

Asking the Right Questions – Talking the Right Language – & Getting the Photography You Want

First, ask questions until you understand.

There are very few “professional buyers” who know all the ins and outs of buying photography.

Just like you, most people don't really know what to ask for when looking for professional photography and you may not even be talking the same “language” as the photographer you are interviewing.

This doesn't mean that you can't get a good deal or exactly what you want. Choosing well is not that tough; if you know what you want and can get through the lingo.

Second, know what you want

You need to decide “how many pictures you will truly use” and “where you plan to use them”?

Many people think that getting lots of shots is always the best deal. For weddings “I want to catch every moment” is a common response. If this is truly what you want video may be the best choice, at as much as 60 frames a second (3600 frames an hour), yank out a few frames for the web, a few for 4x6 prints, and you are good to go.

At the other end of the scale is a single 48x72 print for the living room takes a very different approach and very different tools to capture, develop, and print it well.

Most people are not at either extreme. You may want an album with a reasonable variety prints or a special collage for the wall or a brag book for your purse plus a nice big portrait.

Whatever you want is okay!

Regardless of whom you hire, the final cost will be driven by the quantity and quality of the work you expect from each image. The final cost for each of the situations above might even be purchased for the same money.

Being realistic about the finished product you want will save you money and get you a better product because the photographer will do the right work in the first place; 4,000 candid won't add up to 1 great portrait.

You don't have to be exact, but knowing generally how you want to use the images and roughly how many you want will make life simpler.

Hints: Don't forget your audience. How many will you and your friends and your family actually enjoy looking at? Each photo you keep should add something unique.

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Formality is the third consideration.

Do You Prefer Candid or Formal? Most people will answer “candid” immediately, but this is actually a trick question. This is where “you gotta know the lingo”. So let’s pose the question differently to get you a better answer and understanding. (*I’m going to use a little exaggeration here to emphasize the point.*)

- From your point of view the question is probably asking “Do you prefer to look ...
 - Comfortable, normal, relaxed (candid)?”
or ...
 - Stiff and unnatural (formal)?”
- From the photographers point of view the question is asking “Are you hiring me ...
 - To follow you around and take 2000 nice snaps without bothering you?
or ...
 - To guide you into situations where you can look your best?

This actually isn’t a one or the other type question. Most people want to look comfortable and relaxed, but they also want to look their best. We define this style as “Fine Art”, but that’s not what everybody calls it.

Hints: In part your initial answer may be because of camera shyness or bad experiences in the past. If you have either issue let’s talk about how to address them. Also, the direction (formality) needed to create “Fine Art” doesn’t mean your experience or the images will be boring; it just means the photographer has a good idea of what you want and will work hard to help you get it.

Artistic style is the fourth consideration.

So by now I hope you are getting a better handle on roughly how many finished images you might want, where you plan to use them, and if you want your photographer to direct the shots or just shoot candid. Your answers probably aren’t absolute and they don’t have to be.

Hint: Leave room for serendipity.

Now, it’s time to talk a bit about how artistic you want to be. The sky is the limit here, anywhere from hyper-realism to digitally created paintings. Most people who are looking for professional photography fall somewhere in between these two categories...

- ❖ Realistic. This generally means your expectation is for natural colors and sharp focus. You want to see the subjects in a realistic manner. This might even mean editing a picture to make it look more normal, like blemish removal.
- ❖ Artistic. Here mood and style becomes more important than realism. Images are shot specifically in pastel or vivid color palettes or Black & White. Focus becomes an art rather than a skill. Textures, like film grain, become an integral part of the image.

Hint: Realism is not without artistic merit, it applies normal rules for good composition. The consideration is just a matter of degree. There is no right or wrong choice here.

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