



Don't let
your headshot
prevent you from
getting ahead.

A how-to guide to making
a high-quality headshot.



You've passed the vetting process and you're a part of the Toptal network. But remember, remote jobs are like office jobs—you have to make a good first impression! Your headshot is your first visual contact with a client and a high-quality one can improve your chances of getting hired. To give yourself an edge, follow these simple guidelines.



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Let's clear things up.

How to keep things in focus

Photos need to be high resolution (at least 1000 pixels wide x 1000 pixels tall), in focus, and not grainy. Most 5MP and up camera phones will do the trick.

✓ Acceptable



High resolution.



In focus.

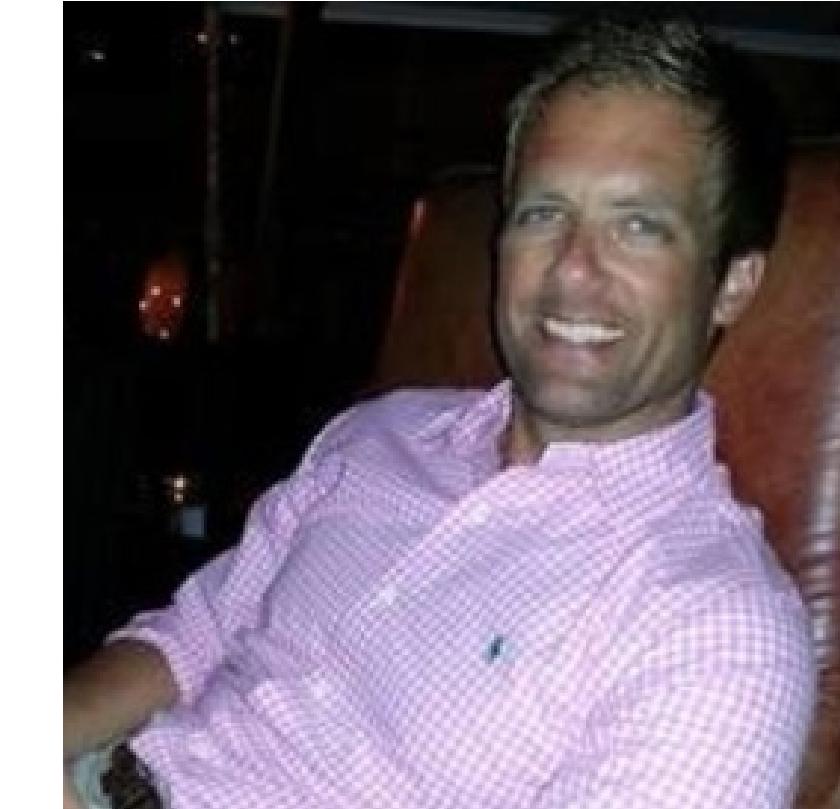


Well-lit face.

✗ Not Acceptable



Low resolution.



Out of focus.



Harsh shadow on face.

Avoid extremes. Stay neutral.

How to choose a background

Light grey works best as a background color and avoid anything that's too light or too dark.

If you go with a more complex background, inside or outside, the focus should be on you with the background blurred.

✓ **Acceptable**



Blank background and proper lighting.
No harsh shadows are present.



Blurred background in an architectural /
natural environment.

