

Essay 1: The Photo Essay: Describing, Comparing, and Storytelling

Description: To describe is to create a verbal picture. A person, a place, a thing—even an idea or a state of mind—can be made vividly concrete through description.

Comparison: We compare things all the time: music, college courses, ideas, and fashion. We often do so in order to establish ways of knowing.

Storytelling: And storytelling is not only a universal form of human expression, it is how people interact and bind cultures.

Describing, comparing, and telling stories go together; they are three of the most important ways of understanding the world around us. More specifically, for this essay students will take their own photos, select three (taken since August 28), and then use them to write a photo essay that uses narration and description. Students should write about and take photographs of things that matter to them. Students must not only describe their photos, they should also compare them. Students should use photos and text to tell a story, and describing and comparing are part of how stories work.

Details:

1. Gathering: Gather as many details about the images as possible. Rely upon not only what the eyes see, but also on the context, the emotions, and the story that the photos generate.
2. Use our 28 terms, but do not try to use all them. Be selective. Portrait Photo, Documentary Photo, Commercial Photo, Art Photo, Photograph, Photography, Photo Essay, Narrative, Dominant Impression, Decisive Moment, Reality Effect, Studium, Punctum, Rule of Thirds, Depth of Field, Balance, Composition, Focus, Foreground/Middle ground; Background, Frame/Framing, Light, Line, Scale, Shape, Space, Pattern, Proportion, Vantage point
3. Organization: How students move through the story is vital to writing a clear and effective photo essay. For example, students may choose to use a chronological order. Or, students may tell a story by using color. Or students may tell a story by telling what happens in the linked photos. Or students might write a conventional story and have the photos explain the writing. Above all, students must organize the essay according to some strategy. For the conclusion, students may consider this reflective question: What have I learned about putting words and images together?
4. More specifics: Length: 900-word photo essay. All photos must be the student's own, and I must approve of the choices. Students must post the final photos and the final draft of the essay to our OpenLab website before class on September 30. Students must incorporate at least three quotations from one or more of our readings: Teju Cole's "Perfect and Unrehearsed," John Berger's "Understanding a Photograph," Susan Sontag's "On Photography," or from one of our other readings such as Calle, Bohbot, or Norris Webb. Students must include a works cited page for this essay.

Grading Rubric:

1. Title, introduction, thesis (25 points)
2. Concrete descriptions, grammar, sentences (25 points)
3. Organization, narrative flow, paragraph structure (25points)
4. Photography terms, conclusion, works cited (25 points)

Important Dates:

Sept 25(w) **Draft of Essay for in-class peer review (printed)**
Sept 30(m) **Final Draft of Essay 2 due—posted before class**