

StageSource Advice: Headshot and Resume

Your theatre headshot and resume is your photograph and a one-page summary of performing experience, skills, and qualifications. Its design and organization must impress readers and make them race to their phones with exciting opportunities for you. Anything that doesn't help you achieve this goal is extraneous. Begin by looking at as many headshots and resumes as you can. You'll quickly get an idea of what works and what doesn't. This article covers the following topics: ***The Actor's Resume, Non-Acting Resumes, The Headshot (Guidelines, Styles, Choosing a Photographer, Prices, and Reproduction)*** and ***Resources***.

Resumes

The Actor's Resume

Make your name at the top big and bold. Directly below your name, list phone numbers (home, service, mobile, etc.), e-mail address or Web site, and any union affiliations. For safety reasons, do not put your address on your resume. You can change your phone number much more easily than your address. And NEVER list your social security number. That information is not required until you sign contracts or fill out vouchers. Provide your weight, height, hair and eye color, and, if applicable, vocal range. If you plan to do print work, you can include your measurements and clothes sizes, but don't give an age-range category—why limit or confine yourself?

For clarity, organize your credits under categories: *Broadway, Off-Broadway, Regional Theatre*, etc. If you don't have a broad range of experience, use more general categories like *Theatre or Stage, Film, Television*, and *Industrials*. Under these general categories, use columns to separate information. In column one, put the production title; column two, the role you played; column three, theatre/producer. You may also want to include directors or even the leads of the production if they are well-known. Avoid cluttering your acting resume with dates.

Make it easy to find details of where you worked, on what, and with whom. Curious readers will ask when you did the work. Use judgment when listing college or high school credits. If you're in your 20s, it's better to not list high school credits. The same goes for college experience after you have been out of school for some time. Don't worry about filling extra space. The gaps in your resume will soon fill out.

List your training—with whom you studied and where—especially if you have fewer than 10 years experience or if your teachers are well known. Training shows you are serious about your craft. You are never too old or too good to learn more.

It is not recommended listing work as an 'extra' on your resume, even if you are just starting out. Producers and directors would rather see roles played in an academic or class setting as long as they are labeled as such.

Special Skills is an important category. List dialects that you can use well—for example, standard British,

Cockney, New York, Southern. Can you drive a stick-shift, play sports or instruments, speak more than one language, juggle, wiggle your ears? One actress got a five-day shoot because she mentioned that she could use power tools. If you've got it, flaunt it.

Most resumes contain too much information. If you've appeared in 40 productions, choose 15 of the most recent and prestigious. Less is more. If your credits are too numerous to list in various areas of theatre, film, commercials, etc., you might say "Additional credits available on request." This keeps your resume easy to read while impressing readers with your extensive experience.

With computers and word processing programs, it is much easier to adapt resumes to specific auditions. First, separate film and commercial appearances from stage roles. For print or film auditions, list this experience first. If you have to choose, list more film appearances than theatre work (though, list projects set in another era, as a film director may be pleased to know that you've done period work on stage or have theatre experience). Similarly, for a theatre audition, list stage roles first, followed by, again depending on available space, a few films or commercials. Make a few versions of your resume: if you're auditioning for a Shakespearean production, put your classical roles first; for a musical, highlight the musicals that you've done.

Don't combine resumes of different types (acting with directing, stage managing with set design, etc.). This makes it hard to tell what job you're seeking. Also: Don't lie! What comes around goes around. The world of theatre and film is very small.

Obtaining clips of film or commercial work is easy these days, and people now post them on personal websites, public websites, or web pages with an agency. If you have good clips, offer a link in your resume to view this work. With digital photography and word processing, you also have the opportunity to insert a miniature headshot into your resume, thus providing a second view of yourself, whether a different expression or horizontal vs. vertical format.

When printing your resume:

- Your resume will eventually be trimmed to fit behind your 8x10 headshot, so set your margins accordingly.