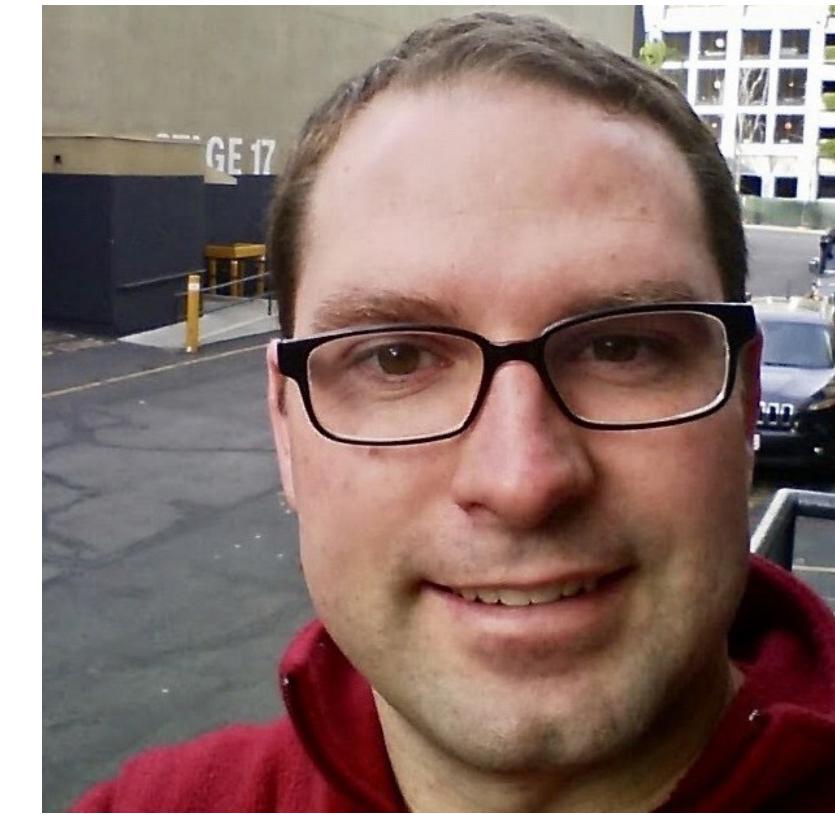


Well-lit and blurred background in a
professional environment.

✗ **Not Acceptable**



Unprofessional environment, displaying
a vacation scene.



Background is not blurred and it's displaying
a non-professional environment.



Background is not blurred and it's displaying
a non-professional environment.

Newsflash: Lighting is everything.

How to light your shot

Whether inside or outside, make sure the lighting is even. An indoor flash is fine as long as the flash doesn't look obvious in your photo. When outside, avoid direct sunlight.

✓ **Acceptable**



Natural sunlight, with lighting that is not too bright or too dark.

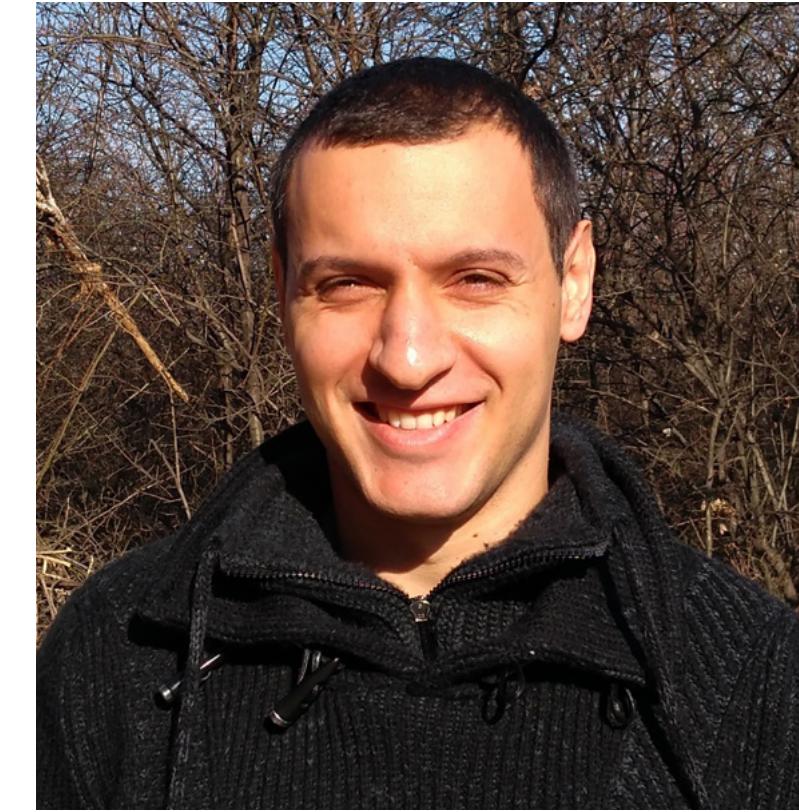


Studio light with face properly lit.



