

# A General Guide for Models

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## Introduction

Modelling can be enjoyable. Modelling can be hard work. Modelling can be a career, a money-making side-line or it can be just a bit of fun.

Anyone can be a model. There are no specific requirements. Certain clients will of course have their prerequisites, however. Fashion shoots for example typically state specific gender, age, height, and measurement criteria. One of the most valuable assets a model can have is the ability to organise themselves and to be reliable, turn up to photoshoots on time fully prepared. Modelling can be fun, but it can also be physically, mentally, and emotionally taxing. There is far more to being a model than standing in front of the camera.

Modelling doesn't mean being tall and thin with perfect posture. It means identifying and playing to your strengths and looking for the type of work that's right for you. Some models specialise in specific genres, such as fashion, fitness, catalogue, lingerie, etc. In recent years, there has been a move towards more 'normally sized' and plus-sized models along with growth in 'alternative models' like tattooed/pierced, steampunk, gothic, etc.

It is important to develop a thick skin to protect yourself from the rejections you will inevitably face. You will hear the word 'no' more often than 'yes'. Try not to take the rejections personally. They will happen. Anyone hiring models for shoots and castings may well have specific needs, and you may not fit the brief. Also prepare yourself for the reaction you may get from friends, family and even total strangers. Many will be positive and supportive, but there will always be the odd one or two that are negative or even downright hostile.

Whatever your reason for thinking about modelling there is one thing you should always remember. Your safety and well-being are paramount. While most people you will meet will be genuine, there are always going to be one or two bad apples. Being a model often involves working in close proximity with photographers, MUAs, stylists etc, sometimes in studios, private homes and remote locations which can make you more vulnerable while I don't want to scare you or put you off, your safety has to be a major consideration and is something that I'll come back to throughout this guide.

## Name and Social Media Etc.

Let's start with your name. My advice is NEVER to use your own name for modelling. Even if you have no intention of modelling except for a bit of fun, personal pleasure, or as a confidence booster, it's worth having a modelling name (stage name or alias if you prefer), so you can separate your modelling life from everything else.

Create separate accounts on social media to use exclusively for your modelling using your model name. That way you can keep your online personal life and online modelling separate. You may have friends and family whom you don't want to interact with your modelling life. Equally, you may have people who follow and engage with you as a model that you would rather keep out of your personal life.

It's worth spending a while thinking about your model name. You don't want to be changing it too often – if at all, as you would also need to change the name of your social media accounts etc., and any such change could make it difficult for people and potential clients to find, tag and follow you.

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Be consistent and use the same model name on all of your social media, Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, X (Twitter), etc. Having your website is also a consideration but of course, that will take more time and effort to set up and keep up-to-date.

Of course, it goes without saying never publish your real name, address or phone number on the social media or websites etc that you use for your modelling.

## Fees and Charges

Whether you can expect to be paid or not will depend on a number of circumstances. The sad fact is that the vast majority of models, and photographers too for that matter, make little or no money for their work. If you're lucky then as a model you might make a little money occasionally from paid commercial shoots, and commissions from hobbyist photographers, camera clubs, photography tutors and such like. Very few models ever make enough money on a regular basis for it to be a sustainable source of income and of course, there are your expenses to take into account including outfits, make-up and travel.

Many experienced photographers, rather than paying the model might normally expect to be paid by the model for providing quality images for your portfolio. Generally speaking, who pays who will depend on who is the most experienced and what they are contributing to the shoot, but this should always be made clear early on when planning a shoot.

Some photographers will offer TFP shoots (Time for Portfolio, sometimes just called TF, Trade or Collaboration), which is a mutual agreement where both the photographer and model will work without fees in exchange for images to be used by both photographer and model. Such a mutually beneficial agreement is quite common and allows both to build up a body of work while keeping costs down. Images produced in such collaborations can normally be used by all the creatives involved in their own portfolios, social media, publicity etc, but the use of images commercially by a third party would require further negotiation.

If you are asked to do a commercial shoot, one for which the photographer is being paid and/or the images will be used to promote a third-party product, service or business, then you have a right to expect payment as a model. Be very wary of being exploited and being pressured into accepting 'exposure' in return for a commercial shoot, 'exposure' does not pay the bills. Put simply, if the photographer is being paid, then you have the right to expect payment also. Bear in mind though that if you are being paid, then you may lose other rights such as permission to use the images yourself, that will depend on the terms of the contract.

