

Environmental Portraiture

Photo Essay

An environmental portrait is a portrait executed in the subject's usual environment, such as in their home or workplace, and typically illuminates the subject's life and surroundings.



By photographing a person in their natural surroundings, it is thought that you will be able to better illuminate their character, and therefore portray the essence of their personality, rather than merely a likeness of their physical features. It is also thought that by photographing a person in their natural surroundings, the subject will be more at ease, and so be more conducive to expressing themselves, as opposed to in a studio, which can be a rather intimidating and artificial experience.

Photo Essay

A photo essay is intended to tell a story or evoke emotion from the viewers through a series of photographs. They allow you to be creative and fully explore an idea. The essay should include the following elements in the most cases: Introduction, Contextualization, Opening, Development, Conflict, Continuation, Climax, Resolution, Closing

Not all essays will allow for such a complex storyline, but we can take some of these elements to formulate an idea of what an essay should include. Therefore, a photo essay is a way to tell a story from beginning to end, with substance and a meaningful content.

PICK A TOPIC

Obvious indeed, but choosing a good topic can be difficult without prior research. This is perhaps the hardest part of creating a photographic essay. The wisest way to approach this is to select a topic that won't be so hard to access – not just because it might be easy. Since it will be accessible, the risk of frustration will be lower than it is when handling a difficult topic. Experience will eventually lead us into working with trickier subjects.

QUANTITY AND QUALITY OF IMAGES

It is important to define the number of pictures we are willing to present on our final essay. Defining that number is important for a couple of reasons. The first one is because it will set the bar of our project's scope (critical when we start to consider our resources). The second one is our readers. The story should be told from start to finish with high impact, just like a short novel or a story. If we stuff our essay with "filler" images, it will ultimately lose its power.

EXICUTION

Let the fun part begin! After defining the previous three elements, we can start shooting to create a great storytelling essay.

EDITING

Editing must not be confused with post-processing, which is an important element of the production of the final photographs. Editing refers to the precise selection of the images that will be included in our essay. There is no perfect quantity or order. You (or your editor) will have to be very objective to select the perfect mix to tell the story the way you want it to be told.



DETAILS IN THE SURROUNDINGS:

It is important that the background does not dominate the subject. But, the details that convey the message from the surroundings can often be quite small and still significant. The key seems to be in the symbolism expressed by various elements in the background; for instance, a baseball cap may not tell you much about your subject (unless he or she is a baseball player), but a chef's hat gives you a lot more detail about who he is and what he does.

