

# 3 Deadly Sins (photographically speaking)

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If Alpaca Show Judges used photographs to pick their winners, would your alpaca win a ribbon? That is what you need to ask yourself when taking pictures of your herd. Your photographs need to point out the positive (and saleable) aspects of your alpaca, but unfortunately, many amateur photographs do the exact opposite. In this article, I identify three of the common mistakes people make when photographing their animals and offer some simple remedies to overcome the problems.

## 1) Don't shoot down on your animal

One reason why an exceptional animal can look "off" or merely ordinary in your pictures is because the natural tendency is for people to aim the camera from where they are standing. When taking pictures of alpacas this often means you will be shooting at a downward angle, which causes distortion. This distortion may be subtle, but it does detract from your alpaca's natural beauty, especially in close up photos like headshots. The taller you are the more severe the angle and greater the distortion.



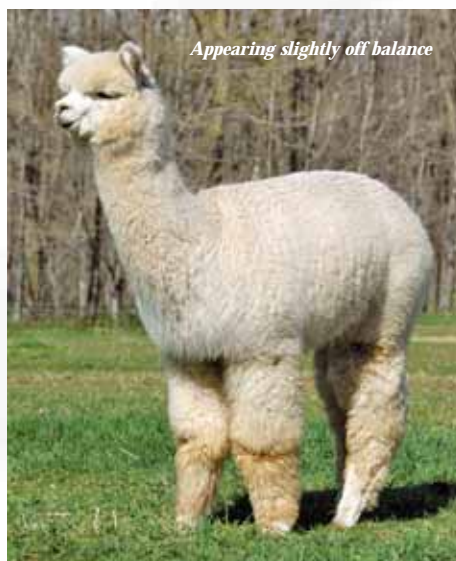
## Remedy:



Place your camera lens at your animal's eye level or aim up from a squatting position. This will preserve proper perspective and maintain the proportion that flatters your animal. Shooting upwards, especially with close-ups, helps capture a sense of dignity or majesty from your animal.

## 2) Proper posture is often overlooked

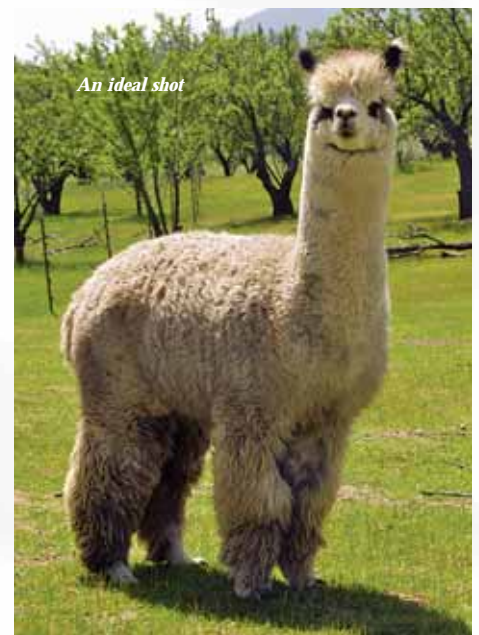
It seems obvious, doesn't it, that a properly posed animal is the object of your photos. Yet, time and again, I see



pictures of animals that look nervous or distracted, or are twisting, leaning or stretching, or display an angry attitude. These photos lack eye-appeal and do nothing to show off your animal or its superior conformation. Ideally, you want to see all four feet planted squarely on the ground, have the alpacas looking toward the camera with their ears up.

## Remedy:

Once more, think like a judge, and visualize "the pose." Have your camera ready on auto focus with an aperture (lens opening) of 5.6 or less. Then bolster up your patience (much more important than the most expensive camera) and find a way to turn your alpaca into a super model. Move slowly and calmly to gain their trust. Do not rush the shoot, but don't hesitate to pull the trigger, and take lots of shots. Often

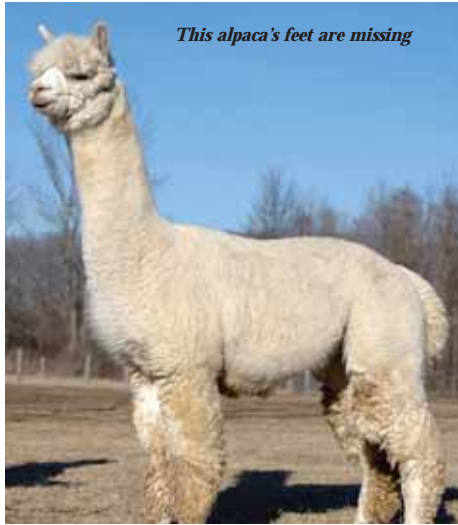
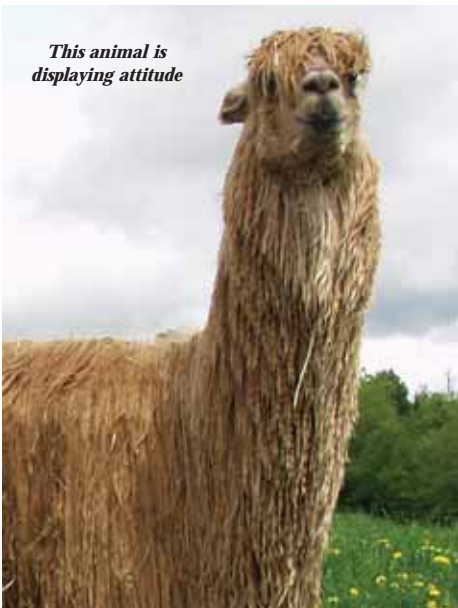




it helps to provide visual props to focus their attention. Dogs and cats work well, as do toys that make funny sounds. Sometimes you can use an assistant out of the camera view to make a sound like barking or by knocking on a barn wall. The important thing to remember is that you won't get the shot you want if you give up too easy. It's entirely up to you, not your camera.

**3) About those Ears and Feet**

Another common error is to clip off the top (ears) or bottom (feet) of your subject. This is just not acceptable, and



everyone who sees the photo feels that something is wrong. Maybe they think that you don't really value that animal (so why should they?) or maybe they suspect that you are hiding some defect. Obviously, "clipping" your photos can ultimately clip your pocketbook.



**Remedy:**

This one is easy. When you look through your viewfinder, pay attention to the lines that mark out your cameras' frame. Don't push the envelope, allow a little safety margin when you sight in on your subject. If you need to, back up a little or zoom out a bit. It won't take long before "framing" your pictures becomes second nature.

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**About the Author**

*Jennifer Clark is one of the premiere animal photographers in the camelid industry. Educated at Eastern Michigan University in Photography and Painting (graduating magna cum laude), she majored in Llamas at Tunitas Creek Llamas in Half Moon Bay, CA, in 1987. As herd manager at TCL she combined her photographic skills and her intimate understanding of the llama to produce her first camelid portraits and archival records. Through the ensuing years she has grown in experience and understanding, not only of the elements of good animal photography, but also of the llama and alpaca industry as a whole. Farms and ranches across the country look to Jennifer Clark for quality photographs of their llamas, alpacas and sales events. She is also a regular contributor to Alpacas Magazine, Llama Banner, Suri Llama Magazine and Camelid Quarterly.*

