

# LOOK YOUR BEST IN YOUR PROFESSIONAL HEADSHOT

AND GET THE BIGGEST R.O.I. POSSIBLE

LEARN HOW TO GET AMAZING SHOTS WITH ANY PHOTOGRAPHER, ANY TIME



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

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## HOW TO PREPARE

The goal of this booklet is to teach you exactly how to get the best headshots possible regardless of your photographer's skill level. Most lower-priced photographers can take a well-lit, professional-looking shot, but are lacking in ability to direct subtle expressions and help clients find a well-defined brand. This can lead to a less memorable shot which, in the end, winds up being less effective.

As a way to close this knowledge gap, we wrote this booklet to teach you as a client exactly what you need to know so you can take care of all those details yourself without the help of a photographer.

As you probably know, doing your homework now will save you loads of money down the road, so let's get started.

### HOW TO USE THIS BOOKLET

Start by reading through each section so you know the basics, and then before any shoot you have, you can re-read the parts you are least familiar with to make sure you have everything prepared for your shoot.

If you do this, you'll be able to work with almost any technically proficient photographer and capture a headshot that stands out.

### WHAT PHOTOGRAPHERS WILL THIS NOT WORK FOR?

You need to be aware that this process won't work with certain photographers, so that's the first and most important part. Remember, even if you have the best expression in the world, a poorly-lit, unprofessional photo will not open any doors for you.

1. **Photographers who do not own professional equipment.** The photographer must own high-quality gear and great portrait lenses. You cannot work with a friend who has a kit lens and a cheap dSLR or iPhone camera. Even if your friend seems to have a lot of talent, you'll be wasting your time. There are certain aesthetic qualities of a professional headshot that are just impossible to capture with entry-level equipment.

- 2. Photographers who do not let you see the images during the shoot.** If you're to direct yourself, you absolutely **MUST** work with a photographer who lets you see the photos throughout the shoot. Some photographers don't like to show their images until they are finalized and ready to be sent to you, but for the purposes of being able to direct yourself, you won't have a chance at a good shot if you can't see what things are looking like in real- time.
- 3. Photographers who do not have excellent technical skills.** The photographer must have excellent technical ability or they won't be able to capture a good headshot no matter what you do. Look through their online portfolio and be sure that their images have professional lighting and a blurred outdoor or flat-color backdrop. See the example images below for reference of what we mean by professional (you can also look at the images on [www.cityheadshots.com](http://www.cityheadshots.com)). If the photos don't really stand out to you, you probably shouldn't work with that photographer.
- 4. Photographers who have really high prices (above \$600).** The whole point of this is to save you money, right? Most photographers who are highly skilled at directing and guiding you through the headshot process will charge a lot (we are one of the few photography studios who don't because we hire more team members as demand grows and expertly train them all). The point of this booklet is to teach you how to do your own directing and guidance so you can work with a cheaper photographer who has good technical ability, but can't direct you well.



To summarize, what we're looking for is someone who is not great at directing but can get you a fantastic-looking photo with their equipment and technical skill. By studying the information in this booklet, you'll be able to direct and guide yourself into an expression and angle that effectively upgrades your headshot.

Ready to get started?

