

Documentary Photography

Documentary Photography refers to the area of photography in which pictures are used as historical documents. Rather than serving as a source of art or aesthetic pleasure, documentary photography is often used to incite political and social change due to its ability to capture the "true" nature of an image or location. In simple terms, this school of photography uses pictures as documented evidence of a particular situation. Lewis Hine and James Van DerZee are two of the pioneers of documentary photography. While documentary and artistic photography are considered to be at opposite ends of the spectrum, Paul Strand is one of the few photographers famous for slyly blending these two opposing schools through his avant-garde style. Oftentimes, pictures taken in the vein of documentary photography tend to be shocking, grotesque, vivid and intense to prove a point and evoke a viewer's emotions. Some of the most common examples of documentary photographs are featured in modern newspapers and magazines.

Through these images, the public learns truth information about cultural, political and environmental situations. Given this fact, it is no surprise that documentary photography exploded into the American consciousness during the Great Depression of 1930s when photographers were documenting the pervasive poverty.

Photo Essay

In the last twenty years, video and film have become the predominant forms of modern storytelling. But before video, there was photography. And for the last one hundred years photography and storytelling went hand in hand.

Now more than ever, the power of storytelling ought to be harnessed. But telling a story with photos takes more than just a skillful photographer. An impacting photo story can only be developed by skillful photographers who understand the emotions and concepts behind ever-great story.

The form of such a story is called the photo essay.

WHAT IS A PHOTO ESSAY?

A photo essay is very simply a collection of images that are placed in a specific order to tell the progression of events, emotions, and concepts. Used by world class photojournalists such as Lauren Greenfield and James Nachtwey, and Joachim Ladefoged to name a few, the photo essay takes the same story telling techniques as a normal essay, translated into visual images.

Assignment #4

DOCUMENTARY PHOTO ESSAY

What to shoot?

Individually, you need to shoot 20-25 images allowing you to put together a strong and effective photo essay. Your images should document a life/situation and tell a story about your chosen subject. Read through the tips and suggestions.

The camera should be set on manual settings:

manual mode

you will decide on the shutter speed, aperture and ISO that best suits your available lighting

Clean them up and color correct your images.

Using prezzi.com, create a zooming presentation to complete your photo essay. For the first frame, write a brief introduction explaining the topic, why it was chosen and what you hoped to learn. Then add your images in order of the story. For each image, write 1 or 2 sentences telling the story ... what's going on in the photograph. For the last frame, write a brief conclusion explaining your experience in completing the essay, what you actually learned and the future of the subject you studied.

What to turn in?

20-25 images in one folder labeled "lastname_photoessay"

Where to turn in?

Drop Box

What to present?

You will present your photo essay to the class by projecting it on the wall.

Brainstorm/Sketches

Before you begin taking photographs, read through the information contained in this pdf. Then, brainstorm ideas and possible compositions for your photo essay. Turn this in before you begin taking photos.

Research PHOTO ESSAY SAMPLES

Via the internet, look at 3 examples of photo essays. For each, copy/past a couple of the photos into Word. Tell why you liked/disliked the photo essay ... Did the essay follow the "Creating a Photo Essay" suggestions ... What improvements could have been made to present this photo essay more effectively?

ALL of the above should be in a Word doc titled, "lastname_researchA4.doc"

5 Photo Essay Tips

A photo essay isn't simply for photojournalists however. Every human being is drawn to stories. Whether you are an amateur or a professional, the photo essay is a brilliant way to bring your images to life and touch your family, friends, and coworkers.

1. Find a topic: Photo essays are most dynamic when you as the photographer care about the subject. Whether you choose to document the first month of a newborn in the family, the process of a school drama production, or even a birthday party, make your topic something in which you find interest.

2. Do your research: If you document a newborn's first month, spend time with the family. Discover who the parents are, what culture they are from, whether they are upper or lower class. If you cover the process of a school's drama production, talk with the teachers, actors and stage hands; investigate the general interest of the student body; find out how they are financing the production and keeping costs down. If you photograph a birthday party, check out the theme, the decorations they plan on using, what the birthday kid hopes to get for his or her gifts. All of these factors will help you in planning out the type of shots you set up for your story.

