MODEL
MASTERCLASSES

BY JULIA GEIER

HOW TO PUT TOGETHER YOUR FIRST TEST SHOOT

In this lesson I am going to walk you through how to set up your first test shoot, and all the little things you should know about it. In the modeling industry a photo shoot that is used for building your portfolio is called a 'test shoot'. This test shoot will been set up between you and the photographer of your choice, and you will use these images for your portfolio, headshot, comp card, and very often for submitting yourself to modeling agencies. These images are so important because they can determine if you get a contract with an agency or not. They will also help you book paid jobs once you sign with an agency, as clients will see the images from your photo shoot when they are considering you.

Modeling agencies are looking for beautiful, finished, and natural looking photos that show what you really look like at your best. They don't want you with overly-styled hair and tons of colorful makeup. They want to see your face and your body looking natural and beautiful. They ALWAYS want high-quality images. Literally if I were to give you only 1 tip for this entire lesson, it would be to make sure you have very high quality images. Nothing is more important than that when it comes to your test shoots. A really great thing to do when you're first starting out is to go onto the websites of really famous agencies, and look at the online portfolio of the models that they represent. Take note of the quality of the images, styling, and the overall vibe. This should be the standard of quality that you strive for in your own photos for your portfolio.

Here Is How It Works

You find a great photographer, agree on the terms, agree on a date and time, and you arrive at the photo shoot well prepared. You shoot for a few hours, change your wardrobe, hair, and makeup a few times, and at the end of the day you pay the photographer. The photographer will then spend a little time on his or her own going through the photos from your shoot and getting rid of any photos that are completely unusable. The photographer will then send you a few hundred photos to choose from and you usually have to narrow it down to less than 10 choices. It's the hardest part! I have had photographers include anywhere from 3-10 images in their price.Once you get your selections back to the photographer, he or she will edit the final images and send your finished images, generally within 2-3 weeks of the shoot. It should not take much longer than this.

At this test shoot you will want to get a few different ‘looks’, but there are 3 shots that are most important. A great headshot, a ¾ body shot, and a full-body shot. You need all three of these in your book, so try to get them at your first photo shoot. You should expect to have about 3-4 different ‘looks’ from this test shoot. By "looks" that your hair, makeup, and wardrobe will be changed each time for each different look. My advice is to keep your looks very minimal and simple. Agencies do not want to see you looking like a clown. They want to see what you look like at your most beautiful, yet still somewhat natural.

How To Find A Great Photographer

If you do not have an agency yet, that is not a problem! You can just contact a photographer on your own. I always recommend finding the best photographer that you can, and I recommend paying for your photo shoots instead of trading. Your photos are the MOST important part of your career. It is what will largely determine your success as a model. And it is also safer to work with a photographer who is a real professional, charges money for his or her work, and has a good reputation.

To find a photographer in your area, spend some time doing a bit of research on local photographers and choose the one that you think has the best quality images. I live in NYC and the average rate for a photo shoot here is anywhere from $400-$1k. That sometimes includes or does not include hair, makeup, and a clothing stylist. But it should ALWAYS include multiple finished and edited images. Remember to look for a photographer that has commercial images if you're a commercial model or fashion images if you're a fashion model, etc.

Start by doing a simple Google search for photographers in your area. If you live near a big city it might be worth looking for photographers located there. If you do have an agency, your booker can set up a test shoot for you with a photographer who they have worked with before. Agencies always have a list of photographers who they work with regularly, and they have special rates arranged for their models. Your agency should provide you with options of which photographer you can shoot with and the price of each one. If you don't have an agency don't worry about it. Just spend some time finding the best photographer that you can.

Why It's Best To Pay Photographers

If you do a photo shoot for "trade" that means that you don't pay the photographer and the photographer does not pay you. If you choose to do this, you can run into all kinds of problems...

#1 Weirdness. Some photographers think of a test shoot that is for trade as 'experimentation time' and this is NOT what you want. This is one of the biggest reasons I suggest paying for your test shoots. If you don't pay for them and you do it for 'trade", you will lose creative control because they can sometimes go into 'experimentation world'. You must be clear with the photographer that this is for your modeling portfolio, and specifically for agency submissions. You don't want to end up with a bunch of photos of you on a bridge wearing garbage bags and holding a pumpkin. See what I mean? This kind of weird stuff happens A LOT at amateur photo shoots. Avoid it.

