

“The illiterate of the future will be ignorant of the use of camera and pen alike”
— Laszlo Moholy-Nagy, 1936

The Shoot

IMPORTANT STUFF

Three camera controls for film exposure:

1. Film speed — ISO; the ISO number determines how sensitive your digital chip is to light. The higher the number, the more sensitive it is to light. Use higher ISOs (800 and above) in low light situations (inside, outside at night); use lower ISOs (400 and below) in brightly-lit situations (like outside, or inside if there is *a lot* of window light). As you adjust your ISO, consider how fast your subject is moving and keep an eye on your shutter speed to make sure it is fast enough to stop this action.
2. F-Stop — “hole” in the lens that lets light in through the lens. The bigger the hole, the more light hits the film. Typical numbers range from f/1.4 to f/32. The size of the hole also determines your depth of field. Your depth of field is the distance in front of and behind the subject you are focused on that remains acceptably sharp. The larger the hole the less depth of field (the smaller the hole the more depth of field). Two other factors that determine depth of field are subject to camera distance — the closer the camera to subject the less depth of field (and the farther away your subject from the lens the more depth of field) and focal length of lens — the longer the focal length of lens the less the depth of field (and the shorter the lens the more depth of field).
3. Shutter Speed — also controls how much light reaches the film. Unlike the f/stop, the shutter is on the camera. The faster the shutter curtain opens and closes when you press the shutter release button the less light hits the film. The longer the shutter curtain is open the more light reaches the film. Shutter speeds typically range from 1 second to 1/8000th of a second. Shutter speeds also determine whether you “stop” or freeze subject motion or blur subject motion. The slower the shutter speed the longer the shutter stays open and the more blurred your subject motion will be. Shutter speeds of less than 1/60th of a second usually require a tripod. At slow shutter speeds you cannot hold the camera still enough and you will get blur from camera shake.

THINK BEFORE YOU SHOOT

Photojournalism is very much a thinking person’s art form. A lot of preparation takes place long before the shutter button is pressed. A photojournalist needs to have good ideas first and foremost. Good ideas take research. Yes, this might mean you will have to crack a few books or magazines to find out more about a subject you are interested in photographing — the worst thing you can do is to go into an assignment ignorant of the subject or subject matter you are photographing. You wouldn’t go into a test without studying up for it, would you? Okay, bad example... Or maybe not. Most of the time, if you go into a shoot unprepared you will fall flat on your face and come out with a weak picture.

So does this mean you have to do a term paper every time you go out to shoot something? Not exactly. Good ideas can come from amazingly simple sources. Sometimes it’s just a matter of talking to the reporter about the story. Reading a newspaper and/or watching TV news programs can clue you into issues and events in your community or school. Check with teachers in the various departments at your school — there are always special projects going on that you should be covering for your newspaper or yearbook. The bottom line is that there are thousands of good stories out there to do, but you have to go out and find them — very few will drop in your lap. Great photojournalists certainly take advantage of luck that comes their way, but they don’t rely on it for their success.

PHOTOJOURNALISM CATEGORIES

News ... planned or unplanned event. Look for international, national or local issues that might be effecting your campus.

Features ... can be found or planned. Look for the unusual moment, “slice of life.” Look for good interaction between people. Features are everywhere and can come your way any time, so keep your camera on you at all times. If you are having a hard time finding a feature then find an event where people are attending — where people congregate, so do features.

Sports ... shoot the action, but don’t forget the sidelines. The interesting part of sports is not so much the action but how the crowd reacts to it. Together, action and reaction tell the complete story of the event.

Picture Stories ... a visual story told with several pictures instead of just one. They take more time to do, but they often let you get much deeper into a story or issue than the single photograph.

ONCE YOU ARE THERE..

1. Take a light meter reading immediately to get an idea of what your exposure is like. While doing this look for good vantage points to shoot from. Observe what is going on and begin to anticipate your moments.

2. Talk to your subjects — this will put them more at ease. A little time in the beginning with your cameras down and taking an interest in your subject can pay off with a better picture, one that reflects your subject’s trust in your genuine interest in him or her as a person and not just another notch on your roll of film.

3. Mix it up — shoot an overall of the situation, then move in closer for a medium view, then move closer still for a close-up, then move closer still for a super close-up. Change lenses if you have them. Shoot from unusual angles. Shoot vertical and horizontal frames. Look for the “fringe.”

4. “Work” the situation — take several frames of one scene, especially if you know it is strong. Why get back to the lab and find the one picture you took of a great story is out of focus? Cover yourself!

James H. Kenney • Professor • WKU • 270.745.6307 • james.kenney@wku.edu