

# THE BIG THREE

## MINI-STORY, PHOTO STORY, PROJECT

PHO 381, 481

### THE MINI STORY ( PHO 181, 281, 381)

#### THE MINI STORY IS.....

....three photos of differing angles, perspectives, moods, emotions and lens choices that, added together, tell a visual story about an event or self-contained subject, like a day-in-the-life a teacher. It is usually at a common location. Mini-story fundamentals are used in photo stories and projects.

#### A MINI STORY IS NOT....

....a step-by-step illustration for a book, or a sequence of three photos or a recipe photo. (A recipe photo is a beginning of a cake, putting into the oven...and the finished product.)

**A MINI STORY IS USED** in publications as a way of giving more emphasis (than a single photo) to an event or topic without developing a theme-based full photo story which is not event driven.

**A MINI STORY USUALLY HAS THREE PERSPECTIVES:** This may be as simple as varying your mini story by employing an oversimplified rule such as taking a close-up photo, mid-view photo and overview photo. But the overview and mid-view concept is not a journalistic approach to a mini story, and only gives an IDEA of finding three photos that have variation. You are not required to have an overview, as an example, if it is impossible or just a waste of space. Overviews, mid-views and detail or close-up photos must stand on their own as photos that could be used alone....**meaning.... each photo must be strong enough to stand on it's own merit.**

It is much better to cover an event or mini-story idea by carefully considering the subtle and less-expected photos seen around the fringe. The idea is to produce three clean, varied and story telling photos that not only supply variety, but also produce an idea of the event's feeling and mood. The idea, in most cases, is to try to find the unexpected and unusual.

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**A MINI STORY NEEDS A DOMINANT PHOTO:** Basically, this means you have your best story telling or graphic shot than runs BIG, supported by two other photos run smaller that add visual information and life to the story. It is important to remember to keep photos readable so they can project visual information even if they run small.

**WHY THE MINI STORY IS SO IMPORTANT:** The concept of the mini story should be employed for every type of journalistic photograph, from single photos through major projects. To explore all the visual possibilities of a scene and subject is fundamental to good photography of all kinds.

**THE PHOTO STORY (PHO 381, 481)**

**The photo story** differs from a mini-story in that it is idea-driven as opposed to event driven.

It usually promotes a cause, cause for action or simply tells a story about the human condition that is best told in photographs, not words. So it is not informational, per se, in terms showing what something or someone “looks” like. Rather, it does what pictures do best, show emotion, interaction, contrast, character. Like the mini-story, it is **not** a step-by-step illustration for a book, or a sequence of three photos or a recipe photo. (A recipe photo is a beginning of a cake, putting into the oven...and the finished product.)

The photo story personalizes an issue. It synthesis issues into a microcosm that we can visualize and feel. It usually shows us one person representing several people, and through the photos of that one person, it gives us a “feel” for what similar people face in life. If we cover a teacher starting her first year of teaching, we are getting a “feel” for other first year teachers. If we talk about a young boy facing the ugly reality of cancer, we get a better “feel” for his pain and triumph through photographs.

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Greg Lewis, in his book *Photojournalism*, gives a very mechanical view of photo story construction. He even goes as far as to prescribe a “script” for the photo story, which most good photojournalists reject, since stories unfold unpredictably. But his mechanical analysis of the photo story structure may help you visually edit your story. He calls for:


- **overview, mid-view, close-up**
- **lead photo**
- **portrait**
- **interaction**
- **sequence**
- **detail shot**
- **closer (closing shot)**

Rules like these are usually good for non-photojournalists who are camera mechanic freaks. The rules exist for people who can't “see” their way through a photo story. I present the above rules for your background knowledge, not for your own comprehensive use.

Like the mini story, a photographer does need a variety of visuals. One should always seek a good close-up and overview **if it is appropriate**. A LEAD PHOTO is a must in any book. It is the cornerstone of your story and layout. Without it, even the best photo stories fall flat. Detail shots are good to look for **if they are appropriate**. Finding a “closing shot” should be more a function of your final picture edit rather than a conscientious part of your shooting agenda. Most stories do not end just because the story is published.

Emotion and interaction **are** essential to your story. They make your subjects come alive. **Remember that the transmission of life and emotion is what photography does best.** What I am saying is that a true photo story is content-driven. It captures life as it passes by. Do not miss true moments in life because you are desperately searching for a good “close-up,” or “closing shot.”

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Your lead shot is a photo that is usually unexpected and candid. To ask someone to look for everything on a shopping list is to actually work against the chances of them finding a true and meaningful "lead" photo.

**THE PROJECT (PHO 481)**

The photo project is an accumulation of the above, plus some strong single photographs that something to life in a comprehensive way. It is so much more in depth than a photo story and, in fact, may encompass three or four separate photo stories to personalize an issue or current event. A project may be published in a magazine or in a newspaper over a period of several days.

A project may be comprised, then, of mini-stories, singles, photo stories, portraits. It is usually very heavily text driven, too. It is the photographer's responsibility to make sure that a project does not become an accumulation of head shots and talking mugs. The photographer can make a project successful by realizing that the text can inform, and the photographs can personalize. When the writer talks about a person's life, the photographer can document the issue and make it real to the viewer.

The photographer does a huge favor for the editor and writer by enterprising better ways to present the project visually. When it comes right down to it, most projects without great photos are gray and draw little appeal to the reader.