

BECOMING A PROFESSIONAL ACTOR - HEADSHOTS AND RESUMES



Tips & hints for the best headshot and the most professional - looking resume.

Why do I Need a Headshot?

The headshot is a memory tool. You want those on the other side of the table to remember you, and remember your acting. The headshot acts as that connection. A poorly produced amateur headshot gives the impression you are not taking your career seriously.

What Makes a Good Headshot?

- Your headshot must be 8"x10".
- The focus of the picture is on you, not your clothes, not the background, not the photographer's skills.
- The picture must look like you. It's a beginner's mistake to wear too much makeup, or to change hairstyles such that the person in the picture doesn't even look like you anymore.
- The picture must not only look like you, but represent you. If you're a comedic actor, why would you frown in your headshot?
- Don't worry about precisely having the same "look" as other actors. The details have evolved over the years – colour photos are more accepted now, as are three-quarter shots.

How do I Know a Photographer is Good?

- Choose a professional photographer who specializes in headshots. Do not use family or friends.
- Make an appointment to see the photographer's portfolio. Do you like the pictures? Do you like the photographer's style? Do the people in the photos look like "real people?"
- Are you comfortable with the photographer? Tension will show in the photos.
- Don't shop on price. You can easily get a lousy photo from an expensive photographer, and a great photo from a less-expensive one.
- Watch out for extra fees. You just want your picture taken. You only need an 8"x10" photo. No other size is necessary.

Shooting the Photo

- Bring several clothing options for the shoot. A good photographer will help you choose what will show you at your best. Shoot at least two different "looks."
- Most photographers will offer you the services of a professional makeup artist. This can be a very good idea, especially if you're not comfortable with putting on your own makeup. Be VERY FIRM that (unless you're a 'glamour type') you don't want to look like a model; you just want to look like yourself.

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- At some point after the session the photographer will give you what is known as a “contact sheet.” This is a photo containing a composite of all the photos taken in the session. Do ask the photographer’s advice for which shots are the best, but don’t take this as the final choice. Seek advice from others, emphasizing that you want photos that look like you. Ask your mom, your best friend, your teacher(s), anyone who knows you well. If you have an agent then you definitely want their opinion too. But remember that the final decision should be yours.

EXERCISE

Google ‘headshot.’ Click on ‘Images’ to see a wide variety of headshots. To make this a class exercise, choose 5-10 pictures and show them in class. Ask students what impression they get from the headshot. Is the picture warm (inviting) or cold (detracting)? Do they like the person in the photo? Why or why not? What type of part would the students cast this actor? Does the photo showcase the actor or the photographer?

Is an Acting Resume the Same As a Resume For a Regular Job?

It’s important to remember that acting is a job. It’s not show fun, it’s show business. The resume goes hand-in-hand with the headshot to act as your business card. The resume shows what you’ve done, what special skills you might have, any union affiliations, your vital statistics (height, weight, eye colour, vocal range) and where you can be contacted. The contact information is extremely important: if you’re wanted for a callback or a part, they’ll get your contact info from the resume.

What if I Don’t Have Any Credits? It’s OK if I Exaggerate a Little on my Resume, Right? Who Will Know?

No. No. No. And No. You will get caught.

What are ‘Special Skills?’

These are unique things that you can do that enhance your hireability: juggling, ride a horse, drive a stick shift, speak another language. Often a director will hire an actor with a necessary skill already in place, rather than have to train someone. If a director is looking for an actor who can play the piano, they’ll look in the special skills section of your resume.

Can I Put My Resume on Coloured Paper to Make it Stand Out?

No. White paper. Format and trim your resume so that it is 8” x 10” and attach it to the back of your photo. Staple, do not paperclip. And don’t put the staple through your contact information!

Resumes are only one page long and should be in 12pt type. Do not use fancy fonts. Do not use more than one embellishment (if you’re going to bold certain parts, don’t use underline) Do not handwrite changes on your resume. If you move, print a new resume. If you add a new credit, print a new resume.

All these choices reflect on you and whether or not a director will want to see you.

The Bottom Line

The headshot and resume are necessary. They say what you look like and what you’ve done. Think of them as business cards. Make them simple and straightforward. No bells and whistles.