Natural sunlight, with lighting that is not too bright or too dark.

✗ **Not Acceptable**



Harsh natural lighting causing squinting.



Harsh indoor lighting.



Shadows and highlights are too harsh.

Dress like you mean business.

How to pick the right outfit

Wear something business-like or business-casual in neutral colors. Avoid sweatshirts, graphic t-shirts, sunglasses, or headphones, as well as anything obstructing your face, like hats or sunglasses.

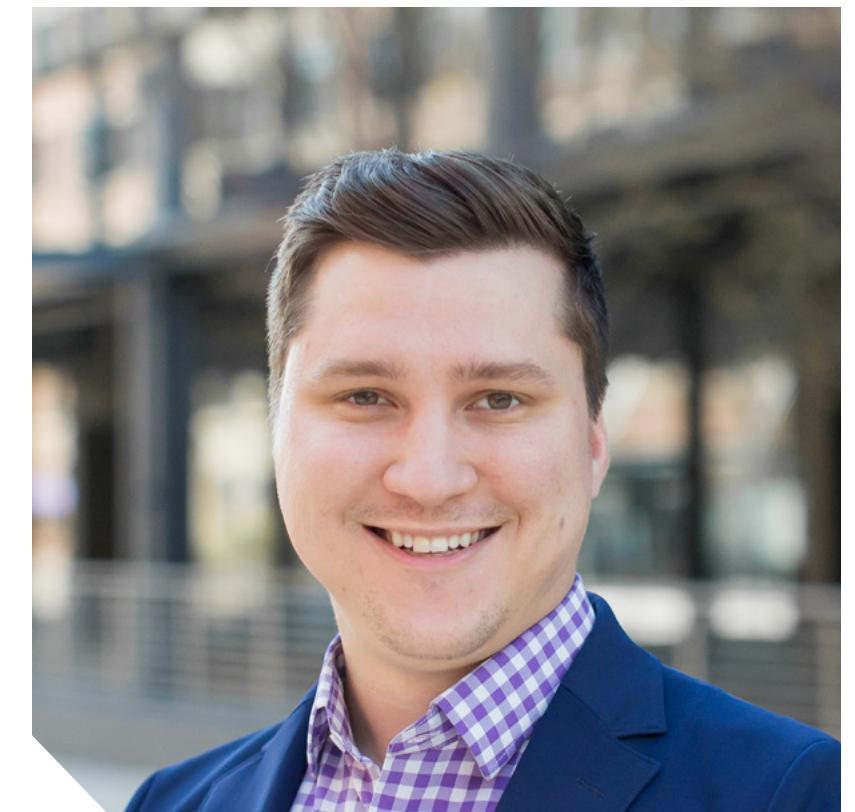
✓ Acceptable



Basic business top.

