



E-BOOK

HOW TO TAKE AMAZING PHOTOS OF YOUR PETS

*CAPTURE PICTURES
THAT BEG
TO BE PAINTED*

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This book was created with lots of love (and likely some noseprints on the camera lens) to help you capture the pets you adore in all their glory. Please enjoy it for your personal use only, and don't copy, share, or distribute it without permission — my tail would be pretty droopy if you did.

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Every effort has been made to ensure that the tips and techniques in this book are accurate and helpful. The author isn't responsible for any camera mishaps, muddy pawprints, or unexpected photobombs that may occur along the way — but hopes they make your journey even more memorable.

*Front cover photo was shot on an iPhone. There was a large window behind the photographer, and the lighting was augmented with a couple of portable stand lights.

The problem...

If you are like most pet lovers, your phone is probably in need of extra storage space just because of all of the pictures that you take of your adorable pet. True confession: The dog pictures outnumber the kid pictures on my phone. And I have 8 kids. (We raise goldendoodle puppies. Don't judge...)

Yet, somehow, do many of those pictures seem... lacking? You flip through them and you see, oops... a blur of moving fur. Is that a vaguely dog-shaped blob running across the lawn? Wait, there's a good one, yet-where are his eyes? His eyes are so pretty in real life-so why can't you see them in your pictures?

And how many of those pictures do you actually display? Wouldn't it be nice to have a truly beautiful image of your pet to hang on your walls, rather than being jumbled in with a pile of random photos of receipts, "is this the right deodorant?" picture you texted from the store, and recipes that looked good but that you might never make, that are stuck on your phone (or is that just what fills my camera roll, lol?)

Do you want a wall worthy image of your pet? One that captures the personality and beauty of your beloved animal? Our pets are with us for such a short time (which is their only fault, really) and yet their impact on our lives is HUGE. It's time to give them the honor they are due.

Stick with me and I will show you how to capture your pets in a way that will make them undeniably paintable. After all, ***a fantastic painting starts with a quality photo of your pet!***

The Solution: Sit, Stay, Snap!

A truly good photo of your pet is going to consist of several key features. This isn't too hard, I promise! Keep these ideas in mind, and you'll be on your way to a great, paintable picture of your pet. (**LAF** for short)

- Lighting
- Angle of camera
- Filling the frame

Lighting Do's and Don'ts

Pet portraits are best shot in natural daylight. Taking pictures outdoors can be an effective way to make sure your pet is well lit. An overcast day makes for nice lighting. If it's sunny, make sure the sun is shining on your back (as the photographer) or off to the side of your pet. If the sun is shining behind your pet, it's not going to be a good photo.

Indoor lighting and flash photography can cause awkward highlights and shadows. Even worse, they can distort the eyes of your pet (we've all seen those strange demon eyes that can show up in pictures when our pets' eyes reflect a flash.)

If you must take a picture inside, try to make sure that a big window, with lots of daylight flooding through it, is behind you as the photographer. Another effective option is to have the window off to one side of your pet to help light them from the side. See examples on the next pages.

How to set up for success if you must shoot inside!

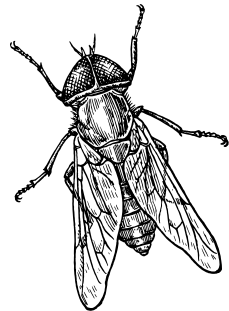
Take a few minutes to rearrange your space so that you can compose a good shot. Open the curtains wide to let lots of daylight inside. Pull a chair, ottoman or sofa over close to the window. Make sure the light is flooding over the side of the furniture.

Toss a doll, stuffed animal, or throw pillow on the seat and snap a few pictures. Are you seeing the light, medium and dark colors of the toy, doll, or pillow in your pictures? If yes, then proceed to taking pictures of your pet.

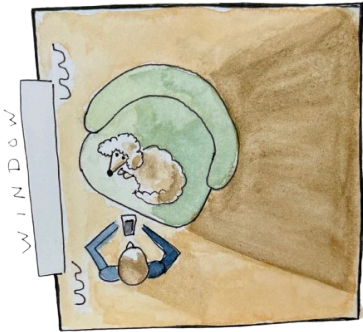
Get him or her on the seat, get down low, and snap lots of photos (or videos) while making goofy sounds, offering treats, or doing whatever it takes to get your pet to look at you while it sits or lays there.

