

Creative Writing and Photography

Introduction to Creative Writing and Photography

It's all storytelling, you know. That's what journalism is all about.

— Tom Brokaw

Creativity comes in all forms- from strategic planning, solving problems and even decorating during Christmas. If done well it provides a true sense of accomplishment that yourself and others can enjoy. This section of the UPAR handbook provides a basis of creativity so that you can do your job better and with flair. Bring out your creative side with writing and photography!

Creative Writing – the Story

Storytelling is fundamental to human nature. It's part of our makeup to ponder how life affects others, to wonder at their struggles, observe their successes, learn their lessons and in so doing measure our own position in the human condition.

That's why journalism is such a recognizable and prominent part of our lives – it's really just storytelling. When we think of the five 'W's of journalism – the Who? What? Where? When? and Why? – it's the "Who?" that invariably first comes to mind. That's because, fundamentally, it's people we are most interested in. The other questions are secondary. Stories without people, without characters, just do not compel us.

In the field of journalism, storytelling takes two distinct forms. There is the hard news story and the feature story. News stories are, by their nature, *new* stories. They are fresh and immediate. This immediacy is sufficient to attract the interest of a reader. With news to convey, a news writer need only be technically proficient to render his or her story interesting to the reader.

A feature story is another matter entirely. There is often little immediate about it. There may be nothing fresh or new about the technician on base who won an award a month ago, or about the firefighter training for a marathon that hasn't happened yet. But though feature stories often appear to propose the slimmest of rationales for their existence, they can nevertheless be hugely interesting.

To generate that interest, a feature story is written much differently than a news story. Feature writing allows a little license – you must use your imagination, the power of description, a little colour, some emotion, character development and, of course, drama. In a news story you stick to the facts. In a feature story, you give depth to the facts. You still want to communicate to your reader some important or interesting information – you're just doing it in a more interesting way, a way that will make up for its lack of immediacy.

The feature story does not suffer the same restrictions as pure news, so you can be much more inventive. While it still requires structure and clarity, there is no "right" answer to a feature story. It's a perfect vehicle for those of you who like to write and who also want to promote the good deeds of your co-workers. If composed well and written with a little imagination, a good feature story will stay in the reader's mind long after the news of the day has made its daily journey into oblivion.

Journalism

Before embarking on your story, there are a few things you'll need to appreciate about the practice of journalism. After all, you'll want your story published. That will be easier if it looks and feels like every other story out there. Be mindful of the following when you don your 'Press' hat:

Curiosity. This is the single most important trait characterizing a journalist, and it's what you'll need to exercise by the bucketful if you want to write a good story. However, as members of the CF/DND team it can be tough to "un-mute" our curiosity. We're trained to keep secrets and we seem to naturally play down what to the rest of the population is some pretty exciting work. To write well you must ask well. It may not always be in our job description, but asking questions is the only way to get the information and the quotes that will make your story an interesting one.

Impartiality. Journalism is defined as *writing characterized by a direct presentation of facts or description of events without an attempt at interpretation*. When we interpret something we are filtering it through our own set of values and experiences. It's an inevitable part of being human, but when we interpret we are really making judgments. As a writer you must be aware of this process and strive to remain impartial. Seek balance. When you are gathering information, interviewing your subjects and crafting your story, resist the impulse to judge. Be as open-minded as possible. Present only the facts. Don't weigh your narrative down with bias. Let the story speak for itself. Let the readers judge for themselves based on the information you provide. If you take sides, the credibility of the story, along with its readability, is destroyed. Finally, try to avoid single-source journalism. If it's appropriate, get another opinion (it doesn't have to be a contrary one for a feature story!) A story is improved if you can add a second or even a third voice (three at a maximum). Speak to a member's co-workers, supervisor or civilian colleagues to add substance to your story.

Invisibility. When you exercise impartiality you are remaining invisible to the story. This is good. The byline should be the only thing the readers see of you. After all, it's the subject, not you, they're interested in. Refrain from editorializing or inserting your opinion into your story. Just stick to the facts.

