

PHOTOJOURNALISM 101

A Student Guide to Telling Stories Through Images

By The New York Times

What Is Photojournalism?

Photojournalism is the practice of telling a true story through photographs. While writers use words, photojournalists use cameras to capture real moments as they happen. A strong photojournalist can often communicate a full story—even without a single sentence.

In today's fast-moving, digital world, photos help people understand events quickly and clearly. That's why news organizations rely on photojournalists to capture truthful, powerful images.

Why Is Photojournalism Important?

Imagine news without pictures—no photos in newspapers, websites, magazines, or social media. Photos:

- Make stories more interesting
- Help us understand what's happening
- Show emotion in ways words can't
- Document history as it unfolds

A single photograph can explain more in seconds than a full page of text.

A Quick History

- **Civil War era:** Early photos appeared alongside news stories but were only used as support.
- **1920s:** Photojournalism exploded thanks to smaller, portable cameras like the 35mm Leica.
- **Magazine boom:** Publications such as *Life* popularized storytelling through images.
- By the mid-1900s, photojournalism became one of the most influential forms of reporting worldwide.

What Is the Purpose of Photojournalism?

Photojournalists:

- Capture real events as they happen
- Provide truthful, accurate information
- Help audiences understand complex stories
- Show perspectives that words alone can't describe

Above all, photojournalism is about **truth** and **storytelling**.

How Photojournalism Differs from Regular Photography

While anyone can take a picture, photojournalists follow two core principles:

1. **High Ethical Standards**
 - No staging events
 - No altering images
 - No influencing the scene
2. **Objective Truth**
 - Images must reflect reality
 - Photographs must be honest and unbiased

Photojournalists report the world as it is, not as they wish it would be.

Key Features of Photojournalism

1. Photos Must Be Truthful

Images must show what really happened—no changing, exaggerating, or hiding details.

2. Context Matters

A photo must help explain the bigger story behind it.

3. Photos Should Be Informative

A strong photo can communicate an entire story without captions.

4. Photos Must Be Timely

News photography must capture events people are talking about **right now**.

Why Photos Have Power

- People remember images much more easily than text.
- Pictures make stories more relatable and real.
- Photos can spark emotion, understanding, and action.

A striking image can change public opinion—and even change history.

Types of Photojournalism

1. General News Photography

Covers planned events like elections, speeches, or sports.

2. Portrait Photojournalism

Shows a person in their real environment—like a doctor in an operating room or a mayor at their desk.

3. Obituary Photography

Uses images to honor someone's life and legacy.

4. Feature Photojournalism

Provides deeper coverage of people, places, and issues—often emotional or human-centered stories.

5. Documentary Photojournalism

Long-term projects covering stories over weeks, months, or even years.