



Instructors: Rules for the student photojournalist

Every journalism student should learn the fundamentals of photojournalism. They should learn how to take pictures, and they should be given specific photo assignments. And they should follow these rules in completing those assignments:

RULE NO. 1: TAKE LOTS OF PICTURES.

You should assign a minimum number of pictures that the student should take, and that number should be high. For instance, if the photo is for a profile story where you anticipate using only one shot, the photographer should come back with at least 10 to 15 shots. In fact, 10 to 15 shots for any assignment would be a good minimum.

Young photographers tend to shoot too few pictures. They get one shot and one angle, and they don't think about doing anything else. Assigning a high minimum number of pictures makes the students think about shooting different shots at different angles.

Young photographers should be told: keep shooting until someone needs medical attention or until you're about to get hit by a truck.

RULE NO. 2: A PEN AND NOTEBOOK ARE AS IMPORTANT AS A CAMERA.

Photographers have to write down what and whom they are shooting. They will have to identify people for cutline information. They cannot trust their memories for any of this. They must have a pen and notebook with them at all times, and they must use it. They must also be accurate in getting their information, especially in spelling names correctly.

RULE NO. 3: PLAN.

As an instructor, you should talk with you students about their photo assignments. Help them plan what they will shoot. Some pictures happen spontaneously; most don't. They are shot because the photographer planned to be there to shoot them.

One thing you might do is diagram the scene of a photo assignment with the student. Help the student figure out where the action is and where he or she should be to take a good shot. Most events -- speeches, parades, sports events -- lend themselves to this kind of planning.

RULE NO. 4: GET CLOSE.

Anybody can take wide-angle, establishing shots. Real photographers get as close to the action and the people as they can. They get expressions, hand movements, interac-



tions, etc. They literally get in people's faces.

Students should be told: if you show up at an event with a camera, people expect you to take pictures. You try not to be intrusive, but sometimes you have to be, and people will understand this.

RULE NO. 5: SHOOT IN THE BEST LIGHT POSSIBLE.

If you can shoot outside, do so. Show near a window if possible (but be careful). If you have to use a flash, do it. Light is what makes pictures possible, and nothing makes up for an absence of light.

Pay attention to the light. Many students don't and return with rotten pictures.

RULE NO. 6: EQUIPMENT DOESN'T MATTER.

Well, it does to some degree. But, students should never be allowed to use equipment as an excuse for not taking good pictures (unless the camera simply doesn't work, of course). A good photographer adjusts to the limitations of the camera. A good photographer learns how to use the equipment he or she has to take the best pictures possible. You might tell students that one of the laws of photojournalism (and of life) is this: Equipment will never be quite good enough.

Students don't have to know the innards of a camera to take good pictures either. They should know how to think about taking pictures. They should know what good composition is. They should know how to plan their shots. None of this has anything to do with whether or not a camera is digital or single-lens reflex or box Brownie.

RULE NO. 7: BE CREATIVE.

Require your students to return from an assignment with shots from more than one angle. Tell them to get high, get low, move around the room. Some situations -- like sporting events -- dictate where you can be. In most other cases, they should always think about their physical proximity to the subject. A shot from a high or low angle can make a fairly standard shot much more interesting. And, you never know which perspective is best until you have tried them all. Always move around--this will show you the options you have for each situation.