power) to control the exposure of the model
- shooting only with one, well-defined type setup
- taking models through an easy to learn sequence of charming poses
- leveraging a lean process for image selection, retouching, and distribution

Focusing on fewer variables might make your photos more diverse and creative. That's counterintuitive. It is about producing more successful photos. You will not only have more winners within boundaries of the standard GL Method. You will also thrive in those moments, when you deviate and put your own creative spin on it.

Mastering the most important variables will bring joy and motivation to you. You avoid overwhelm. Fun is very important. I need your self-confidence and motivation. That's when I share the advanced GL Methods for Portrait Photography with you.



Get Beauty Portrait Gear



We all love photo gear, don't we? To become excellent at portrait photography fast, you need gear that is simple and good. It must be able to produce fantastic portraits in a reliable, reproducible way. At the same time, it has to be simple, so it does not get in your way when you shoot photos. Get hold of a set of gear that looks similar to this list:

- A camera with a manual mode and a hot-shoe for an external flash. Nearly all mirrorless and DSLR cameras fall into this category. Even the most affordable DSLRs make excellent portraits. Yet, if you just have a big paycheck, you might look for fun toys. High-end mirrorless cameras have incredible features. I love an autofocus mode that finds the eyes for your subject. I am using the Sony a7 R II (<http://goodlightmag.com/a7rii>).
- A lens providing you with an aperture of f/2.8 or faster and a focal length of about 50 mm. A 50 mm, f/1.8 prime lens is perfect. A zoom like 28-70mm f/2.8 is terrific. But it's more expensive and unnecessary at the moment. The

lens I make almost all my photos with is the Sony FE 24-70mm f/2.8 GM (<http://goodlightmag.com/24-70>).

- A speed light flash with guide number 58 or stronger, capable of High Speed Sync and with a radio receiver. The receiver should be built-in. I am using the Mitros+ speedlight (<http://goodlightmag.com/mitros>).
- A radio transmitter for your flash. I trigger my Mitros+ and my studio lights with the Odin II (<http://goodlightmag.com/odin2>).
- A light stand that is at least 180 cm / 6 feet high. I am using the P200 MKII Compact Light Stand (<http://goodlightmag.com/p200>).
- An umbrella swivel. It should be sturdy enough to hold your speed light and your umbrella securely. I am using a Neewer S-Type Bracket (<http://goodlightmag.com/stype>).
- A 40" white shoot-through umbrella. Any brand will do. (<http://goodlightmag.com/40inch>)

This is a set that enables you to shoot stunning photos in probably 95% of all thinkable situations. It's not only for beginners. This set is what I use for most of my photos, including those for my tutorial videos, books, and magazines.



Camera Settings

So, you have your gear. You read your camera manual and found out which buttons provide you with the most important functions. This is the right time to set up a few things in your camera. You only have to do this once. The settings stay the same as long as you are shooting portraits with the GL Method:

- Filetype: RAW
- Autofocus: Face Recognition. If that's not a feature of your camera, choose a central autofocus point. Don't worry about any other fancy autofocus modes.
- White Balance: Daylight (because your Speed Light emits this color)
- Mode: Manual
- Sensitivity: ISO 100 (only when your background looks seriously too dark, you increase it to ISO 200 or higher)
- Aperture: f/2.8 (only when shooting groups, you would change to f/5.6),

There is one camera setting you tweak to adjust the exposure of your background. In other words, you control the effect of the available light on your photo. It's the shutter speed. But you will start with a default value for that one, too:

- Shutter speed: 1/200s



Flash Settings

Just like with your camera, there are a couple of options you have to set and forget. Please set them up now on your flash AND on your radio trigger, so the two can communicate with each other:

- Channel 1 (or the first channel your radio system offers)
- Group: A
- Zoom: Manual, at 24 mm (if your flash only offers 28 mm, it's fine too)
- High-Speed Sync (HSS): Enabled

There is one value you will tweak using the flash trigger. It's the flash power. However, you will always use the same value as your starting point:

- Power: 1/16th

Ignore all other, options, like speed recycling etc.

One advantage of lighting with flashes is these lights freeze the action. A flash is quick. It lasts somewhere around 1/1000s. The exact duration varies between flash models and depends on the power setting. But it will always be fast enough to freeze the hair of your model as it is flying in the air after she is tossing her head.



