"Cropping" your original reference photo is an important and surprising way to choose a more creative perspective for the audience/viewer to be intrigued by your artwork!

There are several ways to crop a photo:

1. Use the basic Photo Shop program on your computer. There is a Crop Tool there! Scan in your photo or upload from phone to computer, use crop tool to create a Frame around the image. Start very small, a close crop to the image then gradually enlarge the crop which includes more and more of your original photo. I would "save" several of these different sized cropped images to your computer, then you can compare them as individual photos to see which is more "pleasing" to you!
2. Another way to Crop is to cut out 2 shapes of a thick "L" from paper or cardboard. Put them over the photo and move them closer together to form a "rectangle" shape around the photo. Again, move them larger and larger away from the smaller crop area. You can take pics of each cropped area on your phone to view later to choose.

PURPOSE of Cropping:

The purpose of cropping is to remove extra background areas that are not important to what you want people to focus on in the painting. Sometimes our photos have lots of background scenery, mountains, flowers, grass, buildings, etc. which can distract the viewer from really looking at what is the main focus. Crop will remove these areas. It also can provide a different perspective that will capture their attention!

EXAMPLES:

Pets are good subjects to try the cropping method. Often the artist includes the entire body of the dog in their work because that is what the photo showed > remember YOU are the artist, creating a new painting from the photo (not copying the photo!) If you Crop out the body of the dog and just focus on the face - it pulls the viewer into your work, makes is more personal + meaningful for the viewer. Italian villas with lots of flowers, vases, gates, cobblestone, distant hills is a definite photo to CROP. Too much background that is too busy! Choose part of that scenery, the gate, some cropped flowers in vases that focus on the doorway area.

Flowers are easy to CROP to make your painting different from others work.
Do you need all the stem + leaves? if the flower is the focal point, then "zoom" in to crop all around the petal areas. Some petals can go off the paper edge - that is OK! The viewer knows it's a flower, so focus on the shape of the petals, or a bug inside or whatever caught your attention in the original. Crop to emphasize just what you liked!

Bad Cropping?

You will know if a crop is too much removal from original - always view the photo from a distance of 3ft or at least arm's length to decide if the crop is too much. YES, you can crop part of a person arm off the edge of the photo if that part is not important but the remainder of that arm becomes a "line" to lead your eye up to the focal point!

Try cropping any photos you have, to see how this method effects the image and how you react. The result is very interesting! Art is meant to show Creativity!!