## KNOW YOUR ANGLES

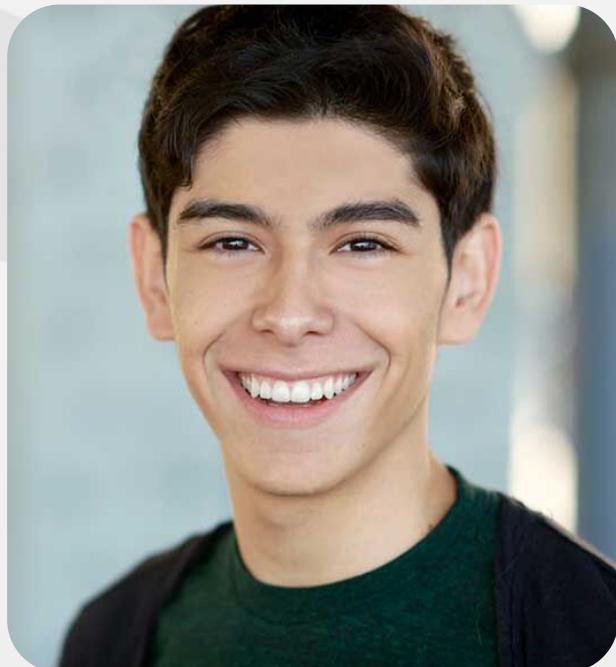
Do you know your best side? Do you know how light can work to flatter your face? Remember, assuming you're working with a technically proficient photographer, if you can explain to them right off the bat which angles you like the best and where the light should be positioned to look more flattering for you, you're going to save time and start getting great shots right away.

Too many people waste the first hour of their shoot with lower-level photographers by trying to figure out what angles and expressions look best, and by the time they start capturing their best stuff, the shoot is over.

### HOW TO FIND YOUR BEST SIDE

90% of people look better on one side than the other. Why? because our faces are not perfectly even. If we were to take a photo of someone and cut it in half and flip it over so both sides match perfectly, the photo would look really weird.

Take a look at the two photos below:



As you can see, people look more normal when their faces are not entirely symmetrical.

This calls into question whether we want the lighting to be coming perfectly from the center and whether we want our face directly straight forward into the camera, or tilted or turned one way or the other. What looks best and how can we find out?

The easiest way to find your best side is to use a simple point system for now, until you start to get the knack for why one angle or the other looks better for your face and you can tell just by looking at yourself.

Let's assign a numerical value to each facial feature so we can figure out which side is your best. Follow the steps below, looking at yourself in a mirror while doing it:

- 1 **Eyes:** First, look at your eyes and notice if one is bigger than the other. In about 70% of cases, the bigger eye should be the one positioned closer to the camera. Give the side of their face with the bigger eye one point. If both eyes are almost the same, no points are needed. *Note: To make it easier, touch your face on the side where you're giving yourself a point, because since you're seeing a mirror image of yourself, it can be easy to get confused.*
- 2 **Jaw:** Look at your jaw. Turn your face a bit to each side and notice if your jaw looks fatter or thinner on one side or the other. In about 70% of cases, shooting with the face turned so the jaw looks thinner is the best choice. Give the side of your face that makes the jaw look thinner another point. Again, it's possible that both angles look about the same. Only assign a point if one side is noticeably different.
- 3 **Nose:** Look at your nose. Does your nose look larger or smaller from one side or the other? Does it seem to be more pointy or distracting from a certain angle and less from another? If one angle or the other looks significantly better, assign another point to that side.
- 4 **Blemishes & distractions:** Look for blemishes or distracting elements. If there are some big blemishes or distracting marks, or you don't like your hair from a certain side, think about whether you're planning on having the final photo retouched. If you are, you don't need to worry about this step because the issue will be fixed afterwards. If you're not planning on retouching your final photo, give the side where the blemish doesn't show another point.

- 5 **Add it up.** Add up all the points and see which side had the most. Let's say your nose looks better on your left, but your eyes and jaw look better from the right. You're not planning on retouching the final photo and can hide a blemish when you turn your face to the left. If you add up the points, you would get 2 points on your left side and 2 points on your right. So in this case, you probably look even from both sides and you can easily do shots facing both directions.

If, however, your eyes look perfectly even, that means you would have 2 points for the left and one 1 point for the right, so you'd probably want to be shooting on left side of your face for most of the shoot.

Remember that in the end it all comes down to personal preference. If you think you prefer a side opposite to what the point system suggests, you can ask the photographer to do a test shot of you facing each direction and take a look and see which image you like best.

Remember, the steps above are just a simple starting point and only work correctly about 70% of the time.