One of the most frequently asked questions by models is 'How much should I charge?' It's really a matter of what people are prepared to pay you. There is no set scale, good models are worth more, average models are worth less, and unusually females tend to be paid more than males, but in reality, many models won't get paid at all. Expect to get more from commercial shoots than from hobbyist photographers and camera clubs. It's also sad, but true, that the more flesh you are prepared to expose, the more you can expect to be paid as a result (see levels).

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## Levels

It's important that as a model you understand the different categories of work you may be asked to take part in. These are generally known as 'levels'. Unfortunately, there is no single definition of the different levels. This is my interpretation, others may have slightly differing definitions. If anything is unclear, then you should discuss the exact nature of the shoot and what is expected of you during the planning of the shoot.

- 1. Portrait** – Fully clothed portrait-style shots, head/shoulders/waist-up/full length.
- 2. Fashion** – Fully clothed. Age-appropriate, (some outfits can be revealing),
- 3. Lingerie/Swimwear** – Some swimwear/lingerie may be revealing.
- 4. Implied (Topless)** - You may be topless but no nipples are on show in the resulting images.
- 5. Sheer** – clothing may be tight fitting and/or (semi)transparent and revealing
- 6. Implied (Nude)** – You may nude but the genital area will not be seen in the resulting images
- 7. Topless** – You may be naked from the waist upward. Nipples may be exposed.
- 8. Nude/Art Nude** – You may be fully naked.

Be clear about which level you are prepared to work to. It is natural that you may feel more relaxed with some photographers than others and are prepared to work at higher levels with them than with others.

While it's not unreasonable for a photographer to ask if you are prepared to work to a particular level, they should not pressure you to do something that you are not totally comfortable with. If they persist in asking you to shoot at higher levels than you have agreed to, then WALK AWAY.

Note that with some shoots where for example you are working to the implied levels and nothing revealing will be included in the resulting images, you may actually be topless or nude and visible to the photographer and others present during the shoot.

If the model is under 18 then levels are generally limited to 'Age-Appropriate Fashion'. In essence that means that models will always be fully clothed, outfits will not be revealing, and poses will not be sensual or provocative. Lingerie/Underwear style shoots are generally only permitted in limited circumstances such as catalogue shoots, even then many photographers, myself included will not be prepared to do such shoots with under 18 models. Many catalogues and online clothing sites are also taking a safeguarding first approach, preferring to display such items laid out or on mannequins rather than use models, Swimwear is somewhat a grey area and if done must be managed in a sensitive age-appropriate way.

## Chaperones

Most reputable photographers will be happy for you to bring someone with you to a shoot to act as a chaperone to ensure your safety. If you are under 18 then it is a requirement that a chaperone is present at all times, no ifs, no buts, no excuses.

Chaperones should be someone known well to you and should be over 18 years of age. If you are under 18 yourself then ideally the chaperone should be a parent or family member.

Some photographers aren't especially keen on chaperones, this isn't necessarily a red flag but you may want to be more cautious in such circumstances. Personally, I have no objection as they serve to ensure the safety of both model and photographer and can make useful assistants.

Chaperones should not interfere with the shoot unless invited to do so by the photographer or unless they have concerns for your safety or wellbeing.

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## Building a Portfolio

Consider both a printed and digital portfolio of a variety of professional-quality images. Models need an impressive portfolio to represent themselves and distinguish them from others. Do bear in mind though that the model is not always the best person to decide which images are the best to include and which are the ones to reject. Photographers, family members and agents (if you have one), can sometimes offer a more objective view.

Commercial clients will often expect to see a simple image of you with minimal make-up natural or flat lighting with a very basic outfit and minimal accessories. A full-length shot and a closer shot of your face are useful along with a brief 'details sheet' that lists your name, height, measurements, hair and eye colour and other personal details so you should have these available. A brief bio, (no more than 4 or 5 paragraphs on an A4 page), is also worth having. Some clients and magazines may ask for this and it's a lot easier if you have one already prepared.

The other images in your portfolio will need to demonstrate your experience, suitability, and versatility especially if you're just starting out. It's important that you include quality images from a range of different experienced photographers in your portfolio, not a few 'snaps' that Auntie Karen has taken on her phone.

Choose photos that vary in style and artistic vision, as well as shots that show off different angles and take on your features. Be ruthless and limit the number of images in your portfolio and as you do more shoots, keep your portfolio up-to-date discarding some and adding new ones.

