

# GET THE BEST HEADSHOTS OF YOUR LIFE

A DETAILED LOOK INTO WHAT GOES INTO THE PERFECT HEADSHOT



**CITY HEADSHOTS**  
IT'S ALL ABOUT EXPRESSION

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# HEADSHOT THAT POP: IT'S ALL ABOUT PERSONALITY

Thanks for opening a copy of my first book about what makes a headshot great. This book covers what you need to know, from how to select a headshot photographer that will get you great headshots, to all the things you must do to get a headshot that will really stand out from the rest.

**CITY HEADSHOTS**  
IT'S ALL ABOUT EXPRESSION



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## THE TECHNICAL PART OF HEADSHOT PHOTOGRAPHY

You must understand some of the technical aspects of headshot photography and what cameras and lenses the photographer should be using so you know the photographer you hire will get you industry-standard headshots. There are a lot of photographers out there who claim to be able to take headshots, but there is a difference between portraits and industry-standard acting headshots in New York.

### THE CAMERA AND LENSES:

A good headshot photographer should have a Nikon or Canon camera with a standard Portrait Lens of 85 mm or longer. Any lens with fewer millimeters than this is not going to look as good for an industry-standard headshot because there will be too much distortion and the background will be too distracting. When hiring your photographer, be sure he or she works with this kind of lens. Feel free to ask what lens they use if you are not sure.

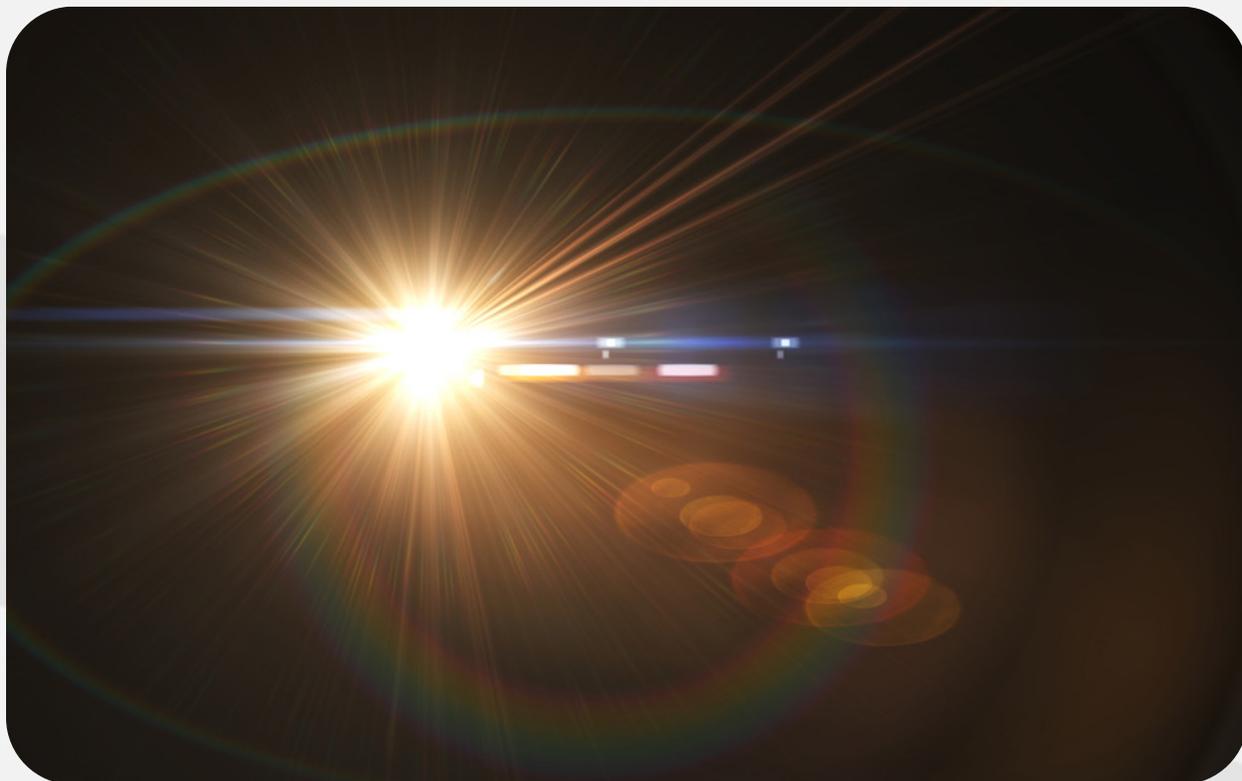


Many amateur photographers don't know what lens aperture to shoot headshots at. New headshot photographers (or friends of yours who claim to have a good camera) will often wind up using a kit lens with a very small aperture. These types of lenses don't work well for headshots because they don't blur out the background as much. On the other hand, if a photographer has a lens with too wide of an aperture, your ears will begin to blur a lot when he focuses on your eyes. This is something that you don't want if you can help it. Be sure to carefully look at the photos and make sure the background is blurry enough that it seems to be just a color wash, but at the same time, your ears aren't extremely blurry (they can be slightly blurry, but not too much that it becomes distracting).

## YOU DON'T WANT BLURRY EARS

The best look is when your head is mostly in focus and the only noticeably blurry part is the background, this way, there are no distractions to the person looking at the photo, and the viewer can focus totally on your face.

Also when the widest possible aperture is used, Lens Optics won't be as sharp and you may get purple fringing and lens flare, things you definitely don't want in your headshots because they are extremely distracting.



### SHUTTER SPEED AND ISO:

The most annoying part of photography is when the photographer finds himself shooting in low light situations. Dealing with noise and camera shake in shots is not fun at all. To help avoid this, it's obviously best to shoot when there is still plenty of light outside. But if that's not possible, he should have a great camera and lens that help get a better image in low-light.

Your photographer should always be shooting in Manual Mode. If not, your photos will have all sorts of exposure issues. For one, the camera will not get the exposure correct every time. You may have images that have too much camera shake because the shutter speed was too slow and the images won't all be at the same brightness.