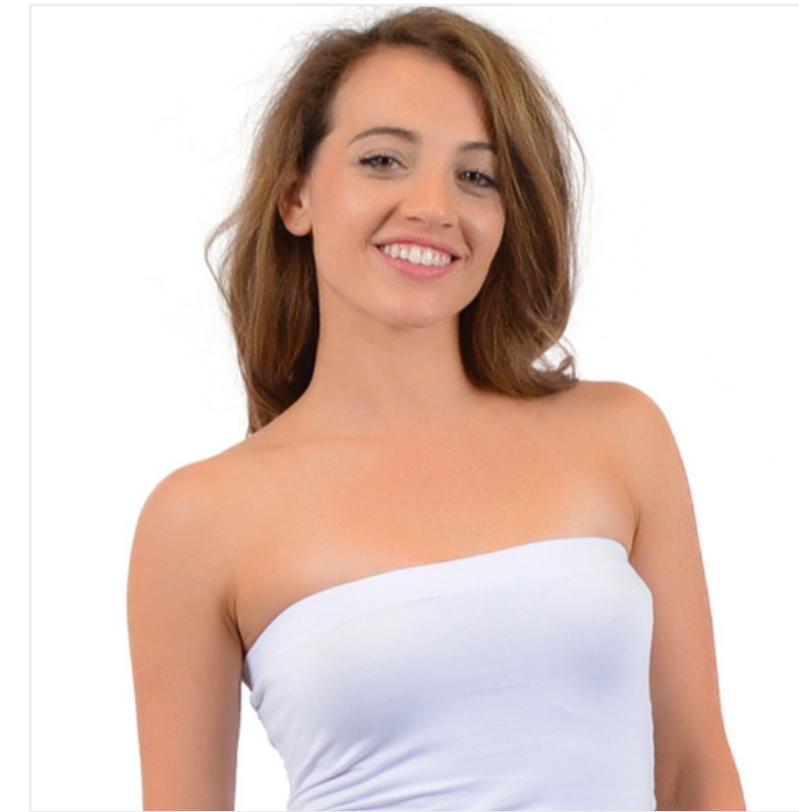


Basic business suit.

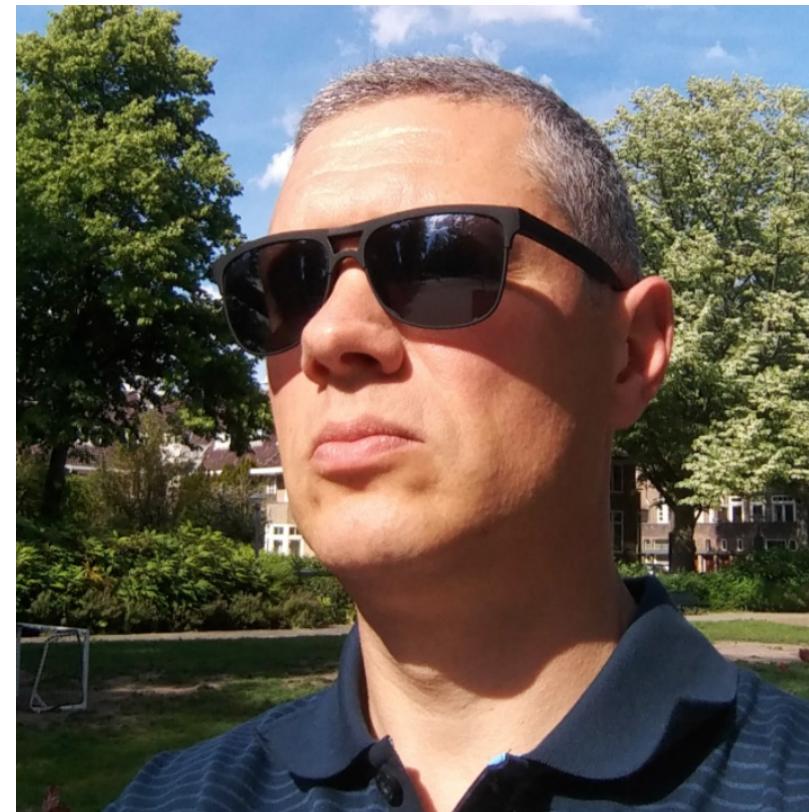


A button-down shirt without a “loud” print.

✗ Not Acceptable



Strapless top / party dress.



Sunglasses.



Casual outfit and beanie.

Say cheese, but don't be cheesy.

How to present yourself

Smiles should be natural, not overly exaggerated or too subtle, and your facial expression should be professional and friendly.

✓ Acceptable



Full, natural smile.

