

How, When, and Why You Need an Updated Headshot

By Mindy McHorse

Unless this is your first time reading *The Writer's Life*, you'll see I'm including an updated photo of myself.

I've dragged my feet on this one, for a couple reasons. For starters, I just haven't gotten around to it. I can't say it was high on my priority list (though it should have been, as you'll discover why below).

But there's also the tiny, somewhat wistful concern that no other photo will ever be as good.

After all, my previous photo was taken seven years ago. I was a month into life as a newlywed, fit and thin thanks to a form-fitting wedding dress. It was also before I'd ever experienced sleepless nights, crying babies, and under-eye baggage.



Mindy McHorse

My husband's best friend, a photographer, took the photo. I remember a golden afternoon of barbecue, wine, and crisp fall air the day he snapped this shot.

You could say that photo reminds me of a special, carefree time in my life. I was younger. I hadn't experienced grief. Not a single crease could be found on my face.

All vanity and happy memories aside, there are two things wrong with staying attached to a head shot from your past:

1. **We live in a visual era.** The photo associated with your website, your social media profiles, and anything you write needs to be current by at least a few years. It needs to look like *you* so readers and clients will recognize you.
2. **It gives the impression you're not proud of who you are or where you are in life.** Like you're hanging on to a past that's slipped away, and you don't know how to move forward.

I once went to the book signing of an author I was excited to meet. But the person behind the table wasn't the person on the back of the books I'd read. I'd estimate her photo was out of date by at least 15 years. Not only did this confuse me, it made me wonder if she was ashamed of herself or her age – though as a 50-something, she was still quite attractive.

These are the reasons I finally decided to suck it up and get a new photo of myself.

I hope you'll take this message as a loud and clear call to go out and get a professional head shot if you don't have one, or if your current one is more than five years old.

I'm not saying you should run out and get a glamour shot. But at the same time, an amateur snapshot or a selfie just won't do.

As a professional writer who expects to be paid what you're worth, you need a well-done photo that shows your readers and clients that you take your writing career seriously.

Here are a few tips for a good headshot that markets your professional writing skills gracefully:

1. Get a shot of your head and shoulders, or from the waist up. Don't go for a full-body shot.
2. Wear solid colors and stay away from flashy jewelry. Nothing clutters up a photo like busy patterns and multi-color prints.
3. Get several photos taken with various poses and facial expressions so you have choices when you go to put together your marketing materials.
4. Spring for a professional hair stylist and makeup artist if you can manage it (this goes for guys, too). Keep in mind that a natural look will go over best, but at the same time, a little color can draw out your natural features much better than a camera lens can.

Finally, when you get your head shot taken, make sure your photographer knows how you plan to use it. Get written permission for the rights so you can post the photos in whatever marketing venue you please.

What about you? What are your hesitations or questions when it comes to headshots? Share below.

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15 Responses to "How, When, and Why You Need an Updated Headshot"

As to the effect of visuals, your new(old)headshot is a great attention getter to your message. Also when you are able to append a great biography with credentialed examples to your image, the image and you are amplified.

mike1000 – over a year ago

Glad the real you has appeared. I was suspicious because the one I use is also 5+ years old and looks like it was taken on the balcony of a Greek Island Hotel. Actually it was a selfie taken in my bedroom. The background I got from Google and just put them together. You just never know what you are looking at.

Guest (Robert Phillips) – over a year ago

I did my own head shot because I'm on disability. Quite a few people told me it looks professionally done. I may change it in a year or two but I'm happy with my portrait as it is.

Bruce Atchison – over a year ago

Great new pic, Mindy! The shorter haircut is young and fresh!

Mel Woods – over a year ago

Thanks Mindy - I needed this nudge. I was asked for a headshot and sent one a little too old and a lot unprofessional.

There is a local photographer that does professional headshots...I will follow up with him.

Guest (Bette Arnold) – over a year ago

Mindy, Hello! I just wanted to comment that your new photo is absolutely perfect!

All My Best, Larry E

Guest (Larry E) – over a year ago

Hi Mindy, I just haven't gotten around to my headshot but, it's next on my list. I have been researching a lot and I am writing my own book. I'm in the process of building my website and lots of other stuff. By the way, you took a beautiful photo.

Wanda Simpson Miller – over a year ago

I have a wife and five daughters. When the camera came out I was always the photographer. I have never been one to search out a picture of myself. I can see by your article that the times for pictures of myself need to become a reality.

J Milton Raber – over a year ago

Beautiful photo Mindy! I definitely need a new photo as mine is 8 years old (and yes, was a selfie)!

Donna Kaluzniak – over a year ago

Exactly 500 years ago, when Leonardo da Vinci was exactly my age (63), he was preparing to leave his motherland Italy forever. The ONLY headshots amongst his few belongings were his Mona Lisa and St. John the Baptist. The former: his very own Bruce Jenner-like "Caitlyn" spin on himself. And the latter: a presaged vision of what Harpo Marx would someday look like.

The King of France LOVED them. So, if you're not w/ the one who loves your headshot, love the one you'll someday find who does.

Guest (Chris Morris) – over a year ago

Thank you all, for sharing your kind and thoughtful comments!

Two thoughts - true, that a "real" headshot could be out of a new writer's price range... so you might consider asking around to see if any friends/family have an interest in photography who could help you make a great one. And another thought is... approach a photographer whose work you love and offer to write marketing copy for him/her. Could become a beautiful arrangement!

Mindy – over a year ago

Your professional shot looks great! I will have to check around, among friends and family, because as a brand new member (day 1), after years of chronic unemployment, I simply and literally don't have the money to pay a professional. Yet. And the shot I've been using is more than 10 years old, and over 100 pounds over my current weight! Huge incentive! Thanks for the hard nudge.
Brenda Russell

Writerinfect – over a year ago

The background needs to have enough contrast with both your skin color and clothing that it they show-up. Ideally the background should also have the same hues as your skin, hair or eyes, but be much lighter or much darker than your skin and hair. To get a feel for what I mean, watch talk-show hosts on TV, paying special attention to the backgrounds.

Guest (Mary O) – over a year ago

This really made me think...the picture I was thinking about using is one that I love, but its a selfie and doesn't have the best lighting. It's currently on my Twitter page. My good friend owns a photography business and has long since said he'd do my headshot for free, but now I'm thinking I can offer him some marketing copy as more incentive. Thanks so much for the tip!

Jessica Terry – over a year ago

As J Milton Rather said above whenever the camera cam out I was always the one holding it, really no excuses but it was funny when I realized that I don't have a picture of myself head OR body shot maybe a little self councils about asking a friend to take one for me and suddenly realize I might be one of those people that never want a picture taken of them, but know that's not true,I think I might be vain enough to want one and then think maybe no one really wants a picture of me, I'll find someone to do it now and add it later if possible.

Lee M Krupski – over a year ago

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