

Photojournalism

WEEK FIVE: News and features

Learning Outcomes



At the end of this week, you should be able to:

1. Explain news and features in journalism
2. Explore news and features in Photojournalism
3. Discuss types of Photojournalism
4. Apply news and features in Photojournalism

Introduction

This lecture introduces you to news and features in Photojournalism. In photojournalism, "news" refers to the practice of capturing and presenting visual images that report on current events, developments, or issues of public interest. In photojournalism, "features" refer to a specific type of photographic storytelling that goes beyond the immediate news cycle. Unlike breaking news or hard news, which focus on timely events and developments, features delve into the broader human experience, providing in-depth narratives, insights, and perspectives on various subjects.

News and features in journalism

In journalism, *news* and *features* are two distinct types of content, each serving a different purpose and style of reporting. Below an explanation of both:

1. News:

- **Timeliness:** News articles focus on recent events and developments. They aim to provide the most up-to-date information to the public. This often means reporting on events as they happen or shortly after they occur. According to The University of Kansas (1994-2023), a news story is a written or recorded (or, occasionally, live) article or interview that informs the public about current events, concerns, or ideas.
- **Objectivity:** News reporting strives for objectivity and impartiality. Journalists aim to present facts and information in a balanced and neutral manner, allowing readers to form their own opinions. According to the Encyclopaedia of Applied Ethics (1998: 381), objectivity is a guiding principle of contemporary journalism according to which news should be reported without bias.
- **Inverted Pyramid:** News stories typically follow the inverted pyramid structure, where the most important information is presented at the beginning (the lead) and

less crucial details follow in descending order of importance. This structure allows readers to get the main points quickly. Essential information generally refers to the oft-cited “Five Ws” of journalism: Who, What, When, Where, and Why. A successful lead paragraph communicates, on a basic level, the essential facts of who did what, when, where, and why.

The “nut” graphs that follow contain additional details, quotes from sources, statistics, background, or other information. These are added to the article in order of importance, so that the least important items are at the bottom (Purdue Online Writing Lab, 2022).

- **Sources:** News stories rely heavily on sources such as official statements, interviews with key individuals, eyewitness accounts, and data. Verification and accuracy are paramount in news reporting. According to Riordan (2014) the reality is that all journalists and media organizations have more complex editorial responsibilities in the hybrid social age. And yet a somewhat unhelpful divide between the defenders of truthful, impartial reportage and a new approach that favours transparency and participation by the audience to get a story right has emerged.
- **Headlines:** News articles often have concise, informative headlines that summarize the main point of the story. Headlines are the marquees of news stories. These short statements located at the beginning of an article frame the information that is to follow. They encapsulate a portion of the story, presenting a snapshot of reality. The New York Times headlines an article as “Climate Change Will Disrupt Half of North America’s Bird Species.” National Geographic frames the same story as “Climate Change May Put Half of North American Birds at Risk of Extinction.” Headlines can distill reality, but with varying degrees of certainty, tone, and outcome (Muddiman and Scacco, 2023).
- **Examples:** Breaking news reports, political updates, crime stories, and coverage of major events like elections or disasters are all examples of news journalism. According to Encyclopedia Britannica (2023), hard news, journalistic style and genre that focuses on events or incidents that are considered to be timely and consequential to people locally, regionally, nationally, or internationally. Traditionally, hard news covers topics such as politics, international affairs, economics, and science.

Hard news stands in contrast with “soft news,” which tends to blur the line between information and entertainment. The term *soft news* originally referred to feature articles, but it has since been applied to a wider range of news, usually including human-interest stories. General topic areas that are typically considered soft news include entertainment, arts, celebrities, and other culture-related subjects.

In the current media landscape, hard and soft news techniques are often blended. Topics that are traditionally considered hard news can be softened by using a different style of reporting, and soft news frequently incorporates information that is of political and societal importance. A story about an election, for example, may have a hard news topic, but a journalist may choose to approach it softly by focusing on the personal experiences of individuals who participate in the election or are affected by its outcome.

