

GOLDEN AGE PHOTOS & ART, LLC

PASSPORT PHOTOS

YOUR PASSPORT PHOTO

The photos on government-issued Ids are famous for showing the subject in the least flattering way possible. So unless you are willing to be stuck with an ugly picture for the next five years, it's best to have your passport photo taken by a professional photographer who can help you look your best while complying with the strict requirements of the Department of State.

Can't I just take a selfie?

Sorry, but it's very hard--next to impossible--to get a selfie that meets the State Department's requirements. For one thing, you need to be a certain distance from the camera, and that distance is not arm's length. Besides, face facts, most selfies are rather unflattering.

Could I have a friend take my picture at home?

You could, if you have a plain white wall or a white bedsheet to use as a backdrop. You also need plenty of light, but not too much light so the color doesn't look washed out. Then you have to make a high-resolution print on photo paper that's 2x2 inches in size and shows your face at between 1" and 1³/₈" height. All in all, it's simpler to hire a photographer who's all set up to supply the requirements.

POSING

I always look terrible in my driver's license and school IDs. I want to get the most flattering photo I can, with my best side forward.

The State Department wants to see both sides of your face, so you'll need to look at the camera directly and hold your head up straight, not tilted or turned. Hold it high and proud, as befits an American, and you'll look just fine. (I have a few little posing hints I'll share with you before I click the shutter.)

Am I at least allowed to smile?

Yes, the State Department has unbent a degree or two in the past few years, and now they will permit a “natural smile”, though they still prefer a “neutral expression.” Most people do look better with a smile, but don't overdo it. No big toothy grin! Think “ice cream cone” rather than “Disneyworld.”

HAIR and MAKEUP

How about makeup? They will let me wear makeup, right?

You can wear your ordinary, everyday makeup, such as you'd wear to church or school or shopping. No fancy glamour jobs, but a touch of lipstick won't go amiss. If you normally use eye makeup, foundation, bronzers, toners, blush, etc. go ahead but keep it very light and natural. Stay with natural colors: forget the blue and green eyeshadows. Likewise, put away the glitter and sparkles: the effect in the photo is not what you'd wish. Do use concealer if you have acne or scars. But don't go overboard; they want to see *you* under all the paint. It's best to use powder-based products and matte finishes rather than glossy, as gloss will make you look greasy. A very light dusting of face powder as a finishing touch will counteract that.

What about my hair? Do I have to tuck it behind my ears?

Again, style it as you do every day. You don't need to tuck it behind your ears if that's not your style, but you do need to pull it back away from your face so your entire face is visible. In general, your entire hairline should be visible. A style with bangs is acceptable, but a style with a swoop of hair from your crown flowing down over one eye and your cheek is not. As for an “up-do”, it's fine if that's the way you wear it all the time, but don't go to any extra trouble to do it.

It should go without saying, but just a reminder: have a shampoo and/or a haircut a day or so before taking your photo.

WARDROBE

What style of clothes should I wear?

Wear ordinary street clothes. Men and boys will look best in a plain collared shirt and tie, or shirt with open collar. Women and girls will look best in a simple blouse with sleeves. Avoid clothing that looks overly casual or sporty, such as swimsuits and other beach wear, tee shirts, tank tops, spaghetti straps or strapless tops. Also women should avoid V-neck shirts as it can trick the eyes into thinking the subject has her shirt open in front; hardly the impression you want to make as you enter a foreign country.

What color should I wear?

Choose a color that flatters your skin and hair. Any pastel or bright color is acceptable. White is flattering to most people, but the background of your photo will also be white, which can cause you to look like an isolated face floating in white space. Black can also be difficult because details of your clothing may disappear into the shadows leaving you stuck in a black blob. Plain fabrics are best; stripes, plaids, checks, and even chintzes can produce strange effects.

How about a hat or scarf?

Head coverings in general are not acceptable, so pack your favorite baseball cap away. If you must wear a head covering for medical reasons, you will need to supply a note from your doctor along with your passport application. Likewise if your head covering is a required or customary practice of your religion, you will need to submit a letter of explanation with your application. While your photo is being taken, you will need to adjust your headgear so that it does not cover your face or cast shadows.

Should I wear my uniform?

No, no uniforms of any kind are permitted. Ordinary street clothing only. And while we're at it, no camouflage apparel either.

What about my glasses or sunglasses? Wear them? Or take them off?

Take them off unless you have a medical condition that requires you to wear your glasses at all times. In that case, you must include a doctor's note with your passport application, but otherwise glasses, reading glasses, sunglasses--they're all banned.

JEWELRY and BODY ART

I do love my bling! Please say I can wear jewelry.

Of course you can wear your jewelry, just so long as you don't cover up the details of your face with it.

Can I wear the jewelry in my facial and body piercings?

Yes you can, as long as it doesn't hide the details of your face.

What about my facial tattoos?

If they're permanent, the State Department wants to see them, so don't try to cover them up with makeup.

BABIES and CHILDREN

Are there any special rules for kids?

For children old enough to sit up by themselves and follow simple directions, the rules are the same as for adults. Because small children are wiggly, however, some allowance is made regarding pose and facial expression. Nevertheless, the face must be turned toward the camera and fully in view without obstructions, the eyes must be open, and the expression must not be exaggerated or extreme.

What if my baby is too young to sit up?

For a child who is too young to sit up and pose, place a white sheet or blanket in the car seat to serve as a background, and place the baby in the car seat on top of it. Or the sheet can be spread out on the floor and the baby placed on it and photographed from above. The photo still must show the full face with no obstructions such as pacifiers or toys, and capture a moment when the eyes are at least partially open.

Can I sit my baby on a chair or stool and just hold him upright?

No, because your hands would show in the photo. It must be a picture of one person, with no other people or parts of other people in view.