

SMFA Your Home Studio

Please see page 232 (the chapter on **Auditions**) in the 4th edition of *Self-Management for Actors: Getting Down to (Show) Business* for information on how best to rock your self-taped auditions with confidence. This is a recommended list of equipment for your home studio, which you can build without breaking the bank!

Camera

Yup. You need one. Sure, some folks use their webcam or iPhone camera, and that's an option—especially because the current-era webcam and smart phone camera are finer cameras than what used to cost \$1000 in "standalone camera" land—but if you're self-taping more than once in a blue moon, investing in a better camera than what lives within your laptop or phone is just smart money.

You'll look better, have more control over the output, and you'll just feel like a pro because you have a real camera for running your career like the business it is. Also, using your webcam can sometimes trip on a fan in your computer that drowns out your sound. So, even if you look great, you may be sacrificing your sound by sticking with a webcam.

Look at cameras that record onto SD cards rather than on any sort of tape. Having an external mic is not required but is definitely encouraged (see below), and I recommend the Canon EOS Rebel T5i family of cameras, as they are reasonably priced (\$500 or so) for some really gorgeous footage, give you a port for that external mic, and a cool flip-screen monitor so that you can check out how you're looking as you shoot! Woo hoo!

If you're down with running an app like Screenflow and using an external mic (again, see below) to capture audio, consider a Logitech c920, which works with both Mac and PC, using your USB port. The quality is HD-level (not that that's a requirement for self-taped auditions, of course) and the cost is under \$100. NOTE: It does not record audio on its own! That's why this is one to use if you also run Screenflow to capture audio through your computer's microphone or use an external mic.

Tripod

Assuming you're not running your webcam or the camera in your smart phone, you'll need a tripod for your camera (heck, even if you *are* using your smart phone, you need something to steady the gadget). I've heard the Ravelli 65" ball-head tripod is good (and it's about \$40).

I use a Joby Gorilla-pod (\$20), and while it's not sturdy enough for the heartier cameras out there, it's a great mount for my mini light kit (see below), my iPhone, and any of my lighter lenses.

Microphone

Okay, so if you're using a camera with an on-board microphone, you're cool without having an external mic. But if you're in a "ponies for everyone" money situation and you think you may expand your empire into podcasting and such, external mics are the bomb.

My favorite is the Audio-Technica AT 2020 USB mic (under \$150), but I also use the MXL 2100 (\$150) when I'm having others over for a podcast and doing interviews. I'm also told the Audio-Technica ATR 3350 Omnidirectional Condenser mic is a great lav option (\$25), if you prefer a clip-on mini for your self-taped auditions. If you're looking for something that pops into your iPhone, the Mikey mic by Blue (\$100) is the current fave among almost everyone.

Lighting

Now, while bad sound is the unforgivable sin among self-taping, bad lighting is pretty distracting, and you want us focused on your acting, so that means you want to be shot in flattering conditions. Lighting helps with that. First off, I recommend that you do a Google *Image* search for "three-point lighting." Boom. There's your layout for some lights you can buy at Lowe's or Home Depot, along with a few little clamps.

Heck, you could even use existing lamps in your home, if you point 'em in the right direction. When I need a really fab fill light, I use an adorable Dynex battery-powered LED light that cost me \$15 at Best Buy. But honestly, the best light source I've ever used for self-taped *anything* is the sun. A great window with the curtains pulled back will flatter you like nothing else.

In Closing

As always, remember that technology is constantly changing and what used to cost thousands now costs hundreds, and some shiny new thing has replaced the cool thing that was thousands, before. Always test out your self-shot footage, play it on other people's computers, check for quality level, and include your contact information in the file, so your audition cannot be separated from how to reach you! Ninja on!

Come jam with us in the *SMFA* Facebook group, the private Talkback forum, or the Bonnie Gillespie instructional DOJO to go deeper with this badassery.

Psst! If you find this or any other of these free resources of exceptional value, we'd love a tweet, a photo of you with your copy of *SMFA* for our awesome gallery, or even a nice review at Amazon!