2. Features:

- **Depth and Analysis:** Feature articles provide in-depth analysis, context, and background information on a particular topic or issue. They go beyond the "who, what, where, when" of news to explore the "why" and "how." According to Word Wise Tips (2004-2023), a feature article is a human interest story about a person, event, or place. Rather than simply summarizing the subject, a feature article highlights one aspect or significance of the story. Its less formal style may take an odd twist or heartwarming angle.
- **Human Interest:** Features often focus on the human aspect of a story. They may include personal narratives, profiles of individuals, or stories that evoke emotions and empathy. Emotional storytelling is characterized by the frequent use of dramatic and personalized narratives (Wahl-Jorgensen, 2013). As a form of strategic narrative, personalized narratives focus on individual experiences, rather than collective or group experiences (Zhou and Niederdeppe, 2017).
- **Narrative Structure:** Unlike the inverted pyramid of news, feature stories often use a more narrative structure, with a lead that may draw readers in with a compelling anecdote or description. According to ZeePedia. Com, *Introduction or Lead:* The lead must attract immediate attention and pull the reader into the story. Leads can vary in style and content. You can use description, narration, dialogue, question, unusual statement, call to action, comparison-contrast. *Transition:* No matter how good the lead is, you need a solid transition into the body of the feature. If you think of the lead as a lure to attract the audience, then the transition sets the hook. It makes the reader want to continue. And it promises some kind of satisfaction or reward. The reward can be entertainment, information or self-awareness but has to be something of value to the reader. *Body:* Sound knowledge of the subject, coupled with good writing skills, will let you take the reader through a variety of experiences. You should use the standard writing devices of crisp dialogue, documental but vivid fact and detail, careful observation, suspense and if appropriate, plot. *Conclusion:* The conclusion should give the reader a sense of satisfaction. You need to tie the conclusion to the lead so that the story has unity. Often you can do this through a short, tight summary, occasionally, you can conclude with an anecdote or a quote that sums up the substance of the story. With a narrative approach, you build toward a climax.

- **Creativity:** Feature writers have more flexibility to use descriptive language, storytelling techniques, and creative writing to engage readers. News is immediate and current whereas a feature can be evergreen, although many are also topical. An evergreen story of course has staying power, being just as relevant and interesting a year or even 5 years in the future. The topics are not always lighthearted however—some features shine a light on societal issues or expose suffering. Feature writing is more flexible, adopting various styles. The lead or opening paragraph for instance can be anecdotal and descriptive. This gives the writer creative freedom and an opportunity to practice their narrative writing skills and employ storytelling techniques like the ample use of descriptions, plot, and character development. A feature piece can be entertaining—profiling an artist or singer, it can be informative—shining a light on an obscure problem, or it can raise awareness about a current issue. (Hill, 2023)
- **Longer Format:** Features are typically longer and may cover multiple angles or perspectives on a topic. They may also include interviews with experts, witnesses, or those directly involved. According to Dianova (2017), news story and a feature story have different types of beginnings and endings. News stories tell what the news is upfront and then give the most important details in the first paragraph or two. The beginning – or lead – of a feature story, on the other hand, doesn't give the news straightaway. Instead, it hooks readers and keeps them reading until the end. A news story can end anywhere after you've described the most important facts, whereas a feature story ends with readers feeling satisfied that they gained some value from reading the story.
- **Examples:** Magazine profiles, in-depth investigative reports, travel pieces, opinion pieces, and human interest stories are all examples of feature journalism. According to Rogers (2019) he outlined five types of feature writing styles: *The news feature* is just what the name implies: a feature article that focuses on a topic in the news. News features are often published in the main news, or "A" section, or the local news, or "B" section, of a paper. *A profile* is an article about an individual, such as a politician, celebrity, athlete, or CEO. Profiles seek to give readers behind-the-scenes looks at what a person is like, warts and all, behind the public persona. *Spot features* are feature stories produced on deadline that focus on a breaking news event. They are often used as sidebars to the main bar, the deadline news story about an event. *The trend* story would likely appear in the lifestyle, fashion, cooking, high-tech, or entertainment section. These stories explore trends such as a new look in women's fall fashions, a website or tech gadget that everyone's going nuts over, an indie band attracting a cult following, or a show on an obscure cable channel that's suddenly hot. *The live-in* is an in-depth, often magazine-length article that paints a picture of a particular place and the people who work or live there. Live-in stories might appear in the lifestyle section of the paper or in a magazine that the paper publishes occasionally, such as once a week or once a month.

