

Transcript for: HOW TO SHOOT A TALKING HEAD, Part 1

Video Runs: 14:45

A talking head is absolutely the single MOST common, and most versatile form of video. If you learn ONE THING about how to make video, learn how to make a simple talking head.

You can do a lot with it. And done the right way, they're also drop dead easy.

Online, a talking head video can be one of the most effective things because it lets you relate one-on-one with people and that's what the internet lacks, the human element. A talking head video is the best way to inject that missing human element back into your website and you simply can't get that with a screen capture or slide show.

SO WHEN YOU COMBINING HOW EFFECTIVE THEY CAN BE WITH HOW EASY THEY ARE TO MAKE, TALKING HEAD IS THE #1 RECOMMENDED ONLINE METHOD FOR NOVICES TO GET THE MOST BANG FOR THEIR BUCK WHEN IT COMES TO ONLINE VIDEO.

By far, the simplest way to make a nice-looking talking head video is to use a webcam and some kind of auto record/uploader like what YouTube offers. One webcam takes care of your audio and video. You're so close to the webcam that the audio picks up just fine. Webcams don't need much light so you can get fantastic lighting using simple home fixtures, even windows. The instant record and auto uploader takes care of several steps in one swoop. You don't have any editing, you don't have any

conversion, and the upload is a real simple process. You Tube or whatever service you use should convert it into all the popular formats for playback online and of course that gets trickier overtime with every new gadget. So that alone is good for the ease factor. This is the wham bam thank you ma'am of online video production. Drop dead simple and highly recommended.

Now if you want to use a better camera, it's just a little bit more work. You put the camera on a tripod, hopefully you can get about 8-10 feet back and zoom in slightly, That semi telephoto lens is most flattering to the face and is more likely to create an out of focus background. So the more room you have n setting it up, the more depth of field you'll have in your picture and that's all for the better. So if you're setting a regular video camera up on a tripod, look for lots of room both behind the person and in front of them and that's going to give you your best shot. Now of course if you're doing it this way and the camera is that far away from the person, the audio is never going to pick up well unless you have a lavalier microphone pinned onto their lapel and then plugged into the camera. That brings up an issue in that a lot of home level video cameras simply don't have a place to plug the microphone in. So if you are going to do this kind of talking head, you need to have a camera that accepts an external microphone input.

A talking head shot is framed up as close-up shot of the person, maybe showing down to the waist, either looking directly into the camera or slightly off camera in what's called a 3/4 profile and that would be more like if you are talking to someone right off camera and that can have a different effect on the viewer in terms of how they perceive the information coming out of the person and how much they feel they are part of the conversation.

If you are looking directly into the camera that is more intimate for the viewer than if you're talking off camera, "Yes Joe, I know what you mean," having that 3/4 profile. Some of the more complex terms in video production include head room and nose room, which refer to how much space you allow when framing up your shot. Here comes the train, can you hear it?

If you're shooting a talking head from a camera on a tripod several feet away, then the procedure is to load that video into your computer, do some minor editing to it, perhaps add a name super across the bottom, maybe edit it together with some other stuff and then you convert it to what's known as a video sharing format and then upload it to the web. Common sharing formats are .mov, .flv, .wmv, MPEG4. So that is the final step when you do a video where you edit it in any video editing program. You convert it to a sharing format and then upload it to the web.

What are you going to say? Here's a little secret. Most people do much better with a talking head video if you write out the script ahead of time and rehearse. Newbies get the impression that they should be able to do it off the cuff in one take and I'm here to tell you that's not realistic for hardly anyone. Viewers never see all the bad takes! But believe me, as a video editor I spent my life looking at the bad takes! So don't feel bad in any way shape or form if it takes you several takes to get it right! It takes most of those professional several takes too you just never see that.

So the best way to do it is to write out a concise script, or at least your bullet points, stick to the point. Rehearse it out loud before the camera is even set up. Reading it out loud is a whole different experience than reading it to yourself and any video script is meant to be heard and not

read so that gives you leeway with your different styles and grammar and sentence structure. You can be much more conversational in a video than you could be in something like an English term paper. So when you write your script keep it very conversational and loose.

Experience and practice take away any uncomfortable feeling of videotaping your talking head. This course provides some script guidelines and fill-in-the-blank talking head scripts that you can download out of the videos.

