

Knight Digital Media Center Multimedia Training

Picking the Right Media for Reporting a Story

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For updates and discussion on this tutorial, visit:

<http://kdmc.berkeley.edu/tutorials/picking-right-media-reporting-story/>

Introduction

One of the toughest decisions a multimedia reporter must make is what type of media would best be used to tell a particular story.

Should you shoot it in video? Would a photo camera and audio recorder to create a photo slideshow be better? Is this just a text story with a photo?

Understanding the strengths and weaknesses of these different types of media, and how to match those up with different kinds of stories, will help you sort this out.

This tutorial takes you through the different types of media - video, photos, audio, graphics/maps and text - and the kinds of stories or characteristics of stories that lend themselves to the different kinds of media.

These aren't hard and fast rules - just general guides to help you make intelligent choices about when to take a video camera, a photo camera, etc. on a story.

Note: this tutorial is an outline developed for an Intro Multimedia Bootcamp Class at the UC Berkeley Graduate School of Journalism.

Video

Here are the types of stories or aspects of stories that lend themselves to video:

Action - natural disasters, sporting events, dance performances, etc.

- [Example - fuel truck explosion](#) - Spokane Spokesman Review
- [Example - Michael Jackson tribute brings zombies to North Oakland](#) - Oakland North

Central place in a story â€” video takes you there and gives you a sense of what a place is like.

Central characters in a story â€” video lets you see and hear them and how they behave. Especially use video if theyâ€™re interesting or animated.

Drama - not so much an emotional moment, but a story thatâ€™s part of larger drama.

- [Example - Sen. Larry Craig press conference](#)

Humor

- [Example - The Daily Show visits the New York Times](#)

Kids - especially if there's a group of them interacting.

- [Example - Charlie bit my finger](#)

Animals

- [Example - Oscar the featherless bird](#) - South Florida Sun Sentinel

Crimes and crime scenes - it almost doesn't matter how boring the crime scene is, many people will want to watch the video

Food - video engages the senses. So use video for food preparation, not necessarily for recipes (recipes might be text with a video to illustrate how to prepare the food)

How things work or how to do something - video is good for simple processes of things with a lot of moving parts.

Readings and Resources

- [CNNMoney.com Video Chief: Videos Should "Amplify not Echo" Text Reporting](#) - Beet.TV interview with Caleb Silver, executive producer for video at CNNMoney.com

Photos

Here are the types of stories or aspects of stories that lend themselves to photos:

Reflection - if it's a story you want someone to reflect on.

Emotions - photos are good for stories that are very emotional. Photos can evoke strong emotions.

Central characters in a story - if you want the viewer to reflect on who the person is, rather than seeing how they behave. A photograph gives the viewer a sense of a person.

- Example - We're all gonna die: 100 meters of existence

Central place in a story - a photograph gives you a sense of a place, but with the opportunity to reflect on it. It's more intimate than using video. Thus if there's a natural disaster, you might take the viewer there with video while things are happening, and then use photos to take the viewer to the scene in the aftermath, so the viewer can reflect on what happened. Panoramas are sometimes a very effective way of taking the viewer to a place and immersing them in it.

- Example - Spin around the spin room - Las Vegas Sun
- Another example - 51st and Telegraph, Oakland, CA - UC Berkeley Journalism School News21 project

Audio

Here are the types of stories or aspects of stories that lend themselves to audio:

Emotions - audio is good for stories that are particularly emotional. The human voice especially evokes emotion.

Creating a mood - audio will set the tone on a story.

Reflection - audio is good for a story you want someone to reflect on, think about and ponder by listening, rather than watching a video as things go by.

Central place in a story - audio can take you to a place - in your head. Thus ambient sound such as common, easily recognizable sounds can take someone to a place.

If you compare the kinds of stories that lend themselves to audio with those that are good for photos, you'll see a lot of similarities. That's one reason why photo slideshows with audio can be very effective - the two types of media complement each other.

- [Example - One thing at a time](#) - Fairfax Times

Graphics and Maps

Here are the types of stories or aspects of stories that lend themselves to graphics or maps:

Statistics and data

- [Example - Gapminder](#) - click on the Gapminder World link, then click the play button.
- [Another example - How Different Groups Spend Their Day](#) - NY Times

How things work or how to do something - graphics are especially good for describing complex processes (video better for

Where humans can't go - stories about space, microbiology, etc.

History - timelines are especially effective ways of showing the historical events

Geo-locational events and stories - can be plotted on a map so the viewer immediately has a sense of where something happened.

- [Example - Loss of the Space Shuttle Columbia](#) - USA Today - illustrates many of the above points about graphics
- [Another example - Evolution of the Shuttle Columbia disaster graphic](#) - USA Today

Text

Here are the types of stories or aspects of stories that lend themselves to audio:

Background information - a FAQ can be a very effective way to give people background information.

- [Example - Remnants of War](#) - UC Berkeley Journalism School student project - click on the FAQs link

Analysis and explanation

Pros and cons of an issue

History - although a graphical timeline can be more effective

Thumbnails for profiles - biographical facts about people in a story

Summaries - especially important with a multimedia package. Include a text box to tell people what the package or a particular page is all about.

Breaking news - the quickest way to get information out, and the most efficient way for people to scan it for what's happening now.

Related Links

Readings and Resources

Here are some additional resources and readings on how to pick the best type of media for a story:

- [Cheat sheet for multimedia story decisions](#) - by Regina McCombs, posted at Mindy McAdams' Teaching Online Journalism site
- [Multimedia Picker: Choose the right medium for your message](#) - an interactive exercise by Mark Luckie

Also check out these [examples of multimedia stories](#) to see how different types of media were used to tell different aspects of a story.

Or spend time studying the multimedia packages on these sites:

- [Interactive Narratives](#) from the Online News Association
- [Kobre guide](#) to the Web's best multimedia & videojournalism
- [Best of Multimedia Design Winners](#) - Society for News Design
- [Online Journalism Awards](#) - Online News Association

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