For your printed portfolio, then you can get presentation folders with clear plastic pockets which are ideal. Have your photographer provide you with prints, or digital copies that you can have printed at the required size and you can insert them into the pockets and swap them out and replace them as you do more shoots. You can also get 'Photobooks printed by many commercial printers which look very professional, but you'll need to have the whole book reprinted to swap out any images which can get expensive.

For your digital portfolio then that can be done at little or no cost. You can use social media such as Facebook and Instagram, specialist sites such as PurplePort and you can create your own website. You can easily make a free portfolio yourself using a website builder like Wix. Wix's tools make it relatively easy to set up an eye-catching online presence that has the potential to boost your modelling career.

## Choosing a Photographer/Photographers

To build your portfolio you will need to choose photographers to work with. If you have an agent, then your agent will probably be able to suggest some suitable ones to you. When it comes to choosing a photographer, it pays to take a little time doing your research. It's worth taking a look at local social media groups for Photographers and Models, look at the work of some of the photographers on there and see which individuals or styles appeal to you.

There are some photographers who you will like, get on with develop a good working relationship and produce some great images together. There will be other photographers you do not gel with for whatever reason. This is just the way it is. Don't dwell on it too much.

Shooting with a photographer isn't simply a matter of standing and posing. All the best photos come from a joint effort, working together to produce stunning images. Don't hesitate to make suggestions and discuss the shoot as it progresses. A good photographer will welcome your input.

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It's important though, especially when starting out, that you don't limit yourself. Shooting with a range of photographers can help to produce a more diverse portfolio and different photographers will bring out different aspects of your personality. Shooting with trusted photographers on a regular basis can also be very advantageous in many situations as you get to know them and bounce ideas around – my advice would be to do a bit of both.

Include a range of different genres in your portfolio, some studio shoots and some location shoots in a range of styles for example to show your versatility.

## Social Media Model and Photographer Groups

I briefly mentioned social media groups earlier. There are some very good social media groups which aim to bring photographers, models, MUAs and stylists together. Some of these are nationally based, and some operate in specific areas of the country. Some of these are of course better than others. The better ones are moderated and actively vet members. Some offer mentoring, social group gatherings and organised group shoots. It's probably a good idea to join some of these (using your model account and model name rather than your real name of course). Maybe join and just watch the group for a while without posting or commenting until you're sure it's a group that suits you.

Social media groups tend to be self-regulating, and any dubious photographers (and models), usually get identified and removed quite quickly however erring on the side of caution maybe ask other models for their recommendations before approaching a photographer.

When you're ready you can then respond to 'casting calls' or contact photographers whose work you like.

## Specialist Sites

There are also specialist internet sites that exist to bring models and photographers together. Probably the best known of these is PurplePort but others such as Model Mayhem also exist. While these sites will require you to use your real name to sign up, your real details can be hidden from other users. These sites offer a basic account for free, if you want an account with more then there is a small annual fee – around £35. These sites offer some potentially useful features such as the ability to create and respond to casting calls, take and manage bookings and the ability to read and submit references. In the past vetting of members on such sites has been patchy so again caution is always the best policy.

## Other Creatives

As well as working with photographers it can be useful to make contact with some other creatives and contacts who can help you with your shoots. An obvious one is MUAs. Make-up artists can make a big difference to the way you approach a shoot and it's worth having one – or three, that you can rely on to do a good job at a good price. Much the same applies to hair stylists. Depending on what sort of shoots you are planning it may also be useful to make contact with SFX artists and body painters. You may be able to find these locally or via specialist sites like PurplePort. Your photographer and agent, (if you have one), may also be able to put you in contact with some.

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## Clothing, Props and Accessories

Modelling means that you're going to go through a lot of outfits. With some commercial paid shoots you may be lucky and an outfit may be provided but for most, you're going to have to find your own and that can be expensive.

You can keep costs down in a number of ways, One option is to approach local independent retailers and ask if they would be prepared to lend you clothing for a shoot in return for some images and credit on social media and publications. The worst they can do is say no. Those who specialise in vintage and/or pre-owned clothing seem to be the most receptive.

Other cheap sources of outfits are of course charity shops, it's amazing what outfits and accessories you can pick up for very little money and of course, you can actually see and feel the items before purchase. Online marketplaces such as Vinted can often turn up bargains and are generally very reliable. Then there are sites like Wish and Temu which can offer some extremely cheap offerings. The trouble is there can be long delivery delays and the quality of items is variable.

