500px Stock Photographer Guidelines

There are actually just a few things you need to know:
Clients are a remarkable bunch. Smart, discerning, creative professionals. We've always catered to their needs – from the everyday to the extraordinary – by offering quality content, and curated collections.

A little art direction goes a long way.
You don't need any special training to pull off a great shot. Just some preparation and attention to detail. Later in this document you'll find a list of aesthetic guidelines that will make your photos more appealing to customers.

Some things are always in demand. Others are timeless. When clients ask for something specifically, we pass the requests on to our contributors. Keep reading and you'll find the basic traits of our most-wanted content.

The following points describe ideal photos. Don't worry – we don't expect every image you submit to match these points perfectly. These are just in-demand things that you may want to strive for if you aren't sure what to shoot.

- **Commercial** images that can be used by advertisers and publishers to sell a product or service. These are images that have a message, have space for words, are versatile, and are technically sound. If you can picture it being used for an advertisement (digital or print), billboard, web banner, or book cover, you've got a commercial image.
- **Literal and conceptual** images. Clients have varied needs. Some require images that convey ideas all on their own (success, friendship, insecurity, etc.) while others need images that are exactly what they appear to be (people, nature shots, simple objects, etc.).
- **Authentic** images that feature real and believable scenes, but with attention to production value. Images taken with a purpose or message in mind, plus some post-production work – not unedited snapshots.
- **Fresh** interpretations of common concepts. There are photos of almost everything imaginable, but clients are always looking for reinventions of the most-used themes.
- Images that are **current and trending**. There's a difference between an image that has a charming vintage aesthetic and an image that simply looks outdated.

Styling
- Simple, classic clothing gives an image longevity and versatility. There's always demand for current trends. Keep in mind that extreme clothing, hairstyles, and makeup can cause an image to become dated more quickly.
- Clothing should fit the models properly, be clean, and ironed.
- No brand names or logos. This is important.
- Strong patterns and accessories can be distracting.

- Black and white are often difficult to expose properly.
- When submitting candid images that were not shot for stock, consider how clothing fits into the situation contextually. Does it match the image's message? Are there distracting or overpowering elements? Does the clothing get lost in the background? A little editing can go a long way. Scrub logos. Clean up stray hairs and fabric wrinkles.

Props and location
- Check the location for lighting conditions in advance. Know how the light will behave at different times of day.
- Avoid locations that provide a busy background.
- For set up/staged shots, aim for realism and authenticity, but don't overdo it. Props should complement, not distract, create clutter, or contribute to the lack of a clear focal point.
- For candid/non-staged shots, be aware of potentially distracting background clutter. Consider using a shallower depth of field, or recompose. Watch for background objects that appear to protrude from your models' heads.
Old technology can date an image. When using technology props that aren't current, consider how prominently they're featured in the image. For instance, if composing an image of a model using a slightly older laptop, can you position the shot so the device isn't the main focus of the image?

Lighting
- Lighting creates mood and atmosphere, and contributes to the story your image tells.
- It's not necessary to invest a fortune in fancy equipment. Clever use of available light can be the difference between your content looking professional or amateur.
- Improper use of lighting leads to technical problems that can cause your images to be rejected. Underexposure is evident when there is significant noise and a loss of detail in shadows. Overexposure is evident when there is a loss of detail in the highlights.
- When outdoors, don't put a model in a situation that causes squinting or leaves harsh shadows on their face.
- Avoid high-contrast, midday lighting.
- In-camera flash creates unflattering, amateur- looking images with harsh shadows and blown-out highlights. Avoid this unless a very specific snapshot aesthetic is intended.
- Objects on neutral backgrounds should be well lit, but not over lit.
- Does the lighting enhance the image or create technical problems and distractions?

Models
- Professional models aren't necessary. Stock photographers commonly use family and friends as models. However, consider your models' strengths and positive attributes and maximize them.
- Whether they're posed or candid, professional or family/friends, ideal models are natural, authentic, relaxed, and comfortable.
- Facial expressions should not look forced or stiff, and should relate to body language. It's even better if models can show emotion with their eyes.

- Avoid "in-between" or "outtake" expressions and poses. Expressions and poses should have a purpose.
- Diversity. Customers need a wide range of ethnicities, ages, body types, and styles.
- Realism is important, but hair and skin should still be well groomed. The best images are authentic while also presenting an ideal.

Framing/Cropping/Composition
- How you present what you're shooting is just as important as the subject itself.
- Be conscious of the entire frame when deciding what to include and where to place elements in the photograph. How content is situated in an image can create visual impact and influence meaning.
- If images started out as snapshots, or you didn't have time to plan your composition thoroughly before taking a candid shot, consider what you can improve in post-production before submitting. Cropping? Eliminating distracting or unnecessary elements? Is there space for copy? Is there clutter?
- Consider viewpoint, how/where the eye travels, and what/where the focal point is. Is there a focal point? It should be easily identifiable. Competing focal points create visual confusion and cause an image to lose its impact and meaning.
Think about orientation. Would a horizontal/landscape, vertical/portrait, or square format be more effective?
- Crops can create effective tension and draw your eye, or be distracting – especially if they cut awkwardly through a body part.
- Consider how your image will look at different sizes. Will it stand out as a thumbnail on a search grid?

Similar vs. Series
- Similar = bad. Series = good.
- Similar images are of a model/scene, with only slight variations in pose, expression, angle, etc.
- A series is a group of images of the same model/ scene that depicts an idea in a variety of ways.
- Our customers are busy. They want options, but they don't want to be overwhelmed trying to distinguish minute differences between photos.
- The customer may be able to use a series of images for a large or ongoing project.
- It's acceptable to submit similar images that only differ in orientation (vertical, horizontal, square). This offers flexibility for layout.
- When you're selecting from similar images, ask yourself which ones have the best cropping, lighting, authenticity, copy space, clear message, etc.. Which are most versatile?
- Submit the images you think best represent the idea/object you're portraying.