Accuracy. Accuracy in journalism is vital. Journalists who can't be accurate aren't journalists for very long. Readers have a strong desire to believe what they read, and look to the author to provide that surety. Be accurate in all you do – be it information gathering, interviewing, spelling, editing, etc. Your credibility, and that of the paper for which you write, are at stake.

Storytelling

A story serves that most basic function of communication – to relate to another human being. Think of it as a conversation. For instance, a news story is just a conversation between the journalist and the reader. The journalist informs the reader of an event, *anticipating* the reader's questions (those five 'w's and two 'h's) before answering them in an order appropriate to their significance.

In the end, stories, like conversations, are personal; they're all about people. Watch any newscast on any event, no matter how large or complex, and the story will feature a person before it begins to deliver information. A story on the budget, for instance, will begin – and end – with Mr. and Mrs. Jones in their living room, talking about how it will affect them.

Just like conversations, stories are clear and to the point. It's human nature to get a little antsy when listening to a poorly crafted story, one that goes on and on, seemingly without a point. So it's no surprise that we unconsciously frame our conversations in ways that are palatable to others. We generally get to the point immediately, then later add colour and extra detail. We keep a good grip on our imagination – unless the context of the conversation allows otherwise – while we get the facts out. When we do use our imagination, it's to add some personal touches which we hope will resonate with our listener. It's no different when we write a story.

To breathe life into a story, writers employ figurative language. That means plenty of metaphors, similes, some personification, alliteration or maybe even a little hyperbole. Writers are also

always looking insight, trying to make connections between specific events and the wider world. Ask yourself if the event or subject matter on which you're writing is representative of something bigger, or symbolic of something else. Eliciting hidden connections reveals the ties that bind all of us, encouraging understanding and comprehension. We'll look at this in depth later.

Finally, remember that stories are **about people**. Like an interesting conversation, they are **specific**; they **get to the point immediately**; they are **clear, concise, organized**. They are **factual**, but they can be told **imaginatively**.

Common storytelling pitfalls

There are a few things you should avoid when telling a story. The most important is telling it without using your imagination. We'll cover that part later in the chapter.

Another common pitfall is not exercising your curiosity. Remember, as a writer *you have to ask questions*. It's the only way to get the information and the context needed for a complete story. The more you ask, the more you will know. The more you know, the better your story will be. Of course you're asking questions on behalf of the reader. So don't forget to answer them. There's nothing more frustrating than a story that leaves questions unanswered. Try to anticipate the questions your reader will have, then answer them fully and unequivocally.

Finally, don't ignore your reader's interests. The military profession has a high 'cool' factor. What may seem commonplace to us can be fascinating to an outside observer, so don't gloss over the details of our job. Remember, if your story isn't interesting, your time spent writing is wasted.

Interviewing

To be interesting a story needs people, characters. That means talking to them. The interview is the best way to get your information on your subject and the only way to observe the interesting aspects of that person's environment. These aspects may well merit inclusion in your story. Here are some things to remember:

- Be prepared. Preparation is the key to a successful interview. Learn as much as you can about your subject. Read any pertinent background info in order to learn what questions to ask. Ideally, you should have most of your information collected **before** the interview. The interview is really a chance to obtain a couple good quotes.
- Be observant. Look around during the interview for anything unusual or interesting. There may be a photo of a zillion grand-kids on the subject's desk, an impressive award, an unimpressive award, a view of the mountains, a view of a dumpster – ask about it, remember it. It may be important to your story or simply something to add a little colour.
- Be dumb. Ask as many questions and get as much clarification as you can. Don't assume you'll figure things out later. After all, you're going to have to write about this.
- Be silent. Don't try to end your subject's sentences. If an awkward pause occurs, leave it be. It's human nature to want to fill the void when we fall silent. So wait a few seconds and allow your subject to exercise his or her human nature. It may lead to something unintended but interesting, touching, or brutally honest. A pause will also give your subject a chance to better articulate his or her thoughts.
- Before you leave, ask if there's anything you missed! Maybe there was something your subject wanted to say, but none of your questions drew it out. This is their chance to say what's on their mind, or point out something they'd like your story to reflect. There's no

obligation to print it, but it may prove useful. Finally, make sure he or she won't mind being contacted again – you may have forgotten something important.

