Cecil Williams - Art of Taking a Picture

Williams: Getting ready to take a portrait, the first thing…if it's going to be a close-up of the…what we call a bust shot…I ask the customer to sit down. And, generally, I kind of look at their features and so forth and decide how I'm going to first begin.

[To customer] I might ask you now to turn just a little bit this way. OK.

And then, from this standpoint, I have a background light that helps to separate the subject's face from the background.

Next, I go back to the camera angle, and then I start molding my light on the person's face—directing it to how I want the light to be. OK.

This is my main light. And, actually, either one of my two lights can become the main light, depending on what I'm trying to do because they are of the same power and consistency.

The other thing that I do is I must always place my camera slightly higher than the person's head. I view the person through my viewfinder. By the way, this is a digital camera, so I'll be able to examine the results of this immediately after I take it. Put it on the computer, look at it, and examine it, if I want to do that or show the customer the proofs before they leave the studio.

Next, what I'm going to do is I'm going to position my fill-in. And in this particular case, this helps to, again, create the way that the light falls on the person's face. A lot of times, the fill-in should not be of the same distance…it should not be at the same distance or the same power that the main light is, otherwise you'd have shadows competing for…on the person's face.

Then I'll go back to the camera. At this point, what I would do before looking in the viewfinder, I would again further kind of tweak my person's position by asking them to lower their head or turn their head slightly or whatever.

[To customer] In this case, I'm going to ask her just to slightly lower her head just a little bit. That's wonderful. OK.

I then look through the viewfinder. And then, after I focus and compose the picture, I press the shutter, thereby creating the picture on the disk, which will then be introduced in the computer to show the person a proof.

And that's about how we begin taking our photographs. *End.*