



## Creating a Professional Headshot from Home

There is a reason photographers can charge so much for headshots: There is an art to taking good ones. So, before we get into the step-by-step, let's quickly go through the elements of a good headshot. These will help put some of the steps in better context.

A quality headshot...

- Is framed from the chest up.
- Captures you looking directly at the camera. Eye contact is one of the most important elements of a great headshot.
- Has good lighting on your face. Beware of unflattering shadows.
- Showcases the personality and impression you want to give off. This is what makes your photo memorable.
- Is easy to see and notice even when it's small.

Here are two great examples



## 6 Steps to Prepare for Your Photoshoot

### **1) Grab something sturdy to hold up your cell phone or camera.**

Contrary to popular belief, selfies typically don't make for good headshots. When taking the photo on your own, you will want to use a tripod or holder for your phone so your camera can sit at chest height. From there, you'll end up setting a timer and posing for the picture.

## **2) Pick a location inside with good lighting and a simple backdrop.**

The best headshot location is typically indoors, away from direct sunlight, and in front of a solid color backdrop like a wall.

There are three key factors for flattering portrait light:

1. Open shadows.
2. Beautiful catch-lights - Catch-light is a light source that causes a specular highlight in a subject's eye in an image. You can achieve this by simply looking up slightly, or photograph from an angle above to reflect the sky in your eyes, reflect the light by using a reflector or face directly towards the light source.
3. Brightly lit faces.

Getting the lighting right is the hardest part, so take some extra time finding a good spot that doesn't have sunlight coming in through a window right onto you. Direct sunlight is harsh and can be totally unforgiving. Not to mention, it will make you squint. If you do want to photoshoot outside, then there are ways to make it work. Finding "open shade" -- a sweet spot between sun and shade, where you're just inside the shade but facing the light -- and a nice, clean wall to shoot against. Whether you take your headshot indoors or outdoors, you'll want a backdrop that makes it look like you're in a professional photographer's studio. That means sitting or standing in front of a solid-colored wall that'll make your face stand out. If you can't find a solid colored wall, you should ensure there are few background distractions in your picture.

## **3) Plan your attire and overall look to be photo-ready.**

What you're wearing in your headshot will say something about you. When you choose a shirt to wear, think about where your headshot will appear and what message you'd like your picture to convey. You don't need to worry about bottoms and shoes, as headshots won't show below your mid-chest.

For example, let's say you have some cool tattoos on your arms. You'll want to think about whether you'd like to showcase them as part of your unique personality, or cover them up if you want to be more formal.

Here are a few good rules of thumb:

- Avoid overly bright colors, but don't wear all black or all white either.
- Avoid distracting, "busy" textures on your shirt/top, and anything that might take away from your eyes.
- Don't wear anything with a logo or words on it.
- Don't wear any accessories that you don't wear daily.

Remember to pick out several options, as you can never quite tell how a shirt will look on camera until you try it!

Additionally, you don't need to spend a lot of money on makeup and hair. The point is to look clean and put-together, but also like yourself. That means spending time making your hair look good, and if interested, putting on neutral makeup that conceals under-eye shadows and redness.

#### **4) Clear up space on your phone.**

Before you start your photoshoot, you're going to want to make sure you have room for all the photos you're going to take. Believe me, you're going to take a *lot* of headshots. The last thing you're going to want to do is pause your photoshoot to clear space on your phone.

#### **5) Block off a decent amount of time for the shoot itself.**

Remember: You're going to end up taking a ton of photos to narrow down that one headshot. You won't want to be in a rush. So don't make this a half-hour break from your work: Give yourself plenty of time for setup, taking the photos, and going through them – we suggest at least an hour.

#### **6) Practice in the mirror.**

Seriously. Practicing your pose may feel a little uncomfortable, but it can really help you during your headshot session. Practice different ways to "let your personality shine" so you have some looks to work with when you finally start your shoot.

### **3 Steps for Taking Your Own Professional Headshot**

#### **1) Set up your lighting.**

Once you determine your location, it's time for the hard part: setting up your lighting. There are a lot of different ways to go about this, and you'll have to do some initial trial-and-error work to get it just right.

**If you're inside:** It's time to set up your artificial lights. Set them up so they don't shine directly on your face, which will produce shadows that are far too harsh. The key to a good portrait is the subtle use of shadow.

**If you're outside:** It's time to find that "open shade." Once you find that spot where you're illuminated by light but not actually *in* the light, make sure you're also facing the light.

To avoid those weird shadows, you'll want to set up your lights about two feet away from where you'll be sitting or standing if they're larger studio lights, or a little further away if they're smaller, desk lamp-sized lights. The best lighting will come from slightly above your head. Two lights, one on each side should give you a nice natural look. If you only have one light, try getting it in the center and backing it up a little so the lighting doesn't look too dramatic.

#### **2) Set up your camera.**

Once you've got the lighting down, set up your camera so it's on a steady surface. If you're using your camera phone, make sure you're using the lens on the back of your phone, not the "selfie lens." (It turns out the back lens has higher resolution specs than the front one.)

You'll want it to be about two or three feet away from where you'll be standing or sitting. Whether you're standing or sitting, you'll want the height of the camera lens to be about at your chin, although you can experiment with a slight upward tilt once you get going. You'll also want the camera to be facing you dead-on (i.e., with no horizontal angle).

Once your camera is positioned correctly, it's time to set up your camera app of choice if you're using a camera phone.

- Make sure your camera flash is off.
- Open up Camera Settings, then:
  - **Self Timer:** Toggle this on, and use the slider to choose how long it should wait before taking a photo. We recommend a minimum of 10 seconds.
  - **Burst Mode:** Toggle on, and use the slider to choose how many photos it takes in quick succession. We recommend 5 photos, in case you blink.
  - **Anti-Shake:** Toggle on so the camera only takes a photo when the camera is steady -- although since you're using a tripod or something to keep the phone stationary, this shouldn't be a problem.

### 3) Select, edit and crop for every purpose.

Now is the time to select the best photo. You want to choose the photo that best looks like you and reflects you in the best way. You can use your camera phone settings to touch up your photo or you can use a simple online tool like PicMonkey or Adobe Photoshop Express.

Once you've touched up your photo, the final step is cropping it for the places you want it on the web. In most cases, this'll mean cropping your photo as a square, since every major social network requires square profile photos. Here's a quick cheat for profile photo sizes on major social networks:

- **LinkedIn:** 400 px wide by 400 px tall
- **Twitter:** 400 px wide by 400 px tall
- **Facebook:** 180 px wide by 180 px tall
- **Instagram:** 110 px wide by 110 px tall
- **Pinterest:** 165 px wide by 165 px tall
- **Google+:** 250 px wide by 250 px tall

When you crop your headshot, don't just crop a square around your face. Instead, experiment with different ways to crop that'll make the composition of the photo pleasing to the eye. One of the best ways to compose your headshot is to follow the "rule of thirds" -- which means breaking your image down into thirds, both horizontally and vertically, so you have nine parts in total.

The theory is that if you place points of interest in these intersections or along the lines, your photo will be more balanced and will enable your viewer to interact with the image more naturally. Surprise, surprise: Your *eyes* are the most important elements of your headshot, so they should be your point of interest.

**And that's it!**

Provided your phone isn't filled to the brim with pictures and apps you haven't used in years, there's almost no limit to the number of photos you can take. Give yourself a big pool to choose from and you won't be disappointed. In fact, you might even be a little impressed. Now, go forth and photograph.