



Photo Team Playbook

By [Anne Glover](#)

Photojournalists and copy editors share a common goal: To write an accurate, compelling sentence or copy block to accompany that stunning/clever/heartwrenching photo that graces four columns of the front page. But it all starts with the photojournalist gathering the information to go with the photo. The facts, emotions, quotes and details that you write down can really pay off later when the copy editor starts examining the photo for a caption. Here's a guide for photographers AND copy editors to help you get better cutlines in the newspaper.

COPY EDITING AS A SECOND LANGUAGE

For consistency's sake, and to keep everyone on the same page, discuss a common language that you can use for the words that go under the photos. These terms are generally common to most newsrooms:

Caption Usually a longer copy block that goes with a package of photos or with a standalone photo.

Cutline The words copy editors write with a photo that accompanies a story.

It's a Matter of Trust

Photographers are now being encouraged to do their own reporting independently of the reporter. Many times, this reporting can yield wonderful details or quotes that will add to the richness of the cutlines. But it's up to copy editors to use the information. When possible, designers should note the information that's available and try to allow for enough space to write fuller cutlines. And rim editors should strive to include the additional information in the cutline when relevant.

We're a Team

Copy editors, please call if you have a question. Photographers would rather get a phone call late at night than have someone interpret the cutline information the wrong way. Photographers, check with the reporter if you can before you send in the cutline information. Often that will nip a name discrepancy in the bud.

Give copy editors these things; they'll be happy

1. CQ odd names.

2. Describe the action in the photo before you give the background on what is happening. This is how copy editors naturally write cutlines, and it throws off their balance to have to search through it at the end of a lot of information.

3. Get the dog's name. And the cat's too.

4. If you're at a restaurant or anyplace else that has printed material relevant to the shoot, snag a copy and give it sent to the editor who'll be using the pictures. We can check spellings with that.

5. If you can, get a quote. We will be happy to use that.

6. If possible, try to give a time element that puts the photo in context: Just after paramedics arrived, before the meeting started, right when she found out she had been crowned Miss Citrus County.

7. If something seems unusual, or not quite right in the setting, please try to get more information. Ex: a bandage on an old man's head; people on bikes (kids) who aren't wearing bike helmets, etc.

8. Don't assume that the people you are photographing will be in the story. Try to get as much information from them as you can. Then check in with the writer. They might want to add some of your stuff to the story, or they might want that information to be used in the cutlines.

9. On standalone feature photographs, conduct an interview with your subjects. The more information we have to use, the better the caption will be. Stretching is not a pretty sight.

10. Be as specific as you can about locations. Ex: On Starkey Road needs a cross street or some kind of landmark or address since it is such a long road.

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