

HOW TO GET THE RIGHT SHOT



GETTING THE RIGHT SHOT DOESN'T JUST HAPPEN

She grabbed her Canon DS5 off her shoulder, steadied her grip, watching the action unfold through the screen. “Patience,” the yearbook photographer reminded herself. “Wait, wait, not yet, not yet.” She moved in closer, then over to her left to include a second object in her site. “Okay,” she breathed in—“now.”

A series of images produced visual documentation that the football team had indeed lost their last game of the season. The players’ disappointment was keen; their frustration obvious. Huddled around the diminutive coach was his team of 22 in varying heights and weights; some in clean uniforms; some not. Heads bowed as the varsity coach talked to his players. In the background of the group shone the final score: Highland, 21, Central 6. But wait, if the student photographer moved a little more left, one senior fullback knelt apart from the group, clearly distressed about the score behind him. THAT was her picture, and it had taken her all night to find it.

Although perhaps not a Pulitzer prize-winning photo, this photographer thought and acted like a photojournalist. What was the story she needed to convey? The 300 digital shots taken throughout the game of the action didn’t explain what it was like for a team, with a pre-season top 10 ranking, to finish with a 1-9 season before the scant home crowd.

Photojournalism or Visual Reporting cannot happen within a quick, 10-minute window of time. It requires research of the subject, familiarity with the surroundings, and the realization that the photographer must arrive early at her assignment and stay late. Oftentimes, it is not the coverage of the event itself that presents the story-telling photograph, but the reaction to the event.

Like the time one student actor was pacing nervously in the wings of the auditorium stage, awaiting his first entrance in the comedy, Charlie’s Aunt. This 6-foot, 275-pound senior male was dressed in the fashion of the 1800s, posing as a rich aunt from Brazil. While pacing back and forth, he stepped on the hem of his black taffeta dress, ripping the skirt from the waistline just minutes before his entrance. The finished photograph? A mix of costume crew members, on their knees, scurrying to sew up the waistband, like baby chicks around their mother, while the actor fanned himself nervously with a program.

To get this particular shot, which illustrates pre-show action and tension, the photographer made arrangements with the director to be allowed backstage prior to the start of the production. There, he had a better chance of getting a photograph that is not obvious; not one that all of the readers expect to see in their yearbook. Meanwhile, the lazy photographer might be seated in the front row of the auditorium, ready to shoot the predictable, rehearsed posturing on stage. No news there.

Previsualization, or imagining photo opportunities before the event, is one of the best ways a staff can help dramatically improve their formerly predictable photography in the yearbook.

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What might be some possible angles or moments during the dissection of a fetal pig in biology class? Where is the sun located during the pole vaulting event of an early spring track practice?



While varsity football games are played in the evening at this school, DST makes the first half of the games played early in the season a great time to get some strong images. This powerful horizontal shot shows a panorama of the field. *Photo by Lydia Williams*

The vee formed by the coaches' backs provides natural framing for the swimmer as his coaches encourage another record-setting performance. Creating both a foreground and a background for the subject provides a depth of field that adds to the image's impact. *Photo by Joe Coombes.*

Collectively, what might be the six or seven best shots that tell the story of what it was like to participate on the school's speech and debate team?

Discuss the upcoming photo coverage with insight and imagination among section editors, other photographers and editors. Take a look at magazine photo coverage. Examine high school and college yearbooks with exemplary photojournalism. Think. Look Listen. Come up with a list of possible photo opportunities before the event to be covered.



Additionally, the student photojournalist should develop a relationship with the coach of a team or the sponsor of the event to be photographed. Find out possible places the photographer can stand without becoming part of the game or show. Maybe the coach will even give you a "heads up" of important plays. Perhaps the sponsor will invite you to a behind the scenes run-through. Not all coaches may approve the photographer's appearance in the locker room at halftime; not all sponsors take the time to fill you in on the background — but it never hurts to ask.

Ultimately your job is not to win a Pulitzer prize in photography, but to capture honest, memorable, compelling and interesting insights to your school life for your yearbook.



If you put your heart and time into your craft, 50 years from now, you will spark recollections of some special moments of one unique school year in one very special yearbook.

Sometimes the reaction tells more of the story than the action itself. Devastated members of Muncie Central's top-ranked girls' volleyball team were emotional as they waited for the presentation of honors after the state volleyball championships. There's not a game shot out there that could tell the story as well. *Photo by Samantha Peterman.*



Of course part of the assignment is capturing the action, but paying careful attention before and afterwards yields rewarding results. If the photographer concentrated only on the action when students had the opportunity to "pie" members of the administrative team, he'd have missed the assistant principal's expression on Activities Night. *Photo by Austin Markley.*





In addition to the expected height-of-action sports shots showing athletes from both teams in a mix of plays (or events), the best sports coverage also shows athletes practicing, preparing to play, on the sidelines, in the locker room and after the competition has ended. It's there that hard-working photographers will find some of the most telling moments. *Photo by Samantha Peterman.*



Anticipating the hot dog-eating contest between classes at Activities Night, the photographer got a priceless expression from one of the competitors. A mix of different rally games and contests provided lots of variety for photographers assigned to cover the Homecoming Week event. *Photo by Samantha Peterman.*



All photos accompanying this story were shot by publications photographers from Muncie Central High School, where former adviser Terry Nelson advised both the newspaper and the yearbook. In addition, Nelson taught the year-long Journalism I course where students learned the basics of photojournalism. Students with interest and aptitude were invited to join either the Munsonian newspaper staff or Magician yearbook staff. Major events were double-covered and the best images appeared in print.

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