7TH EDITION

TELEVISION FIELD PRODUCTION AND REPORTING

FRED SHOOK, JOHN LARSON, AND JOHN DETARSIO

ROUTLEDGE

TELEVISION FIELD PRODUCTION AND REPORTING

Television Field Production and Reporting provides a comprehensive introduction to the art of video storytelling. Endorsed by the National Press Photographers Association, this book focuses on the many techniques and tools available in today's digital landscape, including how drones and miniaturized technology can enrich the storytelling process. The new edition of *Television Field Production and Reporting* is an absolute must in this visually oriented, rapidly changing field. At its core, visual storytelling helps transmit information, expose people to one another, and capture and communicate a sense of experience in unforgettable ways. This edition reflects, through practitioners' eyes, how to achieve those goals and excel as a professional, whatever the medium at hand, even as changing technology revises the storyteller's toolkit. This edition emphasizes digital and emerging media, and includes new color photography relevant to contemporary visual storytelling and reporting. It also features important updates regarding digital media law which affect anyone who records and/or disseminates digital media content, whether in private, on television, the web, via social networking sites, or in commercial venues.

The seventh edition of *Television Field Production and Reporting* stresses the mastery of innovative storytelling practices in video programming as far ranging as electronic press kits, multi-camera production, stylized programs, corporate video, raw documentaries, and real time cinéma vérité.

Fred Shook's professional experience encompasses television reporting, production, writing, photojournalism, and video editing. He has taught at university level and worked nationally and internationally as a television producer, consultant, writer, director, and editor for commercial television, corporations, and government agencies. Shook is a National Television Academy Silver Circle Member for significant contributions to television over at least twenty-five years. He received a Rocky Mountain Emmy Nomination for writing, and the National Press Photographers Association's Robin F. Garland "Outstanding National Educator" award. He also is a recipient of the NPPA's J. Winton Lemen National Fellowship Award for his contributions to television photojournalism. He has written *The Process of Electronic News Gathering*; *Television News Writing: Captivating an Audience*; and *Television Field Production and Reporting*, ed. 1–4, and is lead author on ed. 5–7.

John Larson is recognized as one of the nation's best storytelling reporters. He's excelled in national and local investigative, breaking, and feature reporting. Larson reports and produces stories for *PBS NewsHour*, and is a former *Dateline NBC* correspondent. He also serves as a consultant to hundreds of journalists, and works internationally as a Video Journalist who does it all. His powerful writing has made him a sought-after speaker, teacher, and motivator at workshops and newsrooms across the country. He's earned multiple DuPont Columbia awards – arguably broadcasting's Pulitzer Prize, as well as multiple Peabody's and National Emmys. His award winning work has taken him around the world – investigating drug cartels in Mexico, the sinking of a ferry in Indonesia, police corruption in Louisiana, HIV/Aids in Africa, death of undocumented immigrants at the hands of the US Border Patrol, racial profiling in the United States, and many others. His investigation of the insurance industry for *Dateline NBC* became one of the most honored works of journalism in broadcast history. Before going to the network, Larson spent eight years at KOMO-TV in Seattle, Washington.

John DeTarsio is Director and Director of Photography for scripted and non-scripted episodic TV, documentaries, and magazine shows. As Director/DP of the MTV hit series, *Catfish*, he helped design the look of the TV series and has been with the show since its inception. His body of work encompasses highly-stylized shows, from the raw documentary look of MTV's *Catfish*, CBS *48 Hours* and MTV's *Suspect*, to the premier network magazine show, CBS *60 Minutes*, to multi-camera productions (*Coming Home*, *Lifetime*, and *Kid Nation*, CBS). John has worked for five news stations as photographer, editor, and on-air reporter. At KNSD 7/39 San Diego, he became Executive Producer of Creative Development, before becoming a freelance network photographer and consultant. As a consultant (www.johndetarsio.com/), he works with national and international television photographers, editors, reporters, and managers, sharing his passion for visual storytelling. His awards include NPPA National Photographer of the Year, the national Iris Award, six national NPPA awards, and forty-six regional Emmys. In addition to twenty-eight San Diego Press Club Awards and nine Golden Mic Awards, he also has received more than fifty regional NPPA Awards.

