A photo essay is intended to tell a story or evoke emotion from the viewers through a series of photographs. They allow you to be creative and fully explore an idea.

So here’s a list of photo essay examples. Choose one that you can do easily based on your photographic level and equipment.

1. Photograph a Protest

Protests are like local events. You will find people, some will be standing, some will be moving, some will be holding banners and signs. This is a great way to practice on a moving crowd.

Try to capture the essence and atmosphere of the protest itself. There are many ways to do so and you will need to utilise all your skills.

Think about framing, composition and perspective. Run to the front and capture the head of the group moving forward. Then run towards the back to capture the families walking along.

There will also be bystanders standing on the sides watching it all unfold. These challenges will help you improve fast.
2. Transformation Photo Essay

Transformation is one of the most used photo essay topics, and that is because it is a great way to show change. The change can be slow, such as a woman going through pregnancy, or watching a baby turn into a toddler and beyond.

As a photo essay project, this doesn’t even need to be about people. A building being torn down and rebuilt can make for a great time-lapse or series of images.

This is a great way to practice how to show change through images. You will need to be creative and meticulous in your approach. You will need to take the same image over and over again, but changing them enough to be interesting.

People love these projects because you photograph the old with the new. Life goes by so fast that we often forget what something looked like, compared to how it looks now.
3. Photograph the Same Place

Have you seen the movie ‘Smoke’ with Harvey Keitel? His character goes out every morning at the same time and takes a photograph. The photo is from the front of his shop. He then prints the image and stores them in huge photo albums. Another character flips through these images to see all the different scenarios.
This is an easy photo essay to do as you use a simple set up. It might be a challenge to find somewhere accessible to you at the same time every day. The great thing about this photo essay project is that you can do it of anything. The only prerequisite being that the areas need to change somewhat from day to day.

4. Create a Photowalk

As a photographer based in Budapest, I give guided photography tours. The idea is that you join me for three hours, and in that time I show you the streets and how to photograph them. You will learn about your camera, how to use composition and know what to look for. There is nothing stopping you from doing the same in your hometown. This can make for a really interesting photo essay. Have a clear idea of what you want to achieve, and create it as if you were teaching someone else. Look at reflections to photograph buildings. Or change your perspective to photograph people in different settings. Repeat this until you are comfortable enough to give this as a tour. Once
you know that route inside out, start again in a different area.

5. Follow the Change Photo Essay

This photo essay is like the transformation essay but on a short-term basis. Think about men growing their moustaches for Movember. Or someone who wants to shave their head for charity.
You start by taking a before image, and the end result of an afterimage, with many photographs between. This is great practice in *photographing people* but also documenting their change. You will need to work on your feet and find different ways to capture the same person going through this change. This will be challenging, especially if you are in the same space.

6. Photograph a Local Event

No matter where you live, there will be countless local events throughout the year. They might be fundraisers, farmers’ markets, dances and festivals or food and music. Their organisers will need a photographer. Even if it’s just for *social media images*. They may even offer you money, and if not, they will share the images for you, with your name attached. Here, you will capture *candid images* of people going about their way.
This is a great way to practise capturing emotions and atmosphere. As it is local, you will meet and network with many people who will need a photographer in the future. Keep your business cards with you.

7. Photograph an Abandoned Building

Urban exploration or Urbex is a thing. It is where you enter an abandoned building for the sake of (interest and) photography. It is a great social commentary on the state of our world. Abandoned buildings also show us how life used to be. It’s time travel without a time machine. They make for great photo essay shoots as the amount of details is very high.

Get permission and enter, but be careful as these buildings can be dangerous. Photograph the rooms and the details. This means you’ll have to work with different lenses.

You will get the hang of photographing rooms, looking at light, patterns, shapes and forms. You are also in no hurry, so you can practise to your
heart’s content.
For more information about Urbexing, read our article [here].

8. Behind the Scenes of a Photo Shoot

I used to assist [fashion photography] studio shoots. This means I had the great opportunity to see what happens behind the scenes.
For me, behind the camera is way more interesting than what is happening in front of it. The models pose, and hundreds of images are taken, so it can be slow and drab.

Behind the scenes, however, you have the stylists working on outfits, fixing hair and makeup. This all happens between the shoots and usually in a rush.

9. Capture Street Fashion

If you have ever read Fruits, you will know what street fashion can be like. I have even heard of a street in Milan where people walk up and down, showing off their best styles.

You can easily photograph these styles, in a sort of street photography way. You will also capture portraits while having to be mindful of your environment and surroundings.