Good interview questions

Good questions are the key to a good interview. Interviews don't need to be long, annoying or uncomfortable if your questions are to the point and designed to elicit the maximum amount of detail. Don't ask questions that require yes or no answers. Ask open-ended questions that draw from your subject strong quotes. Make your subject stop and think. Questions like “**What sort of advice would you give...**” establish a direct link between your subject and the reader. Here are a few more:

- **How did you feel when you heard...?** (A great question that leads to a real internal search. However, it's also considered extremely insensitive if directed at recent grief/trauma. Use wisely).
- **What went through your mind when...?**
- **What's most important about this to you?**
- **When you look back on this time, what will you remember the most?**
- **If you weren't doing this job, what do you think you would be doing?**
- **Tell me about your relationship with/experience with...**
- **Why?**

Quotes

If a story is a conversation, then a quote – actual speech – lies at the very heart of a story. Quotes are essential, providing voice, colour and credibility to a story. When relayed accurately and honestly, they impart an unmistakable human tone to a story.

Quotes, whether direct or paraphrased, also fulfill the vital need of attribution. The writer/reporter is not responsible for what the subject has said, but without attributing a quote or statement the writer risks both inserting his or her own voice into the story and, worse, possibly assuming undeserved liability for what was said. Journalists need to be accurate and invisible, so they let the experts speak for themselves.

The word “said” or “says” should be used almost exclusively when attributing. They are so well used that they have become almost invisible to readers. Few other words or phrases are as neutral. “According to” implies doubt. “Suggested” implies a lack of conviction. Use “laughed” if it fits, but stick with “said” or “says”. Just don't over-use them. Too many wreck the flow of your story. Remember that secondary attribution can often be inferred.

Quotes – some guidelines

Try to be as accurate as possible recording quotes. Consider using a recording device, bearing in mind that it may intimidate your interviewee. It's still best to become proficient with a notepad and pen.

You are allowed to clean up someone's grammar, and you are not bound to preserve the chronological timing of different sentences – i.e. you can rearrange them if required. However, any such changes must *never alter the meaning of the speaker's words*. And if the quote's poor grammar is germane to your story, or if it adds colour without harming your subject, keep it.

If you can't remember an exact quote, paraphrase it, but still attribute it. The reader understands the lack of quotation marks to mean the quote is not verbatim, but that it still accurately reflects the gist of what the subject said.

Quotes – Telling it like it is

You'll know a good quote when you hear it. It will have the ring of truth about it. You'll know instinctively that it couldn't have been fabricated. Here are two examples:

- ***“That was the most beautiful sight, that Buffalo; it just glided over me so slowly. I thought to myself, man these are good pilots, there’s no way I could fly something so big that slow.”***
- ***“I believe that angels wear orange!” Murray said. “I couldn’t believe they’d found me and were now ploughing through the trees to get to me. It is impossible to describe the feelings of seeing and hearing them, knowing I was going to be saved.”***

Writing Tips

As mentioned previously, the writing style required of a feature is substantially different than that of a news story. Features are less rigid. They allow for greater expression, the use of figurative language, even a little panache. Panache, however, doesn't go well with poor spelling. Never, ever get a name wrong. You have no real chance to fix it, and it makes your subject feel like you weren't really paying attention. Here are a few other tips:

Use the active voice: The active voice links subject with verb in a direct way and allows for fewer words. It identifies who or what performed the action and encourages you to choose powerful, descriptive verbs:

- Not: **At first light there was any sign of the ship.**
But: **The ship vanished in the night**
Not: **The fuel leak was fixed by the technician.**
But: **The technician repaired the fuel leak.**

Or, since this is a feature, why not try something like this?

