

LTD PHOTOGRAPHY

Test Shoots

Whether you are working with a modeling agency or working freelance you will need photos - photos for your composite, portfolio, and web presence. With a modeling agency, they may try to help you find test shoots. Working independently, you will have to track down your own test shoots. Test shoots or testing has become a generic term for photographic shoots where a model acquires photographs to use for the model's promotional materials. I will elaborate on this further on. You have two basic goals when doing test shoots. One is to get good quality photos as fast as you can to start getting work. The better quality (more professional and creative) photos you have in your portfolio the better paying jobs you will get. The second is to get experience in front of the camera and learning how to find your way around a studio or location shoot.

Test Shoots - Advice for Models My definition of a Test Shoot (also referred to as a photographer's test shoot and Time For Prints [TFP] shoot) is when a photographer wants to try out a new creative idea, test some new equipment or film, wants to build the photographer's portfolio, or just wants to practice and figure out how to take pictures, he sets up a photo session. In the case of a fashion or people photographer he needs a warm body to put in front of the lens. This is where the volunteer model comes in. This can work out well for both parties. The photographer does not want to pay for a model and the model does not want to pay for a photographer, so by trading services both get images for their portfolio and gain experience. In some cases the photographer might give you a couple of prints for your services, in other cases you may have to pay for prints. In all cases you will not get the original and don't even ask to borrow them. There are several problems you will find with this arrangement. A beginning photographer may be eager to do test shoots, but he or she is still learning, so the quality of work may not be that good. You may end up with just so-so prints in your portfolio. In some cases they may forget to take the lens cap off or some other technical problem so you may end up with nothing (of course that can happen to a pro pushing the limits also). In the case of seasoned professional photographers, they are often too busy with paying jobs or burned-out on doing new-model tests to do any test shoots. Thus it might be hard to find someone who is capable of producing good work and wants to do a test shoot with a new model. On the occasion when a seasoned photographer has a burning desire to do something new and creative, he usually turns to a model he already knows and with whom he enjoys working. So for your first goal of getting quality photos fast, free test shoots is not the best route. Is it bad or a total waste to do a test shoot with a beginning photographer? No. When you are starting out any chance you have to get in front of the camera and see some results is valuable. It is a chance to gain some experience, try new make-up, poses, expression, wardrobe, and see how the photographer sees you. And once in while you and the beginning photographer may even hit upon something that will produce an outstanding photograph. It seems to happen more by accident than design, but sometimes neat things can happen. For a model this 'learning by doing' is the best teacher. So you can build a portfolio by this approach but it can take a long time. But it does help to accomplish your second goal of gaining experience. If you are lucky, you may be able to find an advance amateur photographer or a pro who is getting back into model shooting. In either of these cases you have a shooter who has the ability to produce good work but may not hit it on the first try. The photos they produce may not always be top tier shots but would give you good photos to start your career. This situation gives you good quality photos, very fast, for little money, and the experience of working with someone who knows something about the business.

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These types of shoots can also be the hardest to find. This information applies to fashion models, life style models, and commercial models. If you are seeking adult glamour modeling, you it will be no problem finding free test shoot once you learn where to look for them. Warning This is where the warning should come in when looking for test shoots. There always seems to be these "semi-pro" photographers out there. These guys are more then willing to do test shoots with new young models. These guys are more interested in hanky-panky than in producing a great photograph. At some point they want to get your clothes off or they are all over you like an octopus, saying they are trying to show you how to pose. Now this is different from very young, starting photographers who just have raging hormones. They are most likely just looking for a date rather than anything lecherous. In either case you will not end up with any usable photos for your portfolio. This is where professionalism on both the model's and photographer's part is needed. The Model Release As you start to do photo shoots the need for a model release will come up. Follow this link for info. Finding Free Test Shoots If you sign with a modeling agency they may already have a list of photographers that need that warm body to put in front of the camera. The agency may have checked out these photographers and feel they are of a professional quality that the agency can recommend. In some cases, even with an agency, you may be on your own to track down test shoots. What are some strategies for tracking down photographers for free test shoots? One way might be to check photographers' web sites. Find ones in your area and see if any of them are doing model photography. The links to directories and photographers on the Photographer's Link page might help locate some. If you find some photographers in your area, email them and ask if they do any free photographer test shoots (TFP). They may say no, but you don't know until you ask. You can also try calling around or visiting photographers' studios but that will take more work. The yellow pages might be helpful for this approach. If all of the current professional photographers in your area turn you down for free test shoots you may want to try the wannabe photographers. These are the student photographers. You can check to see if your local community college or university has a photography program. If they do you may find you can tell the instructor or place a notice on a bulletin board in the photography department that you are looking for test shoots. As a professional photographer I know we all had to get started somewhere and for many of us it was at college. As a beginning photographer if we wanted to learn any type of people photography we had to try and find a subject to photograph. This could be your place to connect with a student photographer. Keep in mind that the photographer is as new to photography as you are to modeling so you will both be trying to learn the business. Some other fringe spots where you might make contact with a photographer for test shoots are camera stores and camera clubs. Sometimes the clerks at a photography store or photo lab might know of someone who is doing fashion or people photos. They may be able to keep an eye out for a photographer once you let them know you are looking for test shoots. Also, some camera clubs may have members who do people photos. Letting the head of the club know you are looking for test shoots may lead to something. With both of these you run a greater risk of running into the "semi-pro" photographer/lecher. Be extremely cautious about any leads you get this way, but you may find an amateur photographer who does good work. Another area that at first I thought held great promise to find test shoots but now I think is a long shot is one of the regional forums for models and photographers. I have been studying the one for the region I am in for several months.

