

Guidelines For Photo Research



Photo Research 101

Photos are not simply tools to break up a long stretch of text in a chapter. They complement the narrative and highlight real-world examples. We want to make the most of the photos we use. That includes considering images that are interesting, different, emotional, etc. Crucially, we want images throughout the book that are diverse, both in terms of the individual images and the photo program as a whole.

What to look for:

- Content (a portrait may be fine, but an image of the person engaged in an activity may be more interesting)
- Action (a picture of a space shuttle is good, but one showing the shuttle bursting into launch is better)
- Representation (who is being included and/or omitted)
- Color and Contrast (for best display on the page)
- Resolution (for quality display on the page)



Representation Aspects to Consider

- Who is in the picture? If it is a single person, are they a white, cis, middle-class person? If it is a group of people, are they all similar in more than one way? Is there a single woman, person of color, or disabled person in a group of people who are male, white, or abled, respectively?
- How are marginalized people presented in the context of the image? If pictures of people of color only appear in criminal contexts, or queer people only appear in chapters about sexuality, then the photo program needs more equitable representation. Make sure all types of people and families feature in joyful images so that they are not only represented with oppression or struggle.



- Who is in a position of power or action in the picture? In group images, especially ones where one person is clearly presenting or in charge, it can be easy to default to an older white man in the position of power. Make sure group or action shots feature marginalized people taking action and presenting as powerful.
- If there is a marginalized person in the image, is the image “about” their marginalization? If wheelchair users are only in images about ramp access, or queer people only in Pride parades, that looks like tokenism. Photo programs should feature all kinds of people in all aspects of ordinary life. This doesn’t mean that images shouldn’t be relevant to the surrounding content, but that it shouldn’t be the only representation in the photo program.
- Be especially sensitive with images illustrating stigmatized issues like crime, mental illness, eating disorders, weight loss/gain, domestic violence, STIs, or sex work. If in doubt, it is best to use images where the subjects are not recognizable.
- Be aware of multiple facets of identity when choosing photos. If all your images of queer people are only of white people, or you only have men of color but no women of color, make sure to rectify that!
- While issues of police violence are relevant and important, be careful of using the pain of victims of color and their families as a way to get students to engage. Images of dead bodies (George Floyd, Eric Garner, etc.) may be retraumatizing for Black readers and should be avoided.
- Look out for ethnocentrism and exoticizing when choosing international images. Multicultural doesn’t just mean White/Western + Other. Make sure Native and Indigenous people are treated respectfully in images. Seek out international images to illustrate concepts that are not specifically international.
- Look over your photo program with an eye to stereotypes. Are they being upheld by your images? Are there images where you can consciously work against stereotypes by switching roles around?