In summary, news journalism focuses on delivering timely, objective, and concise information about current events, while feature journalism offers in-depth analysis, context, and often a more narrative and creative approach to storytelling. Both forms of journalism play crucial roles in informing and engaging the public, but they serve different purposes and cater to different reader expectations.

News and Features in photojournalism

As we had seen before in photojournalism, news refers to the practice of capturing and presenting visual images that report on current events, developments, or issues of public interest. The news photography captured by a photojournalist serves as a vital component of journalism, offering a visual narrative that complements written news stories. The following are key aspects of news in photojournalism and some are similar to what we saw earlier on apart from a few:

1. **Timeliness:** Like written news reporting, news in photojournalism is time-sensitive. Photographers aim to capture images that document events as they unfold or shortly after they occur. These images often provide immediate visual context to breaking news stories.
2. **Visual Storytelling or narratives:** Photojournalists tell stories through their images. They use the power of visual composition, lighting, and framing to convey the essence of an event or situation, sometimes in a single frame. The skills a photojournalist employs are key as well and especially his or her mastery in the use of camera.
3. **Objectivity or truthfulness:** Objectivity is a fundamental principle in news photography. Photojournalists strive to present a fair and balanced representation of events, avoiding any manipulation or alteration of images that could mislead viewers.
4. **Accuracy:** Accuracy is paramount in photojournalism. Images must accurately represent the scene or subject being documented. Misleading or staged or manipulated photos can damage the credibility of both the photographer and the news organization.
5. **Ethical Considerations:** Photojournalists adhere to ethical guidelines that govern their work. These guidelines include respecting the privacy and dignity of individuals photographed, obtaining appropriate permissions when necessary, and avoiding any interference in the events they are covering.
6. **Candid Moments:** News photographers often capture candid moments that provide an unfiltered and authentic view of events. These moments can convey raw emotions and the true nature of a situation. Though some are risky to capture for example a riot or in a war zone.
7. **Composition:** Composition in news photography is of essence. Photojournalists use techniques such as the rule of thirds, leading lines, fill the frame, perspective, framing and others to create visually compelling and informative images. The principles and elements of composition are well documented in our lecture four.

8. **Captioning:** Each news photo is typically accompanied by a caption that provides essential information about the image, including the *who*, *what*, *when*, *where*, and *why* of the event. Accurate and informative captions help viewers understand the context of the photo. According to Federico (2016), captions should be fact-checked and typo-checked. They should be complete sentences that present the who, what, where, when and (sometimes) why without necessarily stating the obvious (i.e., he sits, she waves, they clap). Captions give photos context, telling viewers what's going on in a photo so they don't have to guess or jump to conclusions. You do not need to summarize the entire story in the caption; it should supplement or complement the story. If the caption is as deep as the photo, it's too long! Please keep captions to a couple lines.
9. **Deadline Pressure:** Photojournalists often work under tight deadlines. News must be presented at the right time. They must capture, select, and transmit their images quickly to ensure they can be included in news stories published or broadcasted in a timely manner. They also work under editors who most of the times are very strict.
10. **Diverse Subjects:** News photography covers a wide range of subjects, including politics, conflicts, disasters, sports, human interest stories, and more. Photographers must adapt their skills to capture various types of events. Note that some events happen without prior notification such as natural disasters, while others the photojournalist have prior knowledge before they happen, in both cases they must always be alert.
11. **Impact:** Powerful news photos can have a profound impact on public opinion and policy decisions. Iconic images can become symbols of historical moments or social issues. According to the New York Times Licensing, the impulse to create images has been around for generations. Whether they be cave paintings or the ceiling of Sistine Chapel, images have been employed to convey information throughout human history. Images can make it easy for viewers to digest a large amount of information in a single frame. Often a user can see a single picture and immediately know what the broader story is about.

In photojournalism, features refer to a specific type of photographic storytelling that goes beyond the immediate news cycle. Unlike breaking news or hard news, which focus on timely events and developments, features delve into the broader human experience, providing in-depth narratives, insights, and perspectives on various subjects. The following are key aspects of news in photojournalism and some are similar to what we saw earlier on apart from a few:

1. **Depth and Context:** Feature photography aims to provide depth and context to a story or topic. It often involves in-depth research and interviews to provide a comprehensive understanding of the subject. The goal is to give viewers a richer, more nuanced perspective.
2. **Human Interest:** Features often highlight the human element of a story. They may focus on individuals and their personal experiences, emotions, and challenges. These stories can be powerful and relatable, resonating with viewers on a personal level.