## THE CREATIVE PART OF HEADSHOT PHOTOGRAPHY:

Some would consider framing, composition, and color to be technical aspects of photography. However, I'd like to respectfully disagree. Different people require different framing, white balance, contrast, and lighting. These are the creative choices the photographer can make, which can help to make or break a shot. Remember that no single rule is unbreakable. Every headshot is different and may need a different approach, so here are some general tips and techniques.

### FRAMING A HEADSHOT:

Headshots can be framed either horizontally or vertically. These days, most casting directors and agents prefer horizontal shots. I myself mostly shoot horizontal unless the client asks specifically for vertical shots. Your photographer should ask if you prefer mostly "Portrait" or "Landscape" headshots before you begin your session, but should ideally shoot them in both formats so you have more choices.

The photographer shouldn't be afraid to experiment with new angles, shooting on a tilt, or moving the camera a little lower than normal in the frame. These are all different techniques that can make your headshots really stand out among the rest.

One of the main rules of headshot framing is to never leave too much headroom in the photo. I've found that it's much better to leave less headroom than too much. I like to position the subject so that their head is right near the top of the frame, and usually off to one side or another. It gives them more space in the shot and this look is more interesting. Try searching sample headshots online and checking out some other professional headshot sites and you'll notice this technique is used quite a lot.

See the sample images below so you know what I mean:



## WHITE BALANCE AND COLOR

Unlike the naked eye, digital cameras have some difficulty in being able to judge what is “white”, so a photographer should “White Balance” his camera before tweaking the “Color Balance”. It's best to have perfect “White Balance” when shooting headshots.

### HEADSHOT PHOTOGRAPHERS SHOULD ALWAYS SHOOT WITH A PERFECT WHITE BALANCE!

The reason he'd want to have perfect white balance is because if he shoots warm or cold and then wants to switch it in post, he'll lose more detail than if he had shot neutral (if he's not shooting in RAW format). Starting with a perfect White Balance gives the photographer the most leeway to change the image coloring in any direction. If he has his camera set to Auto White Balance or he makes adjustments while shooting, it will be impossible for him to batch convert the white balance of your photos later, since they will all look slightly different. The important thing you need to know is that your headshot does NOT appear too bluish, greenish, or orangey.

## JPEG VS. RAW

This is something I think needs to be addressed before we go any further. RAW is a file format native to whatever camera the photographer is shooting with, and is like shooting on film and keeping the negatives. The problem is that once the photographer scans a film negative into a computer, quality will only go down as he makes more adjustments. If he makes adjustments to the negative itself in a lab using chemicals, the quality won't decrease. RAW is like having a digital negative that will not lose quality when he adjusts things like color temperature and exposure. He can capture extra detail in both bright and dark areas of an image which is a remarkable thing, but all remarkable things come with a price.

## RAW OR JPEG?

The price of shooting RAW is as follows:

1. Some clients can't open RAW images and if the photographer does a direct burn onto a CD from the memory card to give to you on the spot, you won't be able to open the images and might want your money back. You'll also have to wait awhile for all the images to convert to JPEGs before he is able to burn a CD for you. Having to waste time with this doesn't look professional and doesn't make you very happy.

RAW: BETTER QUALITY AND HIGHER DYNAMIC RANGE,

JPEG: FASTER AND MORE VERSATILE

I shoot RAW. I used to shoot JPEG, but as I took more and more headshots, I began to realize that shooting RAW made a huge difference in the quality of my work. In my opinion, there is no reason to shoot JPEG unless you are a hobbyist headshot photographer who charges less than \$100 for a session and you don't care to expand your business. You need to understand what RAW offers and how to process those images if you truly want the best possible pictures. The color rendition and quality RAW offers are unmatched, and highly necessary for headshots.

SHOOT RAW WITH THE CORRECT CAMERA SETTINGS

So in summary, I recommend that a headshot photographer shoot with a perfectly correct white balance and exposure in RAW format, and makes slight adjustments later for effect.

## LIGHTING

Lighting is by far the most complicated technical aspect of headshot photography because there are so many variations and possibilities. Photographers should use “Diffused” lighting for headshots because it will result in a soft, flattering look. The larger the surface area of a light, the softer and more diffused the light will be. This is because the light is shooting off in multiple directions and hitting all different points of the face at once. Shadows are minimized and the photographer can achieve a very flattering look

### ***Indoor Lighting:***

For indoor headshots, a photographer should have a minimum of at least three to four lights, three of them being Monolights which have big flashes that work great in a studio. He may also use an umbrella that can be placed into the back of it this monolight to give an even softer lighting if needed. Another small backlight should be used directly above you which will add a nice shine to your hair.

Your photographer should also have a “Backdrop” which comes in framed fabric that can be mounted on a metal stand, or he may use paper which comes in a roll and can be mounted on wall brackets. Using paper backdrops is best because they won't have creases in them and always look perfect behind a headshot. The monolights should be set up at least six to eight feet in front of the backdrop.



**Key Light:**

This is the main light on you, the main subject. Using a softbox with a monolight will give the softest, most flattering light possible for headshots. Using a hard light, could emphasize imperfections in the skin.

**Fill Light:**

Fill lighting is used occasionally for headshots and is used to fill in the details on your face so that you can be clearly seen, something that casting directors desire. This Fill Light should be positioned at about the same angle and distance away from you as the Key Light, except on the opposite side of the face to fill in the shadows. It needs to be about half to three quarters as bright as the key light and should be placed wherever it is most effective. A good spot to place the fill light is slightly below the subject's face level. Lighting from below, as long as it is used sparingly, can be an excellent way to make the subject's face pop and to fill in the shadows under the eyes.

### **Outdoor Headshots:**

With any outdoor headshot session a photographer needs to have a “Reflector”. If he doesn't have one, he will be severely limiting the amount of lighting options he will have, as direct lighting can be too harsh.



What separates professional headshots from amateur headshots is usually the lighting. A Bounce Board will light up the subject's face and fill in their eyes. But if the photographer overdoes the amount of light coming onto the face, it may wind up looking unnatural. Shadows are just as important as light because they define the features of your face. The key is to be able to light up your eyes but still keep the natural shadows everywhere else.

