

PRACTICAL PHOTO GUIDE SERIES

Clean Photo References for Better AI Artwork

How to photograph, choose and send images that give your AI artist the clearest possible starting point.

PHOTOGRAPH | CHOOSE | SEND

MARIA HANSHAW DESIGN

PORTRAITS | MEMORIES | CELEBRATIONS

The five-minute reference brief

If you only read one page, use these six rules before taking or choosing your photographs.

01 Clean the lens

A fingerprint on the phone lens can soften every face and detail.

02 Use soft daylight

Face a bright window or open shade. Avoid strong light directly behind the person.

03 Show the whole face

Keep the eyes, hairline, ears and chin visible. Remove sunglasses and heavy filters.

04 Take more than one angle

Provide a clear front view plus a three-quarter view. Add a side view when useful.

05 Keep each image simple

One person, uncluttered background and one clear purpose is easier to interpret.

06 Send the original file

Choose the full-size photo, not a screenshot, thumbnail, collage or social-media copy.

BEST STARTER SET

- **1 primary identity photo**
- **1 second facial angle**
- **1 full-length photograph**
- Optional outfit, pose and scene images

Build a clear identity set

The strongest identity reference is recent, sharp, evenly lit and easy to read at a glance.



1. **Eyes visible**
   Look towards the camera; remove sunglasses and strong glare.
2. **Even light**
   Soft daylight makes shape and skin tone easier to interpret.
3. **Natural skin texture**
   Skip smoothing, face reshaping and dramatic colour filters.
4. **Hairline and chin shown**
   Avoid hats, deep crops and hair covering key facial features.
5. **Current age and appearance**
   Label older photographs if the intended age is different.
6. **No beauty filter**
   Send the untouched original whenever it is available.

A useful four-photo identity set



FRONT VIEW | THREE-QUARTER | NATURAL SMILE | OPTIONAL SIDE

If only one photograph is available, choose the clearest and largest original. Tell the artist who the person is, the approximate year and whether the age shown should be preserved.

Photograph the whole person and the details

When the artwork shows more than a face, the artist also needs body proportions, hands, clothing and footwear.

FULL-LENGTH



Include the top of the head, both hands and both feet. Leave a little breathing room around the body.

01 **Start with a relaxed standing pose**

Stand at eye level, keep the phone upright and avoid an extreme wide-angle view from very close range.

02 **Add a three-quarter or side view**

This helps clarify body shape, hairstyle, garment fit and features that a front view may hide.

03 **Take detail photographs separately**

Add close views of jewellery, tattoos, shoes, fabric, a meaningful object or any feature that must remain accurate.

04 **Keep identity and wardrobe separate**

If the best face photograph shows the wrong clothing, label a different image as the outfit authority.

QUICK CAMERA TIP

Use the standard 1x camera when possible. Step back instead of using the ultra-wide lens close to the body, which can exaggerate proportions.

Photographing more than one person?

Create a separate identity set for every person. Use exact names in file labels and tell the artist the required number of people, who must be included and who must not appear.

Give every reference image one job

Multiple references work best when the artist knows which image controls each part of the result.

01 **IDENTITY**



Face, age, hair and recognisable features

Recognisable features may include tattoos, birthmarks or beauty spots. Use the clearest recent photograph.

02 **OUTFIT**



Wedding dress, colour, fabric and details

Include wedding bands, jewellery and shoes. Do not use this image to change the person's face or age.

03 **POSE**



Body position, interaction, camera angle and crop

Use as staging guidance, not as another identity or wardrobe source.

04 **SCENE**



Location, background, mood, lighting and season

Use for atmosphere without importing extra people.

Recommended upload order

01 Identity — 02 Outfit — 03 Pose — 04 Scene

Example instruction: 'Image 1 controls Maria's identity. Image 2 controls her outfit only. Image 3 controls the pose. Image 4 controls the background.'

What weakens a reference image

A larger quantity of confusing images is not better than a small, clearly labelled set.