If the script is long, it makes it easier to shoot it in chunks and edit later. That makes it much easier for on camera person and I'm here to tell you, I've worked with a lot of people who were big celebrities and they're supposed to do a 3 or 4 minute gig on camera, they don't do the whole thing at once. You break it into pieces. Otherwise they're never going to get through it. So that's a real good tip for you when shooting your talking head. Break it into chunks. Some people do better than others when it comes to ad-libbing on camera. Ask yourself if you're the type of person who is pretty chatty and can talk up a storm at a party then you're probably going to do better at ad-libbing on camera. But the problem with that is people will start rambling. You really don't want to ramble. so that's when it helps to have your script written out ahead of time and you go through a delete stuff where you are rambling and you can keep it much more precise and to the point that way.

I personally do it both ways. Ad-libbing is much faster than doing something where you have an exact script and feel the need to get it right word for word for word. That takes longer. I personally do it both ways and ad lib on familiar subjects, using a script when I need to be 100% precise with words.

I read through the script at least 4-5 times before turning on the camera, I want to get completely comfortable with what I am reading.

Then I use something to function like a teleprompter. You can do something cheesy like scotch tape a script to the bottom of your camera lens or if you're using a webcam, you can have your document open on your computer screen. That will help you know what to say and you can download the fill-in-the-blank sample scripts that I have provided.

Now the next thing we are going to talk about with talking head videos is lighting. Lighting is very important but it doesn't have to be difficult. #1 mistake I see with talking head videos online is bad lighting. And people tend to make the same mistake over and over and over. The light source, whatever it is in their room, is falling behind the person not on their face. You want the majority of the light falling on the person's face because that is the subject matter of your picture. So if you've got windows in your room, work with your windows. Get to their side, don't get right in front of the windows because that is going to turn you into a silhouette.

Lighting on the face always looks better if it is what you call diffused lighting. That means it is soft and gentle and does not create harsh shadows. You achieve diffused lighting by bouncing it against the ceiling or against the wall. Or, if you have the fancy, professional photographic light fixtures, all these gizmos and gadgets exist to diffuse the light, the umbrellas, the soft boxes, all those provide diffused lighting,. So no matter what light you have on your face make sure it's diffused lighting and like I said you can diffuse it by bouncing it against the ceiling or against the wall. Or, if you're in a brightly lit room and you have the windows placed in the right way, that's going to be nice diffused lighting. We human beings go to a lot of trouble to make room lighting diffused. When you use a light bulb

that's painted white on the inside the whole point of that white paint is to diffuse the lighting. A lamp shade is there to diffuse the lighting. So with a lot of these modern cameras, particularly the web cams that don't need much lighting, simple clip on fixtures that you can put anywhere can be very handy because you can get it close to the face. You can clip lights onto a ceiling fan or shelf and bounce it on the wall to achieve your diffused lighting.

Now I am going to talk about 3-point lighting, which is the professional technique for getting the most flattering lighting on a face. Basically 3-point lighting or triangle lighting is a simple technique where you have 3 points of light relative to the person's head, coming at them in a triangular pattern around their head. This gets light on all 3 dimensions of a person's head and typically this is the most flattering look. And it is done with the one light off to the side that is your brightest and it's called a key light. Now it is a diffused light and is your brightest so that gives light to the majority of your face. Then you put a second light over here that's less bright that is called a fill light and it fills in some of the shadows caused by the key light. The third light in the triangle lighting technique is back light. And I have one on me right now and it makes a big difference. It does best with lots of hair and I've got lots of hair and it's also on my curtain behind me which helps make a nice background and texture to the curtain.

Now my back light, I'm just using a simple webcam so I don't need a whole lot of light, right? **My backlight is just a 40 watt light bulb that in a clip on fixture to the ceiling tiles and I've got it on a dimmer.**

Dimmers can be very helpful when you're doing lighting because without the dimmer it is too bright, it's too much and it glares a little bit. With the

dimmer in there it gives just enough light to separate me from the background. So that is the professional way to light a face, with triangle lighting.

With all those tips you can get the best results in whatever situation you're in. Look around and see what lamps or windows or other things you have and then place them properly relative to your face. Make the ones in the front as diffused as possible. And there you go, quality lighting for your talking head.