And you can even stop people in the street for a quick pose. Photographers have stopped in one location while photographing those who walk past.

Here, the background stays the same, and only the people change.
Offer to send the people a JPEG of themselves, which they can share with your details. They will be more willing to help you.

10. Landmark Photo Essay

One photo essay idea that I have always wanted to try is to photograph one landmark from many different vantage points. Think about it. Look at the
Eiffel Tower, and how many collection of images have been taken of it. All are from many different angles ranging from many different distances away. This is a great way to practise your positioning and composition through different perspectives.

You can incorporate details and a down-up viewpoint, you can photograph it from above utilising a drone. And there are thousands of ways to capture it through streets and using reflections.

The landmark is your study, and it will help you look at the light during different times of the day.

A similar photo essay idea would be to take the images of the landmark from other people from the same vantage point. Unsplash is perfect for this.

11. Fathers & Children Photo Essay

We live in a very different time than we did 50 years ago. Or even 20 years ago, as more and more fathers stay at home and look after the kids.

A great photo essay example would be to capture these small families to show this as social commentary for the times we live in. These portraits and group photographs are a great way to practise and start building up a network of people. The first images are always going to be the most difficult to take. But once you pick up speed, you will have
images to show and persuade the next group. They can use a few of the images and share them, and they may even buy a few others from them. Families always need more photographs to hang on their wall.

12. A Day in the Life of...
There are going to be many jobs and careers that people do that you have no idea about. A great way to understand what people get up to in their day-to-day is to follow them and photograph as you go.

For example, a photo essay entitled ‘A day in the life of a fireman’ will get you access to inside the station, documenting what they get up to on their downtime. You may not be able to go put out a fire with them, but you never know.

This is great practice for documentary images, capturing portraits and still life of all the equipment they use. Again, let them use the images for social media.

Also, pass on the photo essay to the local council as they may be able to help with an exhibition, and spread your work too. This might get you paid work in the future, as now you are a person who gets stuff done. Bravo!

13. Education Photo Essay

One great way to support your community, and possibly even get some of
your photographs published is to photograph inside a school. You may find it difficult at first, but lay down your intentions to those in charge. Offer to let them use and share the image as they see fit. Wham. You now have a team of people sharing and liking your images. They are giving you promotion all over Facebook and other social media channels. Perfect. Get into the classrooms, photograph the students and the teachers during their daily grind. Be as invisible as you can, but involve and integrate those interested when and where you can. There is a whole slew of things to photograph. Chemistry labs, teachers taking a break and even documenting the preparation of food for lunch.

14. Fictitious Meals Photo Essay

One great photo essay example is putting all those great works of literature to good use. Think about all of the meals that characters in books have eaten. Some will be as fictitious as the names of the characters eating them. Think
of the gruel in *Oliver Twist*. Make the meals as realistic as possible, with table settings and appropriate *mise en scène*. If you need some help photographing food for your photo essay, read our post [here](#).

15. **Photograph Coffee Shops Using Cafenol**

Cafenol is a film photography chemical that sits in place of the developer. The developer is what strips the film down to a negative after it has been exposed. The cafenol is made partly from instant coffee granules, hence the name.

A great photo essay idea would be to photograph a coffee shop, the staff, the patrons and the equipment and then using coffee that they serve as a film developer. Not only does it give the film a sepia/vintage tint, but it makes each series of prints personal to each place.
16. Photograph the Photographers

How many times have you seen tourists photograph the same landmark? These landmarks or ‘points of interest’ are magnets for foreigners, all hosting cameras and taking the same shot. Sometimes, even pretending to hold up or grab the landmark themselves. As the area in question has already been captured, why not go 180 degrees in the opposite direction for your photo essay. Exactly. You will be photographing the people, who are the artists rarely seen. These images will be somewhat comical as it is a social statement of our lives and our cultures.
17. Capture the Neighbours

One great photo essay would be to localise your efforts. No matter where you live, you will have neighbours. unless you live out in the sticks, then you will have to find someone else’s neighbours. This would be a great way to get into portrait photography.

What a perfect scenario would look like is capturing the people in their own space. And everyone’s space is completely different. You will come across stay-at-home fathers, night-shift workers, grandmas with heirlooms, musicians and families. There is no telling what is behind these doors. It is a great way to work on your feet, and also meet those who make up your community.

All of these people will come and meet each other at the exhibition you will hold. Your local council (if you’re in the UK) might see this community effort and offer you some help.
Still looking for inspiration for your photo essay? Why not check out our top 20 young photographers or photography websites of 2018!

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