- Select a font that is easy to read and attractive. Better yet, ask a professional to design your resume or give you design advice.
- Print on good paper, 24 lb. weight or heavier. Stay away from florescent or brightly colored papers.

When the resume is ready, trim it down to fit exactly on the back of an 8x10 picture and attach it firmly and neatly (using gluestick or staples). Or print the resume directly onto the back of your headshot, but make sure the printer ink will not flake or wear off the paper.

Bring two or three resumes to every audition, even if you sent a headshot to the casting person.

Non-Acting Resumes

As with actors, resumes for designers, directors, and technicians should be one page, with your name, phone number, and any union affiliations prominent at the top. Organize the resume so that it is easy to read and understand. For example, use columns or blocks of information with clearly defined headings. List your job title, name of the production, and where it was produced. Other information on non-actor resumes includes the year you worked for a given employer; type of production (regional, touring, etc.); type of union contract (if applicable); names of notable producers, directors, and designers you worked with; your training or degrees; and references. StageSource has a file of non-acting resumes that you can look through for examples.

The Headshot

The Headshot

A headshot is an 8x10, color or black-and-white photograph of you. Many actors (especially in NYC and LA) are using color shots as most photographers are shooting digitally now and color shots are no more expensive than the traditional black-and-white.

It is helpful to have your name imprinted directly onto the photo, as it helps to identify you immediately (without having to flip the headshot over) and will greatly aid a director should your resume become detached from your headshot. Photographers using digital photos often can produce a photo with your name on it.

As an actor seeking work, your headshot is your most essential job-search tool. The photo must honestly represent what you look like and what you are about. Casting people base their decisions on a number of criteria, but high on the list is your look or type. Your headshot must be appropriate for the work you are pursuing, and it should look like you so that you'll be recognized when you meet casting people face to face. Always exude who you really are, but keep in mind what casting people are looking for. Stay away from glamour and fancy dress shots.

A bad headshot—for example, one taken by a photographer friend who doesn't specialize in shooting actors—can create problems. It could indicate that you are not serious about acting. Your goal is to attract and motivate the viewer.

Headshot Guidelines

Your headshot should look like you ... on a really good day, the way you want to present yourself at a general audition. Think, who is the person that will walk into the audition? If you change your hair style, length or color, or change your appearance in any way, have new photos taken. Wear clean clothes for the shoot, without a pattern. Avoid whites; go with pastels and colors appropriate for your skin tone. Avoid turtlenecks and confining necklines—they close you off to the viewer. Most photographers recommend that you bring several outfits to a photo shoot.

Actors and actresses should have a shape and style to their hair. If you cut your hair, do so at least one week before the shoot. Your headshot should be crisp and clear. Lighting and focus are critical ingredients for a healthy picture. Avoid artsy effects that glamorize your look. Reality is the key. Casting directors want to know that you are friendly, sincere, and have lots of energy. Give them a clear look at your potential. If you can't cover a sudden outbreak of blemishes with makeup, reschedule (with plenty of advance notice to the photographer).

If your photo needs retouching, don't go overboard. Retouching can make your complexion look pasty and unnatural, and removing lines that express your personality may alter your look altogether.

Digital or Not? While many photographers shoot digitally, some still use 35 mm film. Digital film has some advantages: it is less expensive for the photographer to shoot digitally, as he can "reject" images on the spot that are not favorable, potentially allowing more "good" shots in each session. A typical film shoot will produce one to four rolls of film, and the more rolls used the more you will pay. Digital photos can be viewed right away, so you can actually see how your photos are coming out as they are taken, a real advantage if you see that an outfit isn't working, or your hair is out of place. Digital can also have versatility with color, as it can be printed in color or black-and-white, and once it is put onto a CD, the photo lab can reproduce it in a number of ways. Be aware that just because a photographer shoots digitally does not necessarily mean you will get better shots. But you may have more options to choose from. Conversely, a photographer should not be discounted because he uses traditional film.

