

# Namati Guide: Basic Photography and Storytelling with Pictures



Using pictures is a wonderful way to tell stories and to help your audience connect with the subject of your story! People are more likely to read your words when they're accompanied by a nice picture or picture story too, so it's a useful skill to practice too.

You can sum up storytelling through photography in one sentence: **"It's all about where you stand and when you press the button."**



This is both true in the literal sense and in terms of your values. What is your relationship to the people (or issue) you are telling a story about in pictures? Do you like them? Do you respect them? Do you consider them your equal? Think about where we are and why we're there. What do you want your audience to know about this place or this person? What do you know that others don't and how can you share that? Can you imagine what kind of pictures you might like to make to help you communicate these things about your subject?

There are five basic kinds of pictures  
that help you tell your story:

1. Person at work
2. Relationships
3. Establishing shot
4. Portrait
5. Close-up / details

Perhaps it's helpful to think of these as the grammar you can use to build your picture story, and help you make pictures that people will understand and engage with.

# 1. Person at work



What do we learn about a person from seeing them at work? What other activities might it be good to make pictures of our subjects doing? Make sure you frame the picture so we can properly see what the person is doing. Include the tools used for example.



Vary your composition to help build pace into your story. How is the picture above different from the one above it?



## 2. Relationships



What kind of relationship do you think exists between these two people?



And these?



And how might you visually describe a relationship with those absent?



What else can we show when we focus on relationships?



### 3. Establishing shot

An establishing shot tells us where we are.



Sometimes a picture of a person at work can also be an establishing shot. It can also be inside. Where are we in this shot?



Try to include something happening in your establishing shot, for example the lady coming home, or the man fishing. This makes it more interesting.

## 4. Portrait

Portraits fall into the following three kinds: (1) a formal / posed portrait, (2) an environmental portrait, which shows something of the subject's environment as well as the person, and (3) a candid or informal portrait, in which you capture the person whilst they're not posing for you.



Does a person need to be looking at the camera for it to be a portrait? Try to get both if you can. In some contexts eye contact is important in establishing a connection.



What else can a portrait convey apart from personality? Can you tell something about how much authority or power a person has by the way they're portrayed, for example? Or their relationships with others?





## 5. Close up / detail

Details and close-ups help you bring your story to life, they bring you closer to what's happening.



A detail can be anything telling, like a person's expression. Does the picture below connect you differently to the establishing shot of the meeting in section 3?



You should now be able to pick one picture from each of the five basic picture types and build a complete picture story. Which will you chose?

# Some More Tips To Help You Get Started With Making Engaging Pictures

## Composition

When you compose a picture ask yourself: what is the most important thing I want to include in my picture? Do I need to show more or should I make the framing tighter / closer? For example, if you want to show us where your subject lives then compose the picture to include their house, or a part of it. But if your subject has a beautiful smile then make that the focus of your composition. Perhaps you move in closer. Include elements that help you tell the story.

Use your feet first when composing a picture, only then zoom your lens.

Would the picture work better if you moved yourself - and therefore your camera - in relation to your subject. Use a wide angle lens when you want to include lots of information in the frame, for example, when you want to make a picture that tells us where we are. But use a tighter zoom when you want to isolate your subject or focus our attention on something.

## Think about the background.

Does it add interesting information to your picture or is it simply cluttered and distracting? Notice the difference between an establishing shot and a portrait in the section below to illustrate this. When you use a wide angle lens there will be more things in your background. When you use a tighter zoom there will be fewer things and the background may go a little blurry compared to the wide angle. Use this when you want to isolate your subject from the background. If there's something distracting in the background can you find a better angle?

## Think about action.

Is your subject(s) doing something interesting that helps you tell a story? Try to show it so that we understand what it is they are doing.

## What does the world look like from the child's perspective?

If you shoot from below, your subject will appear to be bigger. If you shoot from above, the opposite is true. When photographing children bend your knees and get down to their level. Show the world from their perspective too.



## Are you writing a story in words too?

Think about what pictures might add to your text. Can you illustrate some of the important things you're writing about in pictures? Can you use pictures to add more explanation to your words? Pictures can help people connect to the people in your story.

## Avoid the mid-day sun.

Dark shadows on people's faces makes it harder to see their expression and it's unflattering. Can you find a shady spot instead, such as a veranda or a leafy tree? If you have no choice but to make a picture in bright mid-day sun try turning on your flash. It will help lighten the shadows.

## Making pictures indoors.

If it's too dark inside, can you make the picture better outdoors? If being inside is important to your composition or the story you're telling, consider moving your subject closer to the source of light, such as an open window or a lamp. If the curtains are drawn, open them.

## When will you make your pictures?

Can you arrange to spend time photographing your subject in the morning or afternoon, when the light is more pleasing? If the light is coming from behind your right shoulder it will generally be quite pleasing in the picture. If it's behind your subject, it creates a silhouette which can be harsh and unflattering. All light can be used creatively but try to make it work for you.

## Connect people to your subjects.

When you work regularly with the same community it is easy to forget that other people, perhaps from far away, will be curious about how your subjects live their daily lives. Basic facts about a subject can remind the reader of the similarities they share with the subject – even if they live in very different circumstances. What pictures will you make to share those facts?

## Safety first.

Ask permission and explain how the pictures you make might be used. Ask yourself, will publishing these pictures (especially on the internet) place the people in my pictures in any danger or pose a risk to them? If so, can you make photographs that protect your subject's identity? Always be respectful, not demanding, ask if people are happy to share information about their lives.

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