Sweating from the effort, the technician manoeuvred his wrench into the narrow opening. His hands moved with the skill of a surgeon. Deftly he tightened the nut, sealing the leak for good.

Write economically: Don't waste words. Tight, concise writing packs the most information into the smallest size. Cut out the fat. Use simple, strong, declarative sentences. It will give your writing more impact. Hey, it worked for Hemingway...

- Not: **He said that the cutbacks in the health care field have put hospitals in a crisis situation.**
But: **He said the cutbacks in health care have put hospitals in a crisis.**

“Crisis situation” is an example of overweight writing. The word “situation” is meaningless – it offers nothing that “crisis” doesn't already address. Here are few other examples:

- **armed gunmen serious crisis**
- **totally destroyed successfully docked**
- **absolutely necessary each and every**

- **exactly identical gathered together**
- **at a later day cancelled out**
- **carbon copy close proximity**
- **consensus of opinion fall/descend down**
- **friend of mine honest truth**
- **necessary requirements refer back**
- **shout out still remain**
- **temporarily suspended patently obvious**
- **plain and simple cool beret**

In a similar vein, some writers incline themselves to wordiness. More words are not always better. We don't speak that way, so there's no reason to write that way:

Not: **at this time** But: **now**

despite the fact that although

consequently so

in the majority of cases usually

residual remaining

initiative plan

placed under arrest arrested

vow not to buy boycott

doesn't trust distrusts

In addition to overweight phrases and wordiness, there are other words that are simply too light to bother using. Words like **fairly, really, pretty, few, quite,** and **very** add nothing to your writing. Pretty much you should really avoid them.

Still with the economical writing, try to avoid jargon and clichés. Every specialty has its own jargon – there's no reason to expect others to know the code. Use the "grandmother test" – would your grandmother know what a "ticket ride" is? How about an ASPL buoy? Write in a way she would understand.

Clichés are similarly unhelpful. They're too vague. Their meaning has long since leached away. So avoid "court of public opinion", "hammer things out", "challenges" or any of the thousands of other expressions you've heard countless times before. Good writing is characterized by trying to say things in a new way.

Use figurative language: Figurative language is all about making comparisons. It's used to go beyond the literal meaning of a word or phrase to suggest something new, to reveal a connection, to broaden understanding. Some examples are:

Simile: A stated comparison using "like" or "as".

- ***"As fast as a bullet"***

Metaphor: An *implied* comparison between two unlike things. A metaphor is a bridge from one idea to another.

- ***"All the world's a stage"***

Alliteration: Repeated consonant sounds at the beginning or within words. Used to establish mood, create melody or call attention to important ideas.

- ***"Solitary, silent, the vessel slipped slowly southward"***

Personification: To attribute lifelike characteristics to inanimate things.

- ***"The rotors screamed in protest"***

Hyperbole: An exaggeration used to heighten effect. Used to emphasize, not mislead.

- ***"He'd encountered that reaction a million times before"***

Paint word pictures: Radio does this best – vividly describing an activity, a person or an environment such that listeners create their own images in their mind's eye. It's an important skill for the writer to master as well. Write in such a way that you faithfully record the sights and sounds. Leave your reader with a sense they've met your subject, or were there when an event happened.

Not: **The reunited couple was overjoyed.**

But: **Reunited, the couple kissed and hugged.**

or

Not: **It was freezing in the wrecked aircraft.**

But: **The shivering survivors huddled together, sharing what little body heat remained. Their breath hung about them in a thick fog. Ice clotted the beards of the men. They sat silent, unmoving, as though time itself had been frozen.**

Show, don't tell. If you remember nothing else about writing, remember this. Show your readers what happened, don't hit them over the head with the message you want to convey. Readers don't want to be told what to think. They'll form their own opinions. Just describe the action objectively and accurately. If you do it right, the right message will come out without any intrusion on your part.