Let's imagine the setup:

Pretend with me for a minute that you are a fly on the ceiling looking down at the living room. There is a large picture window over to the left, and the room has a couch and a chair available.

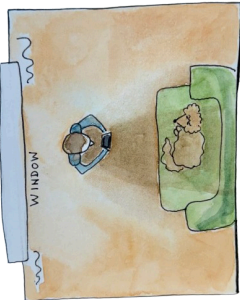


 Do this...



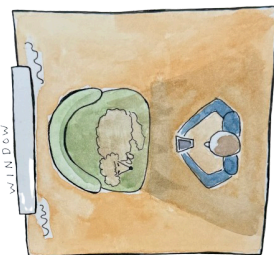
Pull the chair over close to the window and turn it towards the window so it can capture as much light as possible! This will cast great light on your pet, and all of the pretty colors in the fur and eyes should show up nicely this way.

 Don't do this...



In this setup, the couch is on the far side of the room across from the window. Do not try to photograph your pet here. The couch is too far from the light, and when you stand in front of the window, you will cast a shadow on your pet. Not good!

 ...or this, either.



Yes, the chair is by the window, but... it is backlit. Your camera will read the light coming through the window and your pet will look dark and murky. I will demonstrate the differences with photos on the next two pages.

Backlighting woes...

While in some ways I do like this picture, it's not great to paint from. Why? The window is behind the puppy, which leaves his face and body in shadows. His eyes cannot be clearly seen, and it would be difficult for me as an artist to render the fur color accurately in a painting.



(Backlighting is a no-no)

...vs. highlighting all of the features.



(Keep the light behind you, or off to the side of your pet)

The person that took this photo had a large picture window directly behind him. He is slouched down low and he is not casting a shadow on the dog. The light from the window is lighting the dog up very well. (The dog is within 5' of the glass). His eyes can be clearly seen, and the fur colors are accurate, with distinct light, medium and dark values easily seen. Note that the background is distracting, and I would eliminate it if I used this picture as a basis for a painting.

From mediocre...

These are examples of backlit pictures where the light is coming from behind the kitty. Even though he is black, this cat has an awesome variety of tints and shades in his fur. Unfortunately, we can't see those colors in these pictures! He's merely a black blobby loaf without a lot of detail. Let's fix this.



...to marvelous!



Same cat, same room, same chair. By simply shifting the position of the chair so that the light is streaming in across the side of the cat, we can now see his eyes, fur texture and pattern, and the beautiful variety of fur coloration he has! The difficult part becomes choosing just which picture to paint, which is a good problem to have.



Angle of Camera

Most of the time, our pets are quite a bit smaller than we are. This can translate into awkward photos of us looking down on them. These pictures can distort their proportions, and generally won't make for a great painting, although exceptions are possible.



(Awkward photo that was shot from above)

Avoid this...

See how the dog's head looks huge compared to her body? There is a lot of distortion going on here. It works okay for a meme. But unless you like the look of a large head and a tiny, distorted body, skip these shots when looking for a portrait worthy picture.

Get low instead...

You'll get a much better photo by bending, squatting, or even sitting down on the ground so that you are on the same level as your pet. If he or she won't sit well for you, enlist a helper, or tie off the leash to a fence, post, or other immovable object while you snap away. Also make sure your phone is parallel with your pet, rather than tilting it awkwardly.



(Photo taken from same level as dog)

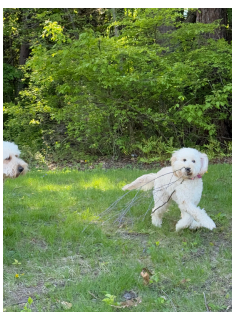
Fill the Frame

We all have an invisible bubble around us. You know, personal space. But when it comes to shooting pictures of pets, closer is better. Try to fill the frame with your pet, without cutting off their ears, eyes or nose. (Again, there are artistic exceptions. But let's try to begin by leaving body parts intact, shall we?)

