



Taking a photograph is one way to tell a story. Some photographs tell stories about specific moments in time, places, or events. Other photographs tell stories of a sequence of events.

To create a good photo, a photographer must decide what to photograph (the subject) and how to frame the subject(s) (composition). To give a broader view of a topic, a photographer might take a series of photographs (the story).

Below, you will learn more about the elements of a good photo. Follow the guide and learn how to plan and take great pictures. The steps were adapted from the *Geography Action!* Project Guide

article "The Art of the Interview" written by Kirsten Elstner, Director of National Geographic Photocamp.

PREPARE

STEP 1: The Camera

Before you begin, become familiar with how your camera works. You should make sure that you do the following:

- Make sure that your camera has fresh batteries and film.
- Become familiar with the available features of your camera such as the flash and zoom.
- Learn and practice the art of taking pictures. One great guide is the National Geographic Path to Adventure Photography Tips <http://www.nationalgeographic.com/pathtoadventure/phototips/>

STEP 2: The Location

The location you choose is one of the most important considerations to make before you start taking pictures. Follow these tips to help you choose your location:

- Do prep work! Plan your route; know the area. Brainstorm pictures that might best tell your story and convey a concrete sense of place.
- Show an overview of the neighborhood from a high vantage point (a hill, the top floor of a building, etc.).
- Take your time. Spend an entire morning in one location, if possible (a bakery, barbershop, café or park – find a location that represents the story you would like to capture).
- Notice details! Find layers in the landscape. Take notes. Write down "cultural markers" you see.

CAPTURE

STEP 3: The Subject

The first step to taking any photograph is choosing a worthy subject. Look for physical landscapes, cultural markers, and people that can help to tell a story.

- ❑ Photograph large scenes (such as a river scene with buildings in the background) or small objects (such as a non-native flower) to tell one part of a larger story.
- ❑ Look for subjects that represent culture—cultural markers—that tell a story about the people who live in a place:
 - Restaurants, businesses, stores, etc. reflect the histories of those who constructed or occupy them.
 - Architectural styles and signs point to the influence on our lives by certain groups of people.
- ❑ Put a "face" on the story. Find a person who can make a good photographic subject.
 - Talk to people. Get to know them and your portraits will become more interesting.
 - Be sure to get a signed release (permission) from any person you photograph.
- ❑ Examine these subjects to find one which is "representative" of the story as a whole.
- ❑ Take pictures that can convey the mood of the story. Don't try to tell the entire story with one photograph.

STEP 4: The Composition

The composition, or arrangement of subjects in the picture, is a very important part of telling the story.

Use these photographers' "tricks" to create interest and movement in a photograph, and help the picture come alive:

- ❑ *Capture a Moment*—Look for an expression or gesture or quality of light that elevates an image beyond the ordinary.
- ❑ *Try Different Angles*—Think about how you would normally photograph a scene. Then shoot it in an entirely different way.
- ❑ *Get Closer*—Many photographers make the mistake of not getting close enough to their subjects. To get a cleaner shot, zoom in or move closer.
- ❑ *Frame the picture*—As you photograph, be aware of how much of the subject appears in the photograph.
 - You don't need to take a picture of the entire object or person.
 - Sometimes taking a picture of a door instead of the entire building, or a face instead of a whole body, will tell a different story.
- ❑ *Include foreground subjects and background subjects*—Objects that are closer to the camera are in the foreground and those that are further from the camera are in the background.
 - Show the importance of a subject by placing it either in the foreground or background. If you want to show that something is important, take a photograph of it in the foreground. If you want to show that something is less important, take a photograph with it in the background.
 - Show *context* in the photograph by photographing more than one object. Placing a flower in the foreground with a factory in the background can tell a more powerful story than just the factory alone.

- *Contrast in the photograph*—Showing two objects, or people, which are different from each other (old vs. new, happy vs. sad, active vs. still) can help to create interest and movement in the picture.
 - For example, if you were taking a picture of a person in the window on a train, that might tell one story, but if you include in the foreground another person running for the train, that might tell another story.

SHARE

STEP 5: The Story

A story can be told in a stand-alone photograph, but it can be told more fully by sequencing photographs.

- Show several photographs in sequence. Think about photographs you have taken on a vacation. One photograph might give the viewer a small glimpse into the story of your trip, but several photographs taken on the same day will give the viewer a much fuller picture.
- As you take photographs of your community, consider how several photographs can give a broader "snapshot" of the history of that community.
 - You may want to include several types of subjects (landscape, cultural marker and portraits).
 - Or, you might choose to show one type of subject (such as all portraits) which will tell a different story about your community.

Suggested Resources

National Geographic: Photo Guide:

<http://www.nationalgeographic.com/photography/index.html>

National Geographic: Path to Adventure—Adventure Photography Tips

<http://www.nationalgeographic.com/pathtoadventure/phototips/>

National Geographic Traveler: Photography Tips

<http://www.nationalgeographic.com/traveler/photos/phototips0507/pt.html>

National Geographic: Photography Field Guide for Kids (hard copy book)

<http://shop.nationalgeographic.com/shopping/product/detailmain.jsp?itemID=64&itemType=PRODUCT&iMainCat=121&iSubCat=199&iProductID=64>

National Geographic: Xpeditions—Extreme Photography: Life through the Lens of Jimmy Chin

<http://www.nationalgeographic.com/xpeditions/lessons/06/q68/jchin.html>

ARTSEdge: Kevin Bubriski, on Photography and Place

<http://www.artsedge.kennedy-center.org/content/3289/>

ARTSEdge: The Language of Photography

<http://artsedge.kennedy-center.org/content/3531/>