Picture editing and selection

When you shoot a photo assignment the goal is usually going to be to have your best images published. But how do you choose the best images that most clearly tell your story from the many photos you took on the assignment?

Picture editing and selection is the process of filtering out the poor images and then choosing from the good images to publish your best images.
Picture editing

Picture editing is a review of your photos to remove all the images that you would not publish. This process will leave you with a group of quality photos that all support your story.

Editing guidelines

- Images must not violate security, accuracy, propriety and policy (SAPP) guidelines.
- Images must relate to the story.
- Images must enhance and help clarify the story.
- Images must communicate information to the reader.
- Images must be clear. Each one should have one center of interest, and there should be no potential to misread the photograph.
- Images must be of good composition, focus and exposure, and the image quality should be technically sound.
**Picture selection**

In the picture selection step you will review the remaining images from the picture editing process and choose which photo(s) will be submitted for publication.

In the book “Photojournalism” Kenneth Kobré and Betsy Brill explain the “secret” strategy for photo selection of Pulitzer Prize-winning photographer Joe Elbert, assistant managing editor of photography for the Washington Post, and his photography team. Elbert, they say, divides photographs into four hierarchical categories: informational, graphically appealing, emotional and intimate.

**Informational pictures** represent the “lowest common denominator,” describing primarily the five “Ws” (who, what, when, where, why and how) as in a written news story. These types of photographs report the facts without flavor.

The next type of photograph is **graphically appealing pictures**. These photos are the ones taken by photojournalists who try to make interesting pictures out of a routine and “boring” shooting assignment by using advanced composition techniques, such as framing a subject through a window or using a distorted perspective with a 24mm lens to add visual interest.

**Emotionally appealing photos** cause the reader to feel something about the subject, not just intellectualize about the story. They include photos with their subjects crying, laughing, smiling or performing other actions to appeal to the emotions of the viewer.

Of course emotionally appealing photos shouldn’t simply be used because of the emotions they may evoke. A better photo would also include information about the story.

**Intimate photos** make the viewer feel part of the subject’s world.

A similar way of selecting pictures for publication includes choosing those with impact. These pictures grab the viewer’s attention and draw them into the story. They have stopping power, emotional response, readability and design possibilities.

**Stopping power** involves strong visual elements that immediately attract the reader.

**Emotional response** refers to the photograph’s ability to touch the reader and evoke a reaction.

**Readability** is the mechanical process of seeing and recognizing the image and the psychological process of accepting or rejecting the image as believable. It sends a clear and direct message.

When selecting an image with **design possibilities** you ask yourself: Is the image going to be a cover photo for a magazine or one for an inside story? How can it be used to supplement the related news story? Is it the correct format for the space in the publication? You may also have to determine whether the photograph should run as a stand-alone photo or simply as a supporting image in a picture story. Whether a photo has all or just one of the qualities and characteristics outlined above, the right one to select is the one that best tells the story.

The following pages contain examples of photographs that represent ideas about picture selection.
Informational

This image is very simple, but very clearly communicates the information. There is one clear center of interest and easily-read labels on the supplies. It is obvious that a relief effort is underway.
Graphically appealing

Interesting shapes, colors and textures draw readers in by creating an image that is pleasing to the eye.
Emotional

What kind of emotions does this photo evoke? How will this bring your reader into the story?
Intimate

An intimate image gives the reader a sense of connection to the subject. It brings the reader into the world of the subject.
Stopping power

This photo has the ability to make a passer-by stop and look again. It creates interest and curiosity to know more.
Emotional response

Your readers will be able to connect to a photo like this because it creates an emotional response.

U.S. Army photo by Kaye Richey
Readability

Does this image make clear what is happening? Is it easy to read?
Design possibilities

What could you do with this photo? An Air Force birthday story? DOD weapons systems story? A story on a particular squadron?

Photo courtesy of Defense Imagery.
Conclusion

Being involved in the picture-editing and picture-selection processes while you’re still on your shooting assignment will help save you and your editor time when publishing your pictures, as well as help ensure viewers actually see the most powerful images available to tell the story.
References


Nikon D70 owners manual

SB800 Flash Manual

BPASC Photojournalism Handbook (2009)