



Photo Essays

A photo essay is a group of photos that tells a story, documents an event, or conveys an idea. Photos generally appear in a specific order, creating a story line.

What do you create?

A set of 5-10 photos in a set order that convey a climate change theme.

How many points can you earn?

Up to 300 points (limit 3 per school)

How do you earn points?

Upload jpg photos into the [Upload form](#) or, if they are too large, send them to us in an email (with your school name and state please!) at: points@thepeoplespeak.org.

What You'll Need:

- A camera
- A photographer

Step 1: Choose A Story, Event, or Idea

Brainstorm with your team about possible stories you could tell with your camera. If you are using your public debate as your event, decide which photos would bring this event alive for the viewer.

Step 2: Shoot the Story, Event, or Idea

- **Think about the purpose of the essay as you frame the shot.** Use the framing, focus, content, and perspective to tell the story or convey the idea. What is the most important element of this photo? What part of the story does this photo represent?
- **Use a variety of shots:** extreme close-ups, close-

ups, overviews. Use a range of exposures and backgrounds. Photograph not only the central subject, but also any details critical to the story, event, or idea.

- **Take photos that reflect a particular point of view.** Just as you write text from a particular point of view, decide whether to tell the story of your photo essay from the point of view of the observer, the subject, or some other person.
- **Do not place a person in the center of the photograph.** For both informational and aesthetic reasons, avoid the common error of placing the subject in the center of your photograph. Instead, use one (or more) of these practices:
 - **Use the “Rule of Thirds.”** Mentally divide your frame into thirds, vertically and horizontally. Place your subject(s) at the intersection(s) of these lines to create a clearer, more dynamic image.
 - **Use “look” space.** Leave space in the direction your subject is looking. This practice will naturally draw your viewer’s gaze in the same direction.
 - **Eliminate headroom.** Allow as little space between the top of your subject’s head and the top of the photograph as possible.

Step 3: Edit Your Photos

- **Do not alter the meaning of any photograph.** It is unethical to use editing software to alter a photo in any way that changes what the photo depicts. Resist the temptation to alter the image.
- **You may crop the photo, as long as you don’t remove any important information.** Be careful not to crop too much, or you will lose image quality.
- **You may make slight adjustments to brightness and contrast.** These changes should only be used



to make the photograph easier to understand. Do not make adjustments for artistic purposes.

Step 4: Choose 5-10 Photos

- **Avoid redundancy.** If two photos provide the same basic information, eliminate one. Ask yourself, does this photograph say something different?
- **Choose photos with good lighting and sharp focus.** Sharp focus is especially important. Good lighting brings out important details and provides the viewer with more information. A dark or blurry photograph will distract your viewer.
- **Vary the distance.** As you place your photos in a series, check to see that you have different kinds of photos throughout—not too many vistas and not too many extreme close-ups.
- **Assess the emotional appeal.** What is the emotional appeal you intend to make with each choice? How can that emotional appeal help you depict your argument?
- **Test your choices.** Show the photos you chose to friends or family members. Ask them to tell you the story they see. Listen to their responses and make adjustments if necessary.

Step 4: Assemble Your Essay

- **Follow the structure of a written essay.** Just as a written essay has a topic sentence, your photo essay should begin with a photo that introduces your essay's topic. The photos that follow should fall into a logical order, like the paragraphs of a written essay. What is your reason for placing this photo ahead of this one? Why include this photo near the beginning? Your story has a beginning, it develops an argument, and then it ends. Your last photo should conclude your essay in some way.

- Do not use captions unless absolutely necessary. Your photos should speak for themselves. If you find it absolutely necessary to caption a photograph, write a concise caption, paying close attention to spelling and grammar.
- Title your essay. Give your photo essay a short, creative title that explains its purpose. Avoid generalities, such as "Climate Change." Use word imagery to complement your visual images.