## Arranging your shoot

Discuss the shoot with the photographer well in advance and make sure you know what is planned, where it will take place and what make-up, clothing, hair etc are expected. Ask the photographer about their ideas and maybe ask for a mood board to get an idea of the look and style proposed and agree on levels and other arrangements. Any payment details need to be established in advance who is paying who and how much, If it's a TFP collaboration then details of copies of images etc need to be agreed upon.

You may be given/sent a model release before the shoot which formalises the arrangements. Should you need to cancel or postpone the shoot for any reason you should let the photographer know as soon as you can.

## Model Releases

A model release is often required before a shoot. A model release may cover a specific shoot or several shoots with the same group of creatives. Unless specifically stated otherwise and agreed in writing beforehand, the photographer owns the copyright to all the images taken during a shoot and is free to do with them whatever they like. In practice, normally, the model is asked to complete a model release, where the model is under 18, then for contractual reasons, the model release must be signed by a responsible adult, normally the parent or guardian of the model or someone over 18 acting as their agent. A model release formally grants the photographer the right to shoot and edit images of the model.

Do bear in mind that once photographs have been taken then the copyright holder has the right to them in perpetuity. If sometime in the future, you have a change of mind for whatever reason the copyright owner has no obligation to stop using the images. Even if the copyright owner does agree to your requests not to use the images, once images are out there on the internet it's virtually impossible to prevent their continued use.

If you are being paid for a shoot then it's quite normal for the model NOT to be given copies of the images. If you are paying the photographer, then the contract or model release may specify the number of images you can normally expect to be given to you.

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## At the Shoot

Appreciate that the photographer puts quite a lot into organising a shoot, they will do a lot of preparatory work, thinking about styles, poses, lighting and the like and may even have gone to the expense of hiring venues and/or making other arrangements. It's important therefore that if you agree to a shoot, you turn up at the agreed place at the agreed time, prepared to shoot. If you have to cancel or reschedule for any reason then let the photographer know as soon as you are aware of the problem. While it's appreciated that occasionally emergencies may occur these should be exceptional and not a regular occurrence. There can be no excuse for just not turning up at a shoot, even with a last-minute emergency a quick call or message can be made. If you make a habit of cancellations or no-shows, then word of your unreliability will soon spread.

If you are attending a shoot unaccompanied then always let someone else know where you are and that you have arrived safely. Maybe get them to contact you at some point during the shoot to check that all is well. If you have any doubts, then WALK AWAY.

If you take a chaperone ensure that they remain with you during the shoot. The photographer may sometimes ask the chaperone to help with props or lighting or maybe to adjust your hair and clothing etc., that's fine but don't allow the chaperone to direct you or interfere in the shoot itself.

A model release should always be completed. These are standard documents that establish the position of all parties involved. If you are under 18 years of age then your parent/guardian/agent must sign or countersign the agreement.

While it is permissible for photographers to clarify levels during the shoot, levels should never be 'pushed' and models never coerced into poses and situations with which they are not totally comfortable. If during the shoot you feel undue pressure is being applied for you to do something you are not happy with then make your excuses and WALK AWAY.

During the shoot, you should feel comfortable enough to discuss the shoot with the photographer, don't be afraid to ask why they are doing something and maybe suggest ideas of your own. Small talk with the photographer is encouraged as it helps both parties to relax, but don't allow the conversation to become too personal.

If the shoot requires you to change outfits you should be able to do this in privacy if appropriate breaks should be incorporated in the shoot to allow you to rest and have a drink.

The photographer may ask you to adjust your clothing, hair or accessories etc during a shoot. There may be the odd occasion where the photographer wants for example, your hair to lay in a particular way, in which case and only with your permission you may consent for them to adjust it as it is easier for them to do it. However, the photographer should not normally touch you and never without your consent.

If during the shoot you become uncomfortable for any reason whatsoever, then make your excuses and WALK AWAY.

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## After the Shoot

The photographer may or may not allow you to preview images and indicate which ones are your personal favourites and may take that into account. Always remember though that with paid shoots it will be the client who selects which images will be selected and used.

If the photographer supplies images to other creatives involved in the shoot, then unless it is specifically stated otherwise, such images may be shared on social media and websites and used in the portfolios of all involved.