Here is a short list of don'ts:

1. *Don't* have your shoot outside in the rain. If you absolutely must, the photographer should bring you to a spot where you are standing underneath something, it blocks the rain and the light can actually be quite flattering.
2. *The photographer should never* shoot in direct sunlight. Shooting in direct sunlight will result in terrible looking photos because they will be extremely bright with harsh shadows and you'll probably be squinting.
3. *You may* need a place to change when shooting outside, so keep this in mind because it's important. Ask if there is easy access for a place where you can do this.

SO, ON SUNNY DAYS YOUR SHOTS SHOULD BE TAKEN IN THE SHADE,  
ON CLOUDY DAYS SHOOT ANYWHERE, AND ON RAINY DAYS HAVE THE  
SHOOT INSIDE OR UNDER A COVERED AREA.

Once you have decided what you are going to do based on the weather and lighting situation outside, you and the photographer should head out and over to a good location. When you've arrived, he should position you so that the light coming down on your face is flattering. If there are dark shadows under your eyes, the headshot won't look very good. If there is a bright spot on your face from a reflection or direct sunlight, then he should be taking you to a different location like a more shady spot. He can use the bounce board to fill in shadows.

A quick warning about the bounce board: don't forget that the purpose of the bounce board is to provide fill light, not key light. This means that the photographer shouldn't have the same amount or even more light reflecting up onto your face than is coming from above. There should always be less. The light coming from the bounce board is what's going to make your headshot pop, but it may become tempting to have it pop more by having even more light from below. He should be using the bounce board light sparingly.

It's nice to have a hair light for the side of your face and hair, separating the two from the background. Sometimes it's possible to get this effect outdoors, though many times it isn't. The photographer can position you in a location where the brightest part of the sky (but not the sun itself) is behind you. This effect usually works best on very sunny days. The bright part of the sky will light your hair, and the bounce board will fill in the lighting for your face.

He also has the option of using a silver reflector, a gold reflector, a black negative reflector (to make shadows even darker), a white reflector, or even diffusion. I'd like to take a moment to explain in which situations I have found each side most useful so that you get an idea:

1. **Silver Reflector:** This is best used during highly overcast days. They give the photo a cool look by providing all kinds of bounce light up onto your face and removing deep shadows.
2. **Gold Reflector:** This can also be used during highly overcast days, as it brings a bit of warmth into the photo. I don't use it too often though because I have to be sure that the gold reflection doesn't look unnatural, which at times can.
3. **Black Negative Reflector:** Sometimes, if shooting a headshot client while they are squatting, I notice that the concrete sidewalk seems to be reflecting too much light back up onto their face. In order to deal with this, I use the black negative reflector, which blocks that light and deepens the shadows. It's also useful in helping to avoid squinting.
4. **White Reflector:** This is the most useful reflector because it doesn't provide too much light, but gives enough to make the shot really pop. The quality of the light coming from it is very soft, so it helps even out the skin and makes for a more flattering photo. Like myself, your photographer will probably be using this ninety-percent of the time.
5. **Diffusion:** This is not to be used as a reflector. If the photographer has an assistant that comes along for the headshot session, he may ask them to hold it above the you when shooting in direct sunlight. It's an easy way to even out shadows and make the lighting much less harsh if he is finding it difficult to find a shady spot to shoot in. If he shoots into a sunlit area in the background and exposes your photo properly for your shaded face, the background could end up being too bright, so you should be aware of this.

This final tip is probably the most important one I can give you. If shooting outdoors, the photographer should always try to have you stand underneath some sort of overhang to block the direct light coming down from above so that he won't get hot spots on your nose and cheeks, and dark circles under your eyes. Generally speaking, the softer the light is, and the more it's coming from in front of yourself (rather than above) the more flattering and better it will look.

TRY TO HAVE YOUR PHOTOGRAPHER POSITION YOU UNDERNEATH  
SOMETHING TO BLOCK DIRECT LIGHT FROM THE SKY, EVEN IF IT'S A  
CLOUDY DAY.

Remember that these tips are meant to be used as a guide and don't always apply to all headshots. In some shots, you may want very low-key, shadowy lighting. But the photographer shouldn't have it too dark or the headshot won't be usable. If a casting director can't see your face clearly, then what's the point? You won't be called in to audition. And the photographer won't get any referrals.



## THE HEADSHOT CLIENT: WHAT HAPPENS NOW?

Well, we've made it past all of the boring technical stuff. Now it's time to get into the details of how you can bring out your true emotion, give the best performance as possible, to get that great headshot you bare seeking! Do you want to be a star? You have to be able to have the photographer turn you into a star first and here's how it's done.

### STEP 1: CHOOSE THE CLOTHING:

The first thing you must take a look at is your clothing. You have to make sure that you are wearing clothes that will add to the headshot, not take away from it. I know you're probably thinking, "But I'm not a wardrobe stylist!" I know you're not, and neither am I, but it still helps to understand some of basic things about it. Think of it this way: why pay someone (i.e. a wardrobe stylist for your shoots) to do something that you can just as easily do yourself if you take a little time to learn it?

### UNDERSTAND CLOTHING

Understanding how colors work together is the first step to understanding clothing. In general, the best colors for you to wear are the colors that you look best in (just ask yourself). Be sure of what your favorite colors are that you wear, and bring a number of different colored outfits with you to your session. Just be sure to choose darker colors, and use as little white as possible. White isn't the best color to wear for photos because it typically becomes overexposed, especially on darker-skinned people.

The color white is also always the brightest part of the image, and bright spots always draw attention. This means that in a photo, if the shirt you're wearing is much brighter than your face, it will keep drawing attention to your eye and will distract the viewer from your whole face. That's something that you definitely don't want.

## DON'T WEAR WHITE!

Often, many new actors think wearing a flat black t-shirt is good. It looks fine, but its never interesting enough for a "legit (or serious)" theatrical headshot. Photographers should have you wear an all black shirt for an indoor commercial shot, but even then it can get kind of boring, as it won't really bring anything to your image.



