
PROPS: USING OBJECTS TO IMPROVE YOUR PHOTOGRAPHS

Quick Guide
Written by Ľudmila Borošová



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Photograph by Jazmin Quaynor

You're a creator, so you always need to be seeking ways to bring out the beauty in your photographs. Many times, when photographing a subject, you'll create a nice portrait with just what you have. But other times, you'd like to spice things up or open a whole new photography world. A very popular way of doing so is adding props. Let's talk about how a few material things can create a huge difference in your photographs!

Today, we'll cover the following:

- What are props?
- Why should you use them in photography?
- My favorite props for portraits
- How to acquire props inexpensively

 **Recommended Reading:** Want to learn how to make your photos stand out from everyone else's? Grab a copy of Photzy's Effective Storytelling premium guide.

WHAT DO YOU MEAN BY 'PROPS'?

In photography, props are all material objects that were added to the scene intentionally to complement the main subject. They aren't the center

of attention; in fact, they often help the main subject to shine through. It can be anything that the model is holding or that is inside the frame on purpose.



Photograph by Harsh Raghavani

SO, WHY WOULD I ADD A FOREIGN OBJECT TO MY PICTURES?

The right question is: why wouldn't you? Photography is art, and any object can be a part of it if you're creative enough. Thanks to props, we can awaken a lot of new feelings in the shot. Often, the only purpose of a prop is to highlight the vibe or aesthetics of the picture. But there are a few more reasons why you should use props.

Conceptual Photography

Conceptual photography is a genre whose foundation stands on good props. Thanks to them, the photographer is telling a message or sharing an idea. It is one of the hardest creative genres, because the prop has a very deep meaning and completes the photograph. The result should speak loudly without any words and evoke many feelings.



Photograph by Nathan Dumlao

Perspective

If you're shooting a landscape photograph, it's very hard to tell how massive the mountains are, how tall the waterfall is, or where the trees can reach. That's why we often use props! In fact, you could be one, too, by standing next to the tree. By including an object we're familiar with in the picture, we can easily compare sizes of all elements included. But it doesn't have to be just you – it can be animals, a tent, or anything simple, such as a chair.

Depth

When using props, we can put depth into our pictures using shallow depth of field. If your subject is holding a prop, or there is a prop close by, you can focus on your subject and let the object just complete the photograph. This is ideal if you want to fill the empty corners of your photo.



Photograph by Ludmila Borošová

SO, WHAT ARE THE OPTIONS?

The possibilities for props are endless! I suggest you keep a list of all good prop ideas to use them later for inspiration. Are you already thinking which props to include in your next photoshoot? Let me show you a few examples, so that you can choose your favorite.

Prism

Prism glass is cheap to buy and easy to carry around! That's why it's my number one favorite prop. It isn't necessarily included in the picture, but it helps reflect interesting shapes and colors on the subject. By holding a prism next to your lens when it's sunny, you can scatter light on your model that will create a very dreamy look, like rainbows or kaleidoscope effects. There are many shapes of prisms which all achieve different looks. Bear in mind that the side effect is also a bit of distortion in the photograph and dreamy blurriness. If my client doesn't bring any props that reflect her personality, I do a few shots with a prism just to incorporate a bit of a different look to the photoshoot.



Photograph by Clay Banks

Fairy Lights

Who doesn't love fairy lights? If I remember correctly, this trend started on Tumblr in around 2010, and it was perfected by Brandon Woelfel. While fairy lights sometimes seem a bit cliché, I believe that there are still many brilliant ways to use them. It's only up to your imagination! Fairy lights bring a lot of depth and magic into your shots. I love when they are complemented with the right makeup and extraordinary outfits!



Photograph by Ludmila Borošová

Flowers

Flowers are a classic! Many people think of flowers as a cliché, but again, it really depends on how you interpret them in your photographs. You can use them as a subtle prop, where the model is just casually holding them in their hands. Or you can use them as a beauty product, often as a hairstyle decoration and makeup inspiration. This doesn't only apply to women; I've seen wonderful portraits of men with daisies in their beard! Keep in mind that different flowers hold different meanings. If your aim is to deliver a certain message, you can use flowers to your advantage. If you want to create a long-term partnership with various vendors, florists are the ones I would start with. Create a few free photoshoots for your mutual portfolio. Now, you have something to show your potential clients! I believe at least some of them would love to purchase the bouquets for their pictures.



Photograph by Ludmila Borošová

Hobbies

The portrait of your client shouldn't just be about looking the best for a profile picture; it should also reflect their personality. Get to know the model and ask about their hobbies, interests, or personality. Are they a bookworm? You can use books as a prop in many creative ways. Your model can be reading a book in their cozy place (café, living room, bedroom, park, etc.) or holding a book in their hands while walking. Books or newspapers can also be used as a background. You're a photographer! Wouldn't it be amazing if someone took photos of you holding your camera? It would bring forward so much of your personality.



Photograph by Ludmila Borošová

Mirror

A mirror is the simplest yet the most creative prop! To have great results, you should choose a mirror that will reflect the mood of the photoshoot. It can go well with a fancy photoshoot, boudoir, or beauty shots, but it is also a great way to enhance the modern minimalism. I would recommend doing your first mirror photoshoot with someone you know, because only practice makes perfect! It's a bit awkward doing it for the first time, because you need to work a lot with different angles for it to make sense. Trust me, the results will be worth it!



Photograph by Onur Bahçivancılar

ISN'T IT A BIT EXPENSIVE TO BUY NEW PROPS?

