

The Posing Playbook

...for Kids Who Don't Do Posing



by Tamara Lackey

Introduction

In my more than ten years of experience professionally photographing children, I have found one universal truth to remain constant: most kids don't do poses. As I've said, many kids are amenable to being moved this way and that and can follow posing direction beautifully – you just often have to use an entirely different approach to get them to do so, and it isn't often verbal. (Oh, and they also won't do it if they're

I created this playbook because I have found the act of referencing my past work to be extraordinarily inspirational when I'm in the middle of a shoot and, frankly, out of portrait concepts. I'd started by bringing small proof prints with me, then moved on to a large binder and finally, blessedly, found the maximum utility of an electronic album on my smart phone. I would glance through the images for ideas – but eventually I started finding the listing of metadata to be quite useful. At the time Past Me jotted down additional information about exactly how the shot was achieved – what lighting was used, what games I played in certain situations, and any other helpful information – was quite appreciated by Present Me.

After all, having poses, metadata, and easy bullet points to reference are rather handy when you are spending a lot of time on a shoot doing this... which is what I tend to be doing quite a lot. (That's my shoe he's running away with by the way; hence, the barefoot chasing.)

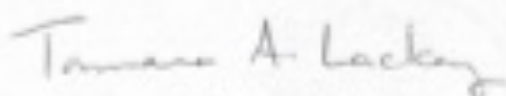


Each of these images show not only the final “posed” shot (read: worked for, styled, and often achieved with some level of effort) but also exposure selection, any additional lighting or location specifics that came into play, and the intangible but powerful work done to bring spirit into each of the images.

I hope you will find the evolution of how “final shots” are created to be useful and educational. I suggest that you either print, laminate, and ring-bound this playbook – or, even simpler, save it to a device you might bring to your shoots, whether it’s a smart phone or tablet. That way, you can quickly glance through posing concepts and keep the ideas coming as you move through your shoot.

Either way, I look forward to seeing how you use this as inspiration in your own work!

Take care,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Tamara A. Lackey". The ink is dark and the signature is fluid.

Tamara A. Lackey

Full Frame

I photographed this pre-teen girl on a cloudy day, and we stood right in the middle of a grassy field. The clouds offered a perfectly diffused light, which I took advantage of, and I used only one reflector – but more as a wind creator/fan than as a fill light. You can see in *Full Frame BTS 1* that I shot fairly straight-on, and a 42" reflector was waved up and down to add some motion to her hair for the final image.

In *Full Frame BTS 2*, she looks at me naturally – a bit of “I am not really into this” mixed with “but I kind of want to look good.” I felt like three things needed to be improved upon – first, I wanted to show a bit more warmth in her expression. I don’t mind serious, or even “attitude” looks – but I want to show the warmth that I know is there.



Full Frame BTS 1

Full Frame

Secondly, I wanted more light in her eyes. And, finally, I wanted to cut out the background entirely and have her fill the entire frame. The background wasn't helping the image in any way (and anytime I can remove something from an image without taking away from the image, I prefer to do that.)

The last two parts were fairly simple: have her tilt her chin up a bit, to catch more light in her eyes, while I stood a bit taller myself. This allowed me to keep a more flattering angle. Often it's just small tweaks like this that change the catchlight situation on the fly. Next, I zoomed in a bit more, to the full 70mm focal length (and then I also cropped in a bit tighter after that in post).



Full Frame BTS 2

Full Frame

The first correction – her expression – was just fun to do. I don't often like to say "smile", unless I'm exaggerating something to silly effect – so, instead, we brought it about naturally. I asked my assistant (often I ask parents or siblings to do this when I don't have an assistant) to go crazy with the fanning. Doing so made her hair go wild and brought about the surprised smile in *Full Frame BTS 3*. I jumped in to fix her hair and asked her to immediately go back to "normal". She did her best, but luckily the smile still stayed in her eyes. And on her lips.



Full Frame BTS 3

Full Frame

- a reflector can be used as a fan to create movement in the hair
- strive for more warmth in expressions, if suitable
- if the background is not helping, crop in to remove it completely
- to add more light in the eyes have your subject tilt her chin up a bit while making sure you are still up a littler higher at a flattering angle



Nikon D4 • Lens: 24-70 mm 2.8 • Focal Length: 70mm
1/160 • f4.5 • ISO 1000 • Metering: Matrix/Evaluative

Air

This athletic 10 year-old boy loved the idea of sprinting from the top of the stairs and catching as much air as possible. So we started there. I positioned myself straight in front of him, crouched a bit, and used the burst mode on my D4 to quickly grab a couple of different expressions, with the intention of pulling the best one.

Since he was jumping directly towards a concrete sidewalk, on a partly cloudy day, I had the benefit of some bounce from the light grey ground and didn't supplement the shot with any other light (although I could've produced some interesting results with a video light here).

Note that he's jumping directly toward me. This matters. The angle the travel of your subject is moving in actually makes a difference when it comes to shutter speed. If he were moving right to left, for instance – or across my viewfinder – a



Air BTS

higher shutter speed would have been more necessary. But subjects that are hurtling their bodies at, or directly away, from your lens are actually a lot easier to capture with a slower shutter speed. Especially if you're using a tripod. I wasn't, by the way... And I hardly ever do use one while shooting out on location in daylight. Sometimes the trade-off of more freedom to move is worth a bit of technical sacrifice.

The other consideration, of course, is focus. When a subject is moving towards or away from the lens,

Air

it's actually more difficult to grab a quick focus than if they were moving across the viewfinder, where it's easier for a focus system to register a moving subject. For that reason, I tend to shoot with a wider aperture when subjects are moving across the lens – and a bit more extended field of focus for subjects that are coming directly at me. In this case, it wasn't much more – an f-stop of 3.2.

As is demonstrated frequently in this book, angle can change everything about the feel of a shot. The first thing I needed to change after shooting *Air BTS* was my position, relative to the subject. I needed to minimize all the distraction behind him as much as possible, and I needed to show way more sky. So I went from crouching a bit to just laying flat on my stomach. I only asked of him one thing: please don't land on my cranium. He considered my

request, but didn't confirm that he wouldn't, then climbed back up the stairs. The glee of possibly landing on my cranium was enough to keep his expression bright.

The other issue I noticed in *Air BTS* was that my shutter speed was too low – at 1/400th, breaking my own rule of keeping shutter speed faster than 1/500th for motion shots. It's rather easy to break your own rules when you're whirling the settings around so frequently in manual mode. This is why I double-check the metadata every so often, as I go. I know from my experience that it's far too easy to get so lost in the image-making that you forget where your shutter speed is.

What I found on image review was that *Air BTS* was a bit softer and a bit lighter than I would've preferred. So I bumped up my shutter speed to 1/640th and left everything else the same – and, thus, achieved *The Final Shot*.

Air

- use burst mode to capture a quickly-moving subject with a variety of expressions
- the direction your subject is moving in is important for shutter speed - faster speed is required for subjects moving across the viewfinder
- if your subject is moving towards or away from you, use a more extended field of focus
- notice the background/angle and try different positions to get the most attractive shot



Nikon D4 • Lens: 24-70 mm 2.8 • Focal Length: 27 mm
1/640 • f3.2 • ISO 1000 • Metering: Matrix/Evaluative