## A FLAT BLACK T-SHIRT IS BORING

The best thing to do is bring layers. Wearing a flat black t-shirt is fine, but wearing a flat black t-shirt with a jacket over it is better. Especially for guys, wearing layers adds interest and depth to your character. Remember this phrase: in a headshot, depth is only paper thin. This means that whatever is seen in the image is what the person looking at it gets. So if you are wearing a single layer, it will appear to be flat and only one-dimensional.

## DEPTH IS ONLY PAPER THIN IN A HEADSHOT... SO PLEASE REMEMBER TO WEAR LAYERS

You should bring colors and layers that work well together and that you feel comfortable and confident in. Make sure that the colors are plain, with no wild patterns or distracting elements. Absolutely no plaid, no logos, and no brand names or words. Anything that distracts from your face and draws attention to itself is not the best choice for a professional headshot. The purpose of the photo is to bring attention to "you" the subject, not the surroundings, lighting, or clothing.

## NO PLAID, LOGOS, BRAND NAMES, OR WORDS ON CLOTHING

Remember that it doesn't matter what kind of pants you wear because they won't be seen in the photo. You don't need to bring a change of pants or shoes unless you specify doing three-quarter and full body shots as well.

## PANTS DON'T MATTER FOR HEADSHOTS

## LEARN THE IMPACT OF DIFFERENT COLORS GROUPS:

Colors each have their own meaning, but can also work in sets to take on new meanings. One such set is called a harmonizing color set, colors that are adjacent to one another on a color wheel such as red, orange, and yellow. Another color set is called contrasting color sets, colors that are separated on the color wheel and cause contrast, such as red and blue. However, when colors are directly opposite one another on a color wheel, they may wind up clashing. Clashing colors often make your image less visually appealing. Be sure that the colors you select support the character that you are going for (if you are an actor) or the type of personality that you have (if you are not an actor and are not trying to play different roles).



Here are the meanings of color groups and the psychological impact of each:

**Cool Colors:** Cool colors such as blues, greens, neutral grays and whites typically give off a calming effect, relaxing people. Blue and green are life-giving colors that cause the viewer to feel calm and tranquil. Fortunately, these colors tend to recede into the background and will not fight for dominance over your face. They don't draw attention to themselves, which makes them extremely easy to shoot with. If you want to go for a calming and relaxed look, then wear greens, blues, or grays. The photographers job is to shoot in a location that flatters these colors.

**Warm Colors:** Warm colors such as yellow, red, pink, and orange naturally cause excitement and raise emotions and can even sometimes cause anger! These colors are typically used to bring life to an image and to make it more visually appealing. I highly recommend you use these colors in small amounts because they tend to be bright and draw attention to themselves. Usually, paler versions of these warm colors are best. Because warmer colors overpower cooler colors, the photographer should use them together in small amounts in the shoot. Though the risk with these colors is high, I still strongly recommend you experiment with them, they can make your images much more powerful.

## LEARN THE IMPACT OF SINGLE COLORS:

Every color can have multiple meanings based on the way it is used, and each can be combined to produce an outfit that perfectly compliments a character. Or, colors can be combined in such a way that they starkly contrast with the character that you are going for. Here is a long list of colors and their meanings. Be sure to learn and review them so you can make the most of your headshots.

1. **Blue:** The color blue primarily gives off a feeling of professionalism and confidence, especially the darker shades when used as the top-most layer of clothing. Wearing blue underneath the top layer usually denotes peace and tranquility, especially if it is a paler shade of blue. Shooting against a pale blue background can often suggest sadness.

2. **Black:** Wearing a black outer layer typically denotes a feeling of elegance and sophistication. It can bring out a professional feel in any outfit and sometimes even lends a sense of mystery to your character, especially if it's worn underneath the outer layer. When black is the only color worn, it often denotes sadness because mourning is mostly symbolized by this color. An all-black background definitely gives a feeling of professionalism and/or mystery, depending on the lighting in the shot. I don't recommend wearing black with another dark color like dark blue, brown, or maroon because they will blend together and look muddy.
3. **Beige:** Beige is an interesting color because it acts like a chameleon, taking on aspects and emotions of any color it is worn with. As people, we mostly have skin tones near beige and so we associate it as not having much of a meaning itself. As an outer layer, beige will add conservatism and sophistication to an outfit. Wearing beige as an inner layer is not recommended because it may make you appear too neutral and boring. I would discourage shooting against a beige background because the color is bland and will often give your image a washed out look.
4. **Brown:** As a more casual color than black, brown can be worn to signify warmth and honesty. It is used to make other colors appear brighter and richer, bringing out the emotions of them even more. A brown background will often suggest a feeling of wholesomeness and can make you appear trustworthy and loyal.
5. **Gray:** Usually worn as an outer layer, gray adds a bit of professionalism to your look and neutralizes brighter colors. Of course, the effect is much more subtle than black, and as the shade of gray gets lighter, the effect becomes even less pronounced. Darker gray is best worn on men and lighter gray on women. You should be careful of overusing the color gray, as it could lend a feeling of depression. Light gray backgrounds can sometimes give your image a dingy and boring look, so they are not recommended. However, if a gray background must be used, typically darker is better.

6. Green: A green outer layer often symbolizes stability and harmony in a character. However, when used as an inner layer, it can symbolize inexperience and jealousy. Fortunately, green pairs well with many colors, and can easily be captured on a digital camera without overexposing. A green background often symbolizes growth and life, giving you a more energetic and happy feeling.
7. Orange: Wearing the color orange is often not a great choice unless it's used in small doses. This color demands attention, and can be a distraction from your face. Throwing some orange into the background of your headshot is great to add a bit of excitement and warmth to your image. The color stimulates the appetite, and can be used to bring a bit of life into an otherwise emotionless shot. Orange can be used in small stripes or designs in the pattern of clothing, but should rarely be used as the primary color of an inner or outer layer. A completely orange background is also not recommended, as it will overpower your face.
8. Pink: Pink is a delicate color, mostly used for females. It typically denotes tenderness and playfulness, and should be worn as an inner layer. Too much pink, such as on an outer layer, will likely detract from your face in the headshot. Combining pink with darker colors can bring a more professional and mature look and if you mix it with lighter pastel tones, will make it more playful. A pink background is highly discouraged as it will draw attention to itself and will be a distraction to your photo.
9. Purple: Similar to black, purple is a color of mystery. Deep shades of purple represent royalty, nobility, and power. Purple can be combined with a warm or cold palette and will take on whichever aspect (hot or cold) it is combined with. An outer layer of purple brings out feelings of nobility and power, while an inner layer of purple brings out the mystery aspect. When used with earthy colors, purple can amplify the earthiness, while still feeling mysterious. Paler shades of purple feel delicate and romantic but lose the feeling of nobility. A purple background can work but should be used carefully, making sure it is not too bright and distracting.