Screenshot or thumbnail



Screenshots and messaging thumbnails are often compressed, cropped and too small to recover fine detail. Send the original camera file or highest-resolution scan.

Beauty or novelty filter



Filters can reshape eyes, jawline, skin texture and colour. Send the untouched original so the artist can read the real face accurately.

Very dark or backlit



Strong backlight hides eye colour, skin tone, facial contours and tattoos. Add a softly lit photograph taken from the front.

Face cropped or covered



Missing eyes, hairline, chin or profile forces the AI to invent those areas. Supply an uncropped view with the whole face clearly visible.

Unlabelled group photo



A group image can lead to the wrong person being selected or several faces being blended. Name everyone and identify exactly who must appear.

Conflicting ages or looks



Mixed ages, hairstyles and changing features create competing instructions. Label the intended age and identify which photograph is current.

If an imperfect photograph is all you have

- Send the highest-resolution original, scan or camera file available.
- Identify the person precisely and provide the approximate year or age.
- Describe which features are accurate and which parts are damaged or unclear.
- Do not repeatedly screenshot, resave or artificially sharpen the same small file.

Label and send the original files

Clear filenames and full-size files reduce uncertainty before the creative work begins.

A simple naming pattern

- 01_MARIA_IDENTITY_FRONT.jpg
- 02_MARIA_IDENTITY_ANGLE.jpg
- 03_MARIA_FULL_LENGTH.jpg
- 04_MARIA_OUTFIT_ONLY.jpg
- 05_COUPLE_POSE_ONLY.jpg
- 06_GARDEN_SCENE_ONLY.jpg

Good ways to send

Private cloud link

Use a restricted iCloud Drive, Google Drive, OneDrive or Dropbox folder.

File-transfer link

Useful for a larger organised folder containing many photographs. For example, wetransfer.com can upload up to 3 GB for free.

Email attachment

Suitable only when files remain full size and within limits. Most mailboxes will only handle attachments up to 10 MB.

Avoid accidental compression

Do not copy and paste a photo from a social feed, place several photos into one collage or send a screen preview when the original is available. If an app asks for a size, choose Actual Size, Original or Full Resolution.

Private images and consent

- ◯ Confirm that every person has permission to have their image used for the agreed artwork.
- ◯ Share only what the artist needs; remove unrelated documents, addresses and private information.
- ◯ Ask how source files, generated drafts and final files will be stored, shared and deleted.
- ◯ Use a private link rather than a public folder for personal or family photographs.

Before you send your photographs

Tick the list, then include one short note describing the result you want.

- ○ The camera lens was clean.
- ○ The face is sharp, visible and evenly lit.
- ○ The primary identity image is clearly labelled.
- ○ A second angle is included where possible.
- ○ The whole body is visible if the final artwork needs it.
- ○ Outfit, pose and scene images each have one labelled role.
- ○ The correct people and intended ages are stated.
- ○ No filters, collages or screenshots are used unnecessarily.
- ○ The full-size original files are being sent.
- ○ Everyone shown has agreed to the intended use.

Good references improve results. Exact identity is not guaranteed.

Different AI systems interpret references differently and may still rebuild facial features, hands, clothing or body shape.

When exact preservation matters

Create the new background separately, then composite an untouched cut-out of the original person over it in an image editor.

Your one-paragraph project note

Please create [type of artwork]. The required people are [names and exact number]. Image 1 controls identity, Image 2 controls clothing, Image 3 controls pose and Image 4 controls the scene. Please preserve [important features] and avoid [unwanted changes].

Save a copy of this guide with your reference folder so the preparation steps stay with the files.

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Illustrated examples are educational diagrams, not client before-and-after claims.

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Every meaningful artwork begins with a clear reference

Keep this guide with your photograph folder whenever you are choosing, labelling and sending images for a new AI artwork.

CLEAR FACES | LABELLED FILES | ORIGINAL QUALITY

Photograph | Choose | Send

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