

Photo Narrative Essay

Photo essay is intended to tell a story or evoke emotion from the viewers through a series of photographs. They allow you to be creative and fully explore an idea.

So here's a list of photo essay examples. Choose one that you can do easily based on your photographic level and equipment.

1. Photograph a Protest

Protests are like local events. You will find people, some will be standing, some will be moving, some will be holding banners and signs. This is a great way to practice on a moving crowd. Try to capture the essence and atmosphere of the protest itself. There are many ways to do so and you will need to utilise all your skills.

Think about framing, composition and perspective. Run to the front and capture the head of the group moving forward. Then run towards the back to capture the families walking along.

There will also be bystanders standing on the sides watching it all unfold. These challenges will help you improve fast.



2. Transformation Photo Essay

Transformation is one of the most used photo essay topics, and that is because it is a great way to show change. The change can be slow, such as a woman going through pregnancy, or watching a baby turn into a toddler and beyond.

As a photo essay project, this doesn't even need to be about people. A building being torn down and rebuilt can make for a great time-lapse or series of images.

This is a great way to practice how to show change through images. You will need to be creative and meticulous in your approach. You will need to take the same image over and over again, but changing them enough to be interesting.

People love these projects because you photograph the old with the new. Life goes by so fast that we often forget what something looked like, compared to how it looks now.



3. Photograph the Same Place

Have you seen the movie 'Smoke' with Harvey Keitel? His character goes out every morning at the same time and takes a photograph. The photo is from the front of his shop.

He then prints the image and stores them in huge photo albums. Another character flips through these images to see all the different scenarios.

This is an easy photo essay to do as you use a simple set up. It might be a challenge to find somewhere accessible to you at the same time every day. The great thing about this photo essay project is that you can do it of anything.

The only prerequisite being that the areas need to change somewhat from day to day.



4. Create a Photowalk

As a photographer based in Budapest, I give guided photography tours. The idea is that you join me for three hours, and in that time I show you the streets and how to photograph them.

You will learn about your camera, how to use composition and know what to look for. There is nothing stopping you from doing the same in your hometown. This can make for a really interesting photo essay.

Have a clear idea of what you want to achieve, and create it as if you were teaching someone else. Look at reflections to photograph buildings. Or change your perspective to photograph people in different settings.

Repeat this until you are comfortable enough to give this as a tour. Once you know that route inside out, start again in a different area.



5. Photograph a Local Event

No matter where you live, there will be countless local events throughout the year. They might be fundraisers, farmers' markets, dances and festivals or food and music.

Their organisers will need a photographer. Even if it's just for social media images.

They may even offer you money, and if not, they will share the images for you, with your name attached. Here, you will capture candid images of people going about their way.

This is a great way to practise capturing emotions and atmosphere. As it is local, you will meet and network with many people who will need a photographer in the future. Keep your business cards with you.



6. Photograph an Abandoned Building

Urban exploration or Urbex is a thing. It is where you enter an abandoned building for the sake of (interest and) photography. It is a great social commentary on the state of our world.

Abandoned buildings also show us how life used to be. It's time travel without a time machine. They make for great photo essay shoots as the amount of details is very high.

Get permission and enter, but be careful as these buildings can be dangerous. Photograph the rooms and the details. This means you'll have to work with different lenses.

You will get the hang of photographing rooms, looking at light, patterns, shapes and forms. You are also in no hurry, so you can practise to your heart's content.



7. Landmark Photo Essay

One photo essay idea that I have always wanted to try is to photograph one landmark from many different vantage points. Think about it. Look at the Eiffel Tower, and how many collection of images have been taken of it.

All are from many different angles ranging from many different distances away. This is a great way to practise your positioning and composition through different perspectives.

You can incorporate details and a down-up viewpoint, you can photograph it from above utilising a drone. And there are thousands of ways to capture it through streets and using reflections.

The landmark is your study, and it will help you look at the light during different times of the day.

A similar photo essay idea would be to take the images of the landmark from other people from the same vantage point. Unsplash is perfect for this.



8. Fathers & Children Photo Essay

We live in a very different time than we did 50 years ago. Or even 20 years ago, as more and more fathers stay at home and look after the kids.

A great photo essay example would be to capture these small families to show this as social commentary for the times we live in.

These portraits and group photographs are a great way to practise and start building up a network of people. The first images are always going to be the most difficult to take. But once you pick up speed, you will have images to show and persuade the next group.

They can use a few of the images and share them, and they may even buy a few others from them. Families always need more photographs to hang on their wall.

