



PSNZ HELP SHEET No 1

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## **PHOTOJOURNALISM**

### **The Art of Picture – Telling Stories**

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Photojournalism (P-J) is a photo that tells a story with only a title to tie it together. It needs to be a human interest story depicting real life activities, dramas, expressions of face, arms, legs, etc - in other words "body language". It must not be contrived or indicate that it has been contrived.

A very real trap in recognising good photojournalism is our own memory. Good P-J is total communication. Many a judge has been puzzled by a picture that brought back vivid memories to its author. Bear in mind that someone else will not have your memories of an event and so must rely on what you have recorded in that split second.

A title can be a real help here, providing it is brief and to the point. Beware of throwaway titles - ones that just state the obvious. Got for the titles that will guide the viewer's thinking in the way you want it to go.

Man's presence in the picture is not always necessary. It can be inferred. What is essential is a clearly expressed theme.

Choosing the decisive moment to make the exposure is an art in itself. Whatever your subject (sports action, emotion or any other theme) there is always a most expressive fleeting moment. I suggest you bracket your exposures. Very often your memories of an occasion are stirred by a picture, but other people (judges included) do not have your memory and see only what is put before them. The Walt Disney cartoon creators always looked for the extremes of movement and then exaggerated them to make their characters see larger than life. In photography we have to settle for the extreme without the exaggeration but, if possible, do try and catch the facial expression at the same time. Body language is an extremely powerful tool in promoting any message.

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A vital consideration in emphasising your message is to move in close to the subject. Delete distracting detail, backgrounds, etc. (Note that most Press photographers use long lenses for this reason.)

The storytelling value of the photograph shall weigh more than the actual picture quality. This is a very important consideration but, of course, top pictorial quality is never wasted. Just look at the winners in photojournalism competition catalogues.

Choosing decisive moments and capturing expressive body language, ranging from the extremely physical to the more subtle gesture or quizzical facial expression, is an art in itself. It can be a lot of fun observing these human characteristics and they have always been a good photography subject. Thinking in P-J terms has helped to make such pictures even more selective and the successful entries make great viewing.

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