Step 1: Setup your Studio Corner



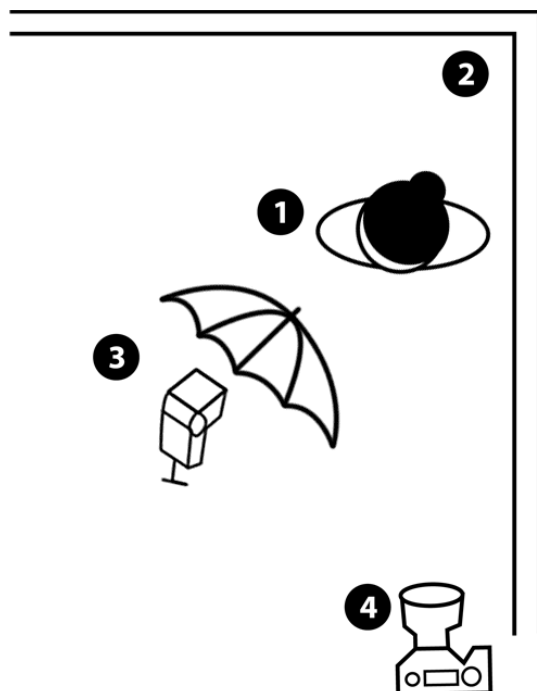
Does your home have a corner where your subject can pose? Does it have simple, clean wallpaper, at least on one side of the corner? Maybe a simple white curtain covering the other side? Found it? There you have your studio corner! It's the place where you will make awesome portraits. Your corner should have the following three characteristics.

1. It's at least 3 feet / 1 meter to each side. The bigger, the better.
2. The wallpaper should be simple, ideally white.
3. It's free of furniture, paintings, and posters. Remove all that!

Troubleshooting

- If a wall looks busy, cover it with a white curtain.
- If there is a suitable corner, make a DIY v-flap out of two big Styrofoam sheets, 1m x 2m each, or use wood and cover it with white fabric.

Your studio corner can be in your living room, cellar, garage, office, or any place that lends itself to photo shootings. When you set up in the corner, it should look like the following diagram. You can mirror the setup and shoot it the other way. You should shoot both directions in your sessions.



1. Model
2. Your Studio Corner
3. Speed light and Shoot Through Umbrella
4. Camera with the Radio Transmitter

If you cannot find such a corner, go for alternatives and find a place in a park or garden nearby. Go for a spot where your model is in the shadow, not in the sun, where she has green nature in her background and where she can lean on a tree. In this case, you don't have a corner, but it will work nevertheless.

In any case, use your corner for the next 100 or so photos. You will master portraiture in this corner!



Step 2: Test and Tweak



Before you shoot any model in your studio corner from Step 1, take the time to do a test shooting. Do it at least one day before your model shooting. Set up the light in your corner as if you were photographing a model:

- Decide where the model will pose and where your camera will be.
- Set up the light stand about 4 feet / 120 cm to the right of your camera position. The other right, also called the left, is fair game as well.
- Attach the swivel and place the speed light in the swivel. Turn on the speed light. Make sure it listens to your con-

troller.

- Attach the umbrella to the swivel. Use the end of its pole. Open the umbrella.
- Angle the umbrella about 45 degrees downwards using the swivel. Turn it towards the model's position and raise the light stand to a height of about 6 feet, 180 cm.
- Make sure your camera and flash settings are set to the values discussed previously.

Camera:

- Mode: Manual
- Aperture: f/2.8 (only when shooting groups change to f/5.6),



- Shutter speed 1/200s,
- Sensitivity: ISO 100

Flash:

- Power: 1/16th

Hold your hand in the place where your model will stand. With your other hand, take a test photo of the scene. Do you love what you see in your display? Then you are done with the test. Otherwise, tweak your exposure like this:

- If the background is too dark, slow down the shutter speed by one stop, e.g., from 1/200s to 1/100s.

- If the background is too bright, speed up the shutter speed by one stop, e.g., from 1/200s to 1/400s. Enable High Speed Sync on your flash controller if you have not already done it.
- If your subject is too dark, turn up your flash power one stop, e.g., From 1/16th power to 1/8 power.
- If your subject is too bright turn down your flash power one stop, e.g., from 1/16th power to 1/32th power.

Once you are happy with the exposure, write down the settings so you can refer to them once you are shooting your model at this location.



