

A few of my thoughts on Photo Essays

With input from articles by other people

And judges remarks on my programs

By Steve O'Hare

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The steps of producing an essay.

1. Select a theme
2. Select and Sequence the photos
3. Add titles
4. Put in music and/or narration
5. Timing
6. Rehearse
7. Show Program

Select a theme

I have used two ways to select a theme. The first is to choose a series of slides and develop a story. The second is to decide on a topic and look for slides or shoot slides for the topic chosen. The theme can be anything that you want to have an interest in e.g. people, flowers, wildlife, or even some thing such as water or pumpkins.

●Either way, do not get too ambitious the first few times or you may get hopelessly discouraged. For the program on March 24, 2005, we are limited to not less than 15 or more than 36 slides.

Select and Sequence the slides

Since we only have a short time to prepare a program most of us will probably use slides that we have already taken.

●Remember in our usual club competitions the slide must stand alone and convey the thought to the judge. In a photo essay we can use less than salon-quality photos that work together to convey our story.

●In sequencing the slides start with a strong group and conclude with a strong group. But most importantly, think of the viewer, and put the slides together so you do not display a mixed-up conglomeration of slides haphazardly flashing across the screen. I remember my English teachers saying repeatedly "have an introduction, a body, and a conclusion." That holds true for a slide show.

Here is a list of considerations I try to use

1. Put like colors together
2. Put similar shapes together
3. Put a group of horizontal slides together followed by a group of verticals, then back to horizontals. Never switch from a single vertical to a horizontal and back and forth. Viewers cannot handle that.
4. In longer shows several sequences will allow a complete story.

5. Use close views, medium views, and distance views of a subject. Watch how TV shows use a distant view to set the scene, then move in closer and closer to show details.

Add Titles

Titles greatly add to a show. They can be made in a number of ways such as computer-generated signs, words on a chalkboard, or clip art -- whatever your imagination suggests. For the Australian show I presented at the club earlier this year, I went to a travel agency and got a couple of brochures on Australia. In one I found a map of the country. In another I found a kangaroo and a kola bear. I used these in both the main title and in sequences and they provided continuity throughout the program.

- If you are photographing a TV or computer screen the image is reformed about 30 times a second. A shutter speed of 1/30 or even 1/25 will capture an incomplete or distorted image. I like to expose at 1/8 sec or 1/15 sec so that several complete scans are superimposed.

Music

Dewitt Jones stated in an article for Outdoor Photography, "*The perception of photographs is amplified by the addition of music.*" He described how during a course he was teaching they had been viewing slides for a week, but when he showed the same slides with music, the students felt that the quality had greatly improved.

- Music sets the mood for the show, creates atmosphere and set the pace. Music that is familiar should be avoided or the viewers will pay more attention to the music than the slides. The selection on music is an individual choice, so there is no real right or wrong with a few exceptions. For example, a show on the interior of churches with John Philip Sousa marches probably would not work. Alternatively, a parade with Georgian chant probably would not work.

- As to copyright of music, I do not worry about it, as I never show my programs for pay. Maybe someday I will be sorry that I did not worry about this but not now.

Narration

TELL is almost more important than TAKE!

- The effect of good slides can be spoiled by poor story telling, and conversely, mediocre slides can frequently be made interesting by good narration. Preparation is required for TELLING, just as for TAKING.

I prefer to write out the narration originally and then go over the program with the script. When it comes time to show it to an audience, I go from memory letting the

slides trigger the words. When I read the script at a program I sound stilted. If I had to have a recorded narration, I would have someone with a good speaking voice record it for me.

- A few do's and don'ts
 - Talk about the slide that is on the screen, not one that has gone before or will come later.
 - Don't introduce each slide with "This is" or "Now we have" or "Here now would be."

Timing

These remarks on timing apply to programs designed for entertainment, not technical programs in which a slide may contain a great deal of information that cannot be absorbed in a short period.

- A slide should stay on the screen no longer than is necessary for the image to be seen and understood. It is a very unusual slide that is on for more than 15 seconds. Ten seconds is the norm and many slides should pass by even more quickly. Exceptions to this are when you are trying to make a specific point that requires a longer time or a rapid sequence when you are trying to achieve a dramatic feeling.

Rehearse

Rehearse by sitting where viewers would sit and experience the presentation from their viewpoint. I think that you will see changes that will improve the program.

Show the Program

Present the program and enjoy showing your work to others.

However, occasionally something will go wrong. A slide will jam, someone (usually me) kicks the cord and turns off the projector, or a bulb burns out. Don't worry, fix the problem, and go on. It happens to all of us.