10. **Red:** Red is one of the most stimulating colors, bringing out the emotions of love and even violence. In some cases, the color red has raised the blood pressure of people observing it because of how stimulating it is. Red also symbolizes power and importance, and often is used to grab the attention of people and get them to take some sort of action. Since it is such a strong color, it is more effective if you use it in small amounts. When overused, red can really take away from your picture. A red background is highly discouraged, as it can be quite overwhelming.
11. **White:** As stated earlier, white should be used sparingly because it can attract too much attention and is often overexposed. The color white is commonly used to symbolize purity, tenderness, and goodness. The only time I recommend using white is for a commercial headshot background. A flat white background works well to remove any distracting elements from your image and will give your headshot a high-key, happy feel. Avoid wearing white as much as possible, but if you must, the photographer should shoot in a very shaded area and he should underexpose your images slightly (if he is shooting JPEG) so that the detail is retained in your white clothing. Then he or she can adjust the exposure later in Photoshop to brighten up the image while still retaining the details.
12. **Yellow:** Yellow is typically associated with joy and sunshine. However, it can also symbolize cowardice and deceit, based on the way it is worn. Make sure that your photographer avoids overexposure with the color yellow, especially if you have darker skin. Yellow should almost never be used as the primary color because of how bright and attention-grabbing it can be. However, if it is used, it should almost always be used as an inner layer. When used as the primary color in a shirt, it will represent happiness and joy. When used as a smaller, less visible color, it can portray a range of traits, from deceit, cowardice, greed or even danger. The effect it has will be based on what emotion you are portraying in your expression. Yellow backgrounds typically signify happiness, but should again be used sparingly because of how much attention the color demands.

I hope that this list of colors has been helpful to you and you should now see how combining certain colors together can have an effect on the complexity of a character. You should also understand why multiple layers are so much better than a single layer of clothing in a headshot. It will give you more of a multidimensional feel instead of a boring, flat look. Imagine: combining a black jacket with a pink shirt underneath will give a delicate female a professional aura. It makes you as the actor seem much more interesting and lets the viewer learn more about your character.

Remember that the effect of each color becomes more intense as the color becomes more vibrant. The paler the color, the more soothing it will be to the eyes, and the more subtle the effect. Keep this in mind when deciding what to wear because you may want a feminine side to a character but not want it overly done, so you may only want a very pale pink. Just remember to have your photographer watch out for overexposure with pale colors.

## THE PALER THE COLOR, THE MORE SUBTLE THE EFFECT

Now that you understand how each color subliminally affects your characters, be sure to apply this knowledge to the headshots your photographer will be taking. Doing so will put you ahead of most of the other competition out there.

The final thing you should be aware of is the different emotions given by different types of clothing. You can pair different colors together, but if you were to wear a blue undershirt and an open black button down, the colors won't give you all that much of a professional feel. Make sure that the types of clothing, from button downs and polos to sweaters and suits, all match and work for the type of character or type of person you are trying to portray in the shot.

## PAIR COLORS WITH CLOTHING TYPES TO GET THE PERFECT OUTFIT FOR THE SHOT

## STEP 2: CHOOSE THE LOCATION:

Locations should be chosen based off a number of things, from the lighting and background colors to the space and amount of people around. Everything about a location can change the quality of the headshot because each aspect affects every other aspect.

First thing to look for when your photographer is searching out a good location is whether the location is in full sunlight or not, or if there will be enough light at all.

### YOU NEED ENOUGH LIGHT!

On the other hand, if your photographer shoots in direct sunlight, there will be too many harsh shadows and hot spots on your image and you will probably be squinting your eyes because of the brightness. Shooting in sunlight is often a mistake and should be avoided if possible. To avoid the squinting, simply close your eyes until the photographer is ready to shoot, and then as soon as you open them, he should snap the photo before you begin to squint again.

### DON'T SHOOT IN SUNLIGHT IF POSSIBLE!

The background is perhaps the most important part of choosing a location to shoot the headshots at. Remember the meanings of the different colors. Be aware that different textures also give off moods and feelings that can be combined with your image to give it more of an overall feel. You have a choice of shooting with any background, but there are two main things to keep in mind:

You want to select a background that is interesting and not too bland because backgrounds add layers to the photo. You can have a shoot anywhere, as long as the colors in the background blend together smoothly and keep the viewer interested in the photo. You do not want distracting elements in the background. Be sure to notice whether there is something distracting behind you, like a pole, a sign, or a person. You don't want those distracting things in your photo because they will take away from your image. Make sure the background is significantly blurred so that it is as non-distracting as possible. However, even though things are blurred, they may still be recognizable, and will most likely distract the viewer.

BACKGROUNDS SHOULD BE INTERESTING IN TERMS OF COLOR, YET NOT  
DISTRACTING

### STEP 3: APPLY THE MAKEUP:

The best makeup is makeup that makes you look like you. Makeup in professional headshots should never be overdone, especially if you are an actor. The more natural the makeup, the better. I usually discourage guys from wearing makeup unless they do in their daily life as well.

#### DON'T OVERDO MAKEUP!

The main things makeup should be used for during your shoot is as follows:

1. Covering up blemishes on your face.
2. Removing shine from your face.
3. Smoothing out your skin a bit.
4. Hiding bags under your eyes.