## HOW TO FIND THE BEST LIGHTING FOR YOUR FACE

Once you know your best side, the photographer should position the key light so that your nose is pointing towards it. Essentially you want your face pointing towards the brightest light source, not away from it for the beginning few test shots. If you're pointing away from the brightest light, it can sometimes make your face look fatter or cause parts of your face to be obscured by shadow, which definitely won't work for a headshot.



After the photographer gets the lighting set up, you should ask to see the photo so you can get an idea of where the light is coming from and what it's doing to the shape of your face. There are a few fixes we will discuss below that can help your face look better on-camera if you remember to try them during your shoot:

- 1 **Face too wide:** If your face seems to wide (or fat) in the shot, you should ask the photographer to switch the lights so that one light comes from above you and another light comes from below you. This is called “clamshell” lighting, and it works wonders to thin out the face. Most people like clamshell lighting best because it’s similar to the light in bathrooms, carving out the structure of the cheekbones.
- 2 **Uneven eyes:** If your eyes appear uneven where one eye seems bigger than the other, ask the photographer to switch the sides of the key light (the main one hitting your face), meaning to make the dimmer light brighter and the brighter light dimmer. This will create what’s called “broad” lighting which should definitely help even out the eyes.
- 3 **Dark eyes:** If your eyes appear shadowed or you’re not seeing a sparkle of light reflected from them and they look a bit sleepy, try looking at the top of the lens or the camera logo. If that doesn’t help, ask the photographer to physically lower the height of the key light (the brightest light) so it fills in your eye sockets and creates a nice reflection (the reflection is called a “catch light”).
- 4 **Double chin:** If you’re seeing a double chin, try adjusting your body position or doing the “turtle.” You can lean forward towards the camera a bit to stretch out your jawline or you can push your forehead towards the camera so that your neck gets stretched a bit. If neither of those help, ask the photographer to stand on a stool or chair and shoot at you from above.
- 5 **Wrinkles:** If you want to soften you’re features and hide wrinkles and blemishes (great for women), ask the photographer to use a brighter fill light. And if you want to define your face more and have stronger shadows (great for men), ask the photographer to use less of a fill light or none at all.



Remember, when you're shooting outside, sometimes it's not possible to make all these technical lighting adjustments. However, if your photographer is technically proficient, you should be able to tell them what you're not liking and the two of you can come up with a creative solution to it, such as turning to one angle or another so the light falls across your face a certain way. They can also try using a reflector from below to create that "clamshell" lighting effect we spoke about earlier to slim the face. Have fun with it and try not to be too hard on yourself.

Remember, customizing the lighting for your face is something most other people won't notice in your headshot... you will probably be the only one who really cares how wide or thin your face looks. So don't stress too much if you can't get it looking perfect; your expression is much more important.

## BRAND YOUR HEADSHOTS

Most people don't know what type of character or look they should focus on in their headshot, and a lot of photographers don't know either. You **MUST** have a clear idea of what image you want to project in your final shot.

This section contains a guided breakdown that should help you figure out exactly what will work best for you based on your personality and what you look like.

### BRANDED HEADSHOTS

Go through and write answers down answers to each of the following simple questions in order to get a clear understanding of what your headshot should look like. The first set of questions is for actors and performers, and the second set is for non-actors:

#### Actors:

1. Type: What kind of characters have people said you look like, or what do you think you look like, honestly? Agents, managers, or coaches - have they ever said you could play a specific type? Examples: student, gang member, lawyer, teacher, grandmother, marine, etc.
2. Personality: What type of personality do you most enjoy playing? How would you describe your own personality? Examples: dark and intense, comedic and lighthearted, or loving and nurturing, etc.
3. Reaction: Imagine you're playing that personality. What kind of reaction would you want other characters who meet you to have? Examples: laugh their heads off, smile in delight, cower in fear, come together and unite, etc.
4. Now fill in the blanks: I am the \_\_\_\_\_ (type) who makes people (reaction).  
Examples: I am the gang member who makes people laugh their heads off. Or I am the grandmother who makes people smile in delight.