3. **Storytelling:** Feature photographers are storytellers. They use images to narrate a compelling story, sometimes over several pages or in a series of photographs. The photographs are carefully selected and sequenced to engage viewers and convey a narrative arc.
4. **Long-Form:** Unlike news photography, which tends to be brief and focused on single moments, feature photojournalism can involve longer, more in-depth coverage. This might include multiple photographs, captions, and extensive written content.
5. **Visual Creativity:** Feature photographers have more creative freedom to experiment with composition, lighting, and visual style. They often aim to create images that are not just informative but also visually stunning or emotionally evocative.
6. **Diverse Subjects:** Feature photography covers a wide range of subjects, including human interest stories, cultural explorations, profiles of individuals, environmental issues, and more. The diversity of topics allows photographers to showcase their versatility and storytelling skills.
7. **Social Commentary:** Features can serve as a form of social commentary. They shed light on societal issues, challenges, and triumphs. By documenting these aspects of society, feature photographers can draw attention to important subjects and stimulate discussion. According to Kench (2022), Social commentary is an element of a narrative that levels a comment — usually a critique — on societal issues or general society as a whole. Any issue relating to or ingrained aspect of a society can be a target. The presentation of social commentary can range from obvious and on-the-nose to subtle and layered within subtext. This type of commentary can be found in literature, music, television, and cinema. Not all stories contain an element of social commentary. Targets of this commentary and criticism can range from extremely broad, such as the concept of racism, to more specific, precise targets such as Reagan’s handling of the AIDS epidemic.
8. **Emotion and Empathy:** Feature photos often evoke emotions and empathy in viewers. They capture moments of joy, struggle, resilience, and human connection. These emotional connections can make the stories more memorable and impactful. Pictures related to famine or climate change for example may elicit lots emotions and empathy from viewers.
9. **Ethical Considerations:** Just like in news photography, ethics are crucial in feature photography. Photographers must obtain consent when necessary, respect privacy, maintain the integrity of the story they are telling. Honest photographs form the backbone of photojournalism. According to (O’Neil, 2023) while genres like fine art or product photography permit alterations, including the addition or removal of objects or people from a photo, photojournalism merely allows for color and tonal value corrections in post-production. Cropping can help strengthen storytelling in a photo, but not when it omits details and creates an incomplete portrayal. Plenty of photojournalists have

attempted to cheat reality in the darkroom or especially with the computer, only to find themselves unemployed once the deceit was discovered.

10. **Cultural Insights:** Feature photography frequently explores different cultures and traditions. It can provide viewers with insights into the customs, rituals, and ways of life of people from various backgrounds. History shows that, photography has developed to become a field that not only captures the memories of cultures, traditions, and people around the world, but also helps to shape these memories.

11. **Storytelling Collaboration:** Feature photojournalists may work closely with writers and editors to create comprehensive multimedia stories that combine photographs, text, and sometimes video to provide a rich storytelling experience. According to the New York Times Licensing, provokes us to imagine a newspaper, magazine, billboard, news segment or online article that included no images. Not only do pictures help to enhance a story, they also tell a story all their own. When thoughtfully incorporated into the news, photos add context and comprehensibility. In the world of media, photos can make or break a story, thus positioning photojournalism itself as a vital craft in itself.

Overall, feature photojournalism offers a more in-depth and nuanced exploration of subjects, often with a strong emphasis on the human aspect of the story. It allows photographers to use their visual storytelling skills to engage, educate, and provoke thought on a wide range of topics, making it a vital and compelling aspect of journalism.

Compare and contrast news and feature stories in photojournalism

Feature stories and news stories in photojournalism share similarities in that they both use visual storytelling to convey information and engage the audience. However, they have distinct differences in terms of purpose, content, style, and approach. There are many kinds of stories. The most common ones are a news story and a feature story. Even experienced writers often confuse the two (Dianova 2017). The following are comparisons and contrasts of feature stories and news stories in photojournalism:

Purpose:

- **News Stories in Photojournalism:**

- **Purpose:** The primary purpose of news stories in photojournalism is to provide a visual representation of current events or developments. These events are typically of immediate public interest and often require quick and objective documentation.
- **Timing:** News photos are time-sensitive, capturing the most recent and breaking events.
- **Objective:** News photos aim to provide an objective and factual account of the event, allowing viewers to understand the "who," "what," "when," "where," and "why" quickly.