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Seventh Edition

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A VALUABLE RESOURCE

For video examples, demonstrations, and an updated library of author-generated content, join us at www.story201.com. Here you will find video tutorials, and valuable links for *Television Field Production and Reporting,* 7th edition. Recognized around the world for their seminars and presentations, the authors provide updated, specific instructional content available nowhere else. We invite you to join us.

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Preface

This book is dedicated to helping you become one of a kind – a visual storyteller rather than simply a photographer or writer. Anyone with a camera is a photographer; anyone with a microphone can be a reporter. Today it may seem as if everyone has a video camera and everyone's shooting video and crafting stories. Relatively few among those multitudes, however, will ever become accomplished visual storytellers.

You will need additional skills and digital "languages" if you intend to incorporate visual storytelling into your professional career. At its simplest level, you will have to master two ways of communicating: one is with pictures, and the other is with sound, including the spoken word. Although it may sound easy, it's not.

Your images must sparkle with articulate meaning; your lighting must mimic the Renaissance mastery of light and shadow on a digital canvas; storytelling sound must become the other half of the image, because we "see" with our ears; your writing must incorporate not only the spoken word, deftly told, but all the tools of visual media. Storytelling is a learned art in a world where only excellence, originality, and interesting, relevant content will attract and hold discriminating viewers who patronize digital screens.

Your mastery of the visual languages in digital media, and a commitment to excellence, will help ensure a long, profitable, and rewarding career. This seventh edition of *Television Field Production and Reporting* features extensive updates and many new photographs that create context for gathering and producing content for digital media, including websites, video, audio, text, and multimedia.

The book includes guidance and insights by co-author and network correspondent/producer John Larson. He also travels internationally, shoots stories on his own, pilots his own drone, and serves as a reporting and writing consultant.

Also of note are the contributions of co-author and network freelance photojournalist John DeTarsio. DeTarsio is known within the television profession throughout the United States, Canada, Europe, Africa, and South America. In this edition, he adds up-to-date information about field production, photojournalism, lighting, and sound. Rather than simply providing technical advice and explanations, he shows how to use the camera, microphone, edit bay, and lighting

as storytelling instruments to create far more compelling and memorable stories for digital media. Equally important, he describes his approaches in working with story subjects and how to capture their most telling insights, actions, and behaviors.

Acknowledgments

The following individuals and institutions deserve recognition for their contributions to this undertaking:

The National Press Photographers Association (NPPA) for its sponsorship of the annual Television News-Video Workshop at the University of Oklahoma. This workshop is internationally recognized for its achievements in illuminating the art of effective visual storytelling. The distinguished professionals who serve as faculty and give this workshop its direction initiated many concepts that appear in this book.

NBC News national correspondent Bob Dotson, a close friend of the authors; his network reporting and "American Story" series have distinguished his work on *NBC Today* and the *NBC Nightly News*.

Grateful recognition also is extended to photojournalists Ernie Leyba, and the late Bob Brandon, both of Denver, KUSA-TV; Patti Dennis, Vice President of News and Director of Recruiting, TEGNA Media; Eric Kehe, Director of Photography, and photojournalist Manny Sotello, KCNC-TV; chief photographer Bob Burke; and to all KUSA and KCNC staff and private citizens who appear in photographs throughout the book.

Other contributors include the following reviewers: Douglas Osman, James Stephens, and Jerry Gibbs.

To these individuals and to those whose contributions are recognized elsewhere, the authors extend most grateful appreciation.

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INTRODUCTION

If you now work in digital media or plan a communications career, you may at times write stories for the page or computer screen. At other times you may share your writing as stories translated into sounds and images for television, stories so powerful your audience may feel strong connections with people in your stories. You can excel in your career if you learn to use each medium to full advantage as a visual storyteller, even as the media landscape changes. Written and spoken words are different than images. Actions and behaviors are different than sounds and silence. As the following pages illuminate, all are methods of expression you can master and employ as appropriate for the specific medium.