**Non-Actors:**

1. Type: What kind of work do you do? Examples: doctor, lawyer, teacher, writer, etc.
2. Role: What type of personality do you have? How would you describe your own personality? Examples: dark and intense, comedic and lighthearted, or loving and nurturing, etc.
3. Reaction: What kind of reaction would you want people who meet you to have when you're in that role? Examples: laugh and smile, feel confident and secure, feel intimidated, work together in teams, etc.
4. Now fill in the blanks: I am the \_\_\_\_\_ (type) who makes people \_\_\_\_\_ (reaction).  
Examples: I am the doctor who makes people feel confident and secure. Or I am the lawyer who makes people feel intimidated.

Now that you know your general brand, you should think about what type of clothing, expressions, and general aesthetics for your photo will most support that brand. We'll discuss more of that soon, but the brand you decide upon is what should essentially be the skeleton of your shoot.

## CLOTHING BASED ON BRAND

You'll need to wear certain clothing depending on the brand you're looking to show in your headshot. This section will help you figure out what clothing will work and what won't, along with information on how to choose an appropriate background for your shot.

### TIP 1: ANY COLOR CLOTHING CAN TECHNICALLY WORK.

If the photographer knows how to light you properly and balance the background colors with the colors you're wearing, pretty much any color can look good on camera.

The real question, however, is what colors do you most enjoy wearing? If you love blue, bring a light blue, dark blue, and really dark, navy blue. Then, based on where you're shooting and the backgrounds/lighting in the shot, you can look at the images to decide if you want to change into a lighter or darker color.

## TIP 2: CERTAIN COLORS POP MORE ON-CAMERA.

### ***Rich, Deep Colors Pop Most:***

Shy away from using white and other pale colors like pink, pale yellow, light green, or sky blue as the main color. Sometimes they can overexpose on camera and distract from your face, especially during outdoor shoots.

What if you want to wear a really pale color anyway? If that's the case, either make sure your photographer can light it properly without certain areas coming out too bright or wear a jacket or other darker layer over the pale color. If you don't take these precautionary steps, you'll wind up having a headshot that has some technical issues that can be distracting.

In general, the best colors are deep, rich ones that stand out. A bright yellow might be too bright and wind up overexposing, whereas a darker, forest green could look great because the amount of light that reflects from it is less. This means it will take less attention away from your face, which should be the focal point of the headshot.

### ***Complimentary Colors Pop More:***

Keep in mind that most headshots only show your upper body, so you don't have to worry about your pants. However, if you're going to be wearing layers (like a suit jacket over your shirt), you'll need to be sure the colors compliment and support one another or they could become distracting. Note: If you're color blind/deficient, ask a friend for help - please don't just wing it.

In general, don't try too many new things unless you're doing a shoot where there will be time for that. If society says blue and beige work well together, trust society and go with it. If you've worn pink and black together in the past and have liked the look, try it out for your shoot! You can usually ask to see the images and determine whether or not you want to change. Many makeup artists are also clothing stylists and can advise you on what colors might work best for your skin tone.

## TIP 3: WHAT COLORS PAIR WELL TOGETHER?

Make sure the color combinations you wear are made of different layers (as opposed to patterns), which add more interest to your portrait and make it more dynamic and visually appealing. By layers, we mean jackets. Don't wear a green button down shirt with a dark blue t-shirt under it unless the buttons will all be undone.

Below is a list of color combinations you can use:

**Red**

Pairs well with light green, pink, dark brown, and purple.

**Yellow**

Pairs well with dark blue, red, light blue, and black.

**Green**

Pairs well with dark blue, dark purple, dark green, and black.

**Teal**

Pairs well with dark green, dark red, peach, and dark blue.