Step 3: Engaging Your Model



Identify models, who are comfortable posing for the kind of photos you are about to shoot. There are many options:

- Think about friends and family, who would like to model.
- Visit a local camera club that organizes model shootings.
- Join online communities for models and photographers, like <http://www.modelmayhem.com/> and <http://www.onemodelplace.com/>.

Once you find a model, give her a detailed briefing. Discuss with her the following details:

- What are the exact photos you want to produce?
- What are you going to use them for?
- Will you compensate the model or are you looking to trade her time for the photos you will produce for her (TfP)?
- What are all the logistics, like time, place, clothes etc., involved in your shoot?

Agree with her to use the Standard Model Release from Getty Images. Don't use anything else. Find the release in your language here:

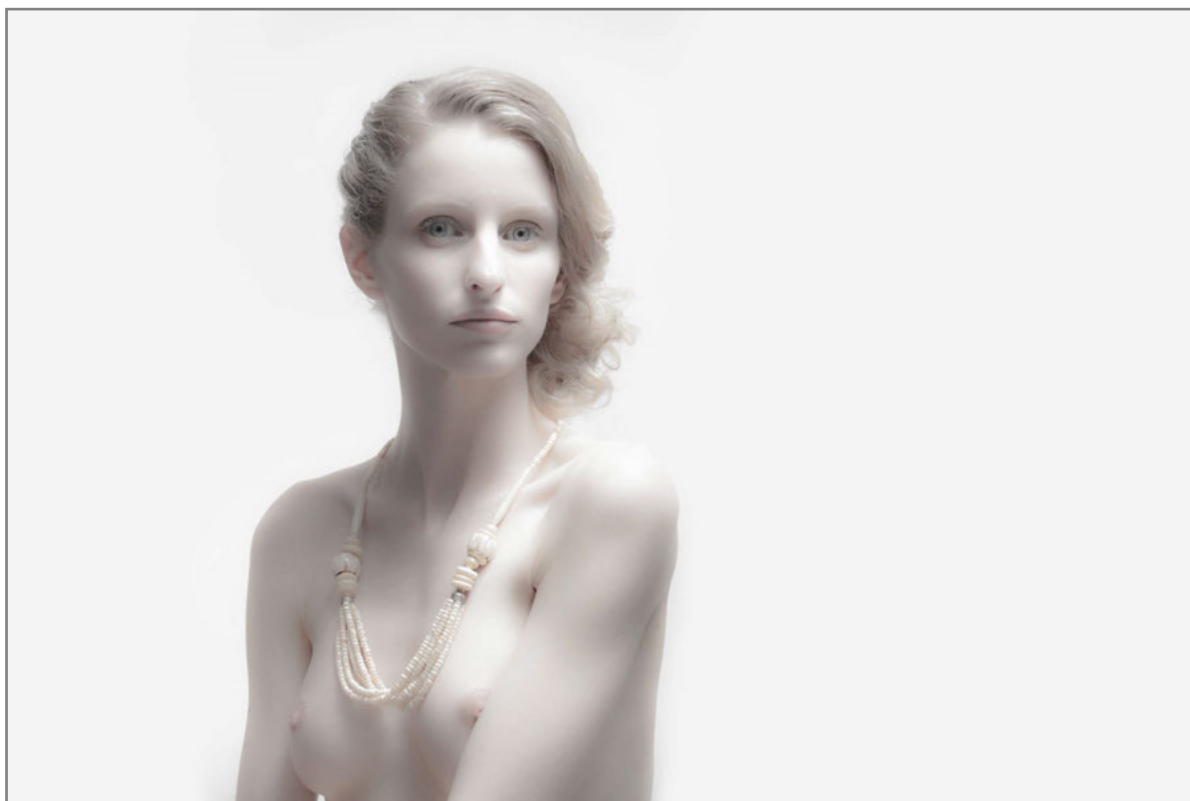
https://contributors.gettyimages.com/article_public.aspx?article_id=1834

1. Print the release and fill in all details.
2. Bring the release to the shoot.
3. Have the model sign it.

If you have no signed release from your subject, then do not use their photos for anything. Otherwise, you are asking for trouble. You made a great image of a model in bridal boudoir style and published it in a book. A few months later, the model's lawyer asks you to pull the book from the market. He also wants a hefty compensation for her. He makes the argument that the model converted to a religion that does not allow for Christian white marriage or for boudoir photography. "This would never happen to me" is what my fellow photographer thought before it happened to him.



Step 4: Shooting Time!



