

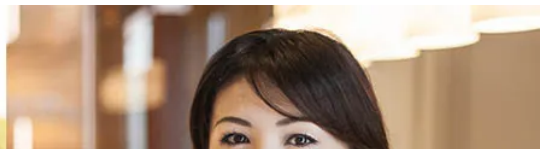
Headshot Posing Guide: 5 Simple Poses to Get You Started

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**A SIMPLE
GUIDE**

TO HEADSHOT POSING

What are the best headshot poses for **corporate**, business, or even **family photography**?

In this article, I share five of my favorite poses, including basic options for beginners as well as more advanced ideas for experienced headshot photographers. I also share a handful of my favorite headshot posing tips just in case you need a little extra guidance.

By the time you're done, you'll have a set of poses you can use in your own sessions. Memorize them, print them out, or even store them on your phone – that way, if you're in a photoshoot

and you're struggling to direct your client, you can whip out my [headshot photography](#) posing examples and capture some beautiful results!

Headshot posing basics: getting started

Every great headshot pose starts with the same fundamental characteristics.

First, ask your subject to bring their shoulders back and push out their chest.

Then direct your subject to lean in with their forehead. In other words, they should always keep their forehead leaning *ever so slightly* toward the lens (while pushing their face slightly forward). Note that the forehead lean can be subtle, and you should take care to ensure it looks natural.

Check out the two images below:



For the left-hand image, I asked my subject to keep her head straight. And for the right-hand image, I asked my subject to do the forehead lean. Can you see the difference? The right-hand shot is slightly more engaging, more dynamic, and features extra depth.

Note that you'll almost always need to adjust the subject after they've leaned their forehead. Most people tend to lean in too far or lower their chin too much, so ask them to make slight adjustments until you find an ideal angle.

Then continue one with one of these professional poses:

1. Crossed arms

This first pose comes from traditional headshots, and it's super easy to pull off: the crossed-arms pose.

Of course, it's hardly an original pose, but by simply changing location, asking the subject to add a slight lean, and loosening up the tightness in the crossed arms, this pose can feel surprisingly modern. Plus, sometimes a classic headshot is what the client wants!

In the example below, the subject is leaning slightly back into the brick wall while crossing his arms and maintaining an upright posture. When asking women to do this pose, I like to encourage them to cross their arms loosely; otherwise, the shot can feel quite severe and cold. Men have a bit more room to keep the arms tight, but be sure to avoid that same severity.





You can always use the location to create different moods. For instance, the shot below relies on the well-lit location to add warmth:





Since the subject is a woman, I asked her to add a slight hip tilt and to drop the shoulder closest to the camera. My goal was to soften up the crossed-arms pose, which can sometimes feel too harsh.

2. The lean

Many clients want a *lifestyle* feel in their headshots – and an easy way to get this more relaxed, informal look is to take the subject outside and ask them to lean against a wall.

For one, a simple lean against a wall or railing can make the shot feel so much more natural than a rigid-backed image. And the wall will add context to the shot, plus the wall texture can inject a bit of character in an otherwise-bland image.

In the example below, the subject is leaning against a wall. The texture of the wall adds interest, and the lean softens the pose for a natural look. We didn't want the shot to look *too* informal – the subject is a lawyer – so the client stuck with a suit jacket, which contrasted nicely against the wall.



Note: Even though the subject should lean, it's still important for them to maintain good posture. Ask them to lean with their bottom half while preventing their entire back from slouching into the wall. Alternatively, they can gently lean with one shoulder to maintain balance while keeping their posture upright.

If the subject starts to look a bit stiff, have them “shake it out,” take a deep breath, and settle back into the pose. Sometimes, they just need a break from all the posing!

Here is another example of a leaning headshot pose:



In this case, the subject wanted to look casual – while also coming off as polished and professional. The subject leaned one arm on the railing for a casual feeling, but the nice clothes and the upright posture kept the shot relatively businesslike.

(In this case, the crossed-arms pose would have created an image that was too formal for the client's needs, but the lean was perfect.)

3. The upright sit

Sitting poses work well for headshots, and you actually have a few options to work with. For instance, you can ask your subject to sit on a set of stairs with their hands joined over their knees:



Ideally, the knees end up slightly higher than the hips, which can easily happen on stairs. In the example above, the subject is sitting on steps, loosely resting her hands over her knees while still keeping her posture upright (very important!). If you're not careful, a sitting pose can come off as too casual – but the resting hands and the upright posture help to avoid such an issue.