**Blue**

Pairs well with dark green, pale green, white, and dark red.

**Purple**

Pairs well with dark blue, red, pale purple, and pale green.

**Pink**

Pairs well with gray, blue, red, and black.

**TIP 4: AVOID CERTAIN PATTERNS AND OTHER PITFALLS.**

Stay away from strong patterns in headshots. By this we mean plaid, big checks, and some really tiny patterns such as mini stripes or checks. Bigger patterns can draw too much attention to themselves if the colors are high-contrast (opposite one another on a color wheel) and tiny patterns can be distracting because they cause a distracting phenomenon called moire where it looks like there is a weird pattern showing up in the shot. (see image on next page).

So if you can't wear big patterns or tiny patterns, what kind of pattern can you wear? If you're not sure though, just avoid wearing a pattern unless it's very subtle with a slight difference between the colors and it's a medium size (not tiny and not really big). If that still sounds confusing, just forget it and only wear solid colors.



One other thing. Stay away from logos or pictures on your clothes unless the purpose of your photoshoot is to promote some sort of product or business. In general, logos or pictures are incredibly distracting and won't work for a professional headshot.

## BACKGROUND BASED ON BRAND

As a general rule of thumb, backgrounds should be based around your profession or what you'll be using the photo for. Follow the simple rules below and you should be good to go, and remember that these backgrounds are primarily for headshots. Other types of photography are beyond the scope of this book.

- 1 **Formal Business Headshots:** These should be done on dark gray or dark blue backgrounds. If you want to ensure your portrait looks conservative, stick to these darker, elegant styles.
- 2 **Relaxed, Professional Headshots:** These should be done on a light gray or blurred background. The light gray looks more relaxed than the dark gray or dark blue, and the blurred indoor or outdoor backgrounds look casual, yet professional at the same time.
- 3 **No-Background Headshot:** Shooting a headshot for technology firms and most medical fields on a white backdrop is popular, especially if the photo will be on a clean, modern website. You can also use a white background if you plan to have the background removed later and replaced with something else.
- 4 **Commercial Headshots:** For actors, shooting commercial headshots on a white or colorful, blurred background is ideal. Commercial shots are generally happy and upbeat, and the background should feel the same. Dancers should shoot on these types of backgrounds primarily.

- 5 **Legit/Theatrical Headshots:** If you're an actor, you know that legit means serious or intense. For these shots, you can do a flat, dark gray or black backdrop, or you can try shooting with a darker, more intense blurred background. Stay away from bright colors so that menacing feeling prevails. Models also look better when shot on these darker backdrops (in most cases).

Although this section is very short, it should give you a good idea of what type of backdrop will work best for you based on the industry you're in or how you plan to use the headshot. For a more detailed and in-depth look at backdrops, check out the following link:

<https://www.cityheadshots.com/my-headshot-recommendation.html>

## PRACTICE YOUR EXPRESSIONS

The final step of being able to upgrade your headshots without spending a dime more is to make sure you know exactly how to get great expressions without needing to be directed. We are one of the few photography companies with a lower price point that can direct the subtleties of expression with each of our clients (check us out here [www.cityheadshots.com](http://www.cityheadshots.com)), but we want to educate you so you can do it yourself.

The most important thing when learning this is to practice in front of a mirror so you develop muscle memory by the time the shoot is ready to start. We understand it's challenging and can be hard to master at first, but if you stick with it, it will eventually pay off big time (in the form of you saving money with every shoot you do)!

### HOW TO HONE IN ON SPECIFIC EXPRESSIONS

As with anything in headshots, you need to be extremely specific as to what you want. You need to prepare ahead of time to know what looks you're going for. If you're doing photos for LinkedIn or professional use, you'll probably want to stick to friendly and approachable shots. If you're an actor, you'll want a wider variety.

