

HEADSHOTS

HOW TO CREATE A GREAT HEADSHOT

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Considerations

- Types of headshots
- Camera choice
- Lens choice
- Lighting
- Background
- Posing

Types of Headshots

- Business headshots
 - School/job applications
 - LinkedIn
- Actor headshots
- Business portraits
- Social media
- Book jackets for authors
- Company websites
- Etc

We will focus on basic business headshots today.

Camera

Any capable camera.

A camera that can shoot in RAW format will help you post process the images.

Many photographers like to tether.

Tripod

- Some headshot / portrait photographers prefer to use a tripod, some prefer to hand hold. There are good reasons for both. Decide which you prefer and go with that.
- Some reasons for using a tripod:
 - If you're doing a full day of corporate headshots, it may reduce fatigue from holding the camera and stooping over (pay attention to differing heights of subjects).
 - To keep a consistent frame if you will be doing composites
- Some reasons to hand hold:
 - Mobility
 - Speed

Lens

Headshots are typically done with a bit of zoom, to help with compression and prevent distortion. You can be creative with wider angled lenses, but the typical focal length is between 70 and 200mm.

A fast, wide-aperture lens helps to blur the background.

Some popular lenses:

- 50mm
- 85mm
- 70-200mm

Lighting

- Strobes vs Continuous vs Natural
- Keep enough ambient light to keep the pupils smaller
- Some types of light sources in a shot:
 - Key light – main light source on subject
 - Fill light – optional. Can be used to fill in light
 - Hair light / Rim light – to give definition to top/side, separate from background
 - Use a grid or a snoot, to point light to back/top of subject, and not get any flare into lens.
 - Background light – to make the background lighter
 - Reflectors – to shine some light into the shadows

Background

- Typically a white / gray / black seamless backdrop
 - This is the classic headshot look. All the focus is on the face, the background is not distracting.
 - This allows companies to keep a consistent look between headshots shot by different photographers in different.
- Environmental portrait
 - In their place of work (kitchen, board room, farm, etc)
- Out-of-focus building or greenery in the background

Posing

- Don't touch! There is no reason you need to touch your subject.
- Basic portrait posing rules apply
- Hair / make up / wardrobe
- For classic headshots, the head and shoulders fill the frame
- Pull subject a few feet from backdrop, so that their shadow doesn't fall on it
- Pull them farther away if you don't want any light to fall on the backdrop
- Good posture – pretend a string is pulling their spine up
- Turn the body a little from the camera
- Face straight on to the camera, bring chin forward
- Masculine vs Feminine
- Avoid glare in glasses – tip them down, or have the light high up
- Show confidence to give them confidence
- Expression – it's part of the job of the photographer to bring out a great expression

EXTRAS

- Extra notes

Misc Notes

- There are many ways to set up a headshot! Going all out and spending thousands of dollars on top of the line gear, making your own, using whatever half-busted equipment you have, using natural light – it can all work. There are different ways to pose the subject, and different elements to include in the background. The important thing is to think about how you and/or the client want the picture to look. And then figuring out what you can use to achieve that goal. This may mean working with whatever space and equipment you have immediately available, which sometimes forces you to be creative.
- Camera choice is usually the least important decision. Very basic cameras can still take amazing pictures. Use what you have.

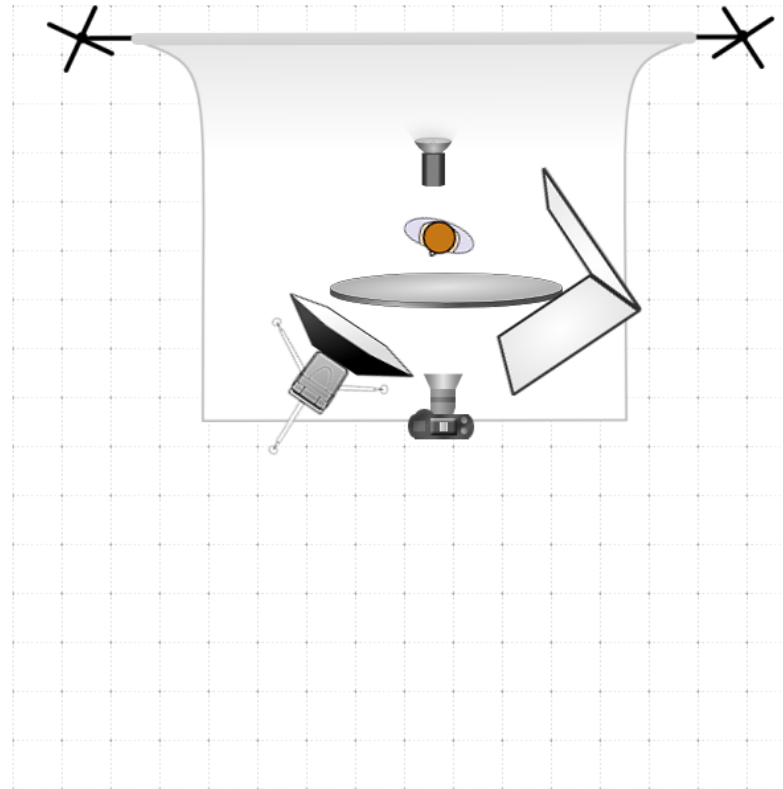
My Gear

- Nikon D700
- Nikkor 85mm f/1.4
- Godox AD400, AD200 ; Nikon SB600
- Westcott 43" Apollo Orb
- Reflective umbrellas 5-in-1 collapsible reflector
- Homemade V-flats
- Savage Seamless Paper, 53", in White and Olive Green

Additional Resources

- Peter Hurley, educational materials online
- YouTube, such as <https://youtu.be/mUDTGMwfz3o>
- <https://www.lightstalking.com/headshot-photography-tutorials/>
- Lynda.com
- Creative Live
- SLR Lounge
- Fstoppers

Sample Lighting Diagram



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Graphics by: Don Giannatti, antic_eye, IconShock & QH Photography