Visual communications

We are all capable of shooting snapshots, and many of you have photo albums full of them. However, most of these are not the types of photographs that get your readers' attention and communicate information.

We must strive to get pictures that provide the readers with enough information to get them to read our stories. Using visual communication techniques properly and understanding what makes a photograph publishable can accomplish this.
Definition

Visual communication is visually telling a story or expressing an idea through the use of one or more photographs.

- Did you know that readership goes from 12 percent to 42 percent when photographs are incorporated into the story?
- Images help bring your words into focus for your readers.
Visual communication techniques

There are nine compositional techniques that will enhance your photos, and, in turn, publication. They include center of interest, eliminating distractions, selective focus, framing, leading lines, silhouettes, reflections, patterns and repetition, and size relationship.

**Center of interest** -- The center of interest is usually the dominant or largest focused element in your photo that contains action. Every photo must contain a center of interest, which is the reason for taking the photograph.
Eliminating distractions -- Eliminate distractions by changing camera position, changing your subject’s position, using minimum depth-of-field, or using selective focus.

- Watch out for border, color, foreground and background distractions.
- Unnecessary objects in your photo interfere with the dominant subject.
Selective focus -- With this technique, we can choose one part of the image to be sharp and in focus, while the rest of the image is kept out of focus.

- For selective focus, try choosing your widest f-stops such as f/2.8 or f/4.
- Couple this with a fast shutter speed to ensure enough light is present in the photo.
**Framing** -- This technique should guide the viewer to the dominant subject.

- The frame should not be distracting and should imply space (depth) between the viewer and the dominant subject.

![Photo of a person in safety goggles looking through a hole in machinery](image1)

*Photo courtesy of Defense Imagery*

![Photo of a military personnel standing in front of bookshelves](image2)

*U.S Air Force photo by Staff Sgt. Charles Vaughn*
**Leading lines** -- Taking advantage of the natural lines available in architecture and urban settings can enhance the visual and emotional impact of your photos.

- When used well, lines can draw attention to your center of interest and create a sense of continuity that’s pleasing to the eye.

- To create this effect you can use railroad tracks, table tops, or any object that will imply a line to your subject.

*U.S Air Force photo by Tech Sgt. Karl Vester*
Silhouettes -- In a silhouette, the subject should be at least three f/stops darker than the background. You must have the subject against a brightly-lit background with no distractions.

- Take the meter reading from the background. Normally a single subject will be shot as a profile.
- Identity of the subject is not necessary.
- Silhouettes create a dramatic composition and is usually an idea easily understood.
- Silhouettes will put the subject in a strong story-telling context.
Reflections -- The reflected object should be relevant to the subject or action, aiding in the story-telling ingredient of the photo.

- Reflections can be found in any reflective surface such as mirrors, water, bumpers, glass, etc.
- Focus on the subject in the reflected surface.
- Expose for the subject’s reflection.
- Avoid your own reflection in the surface by standing at a slight angle to the reflected surface.
Patterns and repetitions -- Patterns and repetition are very prevalent in nature. They can be found in the design of a flower blossom, in the bark of a tree, or in a spring meadow. Pattern and repetition is nature’s attempt at organizing the randomness of itself.

- For a pattern to be recognized there must be more than three repetitions of shapes, colors, forms, etc. Two or three does not make for a strong pattern at all, just a grouping.
- By adding a subject that breaks up or contrasts the pattern/repetition you create visual interest.
**Size relationship** -- Shows the relationship between two or more objects. It helps to describe the subject or contrast it. The relationship can either be similar or larger.
Guidelines

There are three basic rules to identifying publishable photographs. They should contain news value, prominence and action.

**News value** -- All publishable photos should have some form of news value.

- The photos should be *interesting* to the readers.
- They should give readers *information* they don’t already know or confirm what they do know.
- They should evoke an *emotional response* from the reader.
Prominence -- All photos will have some form of prominence, in other words, the photo should appeal to and/or have impact on people.

- **Worldwide** prominence will have an impact to people in many parts of the world by the subject matter of the image.
- **National** prominence will have an impact to people in the country or parts of the country.
- **Local** prominence will have impact to people in a region, county, city or town.
**Action** -- All good photographs will have some form of action. This action will either be physical, implied or facial.

- **Physical** is when the action is clear from the photo taken what is happening.
- **Implied** action is when we know something is happening in the photo and we are clear what it is even though nothing has visual movement. We often use the laws of science to show the action.
- **Facial** action would be best known as expression. The look on the subject’s face tells the story of the action that is happening.

By understanding and using different compositional techniques you can add variety and spark interest in your photographs. Knowing whether to publish a photograph is a difficult decision. Using these basic guidelines will help determine if you should publish the photo and if the photo should be released outside local installation.
Conclusion

You are in this course to learn to tell the military story. In your role as a photojournalist you are a vital part of that process.

The more you become familiar with and start using the visual communication techniques presented in this lesson, the better you will be able to attract viewers and keep their attention.
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