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How to take your own headshot

I'm Lauren, and I'm here to share some tips for how to take your own headshot. By following my advice you'll be able to come away with a headshot that authentically represents your personality, and also feels well-lit and tightly composed.

- Lauren Renner, Kickstarter's Associate Art Director for Photo & Video

Get prepared:

First and foremost, you'll need a **camera**. This can simply be your smartphone, or something more professional-grade like a DSLR (I'll cover tips for using both). If you're using a DSLR and also own a shutter-release cable, that will be helpful in giving you more control over how frequently you fire your shutter.

Another tool that will be helpful is a **tripod**, or at the very least a trusted friend or partner who can help you shoot. Regardless of what you're shooting with or who is helping you, you'll want your camera to be stable, adjustable, and either level with or slightly higher than you once you're in-frame.

A good headshot has an important function, and that is to give your intended audience a sense of who you are. That's why it's important that you keep the following goal in mind before we begin: **You must be the main focus of your finished image**. This means that whatever backdrop or room you choose to stage your photograph in shouldn't be overly cluttered/busy, and shouldn't detract from you being the main focal point. Once you have this etched in your mind you can start composing your frame.

The headshot-taking process:

1. **Shoot your headshots on a cloudy day**. It's best to avoid direct sunlight, which will cast harsh shadows and bright hot spots in your image. If you can aim to shoot on a dreary day with diffused lighting, the contrast and skin tones in your image will appear balanced and evenly lit.
2. **Select a suitable space to shoot in that (ideally) is filled with natural light, and faces a window**. If you can position yourself in such a way that you're facing a natural light source head on, then you'll be in great shape (just make sure you're not backlit).

3. **Stay away from flat white walls.** These run the risk of making your headshot feel more like a mug shot. If you decide to shoot your headshot against a wall, choose a wall with a color, texture, or slight pattern (just not a crazy pattern that will detract from your face). You can also try using your location's architecture for a backdrop, playing off the lines and shadows to help balance your composition.
 4. **Take a moment to consider how the background you choose will inform the vibe of your headshot.** Keep in mind that you can be creative when it comes to getting the look and feel you're hoping to achieve. For example, you may want to choose a background that includes colors and textures that complement the colors on your website, or that mirror certain aspects of your personality or artwork.
 5. **Make sure your background isn't cluttered.** If you decide to photograph yourself in a space where part of a room is visible, it's best to set up your frame and stand in for a few test shots to see if there is anything in the space that you'd like to reposition (after all, you don't want a plant to look like it's growing out of your head).
 6. **Set up your DSLR or smartphone.**
 - a. **If you're using a smartphone,** make sure that it's mounted horizontally and that you're using the rear camera (not the selfie side). Check out [this article](#) for tips on how to activate your self-timer, and proceed. If you don't have a tripod, you could make due with leaning your phone against something to achieve a similar effect—or ask a friend or family member to help you out.
 - b. **If you're using a DSLR,** make sure your lens is set to "Autofocus" and your camera body is set to "Automatic," or use another combination of settings that will deliver an even exposure. If you don't have editing software downloaded on your computer, then make sure that your camera is set to only shoot JPEGs before you begin (as this file type will be easiest to download and use later). Use the self-timer function or cable release to start shooting.
 7. **Adhere to the "Rule of Thirds" while positioning yourself in the frame.** Your face should take up about $\frac{1}{3}$ of the image, and should be located slightly off-center to the left or right side of the frame. Try a few different camera positions until you find a setup that feels balanced.
 8. **Experiment with facial expressions and angles, but keep your eyes looking at the camera.** This will help your intended audience feel engaged with you when they look at your photo.
 9. **Take a few test shots, and refine.** It will probably take a few tries before everything looks clean and balanced in your shot, but once it does you'll be able to spend more time shooting and less time worrying about composition.
 10. **Shoot!** Take a bunch (think: at least 20 shots) and remember to have fun. The more shot options you have to choose from, the better. You can try multiple facial expressions, poses, and even switch up the location a few times.
 11. **Select and edit your favorite image(s).**
 - a. **If you shot on a smartphone,** use your in-camera editing software or an app to make adjustments to your photo, such as brightening the light, slightly adjusting the color, increasing the sharpness and/or clarity, etc. Avoid using photo filters that will make your headshot look over-processed or color tinted. A few apps to try editing your photo in: Snapseed, VSCO, or Whitagram.
 - b. **If you shot on a DSLR,** download the images onto your computer and either edit them there using software such as Adobe Lightroom or Photoshop, or send JPEGs to your phone via Airdrop or email. Once they're downloaded onto your phone, you can proceed to edit them using an app or your phone's in-camera editing software as an alternative.
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In conclusion:

You'll know whether or not you've successfully followed these tips if you come away with one or more headshots that are well lit with a strong composition, and most of all reflect your personality. Save what you end up with in a safe spot, as you never know when you'll need a headshot again in the future. Good luck!

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Vocation

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Fact



Photo Credit: Nina Subin