

You Oughtta Be in Pictures ... or How to Appear Professional on TV or Video

Not everyone is born with TV savvy. If you are not destined to become "an overnight success" by investing ten years in acting and voice lessons, here's a crash course in how to appear professional on television or video.

Whether you are a business owner who wants to be in your own commercials, a potential guest on a news or interview program or a speaker appearing on your own tapes, you will benefit from the following information.

Your on-camera appearances might be live or taped, in a studio or on location. There may or may not be interviewers and/or live audiences. You may become a "talking head" communicating directly into the camera.

Regardless of the circumstances, you should be prepared physically, mentally, and technologically. Know how to turn on the audience before you turn on the camera.

Physical

Get lean. Television makes you look at least 10 pounds heavier. Wear light and comfortable clothing --preferably classic styles.

Don't wear red, white, black or fine stripes. They each adversely affect the quality of video images. Avoid reflective, gaudy and dangling jewelry.

Wear nothing to distract attention from you and your message. Keep your face and neck visible; avoid hats, fluffy scarves or huge earrings.

Have a simple, pleasant hairstyle that does not cast shadows on your

face. Women and men need to wear a base make-up and use powder. Television lighting washes out facial tones, so add some color. Hire a professional make-up artist or learn to do it yourself. If your eyes are bloodshot, use eye drops.

Take voice lessons and practice with a tape recorder.

Mental

Arrive early to familiarize yourself with the surroundings. Find a place to relax and gather your thoughts. If there's no greenroom to keep you calm, create one in your mind.

Check your attitude --accept that things can and do go wrong. Machines sometimes break and humans make mistakes.

Whatever happens, stay calm and go with the flow. The show will go on.

Technology

Take advantage of this visual medium and plan to use: props, charts, slides, photos or high-quality videotape. If you have any of these resources, inform the producer or director ahead of time. Don't show up and say, "By the way, I have a chart and some props."

The lighting can be harsh. Practice keeping your head slightly tilted up while not squinting. A professional lighting director will put you in your best light, literally. Don't rock or swivel in your chair or wander too far around the stage. Know your mark and stay on it.

Discuss, map out, and rehearse your presentation with the director. If

you are unable to rehearse, give verbal cues, such as: "This next point is very important. or "I am about to go over to my chart and show you..." This allows the crew to anticipate and follow your moves. They can change the framing, switch cameras or go to graphics. It also helps for you to speak and move more deliberately.

Learn to use various microphones. Practice directing the pick-up area of the mic to where your voice is being projected.

Helpful hint: wrap your fingers like you are grasping a pole with your thumb loosely resting lengthwise on the microphone, then always aim your thumb toward your mouth.

A wireless lavalier microphone pinned or clipped just below your neck should be centered so you won't sound louder or softer as your head turns in different directions.

Talk at a comfortable volume. The audio engineer will monitor and adjust the recording levels. Avoid drastic volume changes such as whispering or shouting.

Repeat questions or incorporate questions into answers. For example, if someone asks, "How old are you?" don't say, "35", say, "I am 35 years old." Speak clearly in complete thoughts; you will sound smarter and less likely be taken out of context.

During interviews, ignore the cameras. It is inappropriate to look directly into the lens unless you are asked to speak directly to the viewing audience. Pause before

answering. Maintain normal eye contact and a conversational speaking style.

When there is a live-audience, treat the camera as a bystander or just another audience member. Share your eye contact and attention accordingly. While making important points, consider employing a technique used by professional comedians. They deliver the set-up to the audience and the punch line into the camera.

Audience

Warm-up your audience. Explain what will be happening during taping. Remind them to remain attentive and responsive.

Suggest appropriate attire —professional or casual depending on your topic and needs. Have them

arrive early to get used to seeing equipment and crew movement.

Rehearse your audience involvement unless it might destroy the spontaneity. If the audience will ask questions or participate, practice using a hand-held microphone.

It is imperative to have audience members sign release forms giving written permission to show their image wherever and whenever you would like.

When delivering messages directly into the lens, smile and make love to the camera. Whether using a TelePrompTer, cue cards or memory, imagine you are talking to a relative, co-worker or friend. Communicating with one person will make each member of your audience feel like you are talking only to him or her. This intimacy is

the power of television. Use home video for practicing eye contact, body language and vocal quality. Play it back, look at gestures and listen for pitch, pace and volume. Work on developing a commanding presence while appearing and sounding natural.

In summary, prepare yourself both physically and mentally. Work with the technology until you can act as if it's not even there. And, respect your audience. The greatest performers in any arena are often dedicated professionals who work very hard behind-the-scenes to make it look easy. With preparation, practice and persistence, you can look like you have been a pro all your life. It's show time!

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