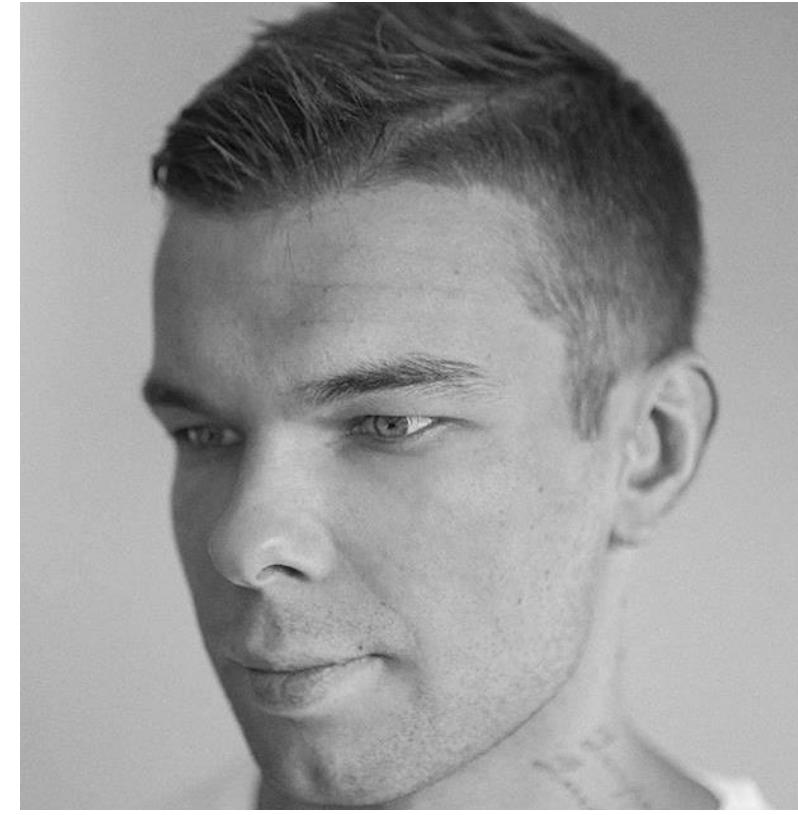


Slight, natural smile with a welcoming expression.



Serious yet welcoming expression.

✗ Not Acceptable



Looking away from the camera.



Non-professional expression.



Over-exaggerated smile / laugh.
Eyes closed.

We're only interested in you.

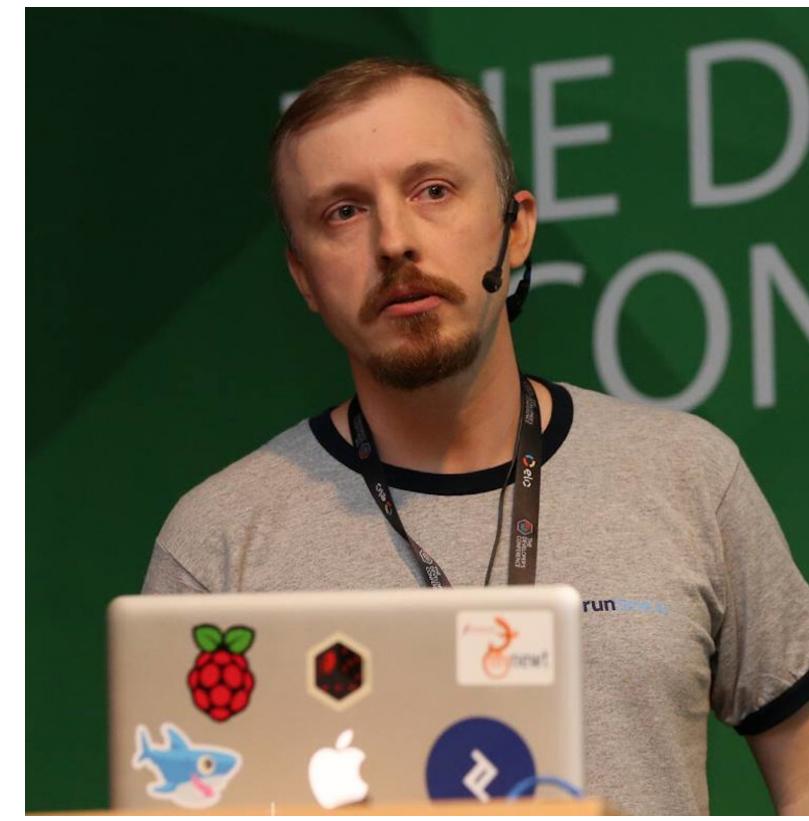
How to avoid distractions

You should be the only one in your photo so clear any distractions (like pets, friends, or even you looking like a big shot on stage) in the background or foreground.

