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The Psychology of the Wide-Angle Lens

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## The Psychology of the Wide-Angle Lens



Some folks choose a telephoto lens to see how close a subject can **appear** to be - to say a bear, for instance. These same people doubtlessly chose a wide-angle lens so they can **get-it-all-in** the picture, usually a landscape picture.

If these people studied the work of professional photographers they would probably be surprised

There are a couple of problems to be aware of in working with wide-angles this close to a subject.

It is difficult to use a wide-angle lens in tight without distortion of people and the surroundings. The wider the lens the more pronounced this problem. A moderately wide lens like a 28 mm is much easier to use than an extreme wide-angle like a 20 mm or wider. Of course, the wider lenses seem to help with creativity – when used correctly.



We've all seen shots where the walls look as if they are falling forward or backward or the clock on the wall and the place on the table are ovals instead of circles.

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to find that the pros do just the opposite. A professional photographer picks the lens (tool) to use based on what that tool will allow him to do. It is the same for a professional carpenter; he picks a tool to carry out a certain task.



Robert Capa, a famous war photographer once said, "If you pictures aren't good enough, you're not close enough." Mr. Capa wasn't advocating the use of longer lenses, he was telling us to physically get closer, to become more involved and intimate with our subjects.

A telephoto lens and a wide-angle lens help us to tell the same story in different ways. The choice of which lens is like a writer choosing which words to use. It depends on what needs to be said.

A telephoto lens not only brings subjects closer to the viewer, it makes objects in the photograph appear closer together than in reality. A wide-angle lens does the opposite. Objects appear

This type of distortion, converging lines, can be used for good, but rarely; the general rule is to avoid these distortions. Practice helps.



Keep the subject out of the corners of the picture to avoid bending their head or body out of shape. Keep them out of the center as well since this creates a negative tension (but may be that's what you want). Using the super wide-angle lenses is a real balancing act. Nothing is cut and dried in creative work and that's why two photographers can cover the same story and their pictures will be nothing alike.

Another problem, if these weren't enough, with up close and personal wide-angle shots has nothing to do with technical evils.

further apart than in reality.

Keeping the rendition of special reality in mind consider perhaps the most creative or powerful use of a wide-angle lens; when you are especially close to someone with a wide-angle lens a lot of the surroundings are included. This is great. The viewer sees not only the subject, but their environment as well.



By using our feet and not just our zoom lenses to approach a subject we are able to make “environmental” portraits. We can now show what they look like and where they are and/or what they are doing. It is now easy for our viewers to relate to our subjects. The photo carries a great deal of information.

I love to show where someone works and what he or she does for a living. By getting close, the subject is predominate and not a little speck in the middle of a photo.

I can have the person pause

Working this close to someone can make **you** awfully uncomfortable. This feeling will transfer to the up close person causing another problem.

To avoid this “in your face” quandary, remember some of these tricks to keep you comfortable while close.

First, tell them what you are going to do and get their permission before you move in for the shot. A funny thing happens when you do this—they usually get a little excited, are cooperative and feel like they are a part of the making of the photograph rather than just the subject.

Second, they understand that you (and/or your client) consider them valuable and that you think enough of them that you want their picture. You want to include them in the project.

Third, most people (regardless of what they may say) are flattered when they are asked to be in a photo, however, they need help to make it enjoyable.

Using a telephoto lens you can make a great head and shoulders portrait with good perspective, but it can be too selective, to narrow a view, to tell a story about a person. It is possible and

whatever they are doing and just casually look at the camera and if I time it just right I can show them at ease with a pleasant expression. Being so close the photo becomes personal with the viewer because I became personal with the subject. You can't communicate what you do not experience with the camera.



Why is a photo usually better when you are closer to the subject? The wider the lens the more you get this feeling of being there.

it depends on what you want to say and the circumstances of the shoot.

Working close to people with wide-angle lenses tells their story in an intimate and personal way.

Watch the distortion, the composition, the projecting of uncomfortable feeling to your subject as a result of working so close, use the background to help tell the story, keep your eye on the ball, your shoulder to the wheel, tote that barrel, lift that bail, load sixteen tons and if all this seems to freak you out—call me. When the pipes are clogged or the water heater leaks I get freaked out. That's why I call a plumber.

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