- **Feature Stories in Photojournalism:**

- **Purpose:** Feature stories in photojournalism aim to provide a more in-depth and nuanced visual narrative. They go beyond the immediate news cycle to explore broader themes, emotions, and human experiences.
- **Timing:** Feature photos are often not tied to immediate events and can be published at any time. They have a more timeless quality.
- **Objective:** While they aim for objectivity, feature photos often allow for a more subjective and personal approach to storytelling. They may include the photographer's perspective and interpretation.

Content:

- **News Stories in Photojournalism:**

- **Content:** News photos primarily focus on capturing key moments and essential details that convey the essence of the news event.
- **Emphasis:** The emphasis is on clarity and accuracy. News photos aim to provide a clear and factual representation of the event.
- **Subjects:** The subjects of news photos are often people involved in the immediate event, officials, protestors, or those directly impacted.

- **Feature Stories in Photojournalism:**

- **Content:** Feature photos in photojournalism often focus on the human aspect of a story. They delve into individual experiences, emotions, and the broader context surrounding the subject.
- **Emphasis:** Feature photos aim to evoke emotions, empathy, and connection with viewers. They prioritize storytelling and often capture candid, unscripted moments.
- **Subjects:** The subjects of feature photos can be individuals, communities, or environments that are part of a larger narrative or theme.

Style:

- **News Stories in Photojournalism:**

- **Style:** News photos are typically straightforward and focused on capturing the moment with accuracy.
- **Composition:** Composition is important, but the emphasis is on clarity and conveying the event's facts.
- **Caption:** Captions for news photos provide essential information about the event and its context.

- **Feature Stories in Photojournalism:**

- **Style:** Feature photos often have a more creative and narrative style, allowing for experimentation with composition, lighting, and visual storytelling techniques.
- **Composition:** Creative composition, framing, and visual storytelling play a significant role in feature photos.
- **Caption:** Captions for feature photos may be longer and more descriptive, providing context and depth to the story.

Examples:

- **News Stories in Photojournalism:** Images of protests, natural disasters, political rallies, and sporting events that capture the immediate action and impact.
- **Feature Stories in Photojournalism:** Photo essays that explore the daily life of a community, personal narratives of individuals facing challenges, environmental photo stories, or in-depth explorations of cultural traditions.

In summary, news stories in photojournalism focus on capturing immediate events objectively and accurately, while feature stories aim to provide a deeper, more emotional, and narrative-driven perspective on broader themes and human experiences. Both forms of photojournalism are essential in conveying a comprehensive understanding of the world's events and stories.

Types of Photojournalism

According to iSchoolConnect (2023), there are seven categories of photojournalism and these are:

Spot news photojournalism: It is the coverage of unplanned and often unpleasant occurrences like air crashes, road accidents, etc.

General news photojournalism: Just as the name suggests it deals with coverage of planned events like press conferences and other official events.

Feature photojournalism: It includes coverage of any non-news-related events or occurrences. It mainly focuses on pictures that are meant to entertain people.

Sports action photojournalism: It deals with covering important events occurring in the world of sports.

Portrait/personality photojournalism: Portrait or personality photojournalism deals with conveying the emotions of the person being photographed.

Pictorial photojournalism: It deals with producing outstanding images that are meant to showcase the artistic side of photojournalism.

Illustration photojournalism: It deals with manipulating two different images to create a new image which helps in conveying a message which may or may not be related to what is being photographed in the images.

How do I apply news and features in my photojournalism practice

Applying both news and feature approaches in your photojournalism practice can make you a well-rounded and versatile photographer. Here are some tips on how to effectively incorporate both styles into your work:

1. Diversify Your Assignments:

- Seek a variety of assignments that cover a wide range of topics and events. This will give you opportunities to practice both news and feature photography. According to O'Neil, (2023), a photojournalism project begins with an idea, a theme, a topic. Beginner photojournalists may have to find this on their own, by following their passion or relying on their network of contacts. More experienced photojournalists can develop relationships with news outlets and work on assignment. Either way, photojournalists can work as freelancers or as staff photographers. The only way to get started is to get out in the world and start shooting photos that tell true stories.