Not: **The pilot bravely kept the helicopter over the sinking ship.**

But: **Despite powerful gusts of wind and spray that at any moment threatened to pitch his helicopter into the rigging, the pilot held his position, allowing the men below a last chance at survival.**

Text structure

Good quotes and good writing won't be of much use if you don't structure your story correctly.

An organized story is a readable story. The structure of a story is much like that of the formal essay, which you may remember from school. It opens with a theme or thesis – in a feature story what you might call your 'angle'. The angle is an idea or perspective upon which your story will hang. It's the reason you're writing it – the thing you want your reader to take away with them. All

the succeeding ideas in the story relate flow smoothly one to another while relating to, reinforcing and supporting your main point.

The similarity to an essay ends with the conclusion – news stories generally don't have one, whereas feature stories do. But just like an essay, stories should exist as individual things. They are about one thing, one idea. Different ideas should be presented in different stories. For instance, in a story about a civilian worker in CE, focus on her achievements, not those of CE. There is an important distinction here between a news story and a feature story. You've no doubt heard about the inverted pyramid – the format in which most news stories are written. The inverted pyramid style puts the most important information at the top of a story, enabling an editor – pressed as they are to make room for advertisements – to cut it anywhere lower. News stories work like this as they are seldom written with an ending or to any set length. The information simply continues to flow, becoming less and less important, until it runs out or is cut off.

A feature story, on the other hand, has a beginning, middle and end. Cutting it somewhere will likely kill it.

Feature stories seldom begin with the most important information. Rather, they begin with a hook – an interesting piece of information, an anecdote, an incongruous statement, even a quote (although this is rare, as there is often insufficient context at the beginning of a story to make sense of a quote). There is no need to immediately answer the five 'w's and two 'h's. The story's thesis – the reason the story is being written – might appear in the first paragraph or it might wait until the fifth. (Generally, however, the closer to the top the 'reason' appears the greater your chances of keeping your readers' interest). The story is then fleshed out and generally comes to its own natural conclusion. Simply slicing a chunk off the bottom will render it incomplete or nonsensical. Feature stories are therefore often written to a prescribed length in order to preserve the story's "wholeness".

Writing the Feature Story

The Theme. The first step when contemplating writing a story is to identify a central theme. What, exactly, are you writing about? It's imperative you focus your theme as narrowly as possible or your story will lack cohesiveness. With too vague a theme, your narrative will simply meander around every aimless distraction.

Focus is essential: it will keep you on track. Here's an example of how to zero in on your subject:

Broad focus:

A story about fitness in the CF.

Narrower focus, but still too vague:

A story about a member who runs.

Narrower still, but uninteresting:

A story about a member who won a marathon

Narrow, fresh focus:

A story about a member who won a marathon, detailing her unique training regiment. She runs 25 km every day, barefoot, while carrying her three ill-tempered cats. (Now *that's* something you'll want to read about...). Sadly, not every person you'll write about carries cats while jogging. A good number of them sit at their desks, working so hard they've won an award for hard work. How do you make that interesting?

The key is to be observant. Un-mute your curiosity and look for the incongruous, the unusual, the humorous. Open your senses to the **new** part of this news that you're profiling. Maybe your award winner raises rabbits when he's off-duty. Maybe the CO your writing about paints gnomes on the weekend.

Perhaps your subject is an infanteer who loves sailing, or a civilian who speaks five languages. Your ears should perk up when you hear these things. Of course your story will have to mention the award they won or the distinction they've garnered, but unless it's the Nobel Peace Prize write instead about this unusual, interesting side. That will guarantee your story will actually be read.

Once you've alighted on a theme, ask yourself how best to represent it. Can you discover any interesting connections? Are there other details/quotes/information that can support this theme? Take, for instance, your rabbit-raiser. He's won an award for hard work. So he's energetic.

Granted it's a little lame, but you could certainly start your story referencing the Energizer Bunny – Cpl Bloggins just keeps going and going and going... How about the gnome-painting commanding officer? Gnome painting, for those of you who don't regularly practice it, takes passion, precision and attention to detail. If the CO exercises similar traits in the workplace, then you've made a connection, one you could easily hang your story on. Not only will you be able to convey his exemplary conduct at work, but in telling his story you'll demonstrate the strength of a CF member's professional values. That's good news.