At its core, visual storytelling helps you transmit information, show people to people, and capture and communicate a sense of experience in unforgettable ways. This edition reflects, through practitioners' eyes, how to achieve those goals and excel as a professional, whatever the medium at hand, and even as changing technology recasts the storyteller's toolkit.

You will discover how to take that extra moment to think and plan stories no one else sees, even while tackling the same subjects, events, and topics. You will learn how to become a multi-dimensional writer with the ability to captivate and hold audiences by making your work relevant, original, and interesting. The authors will help you begin your journey toward those goals and more in the pages to come.

TELLING THE VISUAL STORY

1

> "It takes a special kind intelligence to tell a story, and from our tribal days to this moment we learn most from stories."[1]
>
> Gerry Spence, trial lawyer and author

Reporters report. Photographers take pictures. Writers write. They attend events. Observe. Tell us what happened. If you subscribe to such conventional wisdom, your work will forever imitate what everyone else is doing. Odd as it may sound, the most powerful visual storytellers often stop reporting and writing, stand back, and serve as producers in helping their story subjects tell the story.

Imagine for a moment that you have been assigned to cover a city council meeting. Other reporters from around town are there; taking notes, recording city council members' comments, listening to citizens make statements. It's journalism with a capital J. Except that it isn't storytelling. That's because a meeting is never the thing that happened.

Let's assume city council is deciding whether to apply for federal matching funds to help local minority businesses. Sounds like a clickable or turn-the-page story? How will you make this story interesting? Should you make it interesting? Isn't it up to you to provide just the facts? Isn't it your audiences' job to understand? Not if you wish to have a satisfying career or to compete against other writers, reporters, and storytellers who labor to make their work as interesting, visual, and understandable as possible.

Let's return to city council, this time with an audience of one in the back of our mind, an approach that the Poynter Institute's Roy Peter Clark advocates. When he is struggling to make something clear, he says he imagines a conversation with his mother. "If she asked me, 'What did you learn at city council today?'" he says he would not respond: "The city council agreed by a one-vote margin Friday to apply for federal matching funds to permit them to support a project to aid small minority-owned businesses by giving them lower interest loans." Instead, he says, "I might be more inclined to say, 'Well, Ma, minority business people are struggling, and the city council thinks it's found a way to help them out'."[2]

Note how Clark converts the central character from "The city council" to the more powerful and accessible "minority business people". Now we have real people, non-institutional representatives, who can tell us their story from a people perspective.

If we also tell the story from their viewpoint, or even an observer's viewpoint, we can show their struggles, the forces that make it difficult to earn a living in the community, how minority business folks tried to survive, and why they're failing.

We can still report the city council story for it, too, is important. Once audiences understand why the story matters, then we can cover city council and cast the council meeting itself as a story element: the story outcome that remains unknown until council takes its vote. Even then, audiences will want essential details, the vital facts and figures, in palatable doses. "People want to be spoken to," says Garrison Keillor, noted writer and radio personality. "Ministers who read their sermons inevitably lose the audience in the first two minutes. So sad, so unnecessary."[3]

THROUGH STORIES WE SHARE HUMAN EXPERIENCE AND UNDERSTANDING

We sometimes live inside stories. Sometimes they live inside us. Stories help us understand ourselves, and to grow in self-knowledge beyond personal experience. Stories also help us understand what all humans share in common, whether as children, parents, lovers, relatives, workers, senior citizens, or in belonging to similar cultures or religions, in which we embrace common values and codes of conduct. Through voyagers and explorers, past and present, we learn about places we may never visit and people we may never meet. And, ultimately, most humans ponder what it all means and what happens when it ends.

Visual media helps viewers feel they're part of the action, essentially experiencing the events on-screen (Figure 1.1). The most compelling stories contain a beginning, middle, and unknown ending; the same format in which we experience our own lives and other real-life events. We've been telling stories this way since the first hunters gathered at night to relate the day's happenings: "We began our hunt before sunrise . . ." leads to the story's middle where one or more characters struggle against an opposing force to achieve a goal, and on to the ending where the audience learns how things turned out.