In this section, we'll discuss the eight primary expressions you can focus on, with the first two being for everyone and the other six being for actors and models (or anyone that wants a more advanced expression).

## HAPPINESS

The most basic headshot should have a genuine smile. Make sure the entire expression looks natural and real. Laugh by thinking of something silly or remembering a joke, and the photographer will snap away a couple quick shots of your great smile.



### ***Things to watch out for:***

- Make sure your smile is completely real. Never smile for the camera or it will look forced. Instead, think of something funny so you laugh.
- Make sure you don't squint too much when you smile. If you do, you might need to do a "controlled laugh," which is where you'll laugh into a smile that is a bit smaller, but still natural-looking. If you feel uncomfortable laughing into a smile, try giving a nod and smile as you laugh a bit and say the word, "Hey!" out loud. Imagine you see a friend coming as you call out, "Hey!" with a nice smile right after it.
- Make sure you stay in the right position and don't move too much. Laughing and smiling will often make people move out of place and your posture might look off.

- Look at your photo carefully. If you don't like the crows feet or wide cheeks you get when you smile, try a more subtle smile. Or you might just prefer to do closed-mouth smiles instead. Remember that if you're having a photo retouched, certain things like crows feet can be fixed in Photoshop. Some photographers can even slim the face down, so don't be afraid to ask. And you won't seem vain by asking, about 75% of people we work with ask for facial slimming each day.
- Make sure your eyes look relaxed and natural. If you have wide eyes, either you're nervous, or more likely, you're unconsciously worried that your eyes will squint up when you smile (and so you're trying to make them wider in the shot to undo that). Try a few shots where you deliberately don't widen your eyes. Then, if your eyes appear too squinty or small, you can try looking above the lens at the camera logo or asking the photographer to lower the height of the primary light source a bit. Those tricks will help your eyes look bigger without looking like a "deer in the headlights."
- You are pulling your head back when laughing. If you pull your head back, it will create a double chin. Instead, do the "turtle" by pushing your forehead towards the camera. This should create a better neckline and fix the problem. Make sure you don't overdo it, however. You only need to move your head forward by about an inch or two at most. Another way to fix this is to ask the photographer to shoot from a higher angle down onto you. By tilting your head to look up at the photographer, your jawline will get stretched and be fixed automatically.

## APPROACHABILITY

The most basic form of a closed mouth smile is called approachability. The best way to capture this is to imagine you are waiting for someone you know to arrive. When you count to three, you will imagine that person has arrived and you'll give them a friendly, closed-mouth smile/ laugh with a nod of acknowledgment.



### ***Things to watch out for:***

- People tend to get tense mouths doing this expression. The best way to correct this is to relax your lips slowly after each closed mouth laugh. So essentially, do a closed-mouth laugh and nod (imagining in your mind you are saying, "Hey, how are you?") and then slowly relax the lips down, while still nodding. The photographer can take a series of shots as you relax your mouth down. You can also imagine that your nodding is essentially like you are agreeing with or listening to someone speak, and trying to make that person feel comfortable.

- Make sure your eyes look relaxed. Just like in open-mouth smiles, you can get the wide-eyed look here. Chances are, if you have a wide-eyed appearance with a closed-mouth shot, you are just very worried and you need to get your mind off the photoshoot by talking or thinking about other things, or taking a quick break for a minute or two.
- Another fix is to deliberately squint your eyes to give a cool, confident look, pretending you're a model. Though this might get you laughing! But at least you'll start to relax.
- Subtle it down! Make sure you don't go too crazy with the nodding and that you keep everything very small and subtle so it looks natural. If you start to see too much tension or you're nodding too fast, or anything weird is happening, close your eyes for a moment, relax your face, and then after you count to three, open and look into the camera with a very subtle smile. That will usually help you relax.

