If you commission me to do a painting and send me a photo, there are some important things you should know about what makes a good reference photo.

1. The photo should be of good quality. The subject should be in the foreground of the photo and not back-lit. The photo should not be taken with a flash.  I have a camcorder and a smartphone, both of which take HD photos, and I would be more than happy to take a photo to paint from for you if that will work.
2. Also important: If you didn't take the photo yourself, or if I didn't take it, make sure you can give me the contact info of the person who did take it so I can get their permission. When taking photos for pet portraits, such as dogs or cats, get down to the level of the animal. Don't shoot the animal with you looking down at it.