Many photographers get sweaty hands, an incredibly high heart rate, and a surprising pale face right before their shoot. They feel overwhelmed and insecure. You, on the other hand, need not be nervous. You tested your setup, and you will photograph your model in exactly the poses that you will find in this chapter. There's pretty much nothing you can screw up.

Set up your light exactly how you tested it in Step 2. Before you ask the model to enter the set, make one more test photo. Photograph your own hand and adjust the camera and flash settings if necessary (just like in Step 2). Now, start with your model. Let her alternate

through the 8 poses shown here.

Focus on only these two rules for now:

- The face of the model is turned directly to the light.
- Her body is turned away from the light, so the light can float over her body but does not “hit it” from the front.

When photographing, press the shutter button half down to let your camera focus on your model. If your camera features face detection or eye detection, it will show you when it found your model's face. Alternatively, use the central focus point (e.g. with older DSLRs) then bring this point to your model's

eye. Move it over the eye that is closest to your lens. Press the shutter half way down, so your camera focusses. Then hold the shutter and recompose the way you want your photo to look. Now press the shutter down completely to make the photo.

Photograph your model in each of the starting poses. Go through them one by one. Let your model go into the pose. Correct the pose until it resembles exactly the starting pose.

When shooting the pose, check the result on your display or inside your electronic viewfinder. If you are not happy with the exposure, then tweak your exposure values or the position of your shoot-through umbrella and shoot again. Take your time. Repeat this until you nailed the light and the exposure of the pose you are working on. Only then continue with the next one. But if you feel the pose does not work for your model, then skip it.

POSE 1



POSE 2



POSE 3



POSE 4

POSE 5



POSE 6



POSE 7

POSE 8



Once you are done with the starting poses, play around and improvise more poses. Let your creativity run with it. Also, ask the model if she has any favorite poses or any ideas. Try them as well. The starting poses shown here are taken from my guide on flow posing. Once you are ready to learn an awesome technique for posing your model, watch this video:

<http://tips.goodlightmag.com/boudoir-flow-posing>

Step 5: After the Shoot

You might have made many photos in your photo shoot. If you don't like them, that's fine. In this case, the shoot was just for practice. If you like the photos, then pick the two or three you like best. Don't pick more; otherwise, you will get too caught up with one single shooting.

Photo Selection

To pick those photos from your shoot:

- Copy the photos from your memory card to your phone or tablet. For photo selection, I recommend you use the app Lightroom Mobile. If your device has no slot for your card, then attach a card reader. I use an iPad, and I attach the Apple card reader and copy over my RAW files.
- Import all files into a new collection in Lightroom Mobile.
- Scroll through the whole shoot and tap on the "Pic" symbol for those few photos you want to continue processing.
- If you picked more than three, filter the list of photos to those you picked. Then unpick the least desirable photos until only 3 are left

Basic Postproduction

There are a few tweaks that photographers apply to their photos regularly. You can do so in Lightroom mobile:

- Tap Edit.
- It's nearly always a good idea to enable the setting Optics > Lens Correction.
- Want your image lighter or darker? Tweak the Light > Exposure up or down 0,5 EV

or so.

- Like to see more detail in the dark areas? Pull the Light > Shadows setting up to +50 or similar.
- Could the skin of your model be softer? Go to Effects > Clarity and try a setting around -30.
- How does your photo look in black & white? Try it by tapping Color > B & W.

Every tweak you do in Lightroom is non-destructive. Your image file is not changed. You can always go back and try different settings.

Lightroom mobile allows for more retouching than this. But it is probably not worth your time to learn it. It is better to outsource this work.

Outsource retouching

If you want to retouch your photos in a more sophisticated way, do it on Fiverr:

- Go to <https://www.fiverr.com/>
- Search for „photo retouch“.
- Choose your favorite retoucher based on their before/after photos and their price.
- Usually, you just have to spend \$5 / photo.
- Give them your first photo to retouch.
- If you are happy with the result, continue with the next photos. If not, try another retoucher.
- Once you have the retouched photos back from your retoucher, import them into Lightroom Mobile, so they stay in your photo catalogue.