#2 It can be dangerous, because that person is not a professional and you don't know who the photographer really is. They could be trying to lure young girls or guys to them. It's not worth it. If for some reason you do decide to shoot with someone for free, DO NOT GO ALONE! Bring a family member or a friend with you. Safety is always the most important thing and you always need to be careful about what kind of situations you put yourself into.

#3 You might never get your photos. Shooting for free means that since you didn't pay them, they technically don't owe you anything and you just might never get your photos. Not good.

#4 You will VERY likely wind up with low quality images. If you show an image like this to an agency, they will most likely not sign you. If you want to be taken seriously, you have to have high quality images.
#5 You could have a bad experience on set because the photographer is unprepared and unprofessional.If the photographer asks you to pay before the shoot, DO NOT! This could be a scam. This does not happen in the professional world of photography. You always pay at the end of the day of the shoot.

You should expect to get high-quality, retouched, professional looking photos from this shoot!! If the photographer says he or she DOES NOT edit/retouch the photos, find someone else! My advice to you is to find a photographer with a great body of work, a professional website, set rates for a test shoot, and photos that look like the ones you need for your portfolio. Your goal should be to always maintain a high standard of who you shoot with regarding the quality of photographers who you work with.

The bottom line is that you don't want to have bad photos of yourself that will prevent you from getting signed with a great agency and might eventually wind up on the internet and on the website of an amateur. Keep in mind that people google you, and you want to make sure that the images that come up are good ones.

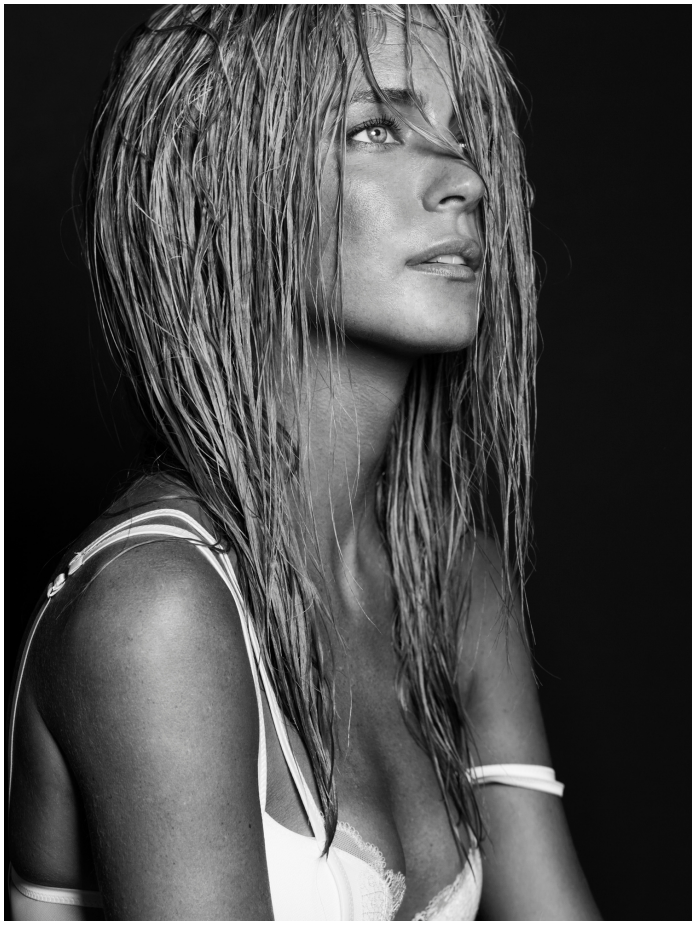
Release Forms

At most photo shoots the photographer will want you to sign a release form. A release form is a contract between you and a photographer stating what the photos can and will be used for. It is important that you read it thoroughly before signing. Since this is a test shoot, it should clearly say that these photos should be used only for portfolio purposes for both parties. For example, the photographer should NOT be selling your finished photos to a stock photo company. Portfolio use ONLY. Have your release forms agreed upon and signed before your shoot. They should give you a date when you will receive your finished photos, or at least a maximum waiting period. This should be included in the release form. 2-3 weeks is standard.