An important aspect of your photo is how to crop it. A photographer who crops a photo selects the ideal margin around your face within the frame of the shot. This is part of the photographer's art. Some are better

at it than others, and this is one reason to see their books before you set up your shoot. The basic 8x10 will always be appropriate, especially for commercial and industrial opportunities. Portrait shots (three-quarter and full-body shots) allow casting directors to read more about your physical characteristics and body language. On the other hand, close up shots allow a better look at your face.

When you look at a photographer's book, pay attention to how the faces and bodies of the subjects are centered in the frame. Is there too much space on the sides or the top? Is the subject's face overwhelming, forcing you to hold the picture away from you at arm's length? The decision of how to crop the picture rests in your hands, but your photographer can guide you with sound advice.

Should you smile? Yes and no. Your session will offer you plenty of opportunity to try both. Don't force anything, and most of all don't fake a smile for the camera; it will show on the final print. Relax, be yourself, and remember that a real smile starts and ends with your eyes. If you do go the serious route, don't overdo it. What may feel dramatic or intense to you might make you look unapproachable. You need to look engaging; for some of us that means a fresh smile, for others, a more enigmatic seriousness.

Your photo should reflect the type of work you seek. Commercials, industrials, theatre, film? If you're looking for work in all these areas, gear your photo toward the work you seek. Unfortunately, casting agents and clients rarely have time to imagine you as another type unless they already know your range. More often than not, their needs are immediate and specific. It is nice to have a variety of looks to review after you get contact sheets back from the photographer. If you can afford to produce more than one headshot from the shoot, and if you are in the market for several types of roles, by all means, reproduce a variety. If you don't have the money immediately, you can go back to the CD or negatives later.

If looking through contact sheets, to help you select the best shot, use a magnifying loupe (sold in photo shops) or a magnifying glass to pick up detail. Viewing on a computer screen may allow for increasing the photo to look at greater detail. Stray hairs, lighting, stiff smile, and poor posture may not be obvious on the small frame. You will probably have a difficult time selecting a favorite picture, especially if you have a great photographer. Get advice from an industry contact as well as from friends, relatives, and the photographer. Ultimately, you need to make the final decision. You know you best, yet another person's "read" is always helpful. Most headshots have a matte finish. They can have a white border or no border. The options vary with current style. Do some research before reproducing your 8x10.

Choosing a Photographer

Speak to several photographers who specialize in headshots. Not every photographer has the background needed to shoot actors or performers. Look for those with good reputations and experience in the field. Get referrals from *The Source* and your colleagues. Before you commit to a session, review as many photographers' portfolios as possible. Many photographers' portfolios can be viewed online – doing a web search on a photographer can save a lot of time in evaluating the best choice for you. The photographer is working for you, so you must be completely satisfied with what she or he has to offer, professionally and personally. Rapport and trust are essential. The more comfortable you are with the photographer, the better your shoot will be.

Headshot Styles

Talk to the photographer about styles. Several headshot styles are in varying stages of popularity or vogue. Trends change, so go with a style that suits your purpose and one that you like, whether it's trendy or not.

The basic head-and-shoulders, full-frame headshot is an all-round shot for performers in all aspects of the business. If you only have one shot, start with this. Also popular now are the three-quarter body or full-body shots that give you a chance to do more physically, and close-ups which give a detailed view of a person's face. Another shot to consider is the horizontal shot, now seen quite frequently. Look at all these styles and choose one that works for you. When you review a photographer's book, see what style he or she seems particularly talented in and inquire about it for yourself.

Postcards, Comp Cards and More

When it's time to reproduce your negatives and if you have extra money to spend, consider printing postcards (either 3x5 or 5x7). Select two contrasting shots that show your range, and use these to update producers and casting directors regarding your performances. Such mailers are your chance to show yourself in a different light than your standard shot. Another option, if you have extra cash, is to produce a business card with your commercial photo. Sharp marketing is extremely important.

