

Perfect your photo essay

Ben Cherry reveals the key components of a strong narrative

I used to get frustrated that I had taken some nice images but couldn't link them well enough when entering portfolio or storytelling competitions – having thought I could simply shoot a location or situation, then tie together images afterwards.

What dawned on me is that I needed to think about these things in or before

the moment. What story do I want to tell? How do I want to tell it? What shots do I need and how will they link together? You can't expect to figure all of that out in advance, particularly if you're in a situation that is quickly evolving.

However, there are some essentials to consider if you want to leave with the component parts of a coherent story.



1. WIDE ESTABLISHING SHOT

Where are you? How do you convey that to your audience and place them in that context so they can better understand the images that follow? Imagine a Hollywood film – each scene generally opens with an establishing shot to give the viewer a context for what then happens. A wide shot of a quiet town as tumbleweed blows across, building up to a shoot-out; or a view of the White House before a character meets the American president.



2. SUBJECT FOCUS

What is your main subject? What do you want your photo story to be based around? This could be conveyed in a single image or a series of images. You could place your subject within the scene or use a close-up portrait which isolates

them from the surroundings. An environmental portrait often works best for me – I like to use a shallow depth of field to keep the viewer's focus solely on the subject, while keeping the setting present in the shot.



3. TELL THE STORY



4. LASTING IMPRESSION

What is the take-home message from your photo story? It doesn't have to be profound; it could be about a family member's birthday party or taking your dog to the park. What is the final image you want the viewer to be left with, to leave a lasting impression? Usually this is a special moment reflecting something only made possible by that which has come before. It could be a moment of peace or relaxation after the preceding events; an escape or a victory; a moment of closure or a new beginning.

The many factors in a story that must be told

On Ostional beach in Costa Rica there are monthly mass turtle landings. Thousands of olive ridley sea turtles, particularly in the wet season, come ashore to lay their eggs. The spectacle attracts tourists from around the world.

The eggs are a traditional

food source, with communities allowed to harvest a proportion of the eggs.

Simultaneously, a range of conservation efforts is in place to protect the turtle population, which is generally in decline. This is close to the hearts of locals because of

the turtles, and the growth in tourism and its positive effect on the economy.

The crowds, though, can cause problems by making the beaches too busy for the turtles, while other factors include illegal poaching and stray dogs digging up nests.

AUTHOR PROFILE BEN CHERRY



Environmental photojournalist and Fujifilm ambassador Ben Cherry has worked on projects including *Flight of the Swans* for the Wildfowl & Wetlands Trust



LEARN MORE

Sign up for Ben Cherry's 'Developing personal projects and storytelling' workshop on Thursday 16 March at Amersham Studios, Buckinghamshire. For more information see page 226