3. Find the "real story": After your research, you can determine the angle you want to take your story. Is the newborn the first son of a wealthy family on whom the family legacy will continue? Or does the baby have a rare heart condition? Is the drama production an effort to bring the student body together? Or is it featuring a child star? Is the birthday party for an adolescent turning 13, or the last birthday of a dying cancer patient? Though each story idea is the same, the main factors of each story create an incredibly unique story.

4. Every dynamic story is built on a set of core values and emotions that touch the heart of its audience. Anger. Joy. Fear. Hurt. Excitement. The best way you can connect your photo essay with its audience is to draw out the emotions within the story and utilize them in your shots. This does not mean that you manipulate your audience's emotions. You merely use emotion as a connecting point.

5. Plan your shots: Whether you decide to sit down and extensively visualize each shot of the story, or simply walk through the venue in your mind, you will want to think about the type of shots that will work best to tell your story. I recommend beginners first start out by creating a "shot list" for the story. Each shot will work like a sentence in a one-paragraph story. Typically, you can start with 10 shots. Each shot must emphasize a different concept or emotion that can be woven together with the other images for the final draft of the story.

Remember that story telling takes practice. You don't have to be an incredible writer to pull off a powerful photo essay. All you need is a bit of photographic technique, some creativity, and a lot of heart. And once you begin taking pictures in stories, your images will never be the same.

<http://digital-photography-school.com/5-photo-essay-tips>

Creating a Photo Essay

Creating a photo essay is a combination of art and journalism. As with a written essay, the elements of a photo essay should be structured in a way that easily conveys a story to the viewer. Each individual photo contributes to the overall story, theme, and emotions of the essay. The photos you choose must not only be compositionally and artistically strong, but also informative and educational. Finding photos that have both qualities can be very challenging, but the result can be very powerful.

There are two types of photo essays: the narrative and the thematic. The narrative essay tells a story through a sequence of events or actions. They may follow an individual or activity over a period of time and present this story in chronological order. A thematic photo essay focuses on a central theme (e.g. homelessness, the environment, etc.) and presents photos relevant to that theme.

Regardless of what type of photo essay you choose to present, the following elements should be considered during its creation:

- 1. The story-** Your essay should be able to stand alone, without a written article, and make logical sense to the viewer.
- 2. A range of photos:** A variety of photos (wide angle, detailed, portraits etc.) should be included. See the types of photos section discussed below.
- 3. The order of the photos:** It is important that the order of your photos effectively tell a story, in an interesting and logical sequence.
- 4. Information and emotion:** Your photos should include both informational and emotional photos. Those essays that effectively evoke emotion while providing information tend to convey their messages the best.
- 5. Captions:** In a photo essay, captions are your best opportunity to describe what is happening in words and ensure that the viewer understands. Include informational content in these captions if necessary.

TYPES OF PHOTOS

By including a variety of types of photos in your essay, you will ensure that it is both interesting and informative. The following types of photos, presented together, can create a successful photo essay. Not only is it important to choose powerful photos, but also to present them in an effective order. While the order of some photos (e.g. the lead photo, and the clincher) is set, the order of most types of photos in your essay is your preference.

The Lead Photo: Similar to the first two sentences of a newspaper article, your lead photo should effectively draw in your audience. This is usually the most difficult photo to choose and should follow the theme of your essay. It could be an emotional portrait or an action shot, but ultimately it should provoke the curiosity of the viewer.

The Scene: Your second photo should set the stage and describe the scene of your story. An overarching photo taken with a wide angle lens is often effective.

The Portraits: Your photo essay should include at least one portrait. Capturing an emotional expression or telling action shot can effectively humanize your story. These photos often evoke strong emotions and empathy in the viewer (whether it is a positive and enthusiastic emotion, or a sympathetic and concerned emotion.)

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The Detail Photos: Detail photos focus in on one element, be it a building, a face, or a relevant object. These photos are your best opportunity to capture specific objects. The captions of these photos should be informative and educational.

The Close-up Photos: Similarly, close-up photos provide an opportunity to focus in on specific objects. These photos are tightly cropped, simple shots that present a specific element of your story. Again, this is an excellent opportunity to present information in the caption.

The Signature Photo: The signature photo summarizes the situation and captures the key elements of your story in a telling moment.

The Clincher Photo: The final photo, the clincher, should evoke the emotion you want the viewer to walk away with, be it a feeling of hope, inspiration, or sadness. Decide on this mood before you select this photo.

<http://www.collectivelens.com/blog/2007/09/23/creating-a-photo-essay/>