Besides these main uses, it's not good to apply more makeup than what you would normally wear. Remember that a headshot is not a time to glamour up and try to make someone look a lot better than they do in real life, because unless you plan on glamouring up every time they go into an audition, casting directors will throw them out because you just won't look like you did in your headshots.

#### IT'S BEST FOR YOU TO DO YOUR OWN MAKEUP IF YOU KNOW HOW

Avoid photographers who don't work with a makeup artist. But if you have no choice, then try to do your own makeup. Don't have your photographer hire a makeup artist for a shoot unless they have specific experience with makeup for "Headshots" and will ensure that you look natural. You can also bring your own makeup artist if you are absolutely sure they know what they are doing. Inexperienced people usually put on too much makeup and it looks fake. In my opinion, if you don't know any makeup artists, it's best for you to just save your money and put the makeup on yourself. If you don't know how, many photographers use a program called "Photoshop" which he can use to fix any imperfections. As it turns out, it's easier to fix problems from wearing no makeup than to fix problems arising from a bad makeup job. But on the other hand, a good makeup job can often look better than fixes made in photoshop.



## PHOTOSHOP CAN RARELY FIX A BAD MAKEUP JOB

### STEP 4: STYLE THE HAIR:

The style of hair worn in a headshot, similarly to the clothing worn, can also convey different feelings. For this reason, it is important that you have different hairstyles planned for the session. You should have at least three different hairstyles in mind.

### YOU SHOULD HAVE AT LEAST 3 DIFFERENT HAIRSTYLES IN MIND

If you are a male, it may be difficult to think of three different styles, but when you really get into messing around with your hair, you'll see that anything is possible. An experienced headshot photographer may have a bit of hair gel or spray on hand or better yet, just bring your own.

If you are female, your hair can be styled in a variety of different ways because it is generally much longer. Just be sure that you remind yourself to change the style up every once in a while throughout the session. Remember: the photographer should shoot the primary hairstyle first, because what you are most accustomed to will probably be worn most often for your auditions.

### DON'T FORGET TO CHANGE YOUR HAIRSTYLE DURING THE SHOOT!

## BEGINNING TO SHOOT: CHARACTER, LOOK, EMOTION, AND EXPRESSION:

We've finally arrived at the moment you've all been waiting for, the most important part of headshots, and the part that will teach you how to get a headshot that shows personality and will land you a great acting job.

No matter whether you are an author, a CEO, a lawyer, or an actor, you still need to know some general rules of being "Directed". Directing is an art, not a science, because although the results are the same, the way to get there is always different, depending on who you are working with and what the situations are. This section of the book will discuss how to get the best photos for your headshots, and from preventing distracting elements in the picture, to exhibiting in-depth performances.

### STEP 1: GET GREAT SMILES:

Every person has a good smile inside them, whether they know it or not. The job of the headshot photographer is to bring it out. We are all photogenic people, but it all depends on what angle the shot is taken from and what kind of lighting is used. Flattering light on a male may not look as flattering on a woman, and vice-versa. Plus, it's in your best interest to avoid making every single picture you take look exactly the same.

### AVOID MAKING ALL YOUR SHOTS LOOK THE SAME

The trick to bringing out happy expressions and real smiles is to just laugh. Genuine laughter will make you happy and will put you in a better mood, so you can prepare yourself by reading up on some jokes beforehand that you can think about as you are being photographed. A good photographer should be able to bring out your best side and try to remove any awkwardness you might be experiencing. This will help you get the best headshots possible.

## TALK A LOT TO RELAX

Without a level of comfort between you and the the photographer, any headshot session is likely to fail because you won't feel comfortable in front of the camera and won't be able to smile easily. It all comes down to how much you talk to the photographer. If you don't talk very much right from the get-go, the ice will never be broken. You have to try and be a little more sociable and feel comfortable with small talk around new people. In general, the more you talk to the photographer during the session, the more comfortable you'll feel and the more relaxed you'll be once your mind is off the actual headshot session. Talking about useless things like pop culture or music is a great way to relax and feel comfortable. Just be careful that you don't talk about politics or something controversial or you'll ruin any chance you had at being happy if you say the wrong thing.



Once you feel relaxed, you have to start telling some good jokes or making funny comments to get each other to start laughing. Just be sure to keep looking at the camera even when you laugh because many people tend to look away during laughter. If that happens, the photographer won't be able to get that good shot. The best smiles usually come right after you finishe laughing, while you are still smiling. At that point, the smile on your face will be completely genuine and will look great in any headshot.

LAUGH, THEN HAVE PHOTOGRAPHER SHOOT THE SMILE THAT  
REMAINS RIGHT AFTER!

## STEP 2: WHILE SHOOTING, NOTICE THE NON-OBVIOUS:

There are a ton of little things that you should watch out for when having your headshots taken -- things that aren't directly obvious. Having distracting elements show up in photos won't look good and will annoy you and the person viewing your photograph. The rules are more strict for actor headshots, but I'll specify whether it is "actors only" or not.

**Flyaway Hairs:** These are difficult to fix in photoshop, especially if you don't have a solid color background. Make sure to bring some hair spray or hair gel so that if flyaway hairs become an issue, it's a quick fix. If you don't have hair spray on the shoot and you wind up needing it, you're not going to look as professional. Because of things like flyaway hairs, I often recommend that you view the photos you are taking as the session is progressing so that you can see and have an idea of how they are looking. Simply tell the photographer what you specifically like or dislike in the photos so that you he focus on those things and change what needs to be changed right away. Sometimes you might not like a certain side of your face, or you may think your hair doesn't look right, things you will need to make sure you fix as you shoot because there are no ways to fix those things after you've left the session.

**Jewelry and Glasses (actors only):** For actor headshots, you should not wear any jewelry. It will likely be viewed as a distraction by casting directors and you probably won't be called in for many roles ( If you have very small earrings, you may actually not notice them). Glasses are okay in headshots if it's your normal look. The main problem with wearing glasses in headshots however is that they often hide your eyes because of the reflections that can appear in the lenses, so if possible it's a good idea to remove the lenses before the session begins. Some of the photos should be taken without glasses as well in case you want a differnt look and would consider getting contacts when coming in for the audition.

