



LISA OBER PSA, IAPS/MC  
[LisaOber.com](http://LisaOber.com)  
[LisaAOber@gmail.com](mailto:LisaAOber@gmail.com)  
636-443-3266 (okay to text)

## TIPS FOR GREAT PET PAINTINGS

### Photos

With most pets portraits you will be working from photos, especially if you are creating a head and shoulders (vignette) painting. Here are a few things to keep in mind that have worked for me:

- Get slightly above eye level with the pet. Do not shoot down from above a pet. It may work for a photo but doesn't translate well to artwork.
- Consider having the pet's head slightly turned for a 2/3 view (head turned but you still see both eyes). This helps give the viewer a better idea of the shape of the head.
- Use natural light. A built-in flash will ruin a photo.
- Avoid a busy background. Simple is best and a contrasting color is optimal. Nothing is more difficult than trying to find the edge of black fur against a black background.
- It often helps to be in the shade on a sunny day but with the sun behind you and slightly to one side.
- Enlist an assistant. This person can get the pet's attention (so they look alert) or they can hold a leash for you.
- Make an effort to catch the pet while alert so ears are perky. Make sure eyes aren't squinting.
- Bring a treat (with permission of course) or ask the owner to provide treats. Sometimes treats or favorite toys are a world of help.
- Become familiar with editing software such as Photoshop, Photoshop Elements, or a free online tool such as Gimp or Pixlr. There are lots of free ways to edit photos. Do some editing before you print and save yourself a lot of trouble.

### Page placement and size

- Plan your drawing so eyes are located at least 1/3 of the way down from the top of the paper (head and shoulders).
- For traditional portraits, try to work slightly under life-size. A good rule is the subject should be between 2/3 and actual size.

### Other random helpful tips

- Avoid painting collars. They distract from the subject matter.
- Watch where collars are placed and ask to take a photo of the pet without the collar so you know how the fur falls without the collar constricting the fur. Otherwise, without a collar the fur will not lay naturally.
- Measure the width of the nose of the pet so you have an idea of what is life-size. Write that measurement down somewhere.
- Paint fur in the direction it grows. Carefully look at your reference for this.
- The highlights or catch lights in the eyes should be the brightest, lightest value in your whole painting.