Models/Creatives should not edit images or allow anyone else to edit them without the permission of the Photographer. Do not apply Instagram filters or other effects to any images you share, any watermarks should be retained and not edited or cropped out. When images are shared then the entire creative team, model, photographer, MUA, Stylist etc., should be credited unless they have specifically asked otherwise. This is beneficial to all involved as tagging all creatives will drive more traffic to everyone's social media and raise their profiles.

With TFP shoots then unless there is a specific restriction all creatives are free to submit images produced to third parties such as review sites, model/photographer forums (PurplePort/Model Mayhem etc), magazines, and the like again the entire creative team should be credited. It's normally implicit on the photographer to submit or at least authorise submission to third parties as the photographer is the copyright owner.

Submitting to magazines is really not that much different from publishing on social media except those submissions to magazines are assessed, quality checked and carefully curated, they don't accept just anyone and anything. Indeed, most work sent to magazines is rejected. Having your images accepted for publication is a real accomplishment. Since magazines typically have a large amount of followers publication can be a real boost to your social media reach as you'll be tagged and credited, helping to get your name out there and raising your own social media profile. Unfortunately, most magazines don't pay for publication, but most will provide free tear sheets which you are free to use and share.

Remember when submitting images to social media or other parties, make sure they you your modelling name, not your real name in any credits and you provide links to your model profiles on social media, not your personal profile.

## Promotion/Influencer Invitations

Once you have an active social media presence, and especially if you get published in magazines and the like, you may well get unsolicited offers to promote some products. Typically, these companies offer to send you make-up, jewellery, T-shirts, lingerie etc in exchange for you including such items in a photoshoot and sending them copies of the images or crediting/tagging them when you share the images.

Some of these may be scams beware any that want a payment of ANY sort. A lot are however genuine. It's actually a very good way for companies to promote their goods without costly marketing overheads, they send you a few items and in return you send them a few images. As with all things check them out and do your research. Check what the conditions are, if the items are yours to keep etc. before committing to anything. You are very unlikely to make any money by including promoted items in your images, but you can get a few bits and pieces for 'free'.



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More importantly, maybe, is that promotion of your images by the company will drive more traffic to your social media and raise your profile.

It is important to make sure your photographer is aware of any arrangements to include promotional items in your images and they are happy with that and so can make sure they ensure the items are prominent in some images.

## Model Agencies

If you want to be a bit more serious in your modelling work then it's worth considering signing with a reputable model agency in the medium/long term. Legitimate model agencies will put paid work your way and help you manage your modelling career. Modelling agencies have had quite a bad press in the past and rightly so as many were nothing more than scams. Be very suspicious of any model agencies who contact you. Reputable agencies will normally require that you contact them. Do your research via Google and social media, ask other models, photographers and creatives and seek recommendations on social media before making any commitment.

It's actually illegal now in the UK for modelling agencies to ask for money from you 'upfront' so if you're asked to pay a signing-on fee then WALK AWAY. Agencies make their money by getting work for you and taking a cut of your fee, normally directly from the client.

Some less than reputable agencies have attempted to get around the law by asking models to attend a 'free' photoshoot or trial, then billing you for studio hire, make-up and hair, costume hire and/or charging extortionate fees for the edited images. Some of the more professional agencies also offer 'model schools' for which a legitimate fee may be payable. These can be worthwhile but always check the price and any hidden costs – again seeking recommendations from others is very worthwhile.

Model Agencies will typically require you to enter into a contract with them. Make sure you read and understand the contract and what it requires of both you and the agent. The contract should specify what percentage of the client's fee they will require. Typically, this can be anywhere between 10% and 45%. In return for their fee, the agency should of course actively seek and find your work from paying clients. Locally based Modelling agencies can often be more effective than nationally based organisations especially if you are just starting out as they are more likely to be able to find you work in your area, but national agencies can have a larger range of potential clients and lucrative projects.

Of course, unless there is an exclusivity clause, you can sign with multiple agencies. Exclusivity clauses can take a number of forms and you need to understand the exact nature and implications of them. An exclusivity clause may seek to prevent you from signing with multiple agencies or may seek to impose higher commission rates if you do. Such a clause may also prevent you from working with clients and photographers who have not been referred through the agency, or if you do work with such clients, may require you to pay the agency a percentage of any fees you receive.

Contracts with agencies should always be time-limited 12 month contracts are often the norm allowing either party to freely 'walk away' at the end of the contract period.