**Muscle Twitches:** Some people have strange muscles in their face that move if they move another part of their face. For instance, with one of the clients that I've worked with, every time he would smile, his left eyebrow would raise, causing him to have a strange expression that took away from the characters and emotions he was trying to portray. In order to fix this, I told him about it and explained to him what the problem was while showing him the picture. Bringing the problem to the forefront of his mind allowed him to make the necessary adjustments to fix the problem.

Sometimes, however, the photographer may not be able to figure out what the problem is, and the picture might just look funny. You both have to spend a few minutes to really examine the image so you can figure out what the problem is and come up with a solution to correct it as soon as possible.



**Mouth Tension:** Some people look naturally better with their mouths closed, others with their mouths open. I'm sure you can think of some people who are great with their mouths shut ( just kidding). Anyway, take a look at your mouth and if you notice mouth tension when you do closed-mouth smiles, then try having your mouth hang open just a bit. It removes that tension and gives you a more flattering smile.

**Background Distractions:** Be sure that the background of the image doesn't have any distracting elements or very bright spots. Distracting elements include but are not limited to, people, signs, bright reflections from windows, or strange shadows. Often it doesn't matter much what is in the background because it can be blurred in photoshop, but sometimes the element can still be a distraction if it is recognizable. Be sure you look closely at the photos taken and make sure that nothing sticks out and draws the attention away from your face.

**Wrinkly Clothes:** Definitely watch for wrinkly clothes. A lot of actors don't think to iron their clothes before coming in for a headshot session and wind up wearing clothes that look distracting because of the amount of wrinkles on them. It is extremely difficult to fix wrinkles in photoshop, so be sure to bring in either ironed or brand-new wrinkle-free clothing. If you are just too busy and must show up to the shoot with wrinkles, make sure you have a water spray bottle on hand. Spraying a tiny bit of water in an ultra fine mist will remove most wrinkles within a few minutes. Spray the shirt you will be wearing until it's been lightly misted and then wait a few minutes for it to dry. By the time it has completely dried, most of the wrinkles should be gone.

**Distracting Shadows:** watch in the shot for any distracting shadows on your face. Many times, if a bounce board is being used and it's throwing up more light than is coming from above, there may be strange shadows near your nose or above your lips. There may be distracting shadows when shooting indoors if one of the lights is too bright. Make sure there are no *harsh* shadows on your headshot. You definitely want soft shadows to define facial features which will give yourself more interest.

**Dirty Lens:** Dirt on the lens can usually be observed as a slight hazing in a certain part of the picture. It is definitely a distraction and will make your image look dirty. If any of your photos look like this, ask the photographer if the lens was a bit dirty. Hazy spots from a dirty lens are very difficult to fix in Photoshop, especially if you have to do it for every image!

**Five O'Clock Shadow:** When shooting as a male client with a clean shaven face, you're all set. But when shooting as someone with a five o'clock shadow, your going to have a problem. Be sure to bring a shaver in case of slight stubble on your face, because it is extremely difficult to remove in post and unless it's the look you are going for in the shot, it will look unprofessional.

**Squinting:** Make sure you don't squint your eyes too much, especially when laughing or if you're shooting in a bright location. Some people are extra sensitive to light and have to squint or wear sunglasses whenever they go outside. A quick trick to help remove squinting is to close your eyes lightly. While your eyes are closed, set the shot up so that the moment the photographer tells you to open your eyes, the shutter is snapped before you squint again. To solve the issue of squinting from laughing, the photographer shouldn't shoot when you are actually laughing. It is much smarter to wait until you finish laughing and are still smiling.

Waiting will minimize squinty eyes in addition to giving them a true smile rather than a laughing expression. Laughing is often a bit too much for a headshot.

Face Turned Away (actors only): Don't let this happen to you. Some people (especially girls) tend to tilt their face down and away from the camera to give themselves more of a mysterious (or cute) look. This is not something you want in your headshots because it hides a portion of your face and doesn't let the viewer clearly see who you are. In the case of acting headshots, casting directors may even think you are purposefully hiding a portion of your face for some reason. Therefore, be sure you can see most of your face in every shot. A good rule of thumb is if you can see both eyes fully, you should be fine.

Focus: Always be sure to check the headshot images as you go along to make sure that your eyes are clear and crisp. If all of your shots have blurry eyes and sharp ears, then the photographer isn't doing a very good job, and that's something photoshop will never be able to fix.

Looking Like Yourself (actors only): Sometimes, actors who come to me to audition for my films don't look like they do in their headshots. And it's not even from photoshopping that they look different. It's because they were shot at an angle much different than the angle people usually see them from. The trick I learned to help clients look like they do in real life is to get shot from the same angle that most people see you from. If you are an extremely tall girl, don't sit down or crouch to take the photos from a high angle. Although it's slightly less flattering to shoot from a low angle, it's more true to the way you look in real life. The point is to maximize the headshots effectiveness and it would be highly inefficient for an actor to continuously send out a headshot that doesn't look like him or her and to go to each audition only to be turned away. If casting directors call an actor in because they like the way they really look, they will get many more jobs.

### STEP 3: TAKING DIRECTION:

Talking to the photographer is very important because it helps reduce the level of awkwardness since you haven't met or worked together yet. But if you really want to be an actor/ actress, know that there is a bit more to taking a headshot than just feeling comfortable and happy. You also have to take direction in the way you stand and the way you position your head. Not knowing how to do this effectively will waste valuable time and make your photographer unhappy. The easiest way to effectively take direction physically is to ask the photographer to start off the session by explaining a few directions they'll be giving.

There are a number of different techniques I use to help position the client in a way that looks good for the photo. The standard position that works well is to have your body open towards the camera, but slightly angled to the side. Standing straight on towards the camera sometimes winds up looking too much like a mugshot, so its better to be angled a bit. Your face can be turned towards the camera more than the body though. Make sure you are feeling very comfortable and adjust yourself if not. The less comfortable you are, the less happy you'll appear in the shot.