## INTEREST/CURIOSITY

For serious shots, going with an interested or curious look can often work well. Don't think about this expression as just looking serious, because it can result in a flat, bored expression. Instead, it's better to look interested, almost like you're curious to hear what someone is talking about. Tilt your head slightly to the side and subtly squint your eyes. This look can work really well and can make you look more intelligent or thoughtful in your shot.

### ***Things to watch out for:***

- Squinting too much. Some people will squint their eyes too much and it will look like they're trying too hard. Others will accidentally squint their upper eyelids, which leads to a tired or sleepy look, or can appear as though they were half blinking in the shot. Just remember to keep it more subtle, or to focus more on lifting your lower eyelids instead of closing the upper lids.
- Too much curiosity, or eyebrows are too pinched. Remember how important subtlety is! Pinching the eyebrows too much can lead to a really odd expression that just looks awkward. Relax your eyebrows if you see this happening.



## CONFIDENCE

Confidence is a “go-to” actor headshot, and is also great to include for CEO's and high-level people in the business world. How do you do it? By focusing on that subtle squint with the lower lids, tilting the chin up or down just a tiny bit, and doing a tiny closed-mouth laugh so you capture a bit of approachability. Showing confidence in a headshot can look great as long as it's not overdone to the point of looking cocky.



### ***Things to watch out for:***

- Don't look cocky. If the expression is starting to look a bit too confident, you can tilt the head down just a bit and smile a tiny bit more. Another tip is to relax the eyes a little.

## SNEAKY

This expression is one to avoid with business headshots but can absolutely work for actors if you want to play a darker character. The best way to capture this expression is to do the confident expression, but instead of tilting your head up, tilt it down. The further down the head, the sneakier (and eventually creepier) the expression will get.



### ***Things to watch out for:***

- Lack of energy in the eyes. Remember that doing a slight squint can help increase the energy and life coming from the eyes by making them appear more confident. However, you can never truly get across an emotion without feeling it internally. Many people will feel uncomfortable doing a sneaky expression at first and won't go for it 100%. For this reason, when doing shoots we tend to give them a character to emulate such as *Joker* from *Batman* or Pennywise the clown from *It* because it can help bring about a certain emotional state. Tilt your chin way down and do a creepy laugh, pretending you're one of those characters. By over-doing the creepiness at first, it's much easier to pull it back and give off that sneaky feeling without looking too creepy.

- Fake smiles. Similar to the energy lacking in the eyes, we want to be sure you're actually doing a laugh for the smile, and not just fake smiling. Remember, in order to get energy flowing through the body, you must breathe, and the best way to breathe during a smile is to laugh through the nose. This will enhance the energy in the shot and make it feel like you're really embodying the emotion. If you don't really feel it, it won't be believable, and casting directors won't want to hire you.

## DREAMY

For women (especially actors), doing a dreamy, thoughtful and/or pensive expression can work wonders. It's all about capturing a soft, subtle smile and almost wistful eyes. Close your eyes and think of a nice memory, something that makes you want to smile a bit. After a moment, open your eyes and just give a soft, almost longing smile into the camera, with your chin raised a bit and your eyes very relaxed.



**Things to watch for:**

- Partially closed eyes. Because you'll be starting this expression with your eyes closed, just make sure when you open them that you open them all the way and the upper lid doesn't appear closed. If it does, and you've tried it a few times, look slightly higher, perhaps towards the top of the camera lens or towards the logo at the top of the camera.
- Smiling too subtly. You want to be sure that your smile is visible. It does need to be subtle, but not so subtle that the expression looks sad. Be sure to do a closed mouth tiny laugh, and then slowly relax the lips back down as the photographer quickly shoots a set of frames so you have a variety of options.
- Too much life in the eyes. On the other end of the spectrum is having too much life in the eyes. This is usually seen in the eyebrows, if they are raised a bit too much. Relax your eyebrows and smile without raising them. Otherwise the emotion will come off as more of a greeting smile instead of a dreamy one.

