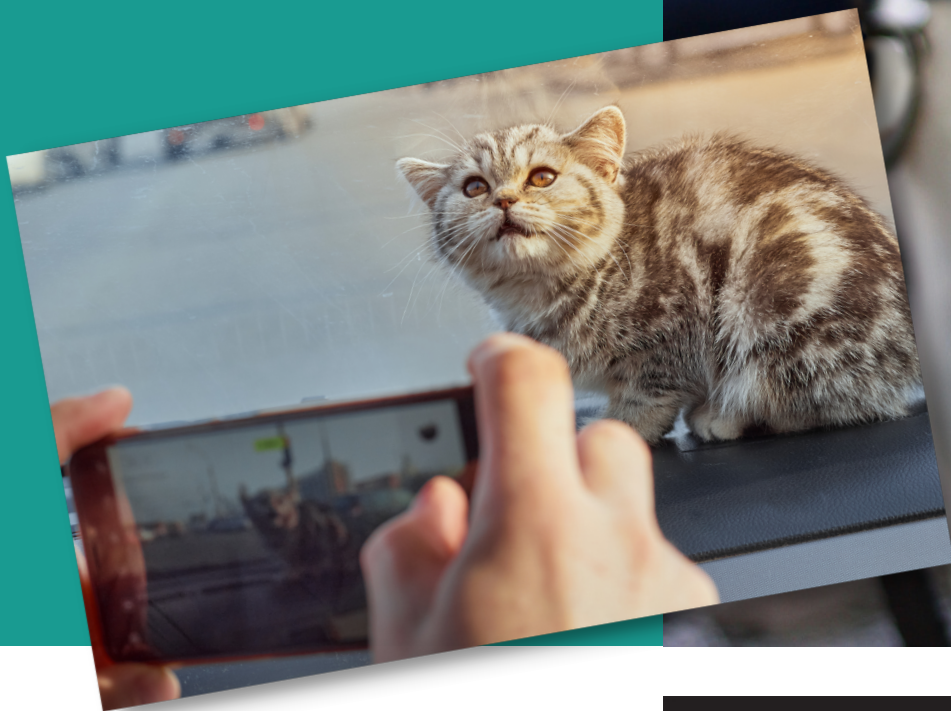


# 10 Steps to Awesome Pet Painting Reference Photos



*Parnell*STUDIOS

*Marla Rush Parnell*

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# 10 Steps to Awesome Pet Painting Reference Photos



## Let's Get Started!

When commissioning a custom painted portrait, it is important to provide high-quality reference photos that capture the unique features and personality of your pet. If you choose to provide your own photos, it is important to keep in mind some simple guidelines that will help you capture the best images possible.



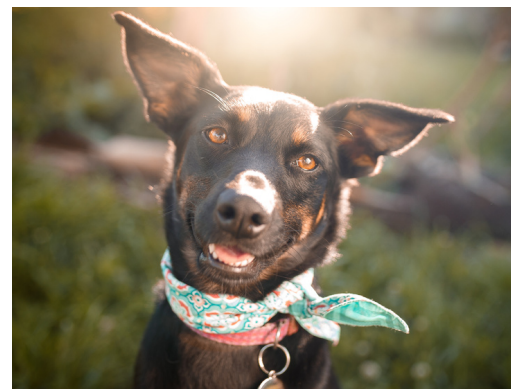
1

### First and foremost, take your photos in good natural lighting conditions

Avoid harsh overhead lighting and strong light behind your pet, and instead opt for natural light.

Don't use a flash because it washes out details, especially in faces.

Plan to shoot outdoors in the early morning or late afternoon, or indoors near a window with indirect sunlight.



Sometimes backlighting, or "rim light" can result in a dramatic image, and will make a gorgeous painting.



2

## Dramatic lighting makes the most stunning portraits!

I depict the way light moves over an animal, highlighting the pose, features and fur. Look for good lights and shadows, as these elements contribute to stunning paintings!



Good  
Examples!



I painted both these Sheltland Sheepdogs, but the photo of the one on the left, with the strong lighting from a window, made a much more interesting portrait. The overall flat lighting of the Sheltie on the right resulted in a painting with less dimension and interest.





## 3

**Choose a photo with a closeup of your subject**

Most important when shooting photos of your pet: get down on their level, and don't shoot from your point of view above them. Animals looking up don't make attractive portraits!

Get back from your pet and zoom in for that closeup. Shooting too closely results in distortion, like a huge nose in the foreground!



*These two are  
Examples of Poor Photos...*

## 4

**Focus for details**

Make sure that the details of your pet are in focus. The sharper the image, the more detail I can put into your painting.

Use a tripod, or hold your phone or camera steady against a stationary object.