As for your sailing soldier, here's someone who can't be pigeon-holed. Imagine her alone at sea, trimming the mainsail on a port tack, as free as the wind. Then think of her in step with her platoon, indistinguishable in her combats and camo. There's a significant gap in expectation there, and your reader will thank you for bridging it for them.

The stretch won't be so great for the civilian with five languages to her credit. Where did she learn them? Where is she from? What sort of experiences has she amassed along the way? How does she keep current?

Given her world-view, what does she think of the CF/DND? There are any number of questions you could ask yourself, but the answer to each one of them will likely make for a fascinating story.

The Lead. The lead is the hardest part of any story. Coming up with a lead can be an agonizing, frustrating process. There will be much gnashing of teeth, a lot of idle doodling and severe doubt regarding your choice of career. Fight through it. Aim for something interesting, unique or compelling. Your opening should, in some reasonably obvious way, relate to your focus. It *can* be a newsy lead, but you can do better than that. Unless absolutely impossible to avoid, don't stick in dates or titles and never, ever use acronyms.

Your lead should be easy to read, easy to understand and beckon like an open door.

The good news is that feature leads don't suffer the same constraints as news leads. Generally, the latter must be 32 words or less and answer as many of the five 'w's and two 'h's as possible. Like these:

Three men escaped with only minor injuries after their light aircraft crashed into a wooded area east of Chilliwack early this morning.

or

Military officials pushing for the purchase of new Search and Rescue aircraft put their plans on hold today as politicians ended Parliament's latest session to prepare for a Christmas election.

Remember that your feature story won't have the same claim to immediacy that makes the news story interesting. Fortunately, that means you don't have to be so immediate with the news. You can take a *little* time coming to the point. You can focus on writing an interesting lead, one that will hook the reader into discovering what you're really on about. Feature leads can be short:

Robert Dunsire was a 23-year-old who would never live to be 24.

or they can be long:

Sandwiched between two busy roads, the small white guardhouse at the 7 Hangar gate barely fits a couple of chairs, a desk and a metal lunchbox. But on this day, his last before retirement, Commissionaire John McKee has managed to find room for a lifetime of friends.

While you can take a little time getting to the point, don't wear out your welcome, as it were. People have short attention spans these days. So, while your reader is likely to grant you a little leeway before learning why this story is being written, and why they're reading it, get to your main point, i.e. your theme, in short order.

The Body. Once you've nailed your lead, the rest of your story won't be far behind. The process of determining how to start a story, of choosing which elements to prioritize, lays the blueprint of the story in your head. You've figured out what information should go first, and what could stand to come last. The next step is to look at your quotes. Do you have any that directly relate to the lead you chose? If so, pick the best one and bridge or transition from your lead into that quote. Doing so quickly puts your character's voice high in the story, which enhances its interest and readability.

With the lead, bridge and first quote tied together, the hardest part is over. Now it's time for the body of the story, which should flow logically from the order you should now have in mind. The create the body of your story, employ all the skills we've talked about:

- Report what's newsworthy – this helps explain why your story should be read!
- Employ colourful, expressive quotes
- Use plenty of detail and colour in your writing. Is there a scene you can include? An activity? An incident? An intense description of something relevant?
- Use figurative writing
- Paint word pictures
- Show don't tell
- Ensure all your ideas relate to your theme

The Conclusion. When you were looking over your quotes, you chose the best one to go first. That makes sense – you want to impress your reader, after all. When you look them over again, however, ask yourself which one would should go last. That doesn't mean choosing the worst quote, just choosing one which will end your story well. Features don't have to end on a quote, of course, but if you're familiar with the format you know it's a common strategy. Why not leave the voice of your subject in your reader's ears?

