

# Photo Essay and Documentary Photography Workshop

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“The camera is an instrument that teaches people how to see without a camera”

*Dorothea Lange*

## What's a photo-essay?

As a photographer, you can be a storyteller. A photo essay is a collection of images that are placed in a specific order to tell the progression of events, emotions, and concepts. Used in documentary photography or photojournalism, the photo essay takes the same story telling techniques as a normal essay, translated into visual images. So, nouns become your subject matter, verbs become the color and contrast that keep the story moving, and a cast of characters all working together to get your point across. Instead of proper grammar, you ensure proper exposure. Instead of spelling errors, you watch for tack-sharp focus. Photo essays can be humorous or emotionally relevant, sparking debate or encouraging compassion, each with a story from your point of view to be told to others.

That point of view can be one of love or hate, appreciation or disdain. The subject matter can be equally diverse. Some photo essays are narrative in nature, others are more introspective. A good personal project can be in almost any form, such as a portrayal of a subculture, a portfolio of landscapes, a series of intimate self-portraits, etc. Some photo-essays are meant to be exhibited or published while others are primarily personal explorations. The best personal projects take the photographer (and the viewer) on a journey, be that geographic, symbolic, emotional or political.



While simple to describe, **photo essays are very difficult to create**. The hardest part of making a great photo essay is figuring out your point of view and establishing how to convey that visually. A photo-essay can be linear, for example a visual narration of a series of events in an individual's life. Or a personal project can be a portfolio of stand-alone images interpreting a place or theme. All that matters is that the images are unified and they tell a story from the photographer's point of view.

## The workshop

The workshop starts by reviewing participant's existing work to better understand their experience and interests and exploring their long term goals. The training helps participants to undertake a project during the workshop, what is useful to develop skills to apply to a photo essay in the future.

This workshop concentrates on the following topics:

- Analyzing and reflecting on different traditional and contemporary photo essays
- Defining a personal project
- Fitting a personal project within the larger cultural, political, photographic milieu
- Writing a project proposal to use in creating, promoting and disseminating a project
- Potential partners for creating, promoting and disseminating the completed project
- Editing a large body of images from a personal project down to a select few

Each participant will leave the workshop with the framework for and the initial parts of a photo essay, apart from basic skills to continue, complete, promote and disseminate their personal projects in the future.

Durations vary and content can be adapted to fit demand (level, availability, age of the participants, etc.). The workshops can be included in activities organized by cultural centers, libraries, corporations or schools.