✗ Not Acceptable



More than one person in the photo.



On stage.



Full-body, with distracting elements in the foreground and background.



Holiday image with distracting background elements and lighting.



Alcohol.



Full-body, with distracting elements in the background.

Stools, chairs, and other photo assistants.

How to set up your camera

If you don't have a tripod or someone to take your photo, use a prop like a chair or a stack of books. Just be sure the camera is eye level.

✓ **Acceptable**



Camera held at eye-level.

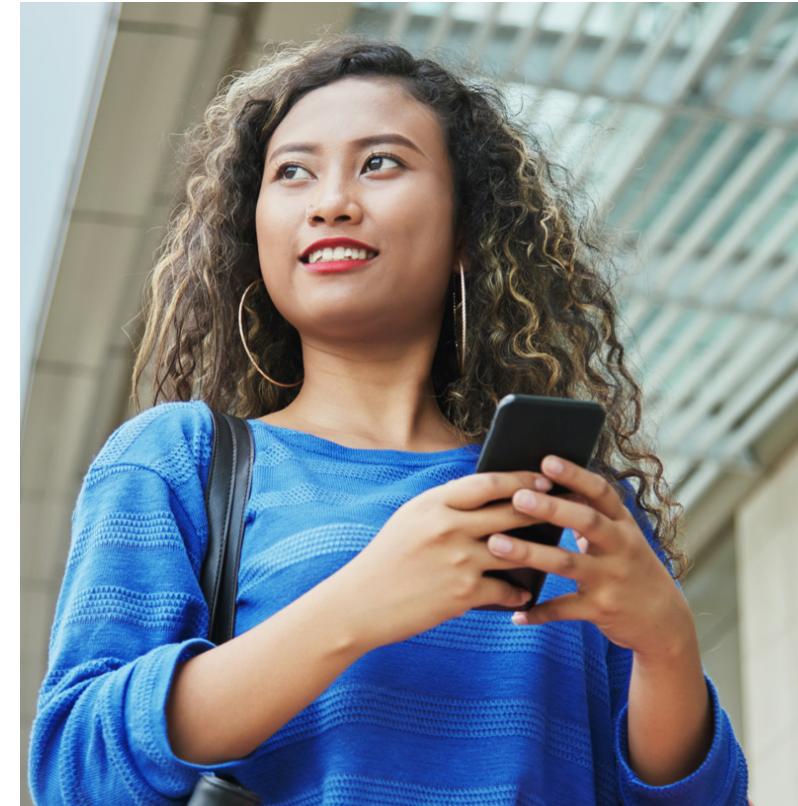


Camera held at eye-level.



Camera held at eye-level.

✗ **Not Acceptable**



Shot from below.



Shot from above.



Shot from above.

Give yourself some space.

How to frame your shot

Have the camera at least 2.5 feet (80 cm) away from you so there's space around your head and shoulders. Only shoot from the shoulders up.

✓ **Acceptable**



Space around the head and shoulders.



Space around the head and shoulders.



Space around the head and shoulders.

✗ **Not Acceptable**



Too tight on the face. No space for the head or shoulders.



Too tight on the face. No space for the head or shoulders.



Too tight on the face. No space for the head or shoulders.

Stand and Deliver.

How to pose for the camera

Good posture exudes confidence!
Stand up straight and face the camera
straight on or at a slight angle.

✓ Acceptable



Slightly tilted with both shoulders in frame
and arms crossed.



