

- Behind every good picture there is a good idea. Behind every successful photojournalist is an idea person. Bob Gilka, former director of photography for National Geographic, says that the photojournalism industry is up to its armpits in good photographers but up to its ankles in photographers with good ideas. If you develop your ability to come up with good ideas, you'll stand out from the crowd.
- Here are some how-to tips on coming up with good ideas. They were generated by Gail Fisher, a photographer for the Los Angeles Times:

REPORTING – Be a journalist first. Don't think of yourself as just a photographer, but as a photojournalist. Take notes when out on assignments, ask questions, talk to people. They're a wealth of information. Pick up the phone and follow up on leads you've heard about. Do the groundwork. If you're not contributing ideas yourself, don't complain about the assignments handed to you.

LISTENING – Most people have an area of expertise and love to talk about themselves. Be a good listener and recognize story ideas.

EXPLORING – Get to know the community you are covering. A walk through your downtown and various neighborhoods will offer insights you will only see when out there on the streets and not zooming by in a car.

CURIOSITY – Use the opportunities and resources of your profession to learn about subjects, cultures and places. Explore the world and bring it back to your readers. Few professions offer this opportunity. Localize national and international stories, or cover local people involved in broader issues.

ORGANIZATION – Keep an on-going file of story ideas and contacts. These will become unlimited resources for you. Call up these contacts. Have lunch with them. These are where story ideas come from.

PERSISTENCE – If it's a story you strongly believe in and a contact says no, try again, find more information, dig deeper, maybe with a fresh approach. This also applies to selling a story to your editor.

RESEARCHING – Be well read. Read the publication you are working for daily, along with the competition and everything else you can get your hands on. Learn how to find the material that will make you knowledgeable about the stories you are interested in doing. Be able to track down stories with only a few leads. Some of the hardest stories to track down are the best ones. Check your clip file in your newspaper's library. What has been done on this subject and when? Use the Internet – this is an invaluable source on any subject matter.

OBSERVATION – Keep your eyes open and your mind alert. This applies not only to finding ideas but how you approach your shooting. Stretch yourself. Take chances. Try a new, fresh approach on stories that seem familiar.

SHMOOZING – Understand the various sections of your newspaper. Take the initiative to get to know the various editors. It's much easier to propose a story when an editor knows the person and what he or she is capable of producing.

PASSIONATE – Be passionate about what you are doing. We put so much of ourselves into our work that we should be working on stories we care about, want to learn something from and take genuine interest in. Why not suggest a topic that gets the adrenaline flowing and you feel some passion for? The only limitations are the ones we set for ourselves. Approach your work with the attitude that anything is possible.