**PENSIVE**

This is similar to the dreamy look, except for the smile. With this expression, we're looking for something almost sad, but not overly sad. Close your eyes, but this time, instead of opening with a subtle smile, you should open and just tilt your head up ever so slightly, while keeping your mouth extremely relaxed. This will result in a super soft, almost sad expression that can work very well for some types of characters.

**Things to watch for:**

- Head tilted too far down. The head being too far down will lead to a more intense expression that could either come across as just completely sad or almost quirky to the point of trying to be "bad girl/boy trying to pretend to be innocent." Puppy eyes work if the head is tilted up, but if it's too far down it can look like you are trying too hard and doing some ridiculous "innocent-sexy" photo.



- Eyebrows raised too much. Sometimes when you open your eyes, your eyebrows can go up automatically. We don't want them to have a surprised look, so remember that, even if you want to do a slight nod to help with the energy in the shot, you shouldn't raise the eyebrows much at all. If you do raise them, it should only be by a fraction of a millimeter.
- No smile in the cheeks. Even though the mouth won't be smiling, you can still do the tiniest laugh through the nose in order to engage the upper cheek region into an almost sad smile. Do not look miserable in the photo; you still need to have something going on, so try doing a tiny laugh through your nose but don't move your lips.

## DIRECT/INTENSE

Direct and intense shots are best done with the face turned almost directly towards the camera, but can in some cases be done with the head turned on an angle. The chin should be down, and the eyes should be completely engaged, with a subtle squint of the lower lids. You can opt for a tiny closed-mouth laugh or do the shot without it.

### *Things to watch out for:*

- Trying too hard. Squinting too much, smiling too big, or tilting the head down too far can all say that you're trying too hard. Remember that you want the image to look natural, and being a bit more subtle is going to work better than going overboard.
- Not projecting real energy. On the opposite end of the spectrum is people who don't feel comfortable enough and don't really feel the energy when they look at the photo. In some cases, you'll really have to go for it and not be afraid. Remember: it's better to go a bit overboard and not worry about doing it wrong because it's easier to dial it back rather than never getting there in the first place. You want to feel the intensity, so be sure to laugh through your nose. The expelling of air through your system will engage certain muscles in the face that will project more energy into the shot.



- Worry in the eyes. In shots like this and also darker, sneaky looks, you might look slightly worried as if you think you're doing it wrong. This can usually be found in the "wavering of the eyebrows," where your eyebrows look a bit like a wave, going up and down. If this is the case, just know that everything was perfect except that you looked a bit worried. Then try it again as if, even if you're doing it wrong, you don't care, and you're doing it right. Go a bit overboard and be ridiculously confident, and then you can do another set where you dial it back.

## IN SUMMARY



Thanks for reading through this booklet; we hope you've found it helpful! Our goal with this is to give headshot clients more options when it comes to choosing photographers. We don't want money to be the only deciding factor anymore on whether or not you can get a great headshot.

Unfortunately, directing headshots is way more challenging than you might think, and many photographers who have the technical know-how unfortunately lack the ability to engage with clients to bring out the best expressions, and they don't know how to help find brands so clients get a shot that works perfectly for their character-type or industry. We hope that by publishing this material and making it available for everyone online, we can start to change that and allow you and others to work with any photographer you want. The key is to find someone that knows how to take a technically perfect shot, and then you can do the rest.

While you're searching for a photographer, we actually run a free headshot drawing where once a month, someone wins a \$650 headshot package (includes makeup). Feel free to sign up here: <https://www.cityheadshots.com/win-the-essential-headshot.html>

When it comes down to it, although we'd love the opportunity to work with you directly someday, we know it might not be possible based on where you're located or things that might be going on in your life.



Until that day comes when we get to shoot together, we wish you the best of luck and hope this info will allow you to get amazing headshots every time.

Thanks, and I hope we'll meet someday!

*Martin Bentsen*

Founder of City Headshots

[www.cityheadshots.com](http://www.cityheadshots.com)