
How To Take a Group Photo

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Introduction Thanks for volunteering to help at a construction site. Your efforts will make a difference not only to one particular family in need of decent, affordable housing but also the whole neighborhood.

In this [Construction Volunteer How-To article](#) we discuss group photos. Many groups of volunteers want to document their day at a construction site with photographs. Whether you're with a church group or a school or a company or any other organization, you might want to take a group photo, perhaps for publication in a newsletter or on an intranet or your blog or a social networking page.

If you are already an experienced photographer then you may skip down to "[How to submit your photos](#)."

But if you're a novice who's been pressed into service at the last moment, in this article we want you to learn how to take a good group photo. After all, you can't go back the next day and do it again.

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Before you assemble the troops [TOP](#)

Lighting. There's a lot to think about about lighting. Your camera wants plenty of light in order to capture detail and freeze motion, but if you place your subjects so they're facing into a bright sun, many of them will squint too much.

If the sun is overhead the squinting will be reduced but many facial features will disappear in shadow. Brows cast shadows on eyes, nose shadows intrude on mouths, necks turn black.

Photos taken indoors or on a cloudy day can be dark or indistinct. And if you rely on flash to lighten a dark scene, you risk red-eye.

The point is that you need to think through the time of day when and the exact location where you will assemble the troops. You also need to think about where you will stand to take the photos.

Unless you're using a film camera, it's quick and easy to take test shots, analyze the results, and make corrections.

Tools. Once you've got your time and place figured out, call the troops together and tell several or all of them to grab tools – it doesn't matter which tools – that they can hold up for the photo. This adds a degree of verisimilitude and context to the circumstances with little effort.

How to rearrange the troops [TOP](#)

Horizontal scrunch. For large groups, take the time to pack everyone close together width-wise. For some reason your subjects will often naturally arrange themselves in one long row like suspects in a police line-up, which means you have to back up or zoom out to get them all in, which means everything you care about is too small. If you're forced to back up or zoom out, too much of the frame is used up depicting dirt or floor in the foreground and the ceiling or top of a house in the background.

This means you should take the time to order them to scrunch in horizontally, which means putting the tall ones in the back and getting some to sit or squat or kneel in front. This allows you to move or zoom in closer in order to fill the frame with the most important parts.

Faces. The most important parts are the faces. Getting the faces is everything. It should be the overriding factor in framing and lighting your shots. If the faces are indistinguishably small then there's little reason to take the photo to begin with.

You aren't looking to shoot a crowd scene, you're looking to document the presence of particular individuals' faces all in one carefully composed frame.

To that end here are three more tips.

- Tell your fellow volunteers to doff their hats or tip them back. Hat brims often cast a shadow on the very objects you most want to capture well, which are – as you know -- the faces.
- Similarly, have them remove their sunglasses. If the faces are the important part of these group photos, the eyes are the important part of those faces.
- Sometimes a few subjects will forget that their faces can be hidden behind people in front of them. Perhaps they somehow assume that the camera will magically X-ray them. Anyway, do scan the crowd to make sure every face is visible.

And do just generally survey the picture you're about to take to check for lighting and framing problems. For example, is a light pole stabbing a shadow through half the group? Because your brain automatically accounts for this phenomenon, you might not regret it till you see it in the still photo.

Fix any problems and take your first shot (but not before reading the next section). Examine your picture to see what can be done better. Pay special attention to the framing. You simply cannot cut anyone off.

How to re-shoot the troops [TOP](#)

“Don't you move!” It's unlikely you will have this exact opportunity again, so definitely do take backup pictures. If you don't tell your fellow volunteers not to move, they will immediately wander off after the first shot. If you're the one with the camera, you're the only one responsible for getting this right. Make sure the crowd understands *ahead of time* that after your first snap, you intend to take more.

Do you move. After taking your first shot, you can move the camera's viewpoint in three axes.

You can **move closer or back up** and take another shot. This will include more or less of the background. Make sure you don't cut off anyone at either side.

A second useful option is merely to **move yourself right or left**. As the camera moves, so do the subjects' faces, and you'll probably get a new combination of lighting and framing to choose from.

The third option is to **move higher or lower**. Climb a ladder for the next shot, or kneel down low. Here again, you'll get a new combination of factors that you might like.

The point is that the more different pictures you take, the more likely it is you'll end up with good ones. Unless you're using a film camera, there's no reason not to take a lot of pictures under lots of different circumstances and sort through them later.

You can make other changes without moving. You can shoot with flash and without. If you are able to manipulate the f-stop to control depth of field, you can blur out the foreground and the background, which is a good way to take a group photo that really focuses on faces.

Also, the more photos of one group of people you take, the sillier those people typically seem to get, which is usually good.

You're in charge of the camera, so keep shooting till you're satisfied you've got what you need.

Six-point spiel [TOP](#)

Here's the whole six-point spiel in abbreviated form. "[1] **Grab a tool, then [2] line up in three rows, tall ones in the back, some in front kneeling. [3] Take off your hats and sunglasses so we can see your pretty faces. [4] If you can't see the camera, it can't see you. When I [5] count to three, smile, then [6] sit tight while I take a few more.**"

How to submit your photos [TOP](#)

If you volunteer on a Habitat For Humanity Kansas City job site and you take photos, you are invited to send the affiliate copies of those images. The affiliate maintains a gallery of job-site photos on their Web site, starting [here](#), and they probably want to add some or all of yours. Mail your shots to [Outreach Coordinator](#).

Please read these guidelines to help them help you get your photos published.

- Please try to keep each image under two megabytes.
- They prefer images in the JPG format.
- In your cover letter please let them know the following:
 - the name of your group,
 - the date the photos were taken, and
 - the address or other description of the job site where the photos were taken.

If you have special captions for particular images or even an anecdote, they'll try to add them.

Thanks for volunteering on a construction job site, and we hope you find the experience pleasurable and educational and worthwhile. Your hard work and earnest efforts will help a deserving family afford a house you built, and that is always worthwhile.

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