GRIZZLY PHOTOGRAPHY INC. | NEW ORLEANS

FREE GUIDE — NO. 01 — REVISED

Light yourself like a portrait.

Self-portrait lighting tips for camera phones — written for melanin-rich skin, natural hair, and the warm light of New Orleans.

Most phone tips were not written with skin like ours in mind. This one is. Your phone is good enough. Your light probably is not — yet. Fix the light, keep your true tone, and the same phone will make a portrait you are proud to post, send, and print.

Start with the window →

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Real client headshot.
From a portrait session at our Mid-City studio.



THE ONE RULE

Find warm light first. Expose for your face.

Most self-portraits of Black skin fail before the shutter is pressed — not because of the face, but because the light is cool, flat, or harsh, and the phone exposes for everything except you. Move yourself, then make the phone meter for your face.

01

Turn off the overhead light

Ceiling lights throw shadows into eye sockets and under the chin. Cool fluorescent light is worse: it drains the warmth out of rich skin and leaves it looking gray or ashy. Turn it off, then walk toward the brightest window in the room. One warm, soft source beats three harsh ones.

02

Face the window at 45 degrees

Sit about an arm's length from the window and turn about 45 degrees to it. Warm light falls across one side of your face and fades gently on the other. That gradient is what shows the shape of your face — and the detail in locs, braids, twists, and coils.

03

Keep your true tone

Tap your face on screen and hold to lock focus and exposure. Then slide brightness until the skin on screen looks like the skin you see in the mirror — rich, warm, and detailed. If the phone shows you lighter, grayer, or washed out, do not accept it. Move closer to the light or adjust until your tone is true.



Window light at an angle: warm, soft, and dimensional — no equipment needed.

Try it in 60 seconds: Take the same selfie in the middle of the room under the ceiling light, then again an arm's length from the window at 45 degrees. Compare the skin first, then the eyes. In the window shot your tone stays rich, your hair keeps its detail, and your eyes catch light — catchlights are what make a portrait feel alive.

OUTDOORS

Golden hour and the porch do the work for you

Outside, timing is your lighting kit. New Orleans gives you two gifts: low golden sun, and porches and galleries on nearly every block — built-in shade our families have been making portraits in for generations.



Golden hour in New Orleans: put the low sun behind you or to your side for a warm rim of light around twists, locs, coils, and shoulders.

Chase the last hour

In the hour after sunrise and the hour before sunset, light is low, warm, and directional — and warm light loves melanin. It brings out golden and deep warm undertones instead of flattening them. Put the sun behind you and slightly to one side, tap your face to expose for it, and let the background glow.

Give your hair its outline

Dark hair against a dark background or deep shade can disappear into it. Move until something lighter sits behind your head — sky, a light wall, a sunlit house — or let golden-hour rim light trace the shape of your hair. Your silhouette should read as clearly as your face.

Use the porch at midday

Sit just inside the shade of a porch, gallery, awning, or oak — facing out toward the light. You get even skin, open eyes with no squinting, and no hard shadow lines. Stay near the edge of the shade, where warm light bouncing off the sidewalk and walls can still reach your face.

Watch cool shade and bright backgrounds

Deep shade can turn cool and blue, which makes rich skin look ashy. Step toward the warm edge of the shade. And if the background is much brighter than your face, the phone will expose for the background and turn you into a silhouette. Turn around, move closer to the light, or tap and hold on your face to lock exposure on you.

THE SETUP

Set the phone up like a camera

A steady phone at the right height, in warm light, will beat a hand-held phone in bad light every time. Two of these steps exist for one reason: to protect your tone.



The home setup: window with a sheer curtain, phone on a tripod or stack of books at eye level, a white board to bounce light back — and you, a few feet from a plain background.

DO THIS	WHY IT HELPS
Turn beauty mode off	Smoothing and brightening filters lighten skin and erase texture and features. Your texture is not a flaw to fix. Turn it off and let the portrait look like you.
Clean the lens	Phones live in pockets and hands. A quick wipe removes the haze that makes good light look foggy and dulls rich skin.
Raise it to eye level	Prop it on books or a tripod. Shooting slightly above eye level is flattering; shooting from below rarely is.
Tap, hold, check your tone	Tap your face, long-press to lock, then adjust until your tone on screen matches your tone in real life — not lighter, not grayer.
Bounce light back	A white poster board, a white t-shirt on a chair, or a light wall opposite the window bounces soft fill into the shadow side of your face. No lamp needed.
Use the timer, step back	A 3- or 10-second timer lets you settle, relax your expression, and reduce the distortion that comes from holding the phone too close.

BEFORE YOU POST

The 5-minute routine

- ☐ **Light check:** One warm, soft source — window at 45 degrees, golden hour, or the edge of porch shade. Overheads and fluorescents off.
- ☐ **Tone check:** Exposure locked on your face. Skin on screen looks like you — rich and warm, not lightened, gray, or ashy.
- ☐ **Hair check:** Light or rim light behind your head, so locs, braids, twists, coils, or a fade read clearly against the background.
- ☐ **Filter check:** Beauty mode and skin smoothing off. Lens wiped, phone at eye level, timer set.
- ☐ **Burst check:** Take 10, not 1. Change your chin angle slightly between frames. Pick later, not in the moment.

Five mistakes that dull rich skin

1. Cool overhead or fluorescent light **2.** A beauty filter that lightens and smooths you away **3.** A bright background that leaves your face underexposed **4.** Dark hair lost against a dark background **5.** Mixed light — a warm lamp on one side, blue daylight on the other. Pick one warm source and commit.

WHEN THE PHONE IS NOT ENOUGH

Some portraits have a job to do.

A profile photo for work, a headshot for auditions or a company page, a portrait that has to represent your business — those deserve controlled light, direction, and a photographer who lights for your skin on purpose, so you do not have to fight the phone to be seen as you are.

At Grizzly Photography, headshots are **$250–450** and portrait sessions are built around your story, in our Mid-City studio at 1001 S. Broad St, New Orleans.



Real client headshot — Grizzly Photography studio.

Book a free estimate: mogriz.com • 504.240.9307 • Instagram @mogrizzly493

Bring this guide to your session and tell us which window in your house you practiced in — we love that story.

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