

Transcript For: How-To Shoot A Talking Head, Part 2
Video Runs: 11:58

Next, we're going to talk about BACKGROUNDS for your talking head. The first thing you need to realize is that not much will show because it is framed up mostly on the face. So the background is minimized but still, you want a nice one. **If possible, make the background say something about the person on camera.** In other words, look for something that is around you that will say something relevant about who this person is. Let's say you are interviewing a high school principal. Something like a row of hallway lockers behind him would immediately say high school. So when you are thinking about your background for your talking head first think what's available? What's around you? Look around and see what you've got and see if there's anything that can be relevant to who the person is. You're talking to a surgeon? Can you interview them inside a surgical suite? That would immediately identify them visually as to who they are.

Now if you can't do something like that, almost anyone will look good in a homey environment look or business atmosphere. Either one of those are easy to create no matter where you are. Look around and get some props that will work. A vase, a lamp, a computer screen thing that you can put in the background. Then clear out whatever clutter is behind you to make a nice, neat looking background. It's very easy to stage a small area and remember like I said not that much is going to show behind them. **Bookshelves make great backgrounds.**

Another alternative which is what I am doing right now is I've got curtains draped behind me. The room I am actually in is not the world's prettiest room and the wall behind me is just a plain ugly color and I didn't have that many props plus I wanted to keep it simple so I just took some cloth and draped it back there. We put up some curtain rods. I used two different colors of cloth and I've draped it and got a little bit of light on it. And it looks nice. You can take curtains with you anywhere you go. You can also take a clothes rack, the kind that you can buy cheap at a store like Wal Mart and that gives you a rolling background you can drape your cloth over. They very portable and you can always use them for a background if nothing else is available. And in this particular situation, I cut videos here all the time so I want a nice background there all the time. So we did it with the curtains.

Now, I want to talk about green screen with talking heads. I talk to a lot of newbies and they get the impression that green screen is mandatory. Now I do not quite know where they get that impression that it is mandatory but it's NOT. Green screen can be used for a talking head video. What green screen does of course is remove the background behind you, you have to have solid green or solid blue or some other color but then you remove that background and replace it with any digital image of your choice. So that can be nice if there is a real reason to do that. If you need to have your talking head video appear as though they are standing on top of Mt. Everest and you don't have the budget to go to Mt. Everest or you're too lazy to carry all the stuff up that high, so you want to fake it, that's when you'd use green screen and change the background out from behind somebody. But other than that, **green screen makes it a whole lot more**

trouble, and a whole lot more likely that it's not going to get done, and adds a lot of steps but it's not for any real benefit. So I want to dispel the myth among newbie video makers that it's mandatory that you do green screen for your talking head. It's simply not. I've spoken to so many people and bless them, I feel bad because some of them have gone out and bought green screen kits when all they want to do is simple talking head videos. It could very well be that whatever is behind them in their living room would look just fine. This is a BACKGROUND, it fades into the background. So green screen, although it can be nice is not necessary. Just so I have made that clear.

You can get a green-screen like effect by standing in front of a big flat screen monitor and having something playing on that plasma monitor. That will look like you green screened in a digital background. And that can look very nice. A lot of people like to green screen almost every talking head they do and use some kind of digital background that is kind of nebulous about what it says about the person on camera and that is a common technique and you can learn it. Make sure your lighting is very even and you get good backlighting that will put the person on camera separate from the background but because it does make it so much extra effort please consider that extra effort before you go to the trouble of green screening your talking head. You might just want to do a simple background like whatever is in the background anyway. If you just clean it up a little bit to make it look nice and uncluttered it can make a very good background just the way it is.

Next we are going to talk about audio for your talking head. And audio for your talking head is super important. People will not tolerate poor sound. If they cannot hear what the person is saying, they will turn it off and I have seen that time and time and time again. They will tolerate poor video quality long before they will tolerate poor sound quality. So what this boils down to is that it helps to have whatever microphone you are using close to the speakers mouth.

Right now I'm using a webcam and I am so close that it picks up just fine even though of course it is not the world's greatest microphone. So lavaliers microphones which are the little tiny things that clip on to your lapel, those are great for talking heads. And handheld microphones are good for talking heads although those look a little clunkier. But that is something you have right there next to your mouth. Now, the microphone will need to be plugged into your camera. So you have to have a camera that will accommodate that. A lot of cameras on the lower end of the scale don't handle plugged in microphones. One pocket camera that does is the Kodak Zi8 and that's one reason why that camera is very popular because it will accept an additional microphone. (The Zi8 has been discontinued)

You can make any microphone work if you have a camera that will accept a microphone input. Now there's two basic kinds of microphone inputs. One is the tiny little stereo plug which is going to be on smaller cameras and there's the XLR input which is going to be on larger cameras. So whatever camera you have that accepts a microphone make sure you have the right kind of microphone for that camera. If you run into trouble there and need adapters rest assured that you can go to stores like Radio Shack and find

adapters and doodads of all kinds in order to take an XLR microphone down to a stereo plug or vice versa if you wanted to do that.

One of the most important things for audio when you're shooting something like this is to make sure and silence all the extraneous noise before recording. That is the single most important thing and makes a whole lot more difference than what microphone you actually use. From the best microphones to the cheapest you need to make sure the entire room is quiet even if you turn off the white noise like air conditioners and fans that makes a big difference. Then have your on-camera person speak loudly with oomph and articulate well and your audio should be just fine. If you are using the on camera mic, you have to have it close to the person who is speaking within a couple of feet. And if you have it that close and have all the background noise turned off, then the audio you pick up is probably going to be just fine. But it is best to have a separate microphone close to the person's mouth who is speaking.

Now, I'm going to change gears. Lots of videos talking heads come, not from one person parking themselves in front of a camera, but **setting up a two-person interview** often, only one person really shows most of the time but there is two people during the taping of the interview.

Now if you are doing it this way, you place everything like this. Here are your two people facing each other a little bit off center. Your camera can go either here or here. Let's stick with here. Set up some supplemental lighting in these places. If you want to use triangle lighting, places 3 lights around your interview subject like this. If you don't have 3 lights you can stick with just one key light.

Now, if you have two cameras, you would set the other one here. Generally speaking, these are done with one camera so if you only have one camera, you set it up here on the major speaker. After the interview is over, you move the camera over here to take some reversal shots of the reporter, the second person involved in the interview and these are known as cutaways and these are done after the interview is over.

Now remember just a second ago when we were placing the camera? **That brings me to one of the few rules in video making. The line of axis. (Also called the 180 degree rule)**

In order to have the people facing each other when you cut back and forth between the shots, you have to have both cameras on the same side of the line of axis. Pick a side, one or the other... both cameras on the same side. Or if you're using the technique where you're shooting the cutaways later, stay on the correct side of this line. Otherwise people don't look as if they are speaking to each other. You've got what's called a screen direction problem. So if you are doing any kind of interview with two people remember the line of axis and your screen direction issues when you're placing your cameras.

There you have it, as quick as I could, all the best tips and tricks for make a talking head video. Use this knowledge to make yourself some powerful and effective online videos today.