

PHOTOJOURNALISM



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Definition

These notes are prepared as a guide for entrants in Photojournalism competitions that require images to comply with the Photographic Society of America (PSA) definition of Photojournalism which is:

Photojournalism entries shall consist of images with informative content and emotional impact, reflecting the human presence in our world. The journalistic (story-telling) value of the image shall receive priority over pictorial quality.

In the interest of credibility, images that misrepresent the truth, such as those from events or activities specifically arranged for photography or of subjects directed or hired for photography, are not eligible.

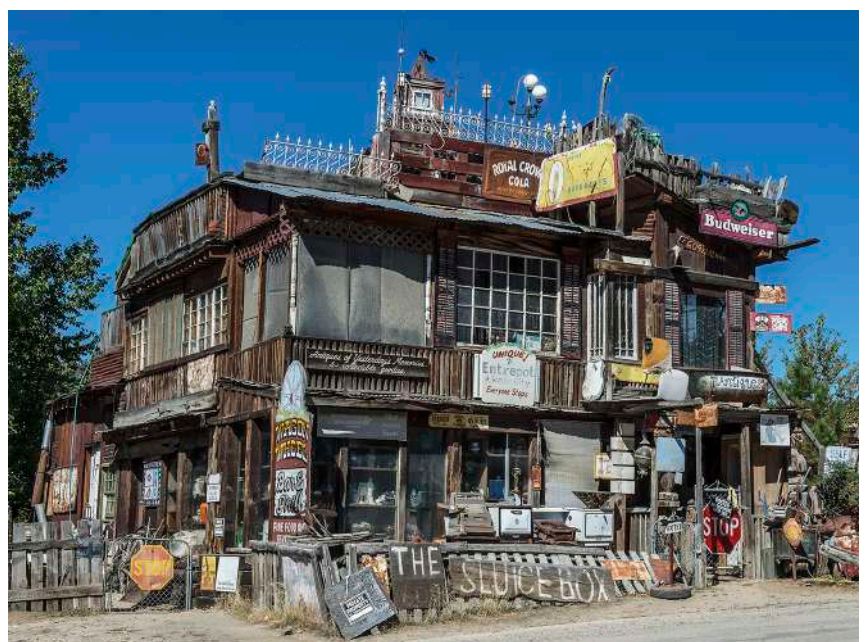
Techniques that add, relocate, replace or remove any element of the original image, except by cropping, are not permitted. The only allowable modifications are removal of dust, scratches or digital noise, restoration of the appearance of the existing scene, and conversion to greyscale monochrome. Derivations, including infrared, are not eligible.

Human interest images depict a person or persons in an interactive, emotional or unusual situation, excluding sports action.

You will note that the final paragraph of this definition specifies restrictions on image editing that are similar to the restrictions that apply to Nature images and to Photo Travel images. The basic idea behind all the definitions for these reality-based categories of photographic competition is that the images presented to judges should be a true record of the scene that was photographed. Further, the things in the scene should not have been controlled or set up specifically for the purpose of photography. (Set up scenes and manipulated images can, of course, be entered in open competitions.)

Informative Content

Images for Photojournalism competitions are meant to convey information in much the same way that images published in newspapers are designed to convey information. It is not sufficient to simply present a pretty picture. For example this image tells a story about how the old house is being used as a junk shop.



Emotional Impact

In addition to informative content, a strong photojournalism image will also have an emotional impact on viewers - it will make viewers feel *something* (happy, sad, angry, sympathetic, etc). For example:



Human Presence in the World

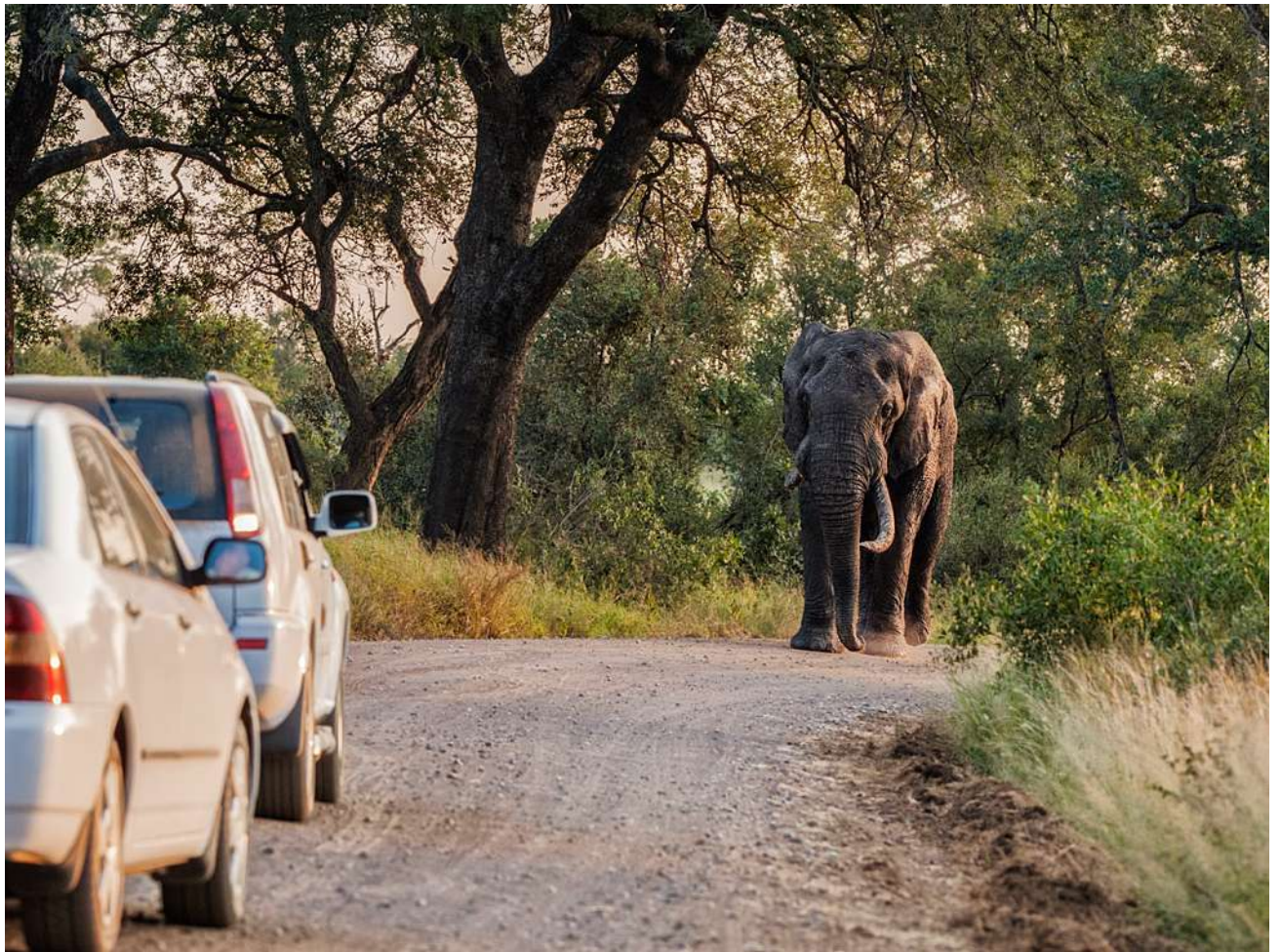
To satisfy this requirement there must be some evidence of humans or human activity, such as in these examples:



Story Telling

The strongest photojournalism images have very obvious stories that are interesting or unusual, as in these examples:





Sometimes a simple story is all that is required:



Sometimes there can be multiple layers to the story, as in this example:



In this image there is a story but the image does not “reflect the human presence in our world” so it is not suitable as a photojournalism image.



Arranged or Directed Situations

The basic requirement of Photojournalism images is that they must tell the truth - what was recorded 'just happened' and you were fortunate enough to be there to photograph it. If you (or other photographers) were not there it still would have happened exactly as you captured it.

You cannot set up a scene for the purpose of capturing a 'photojournalism' image and you cannot edit a photojournalism image in a way that alters the truth of what you captured. When capturing and editing images for photojournalism competitions you should follow the same principles and ethical practices that are expected of press photojournalists. You will find a useful set of such practices in the Code of Ethics statement of the National Association of Press Photographers (USA) <https://nppa.org/code-ethics>. The Associated Press Code of Ethics for Photojournalists expresses similar ideas <https://www.csus.edu/indiv/g/goffs/135%20photojournalism/associated%20press%20ethics%20code.pdf>.

Images of street parades, rodeos, air shows, etc., are acceptable in photojournalism because the events are not staged specifically for photographers (even though there is a reasonable expectation that photographers will be present). So images such as these would be acceptable:



Similarly, images such as this have obviously not been staged:



The situation becomes less clear when images are taken at historical re-enactments or at tourist attractions where historical crafts are being demonstrated. However, most judges will take the view that although these things are being staged for entertainment they are not being staged specifically for photography unless the photographer is directing participants to pose. So images such as these will generally be allowed in photojournalism competitions:



Of course, the photographer always knows whether or not the image they are presenting to judges was staged (or the subjects directed to do something in particular) and the expectation is that you will be honest. However, even when you are being honest, judges are likely to become suspicious if the image gives the impression that the image could have been staged or directed, as in these examples:

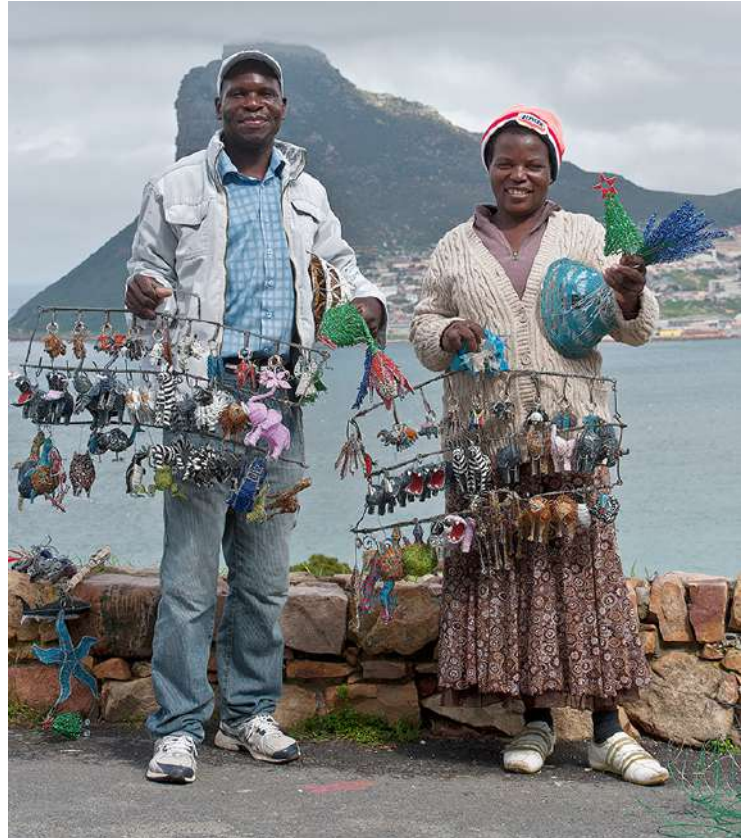


Image Editing

Nothing can be removed (except by cropping), nothing can be added and nothing can be relocated in a Photojournalism image. A useful guide to what you can do is in the Associated Press Code of Ethics for Photojournalists (available at the link given earlier in these notes):

The content of a photograph must not be altered in Photoshop or by any other means. No element should be digitally added to or subtracted from any photograph. The faces or identities of individuals must not be obscured by Photoshop or any other editing tool. Only retouching or the use of the cloning tool to eliminate dust on camera sensors and scratches on scanned negatives or scanned prints are acceptable.

Minor adjustments in Photoshop are acceptable. These include cropping, dodging and burning, conversion into grayscale, and normal toning and color adjustments that should be limited to those minimally necessary for clear and accurate reproduction (analogous to the burning and dodging previously used in darkroom processing of images) and that restore the authentic nature of the photograph. Changes in density, contrast, color and saturation levels that substantially alter the original scene are not acceptable. Backgrounds should not be digitally blurred or eliminated by burning down or by aggressive toning. The removal of “red eye” from photographs is not permissible.



For example, removal of some of the distractions in this image (by cloning) would make it ineligible for a photojournalism competition.



This image also illustrates the point that some images which are suitable for Photojournalism competitions might also be suitable for Photo Travel competitions. (Again with the limitation that Photo Travel images cannot be altered by cloning, etc.)

Monochrome Images



Original colour image.



Greyscale monochrome is permitted in Photojournalism.



Toned monochrome is NOT permitted in Photojournalism.



Greyscale monochrome with spot colour is NOT permitted in Photojournalism.

Natural Appearance of Images

Whatever adjustments are made to Photojournalism images the end result must look natural.



Original



Over-saturated - not permitted.



Partially desaturated - not permitted.



Obvious vignette - not permitted.

Over-sharpened images, with obvious sharpening halos or too much harsh detail will not be considered to look 'natural'.

Human Interest Images

Some photojournalism competitions have a sub-category for **Human Interest** images that are defined as:

Human Interest images depict a person or persons in an interactive, emotional, or unusual situation, excluding sports action.

This image has a person in an unusual situation so that is allowed in Human Interest.



Not allowed in Human Interest because no people are present.



An example of an interactive situation - OK for Human Interest.



An example of an emotional situation - OK for Human Interest.



No 'sports action' is permitted in Human Interest but both these images would be allowed in open Photojournalism:



Conclusion

It can sometimes be difficult to decide whether or not one of your images should be entered in a Photojournalism competition or an 'open' competition. To help make your decisions, ask yourself these questions:

- a) Does the image show obvious evidence of human presence in our world?
- b) Is there a strong story depicted in the image?
- c) Does the image have any emotional impact?
- d) Have I limited my editing/processing of the image to techniques that are allowed by the Photojournalism definition?
- e) Would the situation depicted in the image exist if I (or others) had not been there to photograph it?

If you cannot confidently answer YES to all these questions then do NOT enter the image in a Photojournalism competition.

If you want to suggest any improvements to these notes please send me an email.

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