**Narrative Photo Essay**

Narrative photo essays tell a story in a sequence, the same way you might read a story. There must be a flow to keep the viewers eye and emotion moving smoothly through the story. Think of your favorite book and how it kept you yearning for the next page. A good photo essay will hold you on each image but also make you want to explore the next image as the story unfolds.

While the photo essay should be able to tell a thoughtful and vivid story with out any text, captions are usually needed to clarify the message that viewers walk away with. More lengthy written pieces are optional. The ultimate goal is to hook the viewer into the theme and evoke their emotional connection to the story.

To tell the story, a range of purposeful images should be included in a well-planned format. The goal is to invite the viewer in and guide them through the story, just as they would move through an engaging book or view a dramatic play. The idea is similar, to quickly hook the viewer and set a scene and then lead them carefully as the action may rise, climax and fall back to a moment of resolution.

The number of images and the presentation order is generally at the photographer’s discretion. However, during an interview with The Candid Frame (Perello), William Albert Allard shared the following photo essay outline used while on assignment for National Geographic:

LEAD PHOTO: Hook the viewer and provoke their curiosity while encompassing the theme of the essay

SET THE SCENE: A broad description of the location. A high vantage point is helpful for this image. Look for layers in a landscape to create depth.

PORTRAITS: These images are essential for evoking the emotional, human connection between the viewer and the story.

DETAILS: By focusing on only one element the viewer can be clearly guided through the story - a pattern, a face, a building. A caption should clarify the significance of this image to inform and educate.

CLOSE-UP: An opportunity to pull the viewer closer to explore the abstract and artistic elements within the story that could be easily overlooked. Dirty hands, coffee beans, woodgrains – these images offer another opportunity to inform and educate through well written captions.

THE PHOTO: Henri- Cartier-Bresson would call this ‘the moment’. This is the image that freezes the whole story and wows the reader. If they only remember one image, this is the one!

CLOSURE: Before selecting this image, know the mood you want the viewer to leave with. Sadness, anger, hope, excitement – this closing image should pull and hold an emotion.

STANLEY, P. (2016). *SPEAKING WITH PHOTOGRAPHS*. S.l.: BLURB.

**A Day in the Life of an American Teenager….**

**What To Do**

1. Check out these websites for photo essay inspiration:

<https://medium.californiasun.co/nico-young-santa-monica-high-photography-e0e8ef4ffd9f>

<https://plan-uk.org/blogs/life-as-a-teenager-in-ghana>

<http://time.com/photography/life/>

<http://time.com/tag/photo-essay/>

2. Read the article *The Life Magazine Formula for Visual Variety in the Photo Essay*. It’s located on the class website under the “Photo Essay” tab.

3. Have a plan for all seven of the required photos: lead photo, set the scene, portraits, details, close-up, THE photo, closure. Use the template below to plan out your narrative photo essay.

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| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Where:  When:  Who:  Props:  Light:  Notes: | Where:  When:  Who:  Props:  Light:  Notes: | Where:  When:  Who:  Props:  Light:  Notes: | Where:  When:  Who:  Props:  Light:  Notes: | Where:  When:  Who:  Props:  Light:  Notes: | Where:  When:  Who:  Props:  Light:  Notes: | Where:  When:  Who:  Props:  Light:  Notes: |
| **Lead photo**  How will I capture the attention of the viewer? | **Set the scene**  How will I set the scene? | **Portraits**  Will this be an actual portrait or a metaphor? | **Details**  How will I show details that are interesting and propel the story forward? | **Close-up**  How will you pull the viewer in closer? | **THE PHOTO**  How will you know which one is THE one? | **Closure**  What emotion do I want viewer to leave with? |

4. Document an entire day in your life, or the life of someone else using your 35mm camera. **Photos should use excellent compensation and should be perfectly exposed!!!**

Use the SCAMPER method to increase the creativity and interest in your photos.

The letters in the acronym SCAMPER stand for:

• S – Substitute

• C – Combine

• A – Adapt

• M – Modify

• P – Put to another use

• E – Eliminate

• R – Reverse

5. Properly develop your film.

6. In the darkroom, make a contact sheet and process your photo essay. Make sure to use filters as necessary.

7. Write captions for all of your photos. Refer to the Citations & Cutlines article at this website: <https://web.ku.edu/~edit/captions.html>

8. Display and present your photo essay.

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  |  | **Excellent** | **Good** | **Average** | **Needs Improvement** |
| **Assignment Goals** | **☐ Assignment is on time**  **☐ Includes 7 photos that each add to the narrative of the photo essay**  **☐ Photos demonstrate excellent composition**  **☐ All images are well exposed and developed.**  **☐ Contact sheet is well exposed and properly developed**  **☐ Includes captions that add to the overall effectiveness of the essay.**  **☐ Photos are displayed and presented in a creative way that enhances the underlying message of the photo essay.** | **60** | **59-55** | **54-50** | **49 or less** |
| **Originality** | **☐ Demonstrates good problem solving skills**  **☐ Photos are original and creative** | **20** | **19-17** | **16-13** | **12 or less** |
| **Aesthetics** | **☐ Elements of art and principles of design work well to create a successful composition** | **20** | **19-17** | **16-13** | **12 or less** |