When you're looking for a closing quote, search out those that are optimistic, those that look to the future, or those that drip with realization. Optimistic quotes are a little touchy-feely, sure, but so are many features.

There's no shortage of bad news in the news section to more than make up for your little ray of sunshine. Quotes that look ahead tend to imply continuity, the sense that your story continues,

that's it's still fresh. And those that suggest something has been learned are inherently satisfying – that's what we want stories to convey. Here's a quote that belongs at the end of a story:

“Had I been 20, I don't know if I would have gotten the same out of it. It means so much more.”

Of course there are other ways to end a feature story. As a general rule you don't want to introduce new facts in any conclusion, but sometimes it isn't the distraction it ought to be:

Waldner says this, too, will be a family affair. Daughter Rachel is to be tested for her junior black belt at the same time.

Appealing directly to the reader is another useful mechanism for ending a story. If you've written about a fellow member organizing a fundraiser, put the most useful information where the reader's going to need it – at the end:

For more information on how you can help with the cancer drive, call Dixon at (250) 555-5555

A Second Look. “Thank God that's over with!” ...nice use of quotes but you're not done yet. Look over your story once you've finished. Check your spelling, your grammar, look for wordiness, overweight writing, redundancies or run-on sentences. A good practice is to read your story aloud to yourself. That brings your conversation senses into action. You'll hear if you've repeated words or phrases, you'll be jarred by bad grammar and, most importantly, you'll know if your organization is wanting, just the way you would if someone was telling you a story that didn't make much sense. Finally, have someone else read it over. Everyone, EVERYONE, needs an editor.

Photos. Teaching you how to take good photos is beyond the scope of this chapter, but don't overlook the importance of a good picture to your story. In the real world some stories simply don't get published if they're not accompanied by a good photo. Avoid grip 'n grins. No tiny heads! If your subject works behind a desk, stage a photo – that relates to your theme – somewhere else. Please! Maybe they're an avid jogger – have your Imaging Tech chase them around during their noontime run. Maybe they coach

T-ball – catch them teaching the team. Maybe they paint rabbits on the weekends, er, you get the idea...

There will be more in the Creative Photography section of this chapter!

Text editing

Editing. Eliminate heft, redundancies, editorializing and jargon from the following:

1. They attempted to expedite what they perceived as a viable initiative.

They tried to speed up what they saw as a workable plan.

2. The helicopter descended down to 3,500 feet. Heroically, the pilot commenced the approach in the vicinity of severe cumulus nimbus. “We are descending,” he told the crew. It was now or never.

The helicopter descended to 1,000 metres. The pilot began the approach near a severe thunderstorm.

3. Despite the fact that he said he was not guilty, the man was charged by police in connection with the murder of his friend. The victim, who had died, was among a group of strikers who gathered together to condemn the company.

3. *Although he proclaimed his innocence, police charged the man with the murder of his friend. The victim had been among a group of strikers who had gathered to condemn the company.*

4. **“Ah, a sound policy is, umm, absolutely necessary,” said Jones. The minister added that the policy would revert back to it’s previous form, he said.**

4. *“A sound policy is absolutely necessary,” said Jones. The minister added that the policy would revert to its previous form.*

5. **The company said they would do its best. “Its our promise to our workers,” said a relieved manager. However, a happy ending is unlikely as this company never fulfills its promises.**

5. *The company declared it would do its best. “It’s our promise to our workers,” said a relieved-looking manager. However, one disgruntled worker suggested the dispute was far from over, claiming the company had yet to fulfill promises made following an earlier strike.*

Creative Photography – the Picture

Pictures sell stories.

A good picture can carry a story on to page 1;

Lack of a picture can take a good story off the Front page – and right out of the paper. CP

Aims to illustrate every worthwhile story with colour or black-and-white photos, maps or graphics.

Having that happen depends on awareness.

Professional news photographers need to be alert to illustrating the story, whether it is a rewrite or the germ of an idea for a staff written series. The story without pictures and graphics won’t get the play it deserves.