Not happy with Fiverr? Try retouchers on <https://www.upwork.com/> and on <http://>

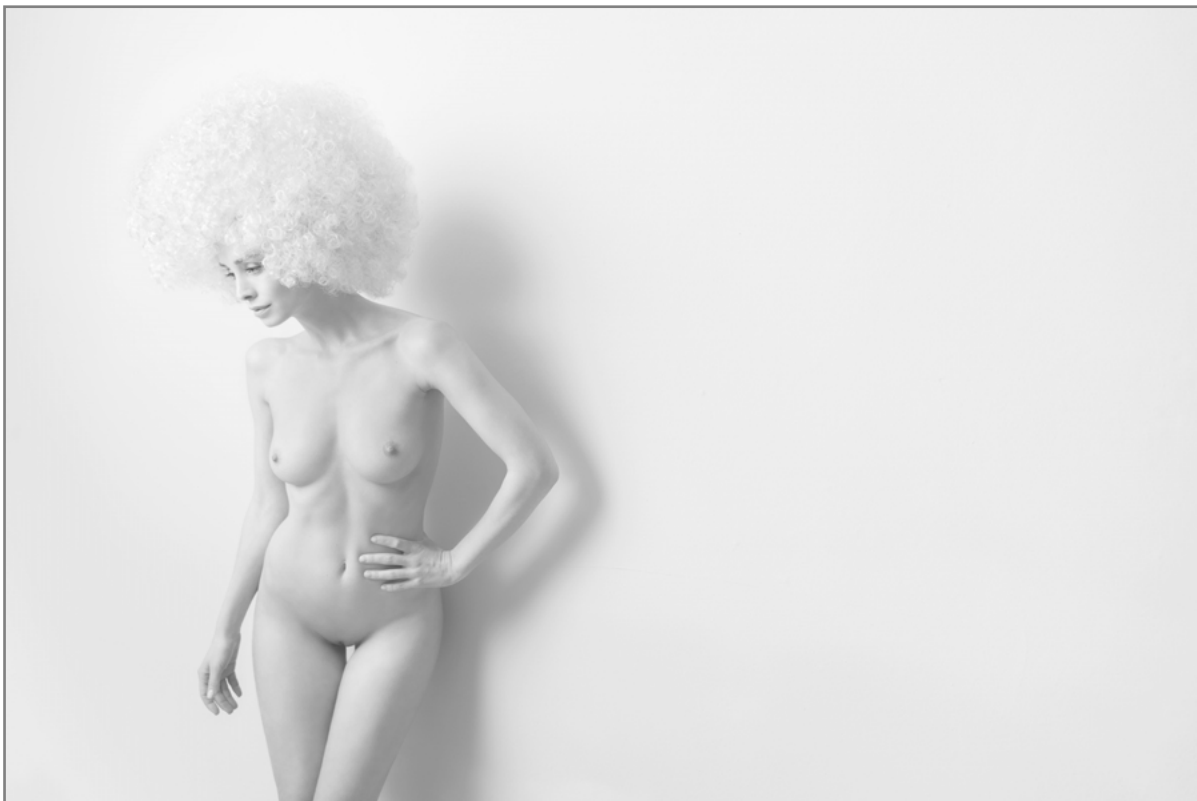
www.modelmayhem.com/. That's where I found the retouchers that I trust with postprocessing my photos. I also referred them successfully to photographers in [Good Light Academy](#).

Distribution

One of the most rewarding moments is when you start sharing the fruits of your work. I assume you can access your social media accounts as well as your email from your mobile device. In this case, your whole flow happens on the same device. In Lightroom mobile, simply do this:

- Select one of your retouched photos.
- Tap the share icon (upper right corner).
- Tap the email icon if you want to send the photo by email, e.g., for sharing photos with your model.
- Tap the one of the social networks to post your photo there, e.g., Facebook or Instagram.
- Tap the printer icon if you want to print your image if a printer is available to your mobile device, e.g., through AirPrint in iOS.

In any case, Lightroom renders your RAW file into the JPG format suitable for the chosen purpose. Then it sends it to the destination you have chosen.





Congratulations! Now What?



Three things:

1. Say a huge Thank You to your model!
2. Celebrate your shoot!
3. Rinse and repeat!



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Michael Zelbel is an amateur photographer operating a photo studio in Düsseldorf, Germany. He accepts bookings for fashion, beauty, and nude photography. For his colleagues of every level of ability, he created an online place where he works personally with fellow photographers, turning them into established professionals in just 12 months. It's easy, it's fun and it's based on the latest scientific research on rapid skill improvement. This is how peak performers in arts like classical music, painting or, in this case, photography, become world class in the shortest possible time.

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