Once You Find A Photographer You Want To Shoot With

When you're ready to book a photographer you'll want to give them some examples of photos that you want so that they really know what you need. What I want you to do first is go to the websites of a few famous agencies and look at the photos of their models books that they have on their websites.This should be your standard of quality, because this is what agencies are looking for, they can actually use it, and this will help you get signed.
You can find more examples of good quality photos n the lesson "The Different Types of Modeling". Also all the photos of me that are posted on my website are all agency quality photos. And remember, if you're going to pursue commercial modeling, you want commercial looks in your portfolio. If you're going to pursue fashion modeling, you want fashion looks in your portfolio, etc. Below are a few examples from my own book.

These are more fashion looks...



These are more commercial looks...

A Few Words About Hair, Makeup, & Wardrobe

Hair and makeup and wardrobe can make or break the final result of your photo shoot. My advice to you, especially when you are first starting out, is to KEEP IT SIMPLE AND NATURAL! I cannot stress this enough. You must let the photographer know that you do not want intense makeup or any crazy hair. Agencies do not want this. It will make you look unprofessional and they will not give you a chance or take you seriously. If there is no styling provided, you should come to the shoot with your hair & makeup READY. And bring a few simple wardrobe options. Remember LESS IS MORE ! Here are a few examples of really simple and beautiful styling. This is the vibe that agencies are looking for...

What To Bring With You To A Test Shoot

Here are my own personal essentials that I always bring with me to every test shoot.

- Wear comfortable shoes and clothing to the shoot!
- Photo shoots can be physically exhausting so wear comfortable shoes and clothing to the shoot. At the end of the day you're going to want to wash your face and throw on some comfortable clothes.
- Wear nude colored underwear and a nude bra so that it doesn't interfere with any clothing.
- Bring Water. Lots of it!
- Eat Breakfast!
- Bring Snacks. Always have snacks.
- Bring your own makeup bag, even if there is someone there to do your hair and makeup. The makeup artist can make you look like a clown, or if you just feel like you need to fix it a bit, it's best to have your own makeup bag with you. Sometimes I grab it and go into the bathroom and just make my face look more normal.
- Black and/or white simple tank tops. These are always great to wear for your head shots.
- Your own nude colored heels! So that they fit you and your feet don't hurt. Neutral colors are best.
- Face wash and moisturizer. Generally photo shoot makeup is MUCH heavier than regular daytime makeup, so I like to wash it all off as soon as we are finished with the photo shoot. And moisturize. It's just more comfortable.
- Hair Ties. Always.
- Release Form. Have it all sorted out before your shoot date.
- Payment for Photographer. Bring a check with you or whatever they require. I would not recommend carrying around large amounts of cash with you. If they require cash, get a certified check from a bank or ask them if Venmo is ok.

If there is no styling provided, you should come to the shoot with your hair and makeup READY and all of your wardrobe options clean and well organized. If you're doing your own hair and makeup, come with it ready. You can do any touch ups when you arrive. Just don't plan to spend two hours at the shoot getting ready if you're doing it yourself. If you don't have a wardrobe stylist then make sure to bring some good options with you. ALWAYS pack your bags the day before.

What to Ask & Clarify with the Photographer Before You Agree to Shoot with Him/Her

- Photographer's name
- Photographer's phone number
- Studio location
- Date & time of shoot
- Price of shoot
- Confirm how many finished images are included in the price
- Confirm that the images be professionally edited and retouched after the shoot
- Reviewed and sign release form
- Make payment arrangements
- Confirm the date you will receive your finished photos (in JPEG format, generally about 2 weeks)
- Does this include a makeup artist?
- Does this include a hair stylist?
- Does this include a wardrobe stylist?
- Is there an extra charge for any of these? If so, how much?
- Is there anything specific I need to bring?
- Can the photographer provide websites or past works of the stylists for you to look at?
- How long will it take them to deliver finished images?

- Can they send the release form now?
- What form of payment do they prefer?
- Let the photographer know that you want all the styling and look to be “natural” and not overdone.
- If the photographer says the hair and makeup is more money, this is always optional and is not a must. If you don’t like the work of the stylists, or if it is too expensive, you can do it yourself or bring your own hair and makeup person.

Ok guys thank you so much for joining me to talk about How To Put Together Your First Test Shoot. Please let me know if you have any more questions! Make sure to click into the next lesson and I'll see you there! :)