

Placement of Photo graphs and cartoons

It is said that a picture is worth a thousand words. On the same basis, it can be said that a good cartoon is worth at least two thousand words.

From a page designer's point of view, it is important to realize that photographs, cartoons and graphic have a special significance. Placing a picture or cartoon at wrong place may not only reduce its utility, but also reduce the design appeal of the total page.

Pictures, cartoon and graphics are, usually, evaluated on the basis of:

- Subject matter
- Topicality
- Clarity
- News value, significance

A page designer has to examine whether the pictures, cartoon, graphic, chart, has an independent value or it has to be juxtaposed with a particular news story. The size may have to be adjusted due to placement or space consideration.

Caption writing is an art by itself, and it comes with experience and aptitude. It is, generally, the job of the news editor. The picture and its caption are complementary to each other, and is very essential to mention when and where the picture was taken, and who the persons seen in the picture are.

Tips for better captions

- Use more of the words provided by the photographer. He or she was on the spot, and what was noteworthy there may create immediacy with the reader.
- Use your other headline idea. That is, the one you had while looking at the picture, as if the photo were to be on a magazine cover.
- Use more from the story. Especially consider good quotes.
- Use what you would put into a lift out.

- Build your caption from the most powerful verb you can find. And get that verb early in the caption.
- Build your caption from the most visual noun you can find. And get that noun early in the caption.
- Add what happened right after the photo was taken.
- Pack the caption with facts that show how the event was special.
- Use the caption to refer to other material.

Be willing to ask for more space, if need, but also less space, if that makes for a more powerful presentation.

Photo captions and cutlines are the most read body type in a publication. Of all the news content, only the titles of stories or headlines have higher readership than captions. It follows that standards of accuracy, clarity, completeness and good writing are as high for captions and cutlines as for other type. As with headlines, captions and cutlines must be crisp. As with stories, they must be readable and informative.

Captions and cutlines are terms that are often used interchangeably, particularly at magazines. For our purposes, we will make the following distinctions.

Captions: Captions are the little “headlines” over the “cutlines”

Cutlines: Cutlines (at newspapers and some magazines) are the words (under the caption, if there is one) describing the photograph or illustration.

When writing a cutline with or without a caption, it is useful to have clearly in mind the typical reader behavior when “using” a photograph and accompanying text:

First, the reader looks at the photo, mentally capturing all or most of the most obvious visual information available. Often this reader look is merely a glance, so subtle aspects of the picture may not register with many readers.

When that look at the photo sparks any interest, the reader typically looks just below the photo for information that helps explain the photo. That's when captions and cutlines must perform.

Then, typically, the reader, after digesting the information, goes back to the photo (so be sure you enhance the experience and explain anything that needs explaining).

The specific information required can vary from one photo to the next. But for most pictures a reader wants to know such information as:

- Who is that? (And, in most cases, identify people from left to right unless the action in the photograph demands otherwise.)
- Why is this picture in the paper?
- What's going on?
- When and where was this?
- Why does he/she/it/they look that way?
- How did this occur?

Simply stated, cutlines should explain the picture so that readers are satisfied with their understanding of the picture. They need not —and should not —tell what the picture has made obvious. It should supply vital information that the picture cannot. For example, a picture can show a football player leaping to catch a pass, but it likely does not show that the result was the winning touchdown. The cutline should give that information.

Cutlines should be as concise as possible, but they should not sound like telegrams or machine guns. Unlike headlines (and caption lines), they should contain all articles and conjunctions, just as do sentences in news stories. News picture cutlines should be straightforward and clear.

Trite writing should be avoided. Do not point out the obvious by using such phrases as “looks on,” “is shown” and “pictured above.”

Don't editorialize. The cutline writer should never make assumptions about what someone in a picture is thinking or try to interpret the person's feelings from his or her expression. The reader should be given the facts and allowed to decide for herself or himself what the feelings or motions are.

Avoid the known; explain the unknown. The cutline writer should avoid characterizing a picture as beautiful, dramatic, and grisly or other such descriptive terms that should be evident in the photograph. If it's not evident in the photograph, you're telling the reader won't make it happen. However, the cutline should explain something about how the picture was taken if it shows something not normally observable by the human eye. For example, was a wide-angle lens used? Or time-lapse photography? Explanations also are needed for special effects, such as the use of an inset or a picture sequence.

Reflect the image. Cutline writers should make sure that the words accurately reflect the picture. If a picture shows two or more people, the cutline writer should count the number of identifiable people in the photo and check the number and sex of the people identified in the cutline to make

certain that they match. Special precautions should be taken to make sure that the outline does not include someone who has been cropped out of the original photo.

Always, always, always check spelling. The outline writer should check the spelling of names in the story against the names that a photographer has provided to see if there are discrepancies. The editor also should be sure that names in the outline are the same names used in the story.

“Wild art.” Photographs that do not accompany stories often are termed “wild art.” The outlines for wild art should provide the same basic information that a story does. Such things as the “five W’s” (who, what, when, where and why) are good to remember when writing such outlines. If you don’t have all the information you need, get on the phone and get the information. Don’t try writing the outline without needed facts. Sometimes, wild art is used on a cover page to tease (refer) the reader to a story inside. But, unlike television, don’t tease the reader in the outline. Give as complete a story as possible, giving the reader the option of going inside for more details.

Accompanying art. If a picture is running with a story, a lengthy outline is usually not needed. Sometimes a single line is sufficient to identify the people or situation shown in the picture and to make clear their relationship to the story. Remember that most outline readers have not yet read the story. Many of them will read nothing but the outline and the headline. So the outline must strike a delicate balance between telling enough information for the reader to understand the photo and its context while being as crisp and brief as possible.

Shorter is better. Outline writing triggers a temptation to use long sentences.

Avoid that temptation.