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I think forums in other regions will be similar and I am not sure all regions will have such forums. It seems these forum tend to attract a lot of the "adult entertainment" wannabe photographers and not many fashion or commercial print photographers (although there maybe some lurking around). The photographers range from beginners to season pros. The photo interest can run from fashion but tend to be a lot of Playboy type glamour photography to web "adult entertainment" photography. So these Forums are not for those under 18 and please read the warnings below and use caution. If you find a forum in your region that has not become a place for "adult entertainment" contacts or if you are looking to become an "adult entertainment" model then a forum will allow you to see what different photographers are shooting and what quality of work they are doing. The forums are a chance for photographers and models to post photos from their latest shoots, ask questions, share news, and get into lively debates. Those who post usually have email address and web sites. You can study the postings and hopefully find some photographers to contact about doing test shoots. You can also posts a notice on the forum saying you are looking for test shoots. If you are just starting, you can post without a picture but most of those postings get ignored. The forums work better if you can get some photos up on the web and be able to link to these photos when you post your message. Most photographers would like to see what you look like before committing to a shoot. This makes the forums a tough spot to get that first all important test shoot but they can be good for finding shoots to build your portfolio, gain experience and all for free. Forum photographers can be spread all over a region so you may need to be ready to do some traveling to get to shoots.

Model Commissioned Test Shoots You may find that you are unable to track down any free test shoots; or, after you have done a number of test shoots with beginning photographers and have your act together, you now need some outstanding professional photos for your portfolio; or, perhaps you don't have time to track down a photographer for a free test shoot and you need a professional portfolio now. In these cases you are in the market for what some call a Model Test Shoot or what photographers call real work with a paying customer. You are going to hire a photographer to take pictures of you for your portfolio and comp card. Unlike a photographer's test shoot you are now the boss. You will need to shop around and check photographers' portfolios to find the one that is doing the type and quality of work you would like in your portfolio. Again checking photographers' web sites can help with this. You also may need to find a make-up artist and hair stylist, if you are not fully experienced at doing your make-up and hair. You will want to plan out with the photographer what type of looks you want, what your wardrobe will be, and the costs. In this case, since you are the paying client, you should expect to receive all original film or transparencies. Be sure to work this out before the shoot and be sure what rights will transfer.

A Need for Photos Whether you are able to track down free test shoots or have to pay for photo shoots as a wannabe model you will have to have photos. You also have to have experience working in front of the camera. The photos are needed for your marketing materials - portfolio, comp card, and web site. The experience in front of the camera is how you truly learn to be a model. During your first few photo shoots you may be just trying to get comfortable in front of the camera. As you do more shoots you will pickup how to move, how to work in the light, how to hit your mark, and the routine of a studio. After you have 30 to 50 shoots you will have a handle on working in front of a camera.

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At this point you become a valuable asset to a shoot and no longer a wannabe. It always amazes me how modeling schools offer to train you to be a model but either never or maybe one time put you in front of a camera. New York modeling agencies send models out on test shoots to gain experience and build a portfolio. That is how they start and train the top professional models. Tracking down test shoots is essential for a beginning model.