Along the way, the best stories address larger issues. From them we gain deeper understandings – perhaps the value of patience and persistence, the futility of hunting in the dark, or what lethal dangers a hunter must confront to feed the clan. The story's narrative structure commonly begins with someone in pursuit of a difficult goal and follows a narrative timeline through to the ending.

Figure 1.1 Photography captures tactile impressions of the environment that give viewers a vicarious sense of experience.

Ernie Leyba Photography

"Amazingly, the same neurons fire whether we do something or watch someone else do the same thing, and both summon similar feelings," writes author Diane Ackerman. "Learning from our own mishaps isn't as safe as learning from someone else's, which helps us decipher the world of intentions . . . . The brain evolved clever ways to spy or eavesdrop on risk, to fathom another's joy or pain quickly, as detailed sensations, without resorting to words. *We feel what we see, we experience others as self*. (Emphasis added)"[4] Further understanding of this phenomenon comes from memory expert James McGaugh, neurobiology professor at the University of California, Irvine. Dr. McGaugh notes that when we experience something, positive or negative, our bodies release adrenalin, searing those memories into our brains more strongly.[5]

THE DIFFERENCES BETWEEN VISUAL STORIES AND REPORTS

Visual stories reveal someone's goals and actions as they unfold sequentially, *along a timeline*. They use moving images and sound to mimic how viewers experience the world in their personal lives.

Reports commonly emphasize just the facts. They may show people in interviews, walking here and there, and sometimes doing interesting things. In the end and with exceptions,

however, they highlight facts and information more than they use video and field audio to help communicate a sense of experience, or to introduce interesting people to viewers. The structure of reports also differs. Reports may even begin with the story's outcome: "Five mastodon hunters suffered grave injuries early this morning . . ."

If you equate powerful visual storytelling with mere feature reporting, abandon such prejudices now. Images and sounds are different tools than words on paper or even words spoken aloud. Typically, print informs or reports first to the *intellect*. Visual stories commonly report first to the *heart*. Storytelling helps you avoid the institutional. It makes your work unique, something alive and exciting.

HEART, EMOTION, DEMEANOR

"Somehow wisdom is not lodged inside until its truth has been engraved by some moment of humiliation, delight, disappointment, joy or some other firsthand emotion," observes *New York Times*' columnist David Brooks.[6] In turn, the emotional reactions that viewers experience help them understand the story's significance. Nearly two centuries ago the poet John Keats noted that "nothing ever becomes real until it is experienced."[7]

Consider how emotion lends significance to events and situations in your own life: your favorite NFL team just won its eighth consecutive game: you *hope* today's injuries won't derail the team; unemployment is high: you're *afraid* you soon may lose your job; you're *excited* because you just found a job, received a raise, or won the lottery; you're *annoyed* by all the political ads on TV; you feel intimidated by that menacing dog next door; you feel *sad* and *angry* because your stock portfolio just lost half its value.

"Facts exist independently, outside people. Seven inches of rain in a night is a fact, so long as you merely see an item about it in the paper," observed author and scriptwriter Dwight Swain. "Let it wash through your living room and ruin two thousand dollars' worth of furnishings, and it takes on true meaning and significance for you. For significance, remember, starts within the individual, in feeling."[8] Clearly, the same thing happens to viewers when stories or situations elicit honest human emotions. Sometimes, the best writing may occur when your images help viewers feel as if those seven inches of rain are washing through their own living rooms.

During four years as the editor of *Life* magazine, Thomas Griffith, later a *Time* columnist, said he learned the different effect of words and pictures. "I concluded that *Time* was about meaning and *Life* about feeling, and that both were valid paths to take," said Griffith. "That gave me a clue to television's influence. I no longer scorn the way even sophisticated voters, while they might sigh for a sober debate over the issues, get as much from a candidate's demeanor as they do from his words."[9]