2. Understand the Assignment:

- When you receive an assignment, clarify whether it's primarily a news story or a feature story. Understanding the purpose and expectations will help you tailor your approach. After choosing a suitable subject, or receiving an assignment, the photojournalist will often make a list of shots they'd like to incorporate in their story. Even if sent spontaneously to cover a press conference or sporting event, a seasoned photojournalist will have a few necessary shots in mind, like some portraits, some wide-angle all-encompassing shots, and some storytelling feature shots (O'Neil, 2023).

3. News Photography:

- For news assignments, focus on capturing key moments and essential details that convey the who, what, when, where, and why of the event.
- Be ready to work quickly and under pressure to capture timely images.
- Prioritize accuracy and objectivity. Avoid staging or altering scenes.
- Pay attention to composition and framing to create clear and impactful images.
- Capture reactions and emotions, as they can add depth to the news story.

4. Feature Photography:

- For feature assignments, take a more storytelling approach. Look for unique angles, perspectives, and characters that can add depth and interest to your images.

- Spend time getting to know your subjects and understanding their stories. Build rapport to capture intimate and candid moments.
- Be patient and allow events to unfold naturally, capturing the emotions and interactions of people involved.
- Experiment with creative composition, lighting, and framing to create visually striking images.
- Use longer captions or accompany your images with written narratives to provide context and depth.

5. Develop a Narrative Eye:

- Learn to recognize stories within events. Whether it's a news event or a feature story, every situation has its unique narratives waiting to be captured. Variety is important in visual storytelling. Many visual stories open with a wide shot to set the scene, then apply a succession of medium and close-up shots to provide context and detail. For example, a riot contains many more elements than just people smashing windows. The onlookers, police and peaceful demonstrators, the treatment of tear-gassed individuals, the red and blue lights as far as the eye can see, all of this and more should be documented to tell the complete visual story (O'Neil, 2023).
- Think about the larger context and themes related to your assignment. What is the broader story you want to tell?

6. Adapt to the Situation:

- Be flexible and adaptable. Sometimes, news can evolve into feature stories, and vice versa. Be prepared to adjust your approach as the situation develops.

7. Ethical Considerations:

- Always maintain high ethical standards, regardless of the type of assignment. Respect the privacy and dignity of the people you photograph.
- Clearly communicate your intentions to your subjects, especially in sensitive situations.

8. Study and Learn:

- Study the work of renowned photojournalists who excel in both news and feature photography. Analyze their techniques and storytelling approaches.
- Continuously seek feedback from mentors, peers, and editors to improve your skills in both styles.

9. Build a Portfolio:

- Create a portfolio that showcases your ability to excel in both news and feature photography. Having a diverse range of work will make you more marketable as a photojournalist.

10. Stay Informed:

- Stay informed about current events and issues. Having a solid understanding of the news landscape will help you identify potential stories and opportunities for both news and feature coverage.

Remember that both news and feature photography require practice, experience, and a deep understanding of storytelling. By mastering both approaches, you'll be better equipped to capture and convey the complexities of the world around you through your lens.

Summary



In summary, news journalism focuses on delivering timely, objective, and concise information about current events, while feature journalism offers in-depth analysis, context, and often a more narrative and creative approach to storytelling. Both forms of journalism play crucial roles in informing and engaging the public, but they serve different purposes and cater to different reader expectations.

In essence, news in photojournalism involves using photography to report on current events accurately, objectively, and ethically. Photojournalists play a crucial role in conveying information, documenting history, and evoking emotions through their visual storytelling. Their work helps the public better understand and connect with the world's most important stories.

This century offers visual outlets like never before. Opportunities abound for rising photojournalists, thanks in large part to the internet. A highly connected world also offers more subjects for photojournalists to cover. Finding news and communicating with others takes far less effort today than it did in the 1930s, the “golden years” of photojournalism. Camera equipment has also advanced enormously, allowing a budding photojournalist to acquire a kit without spending a fortune. Well-executed photography, artistic and creative flair, ethically responsible practice, and a powerful story arc, all contribute to successful photojournalism.

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