

Picture Story

Two kinds of multiple picture presentations (from Greg Lewis)

1. Picture story

- a. A narrative set of pictures that work together to present a single topic.
- b. Complete story includes headlines and captions and a coordinated page design.
- c. For some, the ultimate in photojournalism because it offers a chance to really dig into a situation and develop a rapport with subjects.
- d. In some ways easier than a single picture because the whole story does not have to be told in one frame (though the dominant picture, which we will discuss later, ideally could stand alone). On the other hand, making pictures that successfully work together as a cohesive story is challenging.
- e. A picture package is like a mini story. The package usually consists of two or three photographs, with an overall or establishing shot and a close-up shot.

2. Photographic Essay

- a. Different than the story. The pictures are more loosely related by a theme rather than a specific person.
- b. Stories often tell a story of a person. Essays often tell a story about an issue.
- c. Consider this observation about the difference between stories and essays:
The picture essay is more likely to argue than to narrate. It intellectualizes. It analyzes even when it presents both sides of an issue. It's more likely to be about something than someone. The picture story's visual continuity is not a characteristic of the picture essay. Unrelated in time, unconnected in story development, essay pictures do not lean on one another. Each picture is selected to make a large point; each can stand alone. If pictures in the story are comparable to sentences, the essay picture more closely resembles a paragraph (from Gerald Hurley and Angus McDougal).
- d. As it is with so much in photography, this is a guideline, not a rule.

Shooting a successful picture story

1. Idea

- a. Like single photographs, good stories start with good ideas.
- b. Good written stories do not always make good visual stories. Be selective in what stories you choose to photograph. Consider these questions when deciding on a story:
 - Is this story overtly visual?
 - What makes this story significant?
 - What makes the story unique?
 - Why should readers care?
 - Can I cover this story completely with the time that I have?
 - Will the subject cooperate?
 - Is the story something you can return to for additional shooting?
 - What technical challenges will I encounter?
- c. You should already get an idea list going. You need to start considering which ideas might make better stories than single pictures.
- d. Consider all of the same sources you tap into for your single picture ideas — magazines, newspapers, yellow pages (telephone directory), television, talking to others, visiting hospitals and community centers, **being curious** — the list goes on...
- e. Localize national or international stories.

2. Preparation

- a. Do your research — know the story before you get into it.
- b. Spend enough time with your subject before you start shooting to get them comfortable having a camera around and to develop a rapport with them.

c. Write a temporary headline to help get a focus on what you are doing. This can and probably will change. But the headline gives direction to your story – one of the common elements missing in stories.

3. Photographs

a. The key is to get a variety in your photographs. Each photograph should have some thing different to say about your subject. Together the pictures tell a story the other photographs can't say by themselves. If you have more than one lens, use them to give the viewer this variety. If you have one lens, use your legs to create a variety of camera to subject views.

b. General kinds of photographs to look for during your shoot:

1. **Long shot** or overall
2. **Medium shot** moves closer to the subject
3. **Close-up** shot reveals details about the subject

c. Other kinds of photographs that help reveal the story

1. **Dominant photograph** – Sometimes called the lead photograph. This is the main picture of the story, the one that gets the largest play in the page design. Ideally, this photograph should be able to stand alone and still give the viewer a good idea of what the story is about.

2. The **portrait** – this is not necessarily posed, but it should give the viewer a good look at what your subject looks like. More than a shot for the record, it should show this person's personality or the emotions involved in the story.

3. **Interaction** – showing the subject relating to other people.

4. The **sequence** – a progression of pictures; story does not always lend itself to this type of photograph.

5. The **detail** shot – Extreme close-up shot of a small detail of the story. Since this picture cannot rely on facial expression or emotion, you must use light and composition to really make this picture special. Do not include a detail shot unless it is something really unusual.

6. The **closer** – A picture that ends the story.

d. Other Important Tips (from Dave LaBelle)

- Get up early and stay late
- Make several trips to document subject. Review what you have shot and go back to rework the story
- Look for introductory or opener pictures – pictures that help set the scene and give readers location. Show your viewer geography – where does your subject live?
- Don't just shoot people "doing" pictures. Ask yourself, "Am I shooting pictures that reveal what my subject acts like and feels like, or am I just exercising "mindless documentation?" There is a difference between what Bob does and how Bob feels about what Bob does
- Work your subject/topic by using a variety of angles and distances. Bend your knees. Crawl on your belly. Shoot vertical and horizontal images. Look for unusual and interesting perspectives.

5. Final Product

Don't forget to take copious notes for good captions, story and final headline. The story is not complete without these vital elements.