PHOTOGRAPHY BASICS FOR RESEARCHERS

Shannon Mullane, The Durango Herald

This check sheet provides an overview of ethical principles that guide photographers. It also offers a number of tips for improving basic photography techniques to help extreme events researchers capture meaningful and useful images.

NATIONAL PRESS PHOTOGRAPHERS ASSOCIATION ABBREVIATED CODE OF ETHICS

☐ Be accurate and comprehensive in the representation of subjects.

☐ Resist being manipulated by staged photo opportunities.

☐ Be complete and provide context when photographing or recording subjects. Avoid stereotyping individuals and groups. Recognize and work to avoid presenting one's own biases in the work.

☐ Treat all subjects with respect and dignity. Give special consideration to vulnerable subjects and compassion to victims of crime or tragedy. Intrude on private moments of grief only when the public has an overriding and justifiable need to see.

☐ While photographing subjects, do not intentionally contribute to, alter, or seek to influence events.

☐ Do not edit or manipulate images or add or alter sound in any way that can mislead viewers or misrepresent subjects.

☐ Do not pay sources or subjects or reward them materially for information or participation.

☐ Do not accept gifts, favors, or compensation from those who might seek to influence coverage.

PHOTOGRAPHY BASICS

☐ **Cutline/Caption:**

- Cutlines must identify all recognizable people by name. Crowds and people in the background can be identified more generally.

- Gather first and last names (with spelling) and contact information. If applicable, gather ages, place of origin, current residence, or other identifying information.

- Write down what's happening in the photo. Answer who, what, when, where, why, and how. Make sure it's clear which names go with which people.

☐ **Shot Types:**

- Try to capture three types of shots of the scene: the establishing shot, the medium shot, and the close-up.

  * **Close-up shot:** isolates and emphasizes one element, most often a face or a detail like a hand or object.

  * **Medium shot:** close enough to see the participant's actions, yet far enough away to show their relationship to one another and the environment.

  * **Establishing shot:** includes the largest amount of the scene, enables the reader to orient themselves to the scene.

Close-Up Shot

Medium Shot

Establishing Shot

☐ **Composition:**

- Every photo should have a focal point, a clean, clear center of interest.

Focal Point

- Avoid distractions in the background, and make sure that the subject is in focus.

Out of focus, distracting background

- Make sure the photo is properly exposed, not too dark or too light.

Underexposure

Overexposure

- More advanced photos have people in the scene, capture an action that tells a story, and use more compositional techniques like the rule of thirds, leading lines, and point of view (bird's eye, worm's eye, different angles).

Rule of Thirds

Leading Lines

SUGGESTED FURTHER READING

Cassidy, K. (n.d.). *The Basic Rules of Composition*. https://www.videomaker.com/article/c02/18610-the-basic-rules-of-composition

National Press Photographers Association. (n.d.). *Code of Ethics*. https://nppa.org/code-ethics

Society of Professional Journalists. (n.d.). *Code of Ethics*. https://www.spj.org/ethicscode.asp

Sullivan, T. (2018). A Beginner's Guide to Taking Great Video on Your Phone. *New York Times*. https://www.nytimes.com/2018/04/17/smarter-living/beginners-guide-phone-video.html