



**Friends of
the Earth**

How to: fake it as a photographer

Pictures can have a massive impact on people's approaches to life, and sometimes make them face up to issues they may not have wanted to think about. That's why the best campaigns are backed by the best possible pictures. Here Picture Editor Calliste Lelliott offers some great tips

Good pictures give visual impact: this can create interest for readers, present a message that is quickly understood and grab media attention. Good pictures can help your words get published.

Pictures can be used in a variety of ways: they can be printed (eg in *Change your world*, group newsletters, local and national newspapers), used on a website, incorporated in a Powerpoint presentation or simply used as a historic record of your group's activities.



**Top
tip**

**Have a designated
photographer within
your group**

Having a dedicated role for a member to be responsible for taking pictures will help them take the best pictures. All too often the photographer may be taking part in the action or organising it, which makes it hard to get a good picture.



As with most things, the key to success is in the

Planning

- 1 Be involved in the planning** of the event so that you have a good idea about what will happen. Before the day, think about the event/action you will be taking pictures of — where it is located, the number of people expected, the key speakers, the key moments (eg handing in a petition), the props involved. Work out in advance what you want to photograph.
- 2 If it's outdoors** check the weather forecast the day before to get a better idea of shooting conditions. If sunny use 100 ASA; overcast conditions require 200 ASA and twilight or evening 400 ASA film speed. If you are unsure use 200 ASA film as this is the most versatile.
- 3 The time** you take your pictures will be important too as it affects the type of light and position of the sun. Best light is at dawn and dusk. The most difficult light is at midday when the sun is highest in the sky, and the contrast between light and shadows is too

strong. Pictures taken at this time on a sunny day can lose all detail — bleached out in the light areas, invisible in the dark. In conditions like this it is often best to move the subject into the shade for a more even light, and if necessary use your fill-flash for an extra dash of light.

- 4 Staying inside** you will need to use the flash on your camera and a fast film (400 ASA).
- 5 If you are sending pictures to the media** let them know in advance and see if they are interested in pictures. Send captioned reprints (never originals) or scan as JPEGs and send via email. Make sure a press release and contact information are also sent.
- 6 Test shots:** Novices should go out and practice before the event. Look critically at your results, to see what works and doesn't work — it's the best way to build your confidence and skills.

Examples of good and bad snaps

Let's look at the sort of pictures your group might need and consider what tells your story best

1 Composition

Composition is shorthand for the content of the shot and how it is arranged within the frame. Composition is fundamental to getting a good picture. It is something you need to experiment with on the day.



What's wrong with this picture?

- 1 The shot looks very messy
- 2 There is no focus for the picture
- 3 There is too much information, making it confusing, so the message is lost



What's right with this picture?

- 1 The subject fills the frame
- 2 The message is clear
- 3 The framing is dramatic

Other examples of good composition



Low angle: despite the soldier being on the ground, the camera is even lower and is looking upward.



High angle: camera is looking down on the group. Note the good use of prop in foreground.



Good use of prop: the pumpkin, sharply in focus, holds the message while the out-of-focus background gives secondary information.

Photo speak

Whatever you are shooting aim to get a variety of pictures, so that you have a wide selection to choose from. The basic types of shot are:



Close-up



Mid shot



Wide shot

How to Pull-out section

2 Lighting

All lighting conditions are different, and will change the way your pictures turn out. When looking through the lens look at how the light is falling on your subject. Which are the lightest areas (highlights); which are the darkest areas (shadows). Think about the difference between them — does it provide contrast? Is this what you want?



What's wrong with this picture?

- 1 The picture was taken in bright sunshine, leading to deep shadows, burnt out whites and squinting people
2. Detail is lost — even if the banner had been held straight (a composition fault) the message would still have been obscured by the too-bright lighting

Recommendations

Where possible, move the subject into the shade. Make sure that neither the people, nor the camera, are looking into the sun.



What's right with this picture?

- 1 The subject is evenly lit
- 2 The people are not looking into the sun
- 3 The shot is not being taken into the sun

Recommendations

You can use reflector to bounce light on to the darker side of a subject's face, or use the fill-in flash on your camera (ensure you are one to five metres away).

3 Taking good portraits



What's wrong with this picture?

- 1 Person is too far away and it is hard to see details



Remember to caption (and date) your photographs.

Who took the picture? Where was it taken? What is it showing? When was it? You can create a fantastic archive if you get in the habit of accurate labelling and captioning.



What's right with this picture?

- 1 The subject is a good distance from the background
- 2 The subject is close to the camera

Recommendations:

- ¥ Take lots of pictures, talk to your model, get them to relax and smile
- ¥ Take pictures whilst your subject is doing something. This will produce a more natural looking model and less staged pictures.

Storing and sending images

Depending on the final use of your image (eg print, web, presentation) you will need to create different file sizes for your images. It's important to know the end usage size of your image before scanning it. If you have a scanner you can scan and save your images as digital files. These image files can be distributed easily via email or CD.

General file size guidelines

For print (eg newsletter, newspaper, magazine)

- ¥ typical image size is 6 x 4 inches (10 x 15 cm)
- ¥ high resolution (eg 300dpi [dots per inch])
- ¥ save as JPEG
- ¥ file size should be between 500k — 5 Megabytes (Mb)
- ¥ check the quality needed before scanning if sending to a newspaper or magazine
- ¥ If you plan to use images for a professionally printed newsletter ask the printer to scan your images as it guarantees better quality.

For web use low resolution 72dpi, save as RGB JPEG. If you have control over quality it should be low quality. File size should be around

20k—40k.

Recommended for web download create a thumbnail (using ideas in For web) and link to a high-res file, so people have the option of downloading to their desktop for print use.

Email depends on the recipient's email capacity (do not send large files to hotmail or webmail accounts as they usually cannot cope). As a general rule, 500k — 1Mb for print use; 20k — 40k for web use.

Digital camera users your images will already be JPEGs. Once you have downloaded to your computer following the guidelines above then resize your pictures using tips in For print and For web section above).

Best three

If you are sending images to newspapers or magazines, select up to three best pictures only. Make sure the images are different in content and subject matter, and are clearly identifiable with caption and credit info.

Message/branding

Branding is vital if you are sending pictures to the media and want your group and Friends of the Earth's message to be noticed.

¥ When composing your shot try and include one of the following: your local group banner, campaign materials (eg poster), Friends of the Earth logo (this could be on T-shirt, badge or sticker), placard with campaign message.

¥ If taking a picture at a site battle, try and get a sense of place by including the following: important building or sign, relevant background (eg trees, cars, smoke).

¥ You may want to show local group members interacting with the community — talking, giving information, signing petition. Aim for anything active, participative or interesting.

¥ If you want to gather local support make the event look interesting and fun. Try and differentiate between your actions by using different props, materials, costumes and themes.



Check it girl: make Friends of the Earth's name stand out with a clear, interesting composition including banners and logos.

Want to know more?

Useful books include Michael Langford's *Starting photography* (Focal Press, 1999, £12.99) and Michael Freeman's *Complete Guide to Digital Photography* (Thames and Hudson, 2001, £19.95).



Keep snapping
Do not be disappointed if you don't get the results you expect first time. Experiment and see how much better your pictures become.