Effective creative photography involves developing an understanding of what makes a good illustration and the mechanics of getting it from the photographer or artist to the network of receiving newspapers.

Good Illustrations

Good photos have similarities to good stories. They:

1. Are new and in some way unusual.
2. Show action the instant it happens.
3. Portray people and appeal to the emotions.
4. Relate to some important person, event or place.
5. Wrap up a story or provide an overall view of it.
6. Tie in with a current story, the season, the weather, a fad.

A good illustration will be marked by attention to content, quality and composition.

Content

1. Does the photo tell a story?
2. Is its subject important?
3. Is it appealing?
4. Is there outstanding human interest or some other quality that overrides minor news value?

Any news break that is visually either important or interesting makes the good-quality photo worth distributing. A window cleaner suspended in mid-air by his braces makes a good shot: a minor auto wreck usually doesn't because all wrecks tend to look much the same.

A 20-car pileup, multiple deaths or trapped passengers can give an accident photo the news value needed to get it published.

Picture judgment is partly personal and partly a matter of experience. A photo is almost certainly worthwhile if an editor experienced in handling news finds it eye-catching. A newspaper photo editor's recommendation is always a valid reason for selecting a picture.

Quality

1. The main subject has clear, sharp details.
2. There are bright colours or a gradual range of grey tones between black and white.
3. Skin tones for light-skinned people are a natural colour or light grey against a white shirt. There must be definition in the facial shading of people with darker skins. A poor-quality picture might be slightly out of focus – look at the eyes. It might have heavy blacks and brilliant whites, or have an overall grey cast with no blacks and whites. Colours may be washed out or too dark.

The sole exception to these demands for quality is a shot of such outstanding news value it will get into print despite poor quality.

Composition

1. Are the main subject and its surroundings arranged so as to be attractive and cohesive?
2. Is the picture cropped to make the subject stand out clearly?

Stand-up group shots are not wanted, although sometimes the personalities involved create exceptions. The Queen with Commonwealth prime ministers or a new cabinet are usually newsworthy. In the best such photos, the group's attention is not centred on the camera.

Be careful that the *arranged* photo does not turn into a picture that is contrived or set up by the photographer.

There is no objection to cleaning up a cluttered background or moving the company president from behind his or her desk to stand in front of the widget-stamping machine, for example.

The photo becomes contrived when elements or interpretations are added or subtracted to make a point that would not normally be there.

Photo manipulation

A CF publication does not alter the content of photos. Our pictures must always tell the truth – tell what the photographer saw happen. Nothing can damage our credibility more quickly than deliberate untruthfulness. The integrity of our photo report is our highest priority.

Captions

Some reminders to make caption-writing easier:

1. Does the caption say when and where?
2. Does it identify, fully and clearly?
3. Are the names in the right order? List people in a group shot from the left, and specify position (left or front row, second from right).
4. Use at least two short, snappy sentences. One long, involved sentence is boring.
5. Stick primarily to explaining the action in the picture, but don't speculate. The prime minister's grin may be teeth-gritting anger. The dozing legislator may be reading a paper on his desk. Be sure – or leave it out.
6. Watch attribution and don't let libel creep in.
7. Read what you've written. Are all the questions answered? Count the people in the picture and number of names. Are the left-to-right designations correct? Is the action mentioned in the caption really shown?

Credit the photographer in the body of the caption if the picture has exceptional merit or the circumstances in which it was shot were very unusual. Say so when abnormal techniques such as multiple exposures or time exposures were used.

Say in the caption what day the picture was taken. Avoid today. Bracket the date after the day when needed for clarity.

Captions on stock or library photos must always say when the photo was taken.

Place the caption on the top or left of long pictures with the type facing *towards* the image on short captions and *away* from the image on long captions. Do not cover a vital part of the photo with the caption. Instead, make space for the caption by adding paper to one side of the print after removing unnecessary picture from the opposite side. Leave half an inch of white border on unneeded picture material between the caption and edge of the print. This space will be eliminated in transmission and you don't want to lose the first line of the caption.