#### THE TOP PRIORITY IS LOOK NATURAL

The photographer should be using keywords in directing how he wants you to be positioned. It makes it easier on you if he gives the directions from his point of view. Using words like "tilt," "turn," and "lean" (or others based on your preference), and let you know what each word means so that as he directs you, there will be no confusion and you'll be able to shoot as quickly and efficiently as possible.

#### EXPLAIN THE DIRECTIONS YOU'LL BE GIVING BEFOREHAND

I like to generally position people so they lean in slightly towards the camera, as it gives them a more confident look. Having you drop the front shoulder down towards the camera will open up your neck and produce a more flattering result. Another trick I use is what I call "The Turtle." Asking a client to do the Turtle means that you push your forehead toward the camera, which strengthens the jawline and neck, giving them a nicer look.

## STEP 4: BRINGING OUT INTRICATE PERFORMANCES (ACTORS ONLY):

When working with a client who knows what they want, a photographer should have it pretty easy. When working with a client who doesn't know what they want, he or she will have just a typical headshot session. The photographer should know how to quickly bring out your best personality so you can get that great headshot you are looking for. If your photographer can't bring out the best in you, then you won't get the look you were hoping for and you'll feel as though your money was wasted. There is a standard process to follow which should be done in any headshot session so that you feel you are getting what you paid for.

The process for bringing out intricate performances is as follows:

Start with a series of descriptions to get some ideas flowing for characters. As you get ready, describe different looks you may be going for.

This helps. If you don't have anything in mind, play certain characters you've played before. Additionally, be sure if you have any interest in trying some new roles and expanding your playing range. Having multiple looks is good to expand the amount of roles you will get called in for.

After a few minutes of discussing different possibilities with the photographer, you should begin to get a sense of what kind of characters you would like to play. It's important to know this before the shoot because it will help in deciding what outfits you should wear, what hair styles you should have, and what locations to shoot at.

Be sure you think of these things before you to the headshot session so you'll have a good variety of clothing and you don't have to waste time trying to figure out where to go or what you should put on next. It's always better to go into a headshot session with a clear plan of what to do.





When you are finally ready to shoot, your photographer should talk to you in a certain way to bring out the right emotions. You need to feel as though you are being directed. Result direction works great in headshot photography if you are doing a short session. Result direction is directing the result, meaning if he wants you to be sad, he'll ask you to be sad. The reason I don't recommend this kind of directing for longer headshot sessions though is because it doesn't bring out any depth in the emotion.

You say the word "sad," but what do you mean by sad? Sad can be any number of things, from sad that you didn't get to eat a good breakfast this morning to sad that your best friend got hit by a car... Or even sad that you realized your entire life has slipped away and you never got to do the one thing you always wanted to do. Result direction is surface based. Although it works quickly, it doesn't give any meaning or interest to an emotion. Better direction can bring out intricacies in performance and allows the look to be more organic, interesting, and engaging. It's better for the photographer to tell you to imagine that you are a certain character in a certain situation than to simply ask you to be sad.

The basic process for getting the best results for your session, is to give the photographer an idea to find out what they need before the shoot, and then ask for specific direction during the shoot to bring out the right emotions. Try to imagine, for instance, you are a thirty-year-old person who has been unhappy with their life thus far, and are desperately trying to look good for an interview for a job. Perhaps you can pretend the camera is the interviewer, and that you have just walked into the interview room. Pretend that if you don't get this job, you will be kicked out on the streets. This will give a bit of a look of worry on your face, while at the same time, looking as good as possible so the employer likes them. Giving this kind of direction instead of just saying "look confident but worried" will make a lot more sense to you and will give you a much more interesting look.

Be sure that you constantly ask questions and take direction throughout the headshot session so that you can work well with the photographer and get the best shots possible. If you don't know what you want and neither does the photographer, you'll run into a lot of problems. If you have a specific idea in mind, try your best to help bring out that look on camera. In some cases, you may want something that the photographer doesn't think will work, so you should also be willing to take his advise, but it's his or her responsibility as the hired hand to give you the best shots possible, even if you think you know what you want. Though you are paying him to work for you, he is the expert after all, so you should just try your best to make compromises.

## STEP 5: SHOW YOUR CONFIDENCE:

Remember that confidence is key. I cannot stress this enough, which is why I am addressing it a second time. You must find a way to make it clear to yourself, display confidence throughout the whole shoot. Remind yourself that this headshot session is your moment to shine. These images will be used as your selling tool for many months, possibly even years. Make sure your confidence shines through in every photo, no matter the expression.

A quick tip to bring out confidence is to give a tiny bit of a squint in your eyes, with the lower eyelids. Try googling the word "Smize." Some people think it's a bit ridiculous, but for headshots, giving a slight little squint gets rid of the "deer in the headlights" look and brings more confidence. This is the look casting directors want to see; they want someone who has experience in front of a camera. Be sure to think about doing this.

## STEP 6: WRAPPING UP THE SHOOT:



Congratulations, the headshot session is over! The photos have been taken! Now it's time to head back to the studio (if you shot outdoors). If you plan on going through the images with the photographer, be sure to discuss it with them beforehand so you know how much time you'll have.

If time allows, it is a good idea to view all the photos in full quality on the computer with the photographer at the end of the session. He can delete the bad ones as you go along. Then at the end, he can export the images as JPEGs and burn them onto a disk to give to the you before you leave.

In regards to asking for payment, most photographers can take cash or credit card (through an app called "Square" for the iPhone). They do not like dealing with a check which can bounce and be a big headache when trying to run a business. After paying, thank the photographer and he'll probably give you a few of his business cards and ask you to tell your friends about your experience.

## CONCLUSION



Congratulations on taking your first headshot session! It's going to take a lot of practice to learn how to feel comfortable in front of the camera to get great poses and expressions, but this book should help you get there faster than simply learning on your own like I had to do. I hope you've found this book useful, and be sure to check out "*Headshot Photography Part 2*", "*Post Production Workflow*" and "*Headshot Photography Part 3*", and "*The Marketing Guide*" when they come out.



Thanks, and I hope we'll meet up again!

*Martin Beutsen*

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