Natural, straight ahead, and front-facing
with both shoulders in frame.



Front-facing with arms crossed.

✗ Not Acceptable



Looking from the back.



Side view turning away from the camera
and shoulders cropped.



Sitting, curved posture.

Look here, not there.

How to make eye contact

Eye contact is vital to a great headshot so look directly into the camera. Your eyes should be level with the lens.

✓ **Acceptable**



Maintaining eye contact with a camera held at eye level.



Maintaining eye contact with a camera held at eye level.



Maintaining eye contact with a camera held at eye level.

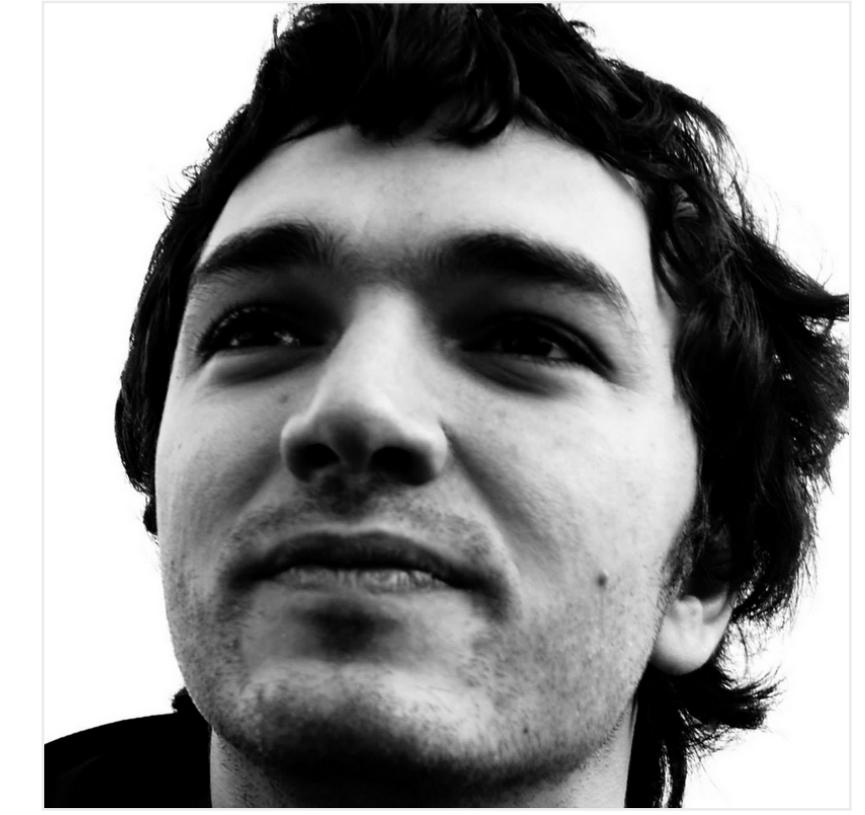
✗ **Not Acceptable**



Shot from the side.



Shot from the side.



