

# Attention to Detail

## Checklists:

Please note that checklists like this work best when used by two people. The second person reviewing the first person's work and providing feedback. The person who wrote the text or took the photo is usually too close to the subject matter to see it as a first-reader/viewer.

Spend some time developing a relationship with a fellow writer/photographer WHO ALWAYS START WITH POSITIVE COMMENTS. Successful critique sessions work best when the first comments are POSITIVE, and never just negative (or, as some people like to say, CONSTRUCTIVE).

## Photos:

The primary purpose of photography is to record something of value or consequence to the person taking the photo, or to someone else, such as a magazine's readers. A photograph must possess certain characteristics or qualities if it is to achieve more than a passing glance. These qualities become even more important if the photographer hopes to gain the approval of an audience.

The items on this checklist can serve as a means to identify the strengths and weaknesses of a certain photo. It can be used by one person, or better yet by two photographers who can critique each other's work. And note that the list is meant to be the means to a discussion or consideration of various aspects of a photo. They are listed in no order of importance (except the last one)—just remember that the purpose of a critique is to learn and improve.

If possible, the critique should be done when there is enough time to reshoot the photo and correct any problems so a deadline can be met.

1. Is the purpose of the photo clear? Is it to show beauty, to provoke, to shock, to be humorous, or what? A photo should have a purpose.
2. Does the photo have a pleasing composition? Do all parts of the shot blend together? Is there a balance of focal points in the shot?
3. Is the main subject matter in focus? Or is just the foreground or background in focus and the subject out of focus?
4. Is the photo dark enough or light enough to see it clearly?
5. Does it have proper contrast? Is there a range of color from lightest to darkest as you planned?
6. Are the colors true to the subject?
7. Are the vertical lines up and down (90 degrees) or do they list to the right or left?
8. If flash was used, do people have red spots in their eyes? (In this case, have people look off camera.)
9. Are people overly posed, into an artificial setting? Stiff, or overly smiling?
10. Do people look grumpy, bored, angry, or embarrassed? Maybe they do not want to be in a photo—in these cases do not take or show the photo. People should never be shown in a negative light.
11. Has the photo been cropped so that distracting elements or unnecessary space in the shot is eliminated. (Cut several square openings of different sizes in a piece of mat board so that you can cover photos and see how they look when you zoom into the subject matter in the photo.
12. Is the photo such that you would be proud to have it hung in your home or office or someone else's home? Is this a photo that you would expect to see in a magazine?
13. Is this the best you can do?

## Text:

In a magazine, the purpose of text is to give in words an experience, a description, a profile or some other journey to the reader that cannot be experienced with a photo or some other illustration or visual tool.

As the writer of the words, make your prose engaging to the reader. Concise, clear and engaging writing always has a market.

As you prepare a text, keep the following in mind. When you've completed the text, go back and review the story with this checklist to see if there's something missing or could be added to benefit the reader:

- Who is going to read this? What will they do with the information?
- What prior knowledge do I expect the reader to have. Should I have some added information/sidebar for beginners (those not familiar with the subject) such as an introduction to the terms used in the story, introduction to an activity, etc.?
- Is the text overpowering and dense? Do the ideas flow with good transitions from one idea/concept to the next? Would a reader be looking ahead to see how long the story is (too long)?
- What compelling quotes are contained in the story? What nuggets could be pulled from this text that would grab a passing viewer's attention? If there are two or less of these, consider doing more research/interviewing to obtain more.
- Are there sufficient quotes by those involved in this story? Readers like it when people play a major role in stories rather than having writer relay information about facts, figures and stuff.
- What ties into the emotions of the targeted reader of this story? History can be a dense thicket of facts and figures unless the writer can link it to current day events, the local geography of the reader or some other human interest angle to interest the reader.
- Can paragraphs of this story be made more like a children's book: distilled down into simple phrases that are profound?
- Will the editor require some extra information to make this story easier for the readers to use (maps, visitor information, how to get there, etc.), if so, suggest what you feel could be added.
- Why would a reader be interested in this subject? Can you see a reader taking some sort of action after reading the story (attending an event, relating the story to someone else, seeking more information on the topic)?
- Is there anything intimidating in the story that could be explained or given a how-to sidebar to make the subject more accessible?
- Why is this story more compelling because *you* are the one writing it? What connections can *you* bring to the story?
- **Finally, if this were to appear in a magazine** that you regularly read, would *you* take the time to read the whole article? Would you read it if there were no pictures accompanying the article? Would you stay to finish reading it knowing that you'd be a few minutes late for a haircut appointment or dentist visit?