It depends! If you're buying everything online, the prices can accumulate quickly. You'll end up owning a lot of things that dropped in value immediately after you bought them. Unless it's a once in a lifetime find, I wouldn't recommend buying new props every time. Here's how you can save money and have fun while looking for props:

Find the Treasure

Our houses are full of old treasures (that we would normally just call clutter), and you never know what you could find, especially in our parents' and grandparents' houses! I can imagine old briefcases, gramophones, old telephones, vintage clothes... look for the treasure next time you visit!

Shop Second Hand

There are many offline and online ways to get secondhand props! If someone doesn't feel like an item is valuable anymore, it can still bring a lot of joy to you and your photographs. It is usually a bargain, and you can also re-use it for other photoshoots.



Photograph by Aziz Acharki


Form a Partnership

As mentioned before with flowers, it's important to have partnerships with vendors. If you know someone that's creating beautiful things, reach out and offer an exchange service for the product. You will be amazed how many things you can borrow for your shoots!

Ask Your Model

Does your model have something that she always wanted to try photographing with? I am currently speaking with a model that would love to have a photoshoot with old, embroidered curtains! She is so excited about this, because not only does the item mean a lot to her, but she loves the shadow play you can get using this.

I hope that next time you're shopping second hand or cleaning up your house, you'll think of alternative uses of the items: in front of your camera. Props are an exciting way to bring life to your photographs. When used correctly, they will save you tons of work! I have to say that I just realized that I don't use them enough and I should start looking for exciting objects myself.

 **Recommended Reading:** Want to learn how to make your photos stand out from everyone else's? Grab a copy of Photzy's [Effective Storytelling](#) premium guide.

Self-Check Quiz:

- 1) What are props? How would you describe them?
- 2) Why is it beneficial to use props?
- 3) What does it mean to play with perspective?
- 4) Can you name at least a few props?
- 5) What is a prism and its effect?
- 6) What are some of the creative ways to use flowers?
- 7) How can you use the knowledge about your model in your photographs?
- 8) Why do angles matter when using mirrors as a prop?
- 9) How can you find inexpensive props?
- 10) Do you always need to be the one bringing props to your shoots?

Assignment:

- Find examples of conceptual photography. What are your favorite shots? Why did the artist use these certain objects? How does it make you feel?
- Set a timer and dedicate 15 minutes to finding five interesting objects at home that you could use as a prop. Use this for your self-portraits. All you need is a tripod and these five things. Get creative with what you have!
- Look at online secondhand listings and filter for things that are less than \$5. Did you find anything that you could use?



Hey there!

Let's get real for a minute... Learning photography can be super challenging! But we're here to help you every step of the way! Here are 3 of our most useful (*and FREE!*) photography resources:



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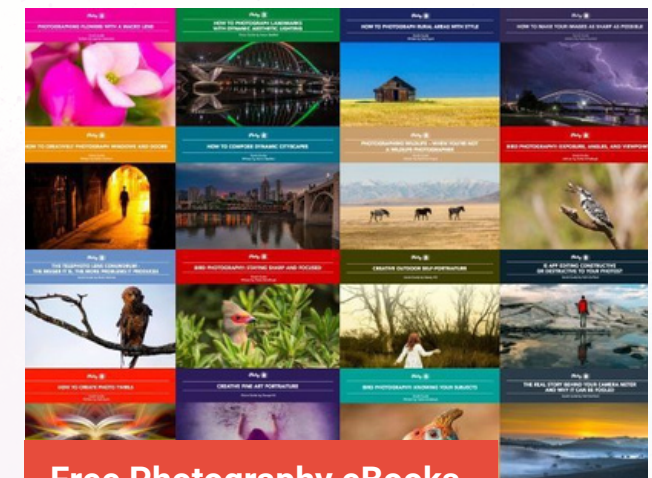
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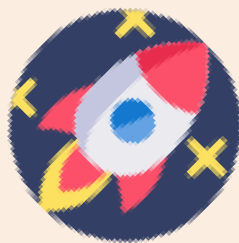
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ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Ludmila is a Slovak photographer focusing on portraiture. She does photography while finishing her Master's degree in Business Administration, specializing in Entrepreneurship. She is based in Prague, Czech Republic but loves to travel around the world and share her stories, as well as her photoshoots, on her blog.

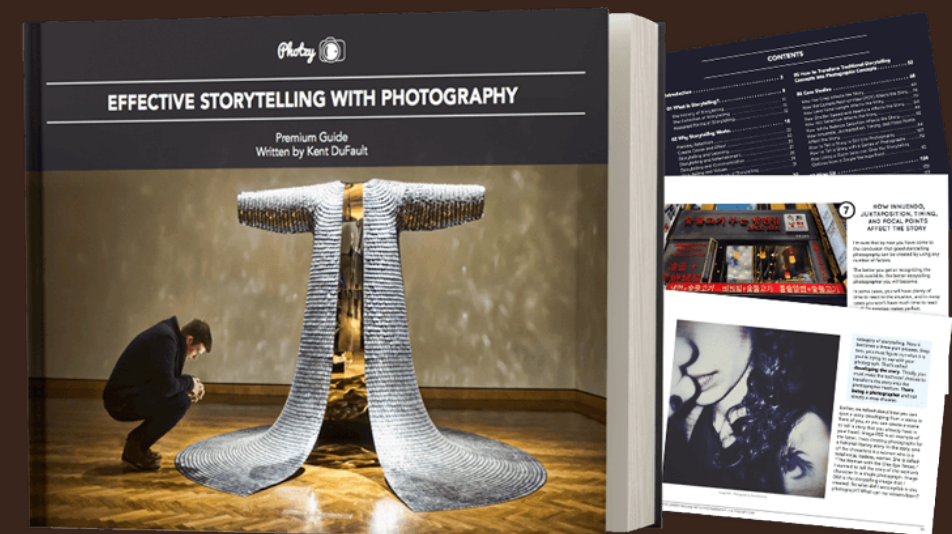
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