

## Assignments: Goals and Self-Evaluation

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“I really believe there are things nobody would see if I didn’t photograph them.”

*Diane Arbus*

“Work is something you can count on, a trusted, lifelong friend who never deserts you.”

*Margaret Bourke-White*

“To be successful, the first thing to do is fall in love with your work.”

*Sister Mary Lauretta*

“If we don’t know where we are going, we are sure to end up somewhere else.”

*(I don’t know who said it, but it is certainly true!)*

Your assignment this week is to begin the assessment and work that is necessary to make your goals and understand your career path.

### Assignment One

Gather together EVERYthing (I mean everything) that you have made. Don’t edit. We want to see early photographs, recent photographs, ugly collages, new contact sheets. If work you have done in other media seems relevant, bring that also. We want to assess where you have been and what raw material you have to make your portfolio.

### Assignment Two

Spend some time with what you have gathered. Choose your current favorite pieces and your least favorite piece. Keep this information to yourself.

### Assignment Three

Complete the artistic contract. Dream big. Make embarrassing prediction and brave wishes. If you could do anything, be anything, what would it be? Be truthful, despite the fact that I will read it!

#### Due:

1. Artistic Contract thoughtfully completed.
2. Everything you can get your hands on that you have made in your career as photographer.
3. Know your favorite and least favorite pieces

## Artistic Contract

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I, \_\_\_\_\_, committed to a life of creativity and a career in the visual arts, undertake this contract with myself as an important step in my life as an artist. During the twelve weeks of this class I will work intently and diligently and set the habits that will mark my future in Photography. As part of this process, I will answer the following questions bravely and completely:

**1. What are my lifetime goal(s) as an artist? (Be specific. Be expansive. Be free to dream.)**

**2. What is my five-year goal as an artist? (Be specific. Set priorities.)**

**3. What do I plan to accomplish in the next six months? (Be specific. Set some things that can be accomplished in this time line.)**

**4. What do I plan to accomplish in the next 12 weeks? (Be specific. What do you want out of this class?)**

**5. How much time do I plan to devote to my goals each week? (Be honest.)**

Realizing that success in the arts is the ultimate mix of luck meeting preparation, I am committed to do the work necessary to make my goals a reality.

\_\_\_\_\_

Name

\_\_\_\_\_

Date

(Inspired by *Taking the Leap*, Cay Lang and *The Artist's Way*, Julia Cameron)

## Photographic Portfolio: Self-portrait Collage

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Trust in yourself. Your perceptions are often far more accurate than you are willing to believe.

*Claudia Black*

Who are you? As you begin this creative journey, remember that as you explore yourself, the world around you and all your concerns in life, you open yourself to creativity. There are no right answers or wrong answers. This assignment is open to you. What will you do with limited time, unlimited possibilities and the materials at hand? The creative photographer learns to work with uncertainty and thrive on the serendipity. As you explore you will discover your curious inquisitive self. Play. Experiment. Tell us visually who you are tonight.

*Collecting: (30 minutes)*

Take a number of magazines and freely dismember them. We will tear through these magazines for thirty minutes. Collect any image that reflects your life or your interests. Think of this collage as a form of pictorial autobiography. Include your past, present, future, your dreams or images you simply like.

*Assembling: (30 minutes)*

Arrange the pieces in anyway that pleases you.

*Sharing:*

We will introduce ourselves with our collage.

*Inspiration from "The Artist's Way," Julia Cameron, Tarcher/Putnam, 1992.*

## The Portfolio

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Often, for an assignment, an exhibition or for yourself, you will want to make a portfolio. Generally speaking, this is a set of pictures that work together. The purpose they serve defines them. Some portfolios are for editorial assignments, some for display and some are for advertising. Each type of portfolio must be customized and it is not unusual for a working photographer to have several current “books” or portfolios.

In a portfolio, good is not good enough. Show only your best. You should not be apologizing for any aspect of your presentation. The images should shine in their environment.

You must have a clear idea of your goals to make a good portfolio. What are you trying to say? Without a good idea as to the message you wish to convey, your portfolio will be a hodgepodge of greatest hits with no punch. It is a difficult task, but only you can do it! **Edit**, clarify your goals, **edit**, make a perfect presentation, **edit** and finally, present your portfolio with pride.