For a painting, I am usually going to focus on the face, so it's not as important to have the entire body in the photo. So, get up close to your pet when taking your pictures and fill the frame with their head, ears, and nose.

If getting close means being slobbered by doggy kisses (wet lenses don't take good pictures), then try using the zoom feature on your phone to help you fill the frame. You can anchor your elbows into your hips, or lean on something nearby, to help steady the camera. The zoom feature does take a steadier hand to avoid blurring, which is why I recommend anchoring yourself to avoid jiggling the camera.

Not good...



Good...



In the picture on the top left, the dogs are too far from the camera. Details are getting lost because of the distance, and the dogs' eyes and distinctive features aren't able to be seen well. The lighting is poor, which leaves the artist very little to pull from for the light, medium, and dark tones in the fur. The stick is distracting, the puppy's mouth position is awkward, and the feet are in a strange pose. It's a fun, goofy candid, but it is not painting worthy.

The bottom left photo is another example of poor lighting where details are getting lost. This spot was likely just too shady, which makes the colors too cool, dark, and indistinct.

In the picture on the right, the dog fills almost the whole frame. The photographer is bent down so that she is eye level with the dog. He is well lit, and you can distinctly see his coloring.

★ A very important detail is that the dog's eye is easily seen, which means I will be able to capture that in a painting. When the eyes can be seen well, it really helps the painting to come to life! In fact, this is the picture that I chose to work from when I painted this oil painting:




(Pebbles, 9"x12" oil on canvas paper,
Amy Mayne, 2025)

Adjusting the light in your picture

Cameras tend to adjust themselves to whatever is brightest in the frame. That is why the picture of Pebbles by the pond on the previous page did not turn out well. The camera was reading the light on the water and the trees across the pond rather than the lighting on the dog . Sometimes, this can be worked around.

If you have an iPhone, you can adjust the light in your photo. (Androids might do this, but since I work from an iPhone, I'll stick with what I know.) Touch the screen where you want the camera to focus (i.e. your dog's face in the frame.)

While focused on the dog, you should see a little sunshine symbol appear on the screen to the right of the dog.  Touch the screen just to the right of the sunshine symbol, and slide your finger up and down the screen. Notice that this will adjust the exposure, making the picture appear lighter or darker. Sliding your finger upward on the screen will increase the light, and sliding it downward will decrease the light. Practice using this feature before trying to get pictures of your dog so that you become familiar with it ahead of time.

More Helpful Tips

- Have a play session with your pet before trying to get pictures. A dog that has been pent up all day waiting for you to get home is probably not going to be a good model for your photo session. Get the wiggles out first. Feed, go for a walk, play fetch, then take pictures.
- Bring along a helper. Taking pictures of our four legged friends can make us wish we had extra arms and legs, too! A helper can be invaluable. They can squeak a toy behind you, call the animal's name, hold something, or observe details that you might miss while trying to focus on all of the "photography stuff."
- Praise, praise, and more praise. Taking pictures should be fun both for you and your pet. Remember to praise them for all the hard work they are doing in trying to please you. Treats are a good motivator, too. (You might even want some for yourself!)
- Take LOTS of pictures. I'm old enough to remember cameras that used film; times when we were limited to only 12, 24, or 36 shots, and we couldn't preview the images. I don't miss that! Now we can take pictures in abundance. So, don't be stingy with your picture taking. Better to take a 100 pictures and throw out 97 than to only take 5 or 10 and not get any good ones.
- If your pet is super wriggly, you might want to take videos of your dog rather than trying to take pictures. That way you can pull "stills" from the video footage.



But my pet is deceased...

Saying goodbye to our pets is so difficult. Having a portrait of them can help ease that pain and bring to mind the good memories you have of them. Please contact me and we can work together to pick the best photos from the ones you already have.

How do I choose the best photo?

Hopefully the previous pages have helped you capture some truly great photos of your pet. If you are ready to commission a painted pet portrait, please reach out and I will gladly help you choose a picture that will make for an amazing painting. In fact, I would much prefer to have several photos to work from, so don't be shy about sending me a handful of your favorites, and we can discuss which ones will work well.

Contact:

amy@amymayneart.com

amymayneart.com



Facebook: Amy Mayne Art



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YouTube: Amy Mayne Art