Don't worry about the background, unless there's something back there you plan for me to paint.



## 5 For a portrait with more than one pet

If you provide photos of multiple pets to be included in the same portrait, you may supply separate photos of each subject. However, it's important to make sure that the direction and brightness of the lighting is the same in each photo, as this will help to ensure that the colors and shading are consistent across all the subjects in the portrait.

### Original Photos



It's also helpful to provide at least one photo with all the subjects together, so that I have a size reference for each pet and can accurately capture their relative positions in the portrait. This will help me to create a cohesive and balanced composition that accurately reflects the relationships between the pets.

Note that it's okay if your hands are in the frame helping to pose the pet, as I can of course eliminate them!



Using Photoshop, I arrange multiple pets into a good composition and let you approve the arrangement prior to painting.

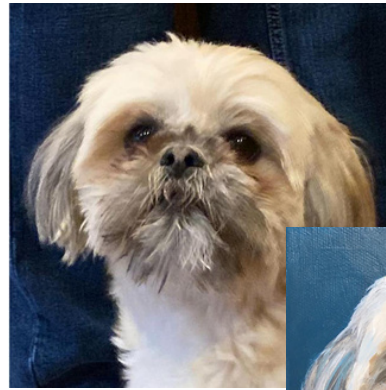




## 6 Choose a photo that captures an expression that you love

The view you provide of your pet will be the view that I can replicate in the portrait. I strive to create a portrait that captures the essence and personality of your pet, but I am limited to the reference photo that you provide.

It's important to understand that I cannot change the position of your pet's head, alter their expression, or open their squinting eyes. Therefore, it's important to choose a photo that best represents your pet and showcases their unique features and personality. If you're unsure which photo to choose, consider selecting one that you feel best captures your pet's character and spirit. I can help you choose just the right image.



## 7 Provide a variety of photos

Every pet has their own unique personality and backstory, and it's important to capture these details in a pet portrait. That's why I welcome clients to provide a variety of photos for color reference or background ideas. These additional photos can help me to better understand your pet's character and create a more personalized and meaningful portrait.

I'm also happy to make small adjustments to the photos you provide, such as removing a pet's collar or even adding a name to a tag. If there's something you would like changed or adjusted, just let me know and I will do my best to accommodate your requests.

## Photos taken with your phone

...are absolutely fine! Just be sure to follow all the guidelines suggested on these pages to get the absolute best quality reference pictures.



## 8 Emailing your photos

To ensure that I have the best possible reference photos for your pet portrait, please email them to me directly and I will confirm receipt of your files.

Be sure to send high-quality files that are up to 10MB in size. This will ensure that all the details of your pet's features are visible and can be accurately replicated in the portrait.

If at all possible, the resolution for digital photos should be at least 300 dpi to ensure that the image is clear and crisp. I have had excellent results using photos taken on a phone; if you're in doubt, just send it to me to check out.



You may send me your photos in a variety of formats, including jpg, tif or pdf files. If you are sending multiple files, you may also compress them into a ZIP folder to make the process more manageable.

Once I receive your photos, I will carefully review them to ensure that they are suitable for creating a high-quality portrait. If I have any questions or concerns, I will reach out to you to discuss them before beginning work on the portrait.

## 9 Mailing your photos

If you need to send a large number of printed photos or to simply send photos that are not available in digital format, contact me and I will provide my mailing address.

I recommend using a shipping method that includes tracking and insurance to ensure that your materials arrive safely. I will take great care in handling your materials and will return them to you with your completed portrait.

## 10 Using Professional Photos

I welcome using reference photos shot by a professional photographer. However, it's imperative that you first provide a written release signed by the photographer that grants us the use of his/her original photo(s). That will keep everyone happy.

## Thank you for requesting my Pet Painting Photo Reference Guide!

I hope you've learned a few tips that will help you shoot great reference photos of your pets, not only for me to use in painting their portrait, but as keepsakes for you.

Pets are an important part of our lives and capturing their unique personalities and traits through photography is super fun!



*Marla Rush Parnell*

Bolivar, Missouri • USA  
[marla@parnellstudios.com](mailto:marla@parnellstudios.com)  
[#marlarushparnell](https://www.instagram.com/marlarushparnell)

- Signature Member of Pastel Society of America, New York, NY
- Gateway Pastel Artists, St. Louis, MO
- International Association of Pastel Societies

Award-winning canine portrait artist with a pastel painting in the permanent collection of the American Kennel Club Museum of the Dog, New York, NY.



## One very last thing you should know:

I have literally been drawing and painting animals for as long as I can remember. Here's the proof. This is a portrait of my first dog, Torky, who came into our family when I was seven years old. I've been obsessed with dogs ever since. I am currently Dog Mom to two Shelties, Zookie and Zeke.