Setting up a Photo Station Using a Webcam

Here are a few suggestions on setting up a Photo station and connecting a Webcam to your computer or using a digital camera .

Webcam:

Setting up a photo station with a webcam can save time on your project. You do not need to have a webcam imbedded within your computer, a free standing affordable web cam can be purchased from an office supply store or electronics department of a discount store or online.

Equipment you need:

Webcam - The Logitech webcam is very easy to use. They are available everywhere computer accessories are sold. You can get one for as little as $40. You may need to get a USB extension cord because the cord is pretty short.

Tripod or easel to hold the webcam. Inexpensive webcams do not have a tripod thread but you can use a clamp to hold the webcam on the tripod. I have also used a desktop easel (available from art supply stores) and a binder clamp to hold the webcam. See photo - the webcam is on the top of the easel.

Backdrop - I have made a 36" x 72" portable backdrop from white fabric and a few dowels. See directions for making one is at the end of this guide. This makes the costume photo look more professional.

IV Pole - Heavy weight IV Poles are excellent to hold the costume and the backdrop. They are on wheels, have two hooks at the top and the height can be adjusted. Look for one with 5 legs in the base and at least 15" across the base. I have found an excellent used poles on eBay. Look for a heavy 5 leg base, large, locking wheels and very sturdy pole. I have hung very heavy Renaissance costumes on one without any hint of tipping over.
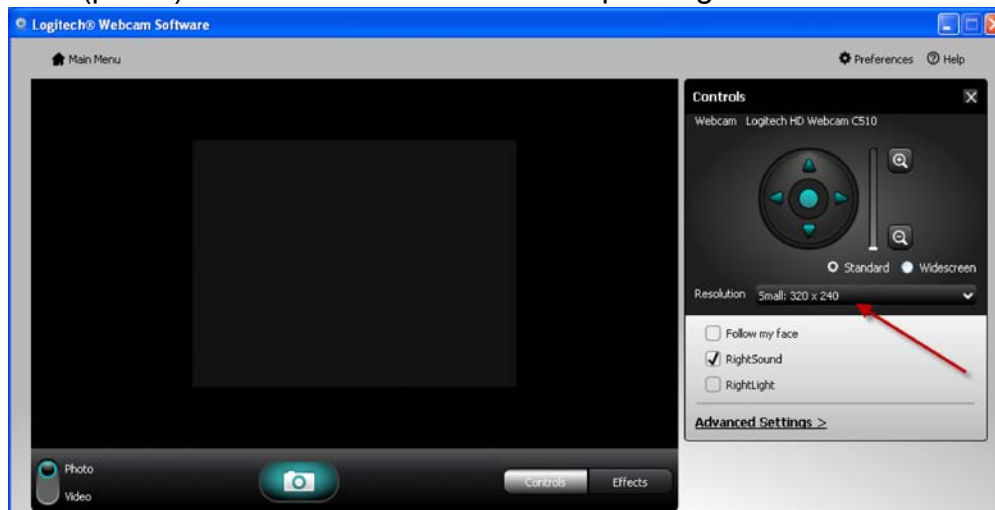
Computer - The computer to store the images can be the same one as you use for the Costume / Props Inventory Database or another one. You just need a USB port to connect the webcam. The webcam software installs from a CD.

Setup:

1) Install the webcam software on your computer. The instructions are very easy to follow.

2) Connect the webcam to your computer. Set the webcam up on a tripod or easel. Open the webcam software.

3) Adjust the webcam software to take the photos at the lowest setting - "Small" 320 x 240 (pixels). See where the red arrow is pointing below.

4) Set up the IV Pole. Hang the Backdrop on the front of the pole.

5) Line up the IV Pole and webcam so that the image of the backdrop fills the field of view.

6) Hang the costume on the IV Pole

7) Click on the camera icon in the webcam software to take the picture. You can zoom in or out on the webcam software if you want to crop the photo. You can also select wide-screen if you like the image view better.

Resources for IV Poles and Webcams

IV Poles - I have found good, used, sturdy IV Poles on eBay. Look for bases that are heavy and have 4 or 5 wheels.

You can also try local medical equipment stores. Be sure to look for one with a heavy base and one or two locking wheels.

WebCams - Logitech and Microsoft sell inexpensive webcams. All have a USB connection. They both come with their own software that will install on a PC or Mac. Look for them at stores that sell computer accessories - Target, Best Buy, Walmart, Staples or other office supply stores. Since you are taking photos for the database and do not want a large file size you can get a relatively inexpensive one.

Table Top Easel - Look at art supply stores. I got the Utrecht (now Blick) Aluminum Easel - it folds up when not in use and holds the webcam with a binder clamp.