If you market yourself for industrials, commercials or modeling, you might want to produce a composite sheet of three to five pictures on the same sheet. . This shows your range with contrasting poses and wardrobe or versatility in playing different characters (a doctor, a mechanic, a schoolteacher, etc.). Some actors wonder if they need them, and in general, unless they are looking for print work, or to market themselves as all-purpose background actors, they are not a necessity for the average actor. For an

actor, a Comp Card is usually not essential, unless that actor is seeking print work. In this case, the Comp Card can be used in place of a headshot for modeling/print jobs only. A Comp Card is normally not helpful in acting auditions, as the headshot is the primary photo for the actor; a Comp Card might suggest to the Casting Director that the actor is more of a model, or someone for whom acting is not their main profession. The size of the composite can vary from 5x7 to 8x10, and it costs at least \$200 to produce.

If you are pursuing modeling, find a photographer who specializes in fashion portfolios. Research and interview just as you did for your headshot. Modeling agencies often offer referrals.

Headshot Prices

A sitting in the Boston market ranges from \$350 to \$500. New York photographers charge from \$400 to over \$1,000 for a sitting. Although, with digital cameras these days, many are charging less for "rolls" and more for the complete package. In Boston, the price usually includes 2-3 rolls or equivalent. (Two rolls is approximately 72 shots, 3 rolls is 108 shots.) The number of rolls or shots in a shoot varies with photographer and price, and some will edit out bad shots with you if they are shooting on digital. Ask.

At the shoot, some photographers offer to give you a CD on the spot. Some will send to you contact sheets. Some provide negatives, but most photographers maintain control over the negatives, holding them on file for you. You'll want to ask for how long as they no longer hold on to negatives indefinitely. You should inquire about getting the whole CD, which might be an additional cost. Some photographers even include retouching and a print for you to reproduce.

Questions to Ask Photographers

- How much do you charge for a headshot session?
- Do you use a Digital Camera, Traditional Film, or both?
- How many rolls of film do you shoot or how many shots?
- Will I get contact sheets, a CD or negatives? If a CD, is there an additional cost? Who keeps the negatives? If the photographer keeps the negatives, ask for how long? If contact sheets, what is the turn-around time for contact sheets?
- Do you retouch photos or can you recommend someone who does? If you do, what is your charge, and what do you do with the retouched images? Can I get a digital copy of the retouched image?

- How many 8x10 prints, if any, are included in the package price? What is the charge for extra prints?
- Do you have a make-up specialist available? What is the charge for this service?
- How many outfits do you recommend I bring?
- If I'm not happy with the results of the session, what is your policy regarding another shoot?
- Do you produce a photo with my name on the front?
- When can I see your book?

When you select the photographer, inquire immediately about an appointment. Many of the best photographers are booked weeks in advance.

Headshot Reproduction

The price and quality of reproduction for headshot photographs vary. As a rule, you get what you pay for, so check out any lab's work before you assume it will be good enough. You need sharp and crisp headshots, with excellent contrast. Do not scrimp when reproducing your headshot. This is the most important marketing tool you have; respect yourself and your profession. For a list of reproduction services, see *The Source*.

Questions to Ask the Photo Lab

- Can you put my name on the front? How much will it cost? What typestyles do you have available and what size do you recommend?
- How much will it cost to make the copy negative?
- What is the price for each print and what are the price breaks for ordering large quantities?
- What are the costs for borderless versus bordered photos? Is there a charge for matte finishes?
- How long will it take to reproduce my headshot?
- What other reproduction options do you offer (postcards, flyers)? Are special packages available for performers?

Resources

An excellent reference book is *The Actor's Picture/Resume Book* by Jill Charles with theatrical photographer Tom Bloom. It contains information about finding a photographer, the shooting session, reproductions, and the resume. It's illustrated with dozens of photos and contains worksheets to help you get organized. You can buy this book at Baker's Plays or via mail from Theatre Directories.

StageSource keeps members' resumes and headshots on file in the office. Come to the office to see how other actors and theatre professionals have presented themselves. Listings of Boston-area headshot photographers and reproduction services, as well as theatre companies and other theatre-related services, can be found in *The Source*. See www.stagesource.org for more information.

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