### Steps to creating an effective portfolio

1. Begin with a rough idea as to your current goal(s).
2. Begin to sort your images into groups by subject or style.
3. Review the direction you have chosen with the evidence of the images at hand.
4. Edit out any weak pictures. Be ruthless. Keep only the best in the running.
5. Review these images. Reshoot? New Direction? At this point only pictures that have impact and support your portfolio’s goal will remain.
6. Sequence into a flow that keeps the viewers interest and best illustrates your strengths.
7. Place into a container/box/book of the highest quality. Choose one that show the work to its best advantage. Plan and purchase the necessary materials so that portfolio stays clean and fresh (i.e. shipping cases, covers, plastic bags for prints, coversheets)

Remember that in the midst of all this intellectualizing and technical decision making, that the best work always comes from your heart, but without technical excellence your message will not be heard.

## What is a Portfolio?

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At its very basic level a portfolio is a collection of works with works being defined as any creation - jewelry, paintings, photographs, illustrations, etc.

Portfolios can be further divided into two types: the professional portfolio and the artistic portfolio. The differences between these two collections of works are clear and distinct for some and uncertain for others. It can, however, be agreed upon that a professional portfolio is created as a means to other ends, such as getting an assignment, job, exhibition, etc. An artistic portfolio on the other hand is both the means and the ends in itself.

The artistic portfolio is created out of questions ideas and topics the photographer wants to explore. It is what Ansel Adams called the assignment from within.

The main differentiation then between a professional portfolio and artistic portfolio lies in its intent more than in its content. Many a photographer has complained of commercialism contaminating his or her creative vision. Market forces and public demands can exert great pressure on the creative process. An artistic portfolio must ultimately remain true to itself.

It is in the area of craft and presentation that the professional and artistic portfolios merge. Regardless of the end in mind, all portfolios must be seamless in their presentation and effortless in their craft. There is no room for shoddy workmanship or shortcuts in any portfolio. Even works which relies on scratched negatives and torn prints reassembled by masking tape are presented just so. Transparency of craft is the rule regardless of medium, content, process or subject. In the end, all work is measured against all other work. Excellence in execution and presentation is expected.

The artistic portfolio is the ultimate creative challenge. You must give the assignment. You must accept the assignment. You are client, photographer, art director, seller and buyer. You have no one else to fall back on except yourself. It is this very responsibility and incredible freedom that destroys many an artistic photographer. The artistic portfolio is a result of vision, discipline, exploration and honesty. Your ultimate goal is to use the medium of photography to explore and expand your awareness of yourself and the world around you.

## Informational Interview

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### What is an “Informational Interview?”

An informational interview is a question/answer session with a professional in the photographic field who does what you hope to do in your future career. It is **not** a job interview. The focus of your questions and your attention should be on your subject and their career!

You should plan the interview so it is convenient for your subject and gets you the information you need in one session. You must be organized in both your questions and in your thinking. You should be courteous and considerate of the subject’s time. An informational interview should be 10-20 minutes long and the interview can be in person or by telephone.

### Choosing a professional to interview

Ideally, the subject should be someone who is doing what you would most like to be doing. They have the job of your dreams. Be prepared to ask a number of people before you find someone who has the time to work with you. Be persistent. Don’t expect a busy professional to return your phone call the first time or have time the day you call. Be prepared to call back and arranged an interview time even if you are telephone interviewing. On the other hand, if the subject says they do not have time, respect their wishes, and find another subject.

Sources of interview subjects including the telephone book, gallery spaces where you have seen work, a “black book” or publication that includes contact information, and professional organizations like the ASMP (American Society of Magazine Photographers) or PAPA (Peninsula Area Photography Association). Ask friends and instructors for people they might know would make good subjects.

### Preparation

Before you even call your subject ask yourself the following questions:

1. What area(s) of photography do I want to pursue?
2. Who could I call that is doing this now?
3. Why do I want to pursue this area of photograph? Creative reasons? Financial reasons? Other reasons?
4. Before I talk to this person, what do I think will be the good parts and bad parts of a career in this area of photography? What preparation do I think I would need to succeed?

