Feature photography

In your job as a photojournalist, you may find yourself spending a lot of your time shooting photos for various feature stories or putting together a feature photo spread. A feature picture contains strong human interest and is designed to entertain or inform the reader. The subject of a feature picture may be an individual or an event, and its content is timeless.

U.S. Army photo by Sgt. Michael J. MacLeod
Types

Types of feature pictures include news, sports and personality.

- A news feature concentrates on a human or unique aspect of a news event, giving the photograph a timeless interest.
- Sports feature pictures emphasize the event and continue to interest the reader after the event has passed.
- A personality feature captures a subject’s personality rather than just a person’s image.

- An environmental portrait is of an individual in his natural surroundings. The subject is performing no action and is looking at the photographer as the photo is taken.
Elements

The essential elements of a feature picture are identification and action.

- Identification of the subject is achieved by shooting your subject so that you can clearly see who he/she is. This requires showing either full face or three fourths (¾) face. You must see both of your subject’s eyes. Avoid profiles and back shots.

- Subjects should be actively involved in performing some function. They also must be looking at whatever action they are performing. Use of props will add visual information about the person and provide a context.
Shooting techniques

Most of your feature picture images will be medium and close-up shots. Occasionally, your subject’s action will require a longer shot. Here are some techniques to use when you take your own feature photos.

- Isolate your center of interest by looking for non-distracting backgrounds. The darker or the shallower the depth of field you use the more your subject will stand out.
- Multiple subjects would be viewed as props and should only be used to convey the subject’s prominence in the photo. Only use as much of the supporting person as needed to understand the action.
- Distracting elements will take away from your subject so change your camera angle, if necessary. If possible, you can reposition the subject or wait for him/her to move to a different position.
- Set the mood of the photograph by using varied lighting techniques. The direction and quality of light can produce different effects. The use of electronic flash, whether direct, diffused, bounced or fill can alter the mood dramatically. Light is used to spotlight the subject.
- Timing or anticipating the subject’s action will help you capture your subject when his/her action or interaction is the strongest. Take more than one frame to ensure you get the right moment.
- Mobility is the key to finding the right angle. Move around your subject until you no longer have distractions, have full identification, and can see strong action. The use of different camera angles adds variety and gives the editor the flexibility of choosing multiple images.
- Use props to convey the environment of your subject. If your subject uses tools to do his job, include them in the photo. For example, children are excellent props for a child care provider.
Research and planning

Research and planning are two of the most crucial parts of photo assignments. Understanding the preparation that goes along with doing a photo shoot makes your job as a photojournalist much easier, although sometimes you may have to do a photo session with a subject with little or no research and planning. In either case, flexibility, adaptability and a positive attitude are essential.

- Using a planning sheet can help guide you in setting up a photo shoot so you have an idea about what you’re going to shoot before you start taking pictures. In this course you will use a modified planning sheet with your practice personality feature photo assignment. [In the BPASC-ADL resident course, the planning sheet will be more detailed.] On this modified planning sheet, you will describe the location where your photos for the assignment will be taken and the action/s on which you want to focus. You will also describe why you think your personality feature idea is a good feature photo story.

- Other activities to help you prepare for your shoot include researching the subject’s job or hobby or visit the location before the shooting session. This will help you anticipate what actions you may want to focus on and also help in providing information for photo captions.
Conclusion

Whether entertaining or informing, feature pictures are a great way to attract readership to your publication. Personality feature pictures can especially be interesting because of the action-filled story they tell about a specific person and his or her environment. Before you pick up your camera to do a feature photo shoot, if you do some research and planning, you will be able to maximize the time spent at the session and maximize the opportunity for some very intriguing photos.
References


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