

What to wear for portraits that look like you

Wardrobe tips written for our skin, our hair, and our families - from a Black portrait photographer with 20+ years behind the camera. Rich color, real texture, and outfits chosen the night before, so you walk in already confident.



The one rule underneath everything in this guide: the right outfit does not compete with your skin - it honors it. Nobody should remember what you wore first. They should remember *you* - your face, your hair, your presence.

Start with your skin, not the whole closet

Most wardrobe advice was not written for melanin-rich skin. Ours is. Deep, warm, golden, and cool brown skin does not need to be toned down - the right colors make it glow. Start with two or three rich colors, add warm neutrals, and build from there.

EMERALD

Makes deep skin luminous, stunning outdoors and in studio

BURGUNDY

Warm, rich, regal - never washes you out

GOLD / MUSTARD

Echoes warm undertones - use for a dress, top, or accent

CREAM / IVORY

Choose this over stark white - softer, richer against brown skin

DEEP NAVY

The polished alternative to black - keeps detail and depth

WHAT THE CAMERA SEES ON OUR SKIN

- **Jewel and earth tones win.** Emerald, burgundy, deep navy, gold, rust, and warm olive bring out warmth and depth. They hold up in City Park green, against brick, and under studio light.
- **Go easy on ashy pastels.** Pale powder blue, dusty lavender, and chalky pink can turn grey against deep skin and drain the glow. If you love a light color, choose its warmer, richer cousin - cream instead of white, peach instead of powder pink.
- **Stark white and jet black need care.** White can blow out next to deep skin; black can swallow detail. Cream, ivory, charcoal, and navy give you the same polish with the detail kept.
- **One statement, well placed.** A gold top, an emerald dress, a burgundy blazer - let one piece carry the color and let your skin carry the portrait.

Quick test: Hold the fabric up to your face in daylight and take a phone photo. Does your skin look warm and alive, or grey and tired? Trust that photo - the camera will see the same thing.

Fit, texture - and room for your hair



FIT: TAILORED, NOT TIGHT - AND HAIR HAS A SAY

- Choose clothes that skim, not squeeze. If you cannot sit, breathe, and raise your arms, the camera will see it.
- **Give your hair space.** Braids, locs, twists, an afro, a silk press, or a headwrap all need a neckline that respects them. Open, scoop, and V-necks frame volume and length; tight turtlenecks and high stiff collars crush and compete.
- Bring layers - a blazer, cardigan, or wrap you can add or remove makes two looks from one outfit, and will not fight your style.

FABRIC: TEXTURE YES, SHINE NO

- **Photographs beautifully:** linen, denim, knit, matte cotton, and woven texture. They add depth next to skin without stealing light from your face.
- **A heritage accent, with intention:** one Ankara-inspired scarf, pocket square, headwrap, or dress panel can root a portrait in who you are. One accent reads as pride; head-to-toe pattern reads as costume.
- **Gold loves our skin.** Simple gold hoops, a chain, or studs warm up a portrait and catch light kindly. Silver works for cooler undertones - pick the metal that makes your skin look rested.
- Steam the night before and hang outfits - do not fold them into a bag for the drive over.

Coordinate the family - do not match it



Our families hold a beautiful range - light to deep skin, babies to grandparents, locs to fades to braids. Matching outfits flatten that. A shared palette honors it. Pick the palette from page 2, let each person wear it their own way, and check that no one disappears: do not put the deepest skin in the darkest color against the darkest background.

BRING THIS

- One patterned piece per group - an Ankara-inspired scarf, plaid, or subtle stripe
- Simple gold or classic jewelry that frames, not distracts
- Clean, broken-in shoes that fit the outfit
- A second top for variety and insurance
- For headshots: a solid, rich color and a neckline that frames your face and hair

LEAVE THIS AT HOME

- Big logos, brand names, and slogan tees
- Tiny stripes and small checks - they shimmer on camera
- Neon that casts color onto skin and steals the face
- Ashy pastels that wash out deep skin
- Brand-new outfits and brand-new hairstyles worn for the first time

BY SESSION TYPE

Headshots and branding: solid jewel or earth tone, a structured layer, and the outfit your best client should meet you in. **Families and reunions:** start with Mama or Grandma's outfit - the anchor - then build everyone else around her palette. **Seniors and creatives:** one classic look, one look that is unmistakably you, hair and all. That second look is often the favorite frame.

Lay it out, steam it, protect the hair

- **Lay out every outfit** - top to shoes - and photograph it on the bed in daylight. Check the colors against your skin, not just against each other.
- **Try it on with your hairstyle in mind.** Sit down in it. Check the neckline against braids, locs, or volume, and look for gaps, pulls, and missing buttons.
- **Do hair the day before, not the morning of.** Fresh braids, a fresh retwist, or a fresh silk press needs a night to settle. Sleep in your wrap or bonnet so you wake up ready, not redoing.
- **Steam or iron,** then hang everything by the door.
- **Moisturize for glow, not shine.** Skin should look nourished in photos - lotion or a light shea the night before and morning of, blotting papers in your bag for T-zone shine at the studio.
- **Pack a backup top** in the same palette, plus the small kit: lint roller, safety pins, edge brush, hair ties, lip balm, and blotting papers. New Orleans weather is real.
- **Hands and nails show.** Clean, trimmed nails and moisturized hands - close crops catch everything.
- **Sleep.** No outfit fixes tired. Rest is part of the wardrobe.

READY WHEN YOU ARE

Book a portrait or headshot session at Grizzly Photography in Mid-City New Orleans, and bring this guide with you - we will do a quick wardrobe and color check together before the first frame.

Headshot sessions from \$250-450. Free estimate on every booking.

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