

DOCUMENTARY FIELD GUIDE

What's your intention?

Lasswell formula

WHO

says

WHAT

in which

CHANNEL

to

WHOM

with what

EFFECT?

What kind of images do you need?

LIFE formula

For narrative essays (=having a chronological element), e.g. events or general reportage.

Image types:

1. Establisher

Leads into the scene, often wide angle / drone (needs to be redone as the set changes!)

2. Medium

Protagonist(s) with scenic elements, often „cowboy shot“

3. Detail

Close-ups of important elements (can be arranged as mosaics to save space)

4. Portrait

Establishes emotional connection („classical“ < „environmental“)

5. Sequence

Underlines the chronology, kind of keeps the essay together contentwise.

6. Action

Visually strengthens the series, often shows drama, emotion, interaction, gestures.

7. Decisive Moment

The story in one shot, raises interest (often „peak action shot“, often cover photo)

8. Closer

Conclusion, final thought, lasting impression (needs to be redone as the set changes!)

Normally 1., 8. and a third one („body“) are „must haves“. ALL TYPES CAN be included multiple times, NOT ALL of them NEED to be part of an essay.

Hero's journey (simplified)

A narrative approach on literature, film,... for highlighting (the development of) one person.

1. Act: Departure

- The call to adventure
- Hero finds his talent
- Hero meets companions
- Hero crosses first threshold

Example

Olympic games are about to start
Athlete qualifies (e.g. 100m sprint race)
Athlete meets national team / trainer(s)
Departure, flight, arrival at the hotel

2. Act: Initiation

- Hero passes first test
- Hero starts to believe in himself
- Hero passes further test(s)
- Hero masters drawdown(s)

Athlete wins first olympic race
Athlete cheers after first race
Athlete passes the semifinal
Athlete suffers injury during semifinal

3. Act: Return

- Hero returns strengthened
- Hero faces his final test
- Hero receives reward
- Hero develops new consciousness

Athlete recovers from injury
Athlete wins final
Athlete receives gold medal
Athlete is now an olympic champion

General advice

Keep in mind: Unlike video, the story of a photo essay mostly lies between the images. Your job is to create guard railings for the viewers imagination.

Topic

Choose a *relevant* subject you are close to, geographically and personally. Enables you to visit a scene more often, and makes you want to do so. Research is key.

Perspective

In most cases, you won't be able to capture a topic on the whole. Concentrate on a smaller part, cover one perspective - don't try to recap „the olympics“, go along with one athlete.

Length

Depends on medium. Normally, 10-15 images are enough to tell a full story. Kill your darlings. Every shot needs to advance the story in some way, or hold it together (visually).

Medium

Influences your photographic style, e.g. choosing portrait / landscape orientation or leaving negative space for layouting text. Might influence topic and / or perspective as well.

Multimedia

Combine different media formats (text, audio, video, drawing, painting, collages, ...) to enhance the chances of distributing your work to diverse media outlets over time.

Post production

Use a consistent post style for one series. Make sure to comply to the various industry standards, e.g. relinquish using the stamp tool in photojournalistic work.

Legal aspects

Check thoroughly to have all your releases (model, property,...) signed. If possible, settle such stuff in advance of a shooting to keep your mind as free as possible.

Good Story

A good story is interesting, inspires, instructs or involves. At best, all at the same time.

Equipment

Keep it simple. You are the tool that needs to interact with your subject (instead of fiddling with three flashes or a new camera) to ensure creating your best work possible at that time.