Alternatively, you can ask your subject to position themselves symmetrical to the camera before leaning slightly forward, with their legs apart and their hands folded together. This is a hugely popular pose for men, and it works especially well for medium-formal shoots.

I also like to use sitting poses when working with multiple headshot subjects. For this next example, I asked the subjects to sit on different stairs (my goal here was primarily to balance out their height differences!):



In the photo above, the subject on the top step is leaning slightly on the railing, which helps show a bit more of his torso. His arm is casually resting over his leg (similar to the popular male pose I just discussed). The front subject is leaning back and to his left, helping to unify the two subjects. Since these two men are business partners, it was important to maintain a sense of camaraderie in their poses.

4. The walking subject

I *love* walking headshot poses, and here's why:

It loosens up the subject's body if they are a bit stiff in front of the camera.

It encourages a more natural expression because you can chat with them as they walk.

It creates a sense of movement that translates into a deeper connection with the viewer.

Plus, walking headshots are easy to do, especially outdoors. Just find a nice background, take a few steps back from your subject, and ask them to walk toward you. As they go, fire off a series of shots (your camera's burst mode can be helpful here, but isn't essential).

Because you don't have as much control over the background with a walking subject – they'll be constantly moving, after all – I'd recommend using a longer lens and a wide aperture to blur out any distracting background elements.

And as always, encourage your subject to maintain good posture while walking (and if possible, to lean their forehead forward!).



5. Do an action pose

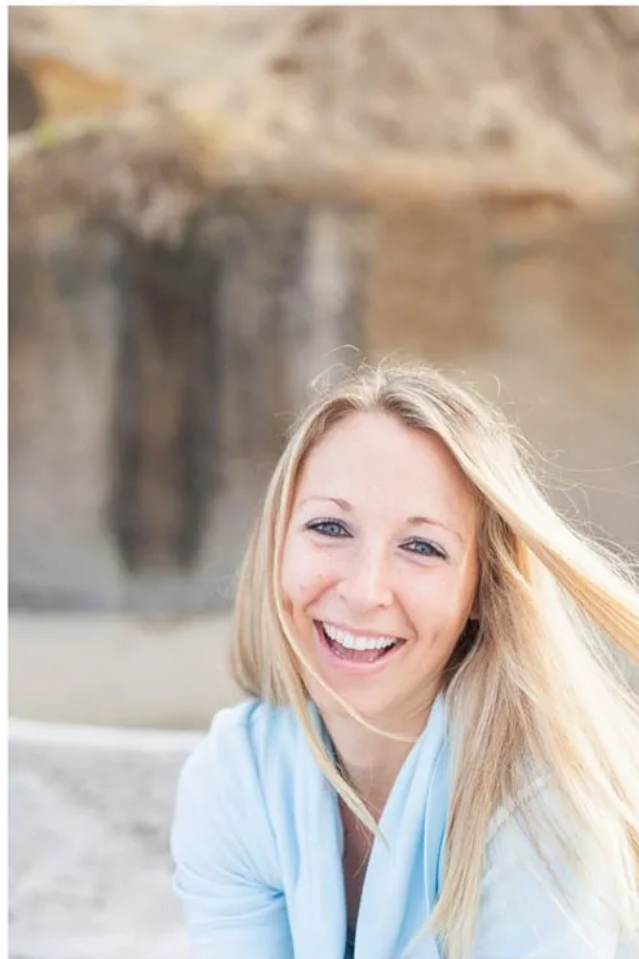
This is where modern headshots get fun.

You're photographing a subject, often for their business – and you have the opportunity to express something about what they do and/or what their personality is like.

If they make a product, ask them to show you a product (and snap a photo!). If they do some sort of training, ask them to perform a bit of what they do. If they have a hobby, ask them to bring out some gear, get dressed in uniform, and so on.

With this type of fluid posing technique, it's not so much about giving detailed directions; instead, just let the subject do their thing. Keep your camera at the ready, and capture some headshots *full* of personality.

For the photos below, I gave my subjects free rein to do what they wanted. I then snapped quite a few frames, as the final images needed to capture movement and activity, *plus* feature flattering expressions.





The best headshot poses: final words

Hopefully, you now have a few poses you can use for your next photoshoot! Of course, always make sure the pose you use is a good fit for the interests of the client (and don't use these posing ideas as substitutes for getting to know your client, either!).

Now over to you:

Which of these headshot poses is your favorite? Which do you plan to use? Share your thoughts in the comments below!