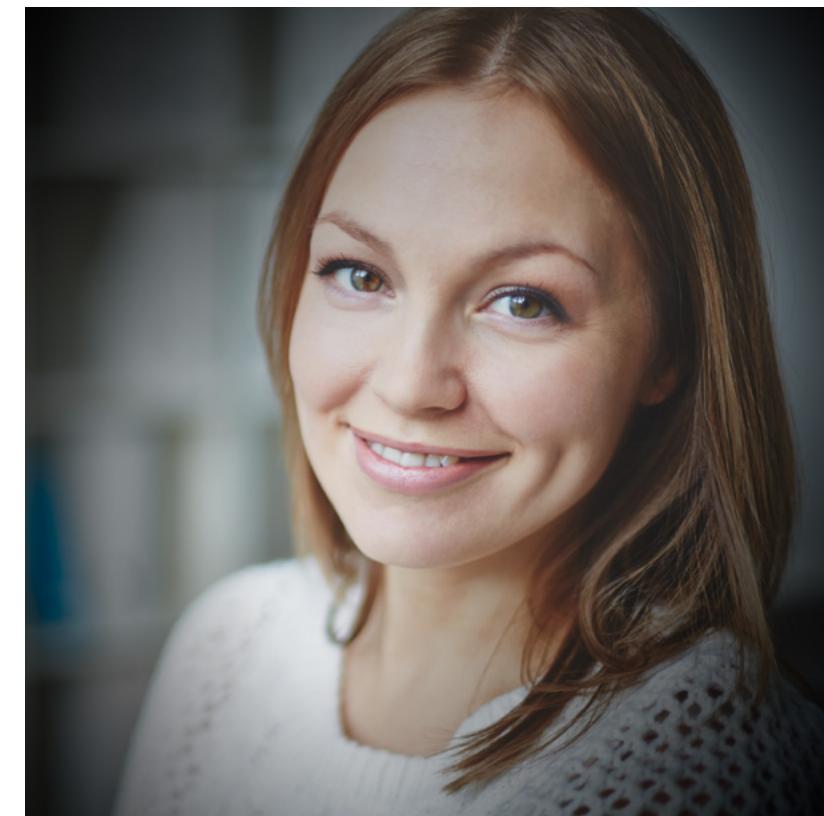
Shot from below eye level.

We like you just the way you are.

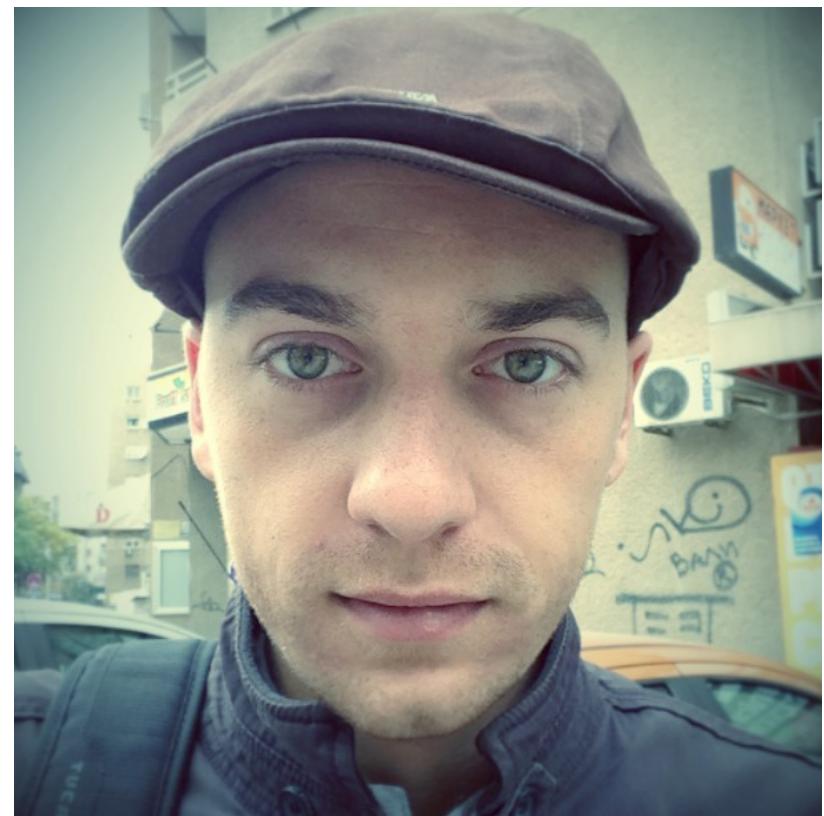
How to stay professional

Don't alter the original photo by adding overlays, filters, black and white conversions, circular frames, airbrushing, or vignettes.

✖ Not Acceptable



Heavy vignette: fades to dark or light around the edges.



Color effects.



Color effects.



Black and white filter.



Black and white filter.



Circular frame.

Technically speaking...

How to format your image

The image file must be a .jpeg or .png format with a maximum file size of 25MB.



