

Headshots

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Headshots are needed as often as you change in your appearance. Some folks can go years and look quite the same. Other folks change their appearance rapidly or often. If you are just starting out medically transitioning, that means often. If you are significantly changing your hair style, such as hair color, chopping off inches, or getting a perm, that means updating your look immediately if possible.

I think the number one complaint I hear is that a casting director will schedule an audition, and when the actor walks in the door, they do not look anything like the headshot they saw. It needs to actually look like you. The quality of the headshot can be very inexpensive.

Photo alterations

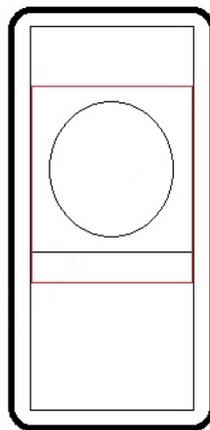
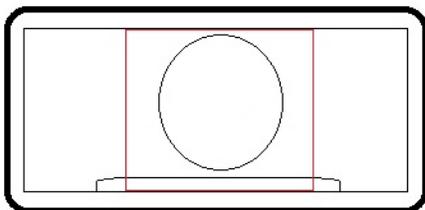
No photoshopping! That mole on your chin needs to be visible! If you are fighting acne, it needs to be apparent. Those are all things that can be covered with makeup if the production chooses to.

Photo composition

A headshot means a 'head shot' - not some fancy poses against some expensive backdrop, showing so much of you 'to show your personality'. That's not the point. It means a tight shot, cropped maybe slightly wider than the picture on your driver's license. Keep in mind your headshot will be viewed on a screen that typically is just the picture with your name underneath, like a wall of mugshots on a page. If your picture is cropped wider, your face will be that much tinier.

It needs to be your entire head, and going out towards your shoulders. It doesn't have to be including your shoulders.

Approximate crop
lines in red



Facial expressions

We need multiple options for your headshot, and that means at least two expressions. One needs to be a blank look, like your driver's license, and the other can be smiling. You can have other options as well, but they will be far less used.

Profile

Do a profile shot as well, while you're at it. It might not get used often. But you simply have to turn to the side and get a couple more images. It could come in handy.

Background

The background on the headshot needs to be neutral. In other words not distracting. A blank wall is fine, as long as the color is one that compliments your skin and hair color well. If you have dark hair, do not shoot against a dark wall. If you have really light hair, not against a same colored or light wall. Have some contrast.

Lighting

We need to clearly see you! Make sure you have just the right amount of light.

If you're in a room where you can totally control the lighting, like after sundown, have two similar lamps. Here, we're assuming you don't have professional dimmable lights, but are using household lighting. Set one 45 degrees to one side of you maybe a couple of feet away. Set the other about twice as far away on the other 90 degree angle. Set the lights slightly above you, like starting at shoulder height and above. Now take a look at how you look and adjust things so that you have one side a bit brighter than the other and you are evenly lit.

If you're in a room with outdoor or other light that messes things up, take a look at yourself on camera and set a light or two on the side that appears darker on camera, or use the lighting pattern described above. Since outdoor lighting in general is brighter, sit at a 45 degree angle to it if possible, and fill with lamps on the opposite 45 degree angle.

If you're shooting entirely outside, don't sit in direct sunlight, as it will make you squint. Instead, be in a shaded area, behind a building, wall, or hedge, under a tree, etc. If you need to fill in your lighting because it's uneven, be creative with reflecting sunlight from the 45 degree angle towards you. This could be using a bright white sheet on a stand, a white foam board from a craft store, or the white or foil side of a smaller piece of foam insulation from a hardware store.

Photo resolution

It needs to be very high resolution, like 6 Megapixels or greater. The higher, the better. But don't reduce the image quality by transferring between cell phones via things like text messaging. Commonly those apps cut down the image size on purpose. The way to check

the quality is to just check the file size. If the image is like 46K, then it's been horribly reduced. When blown up on a computer screen, which a casting director may do, the image will get really grainy. A good size is at least 500K or larger. As big as 1MB or 2MB is fine for the original.

Equipment to use if doing it yourself

Use the best cell phone you can get your hands on. The more megapixels the camera has, the better. If your camera person is a bit shaky, have them prop their elbows or the phone itself on a solid surface. Use a camera stand if necessary.

Are selfies ok?

Selfies should only be used as a last resort. The reason why is that many cell phones have a reduced quality camera for the one you use to take a selfie. Plus people tend to hold the phone up over their heads at an angle for them, making them look 'selfie style'. With your arm raised up, you can see it in the picture, too. Sometimes a casting director will be confused about how you look on a daily basis, and request a selfie done immediately, so just snap the picture, regardless of clothes, hair and makeup.

Hiring a photographer

Professionals will know all the above already - well to a degree. They may have formed their opinion of what a headshot needs to be and be totally wrong. Even ones in the heart of Hollywood. But, you can tell by their prices and delivery times. If they want to charge you \$500 and take two weeks to deliver, don't bother. This isn't for your high school senior yearbook. The long lead time is to allow for color correction and photoshopping, neither of which you really need.

If they claim you need all that extra work done to make you more marketable, please don't listen to them, and go elsewhere. When you start making buckets of money, then maybe get portraits done like that for publicity purposes. Paying rent each month is more important than fancy headshots. If they're charging a few bucks for 15 minutes of work and sending you the pictures unaltered, then that's worth it.

Body Shots

We get the occasional request for a body shot. If you're doing headshots, throw in a couple of body shot poses for good measure. They need to be your whole body, from head to toe - don't chop it off at the knees or ankles. Have one straight on, feet shoulder width apart, arms at your sides. Do a profile (from the side - same basic pose.) Then do a pose or two for drama.