### Questions

Make a list of questions to ask before the interview. The more specific and focused and organized the more you will get out of this experience. Sample questions include:

1. How did you get into this career?
2. What do you like best about your career? What do you like least?
3. What is a typical work day like for you?
4. What training and/or education did you have for your position?
5. If you were beginning now, as I am, what would you do to get into this field?
6. Do you know anyone else I could talk to or where else I can go for more information?

### **Evaluation**

After the interview, spend some time “digesting” the information. Ask yourself the following questions:

1. What positive and negative information did I learn?
2. How does what I learned fit into my skills, values or interests?
3. What else do I need to know? How or where will I find this information?
4. How do I feel about this area of photography after getting this information? Do I want to continue to pursue this area? Do I want to change my focus? Why?
5. How do I incorporate this information into my career plan and my educational plan?

### **Follow up**

Within 24 hours, send a thank you note to your subject. Tell them how appreciative you are of their time and their sharing.

Within a week, with the knowledge you have gained, fine-tune your plan for your career/ photography activities. If possible, interview another person in the same area. All that you learn is just one person’s opinion. The more contacts you have, the richer picture of the field of photography you will get.

### **Due:**

Your project will be an “Informational Interview” with a professional in the field of photography. The final paper will be 2 pages typed. You will also share this information in class informally.

## Expectations and Goals

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Working in the creative areas can be difficult. The feedback is sometimes limited and often not enough. People will sometimes gush over your least favorite pieces and ignore the one you think is dynamite! The same portfolio that inspires cheers in one interview is met with polite silence at another. Here are a few helpful hints to sticking it out during the trying times.

### **1. Choose realistic rather than nonrealistic goals.**

You can decide to enter 10 juried shows by June. You cannot decide to be accepted to 10 juried shows! Make your goals actions that you can take and control. You can decide to photograph every week, but not to make 10 out of 36 photographs winners.

### **2. Have a lot of irons in the fire and/or don't put all your eggs in one basket!**

This is an important part of this process both because it increases your chances of success dramatically and lessens the blow of unexpected rejection.

### **3. There is no accounting for Taste.**

Some people will always like your work; some people will never like your work. Recognize that everyone sees things differently and don't waste time taking it personally. Research the juror/decision maker if possible and use it to shape your applications. This doesn't mean don't apply if the decision maker is not sympathetic to your style of work; you should send work to all avenues possible—you never know what will happen. But, forewarning can lessen the blow of rejection and help you set priorities.

## Project Worksheet

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GOAL:

Background research

Necessary supplies & equipment

Skills needed

Deadlines

## Outcome

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Contacts made

Materials delivered or sent

Response

Future Plans/actions

## Words to the Wise

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**Below is a series of quotes from gallery directors, editors, photographers and other professionals in the field of photography.**

- Don't do anything until you see what your competition is doing.
- Although gallery owners, art directors, photo editors may tire of urban landscapes, the play of light through translucent bedroom curtains, or surrealistic flash effects, one thing is certain. A clean, concise, unified presentation of your best work in a knockout portfolio will never become passé. Your vision, after all, is your own, but the way you present it can make or break your future potential for exhibitions, commercial or editorial work, or whatever photographic endeavor you choose to pursue.
- Your portfolio or "book" is the ticket to success or failure, whether in advertising, corporate, editorial, or fine art photography. It's the first thing interviewers notice about your work and the last thing they forget.
- The majority of errors we see seem to be in the area of presentation. Inexperienced reviewers frequently show you too many pictures that aren't edited, or are dog-eared, beaten up, on soiled mats, or not recent.
- If you are able to begin with the assumption that your work is good, somehow distinctive in its own way, and worth showing to prospective exhibitors or employees, that's half the battle.
- What makes a good portfolio? Cohesiveness, consistency of quality, and a singularity of vision emerge as the most important characteristics of any successful portfolio.
- In a good portfolio, the quality of the images is outstanding. They are all well printed, spotted, and mounted. The sequencing is clearly deliberate and well done, and each picture is different and stand well on its own.
- Art Professionals search for two basic characteristics that good portfolios-and good photographers-share. These are a professional presentation and a 'singular vision'.
- Don't try to make it perfect—just powerful.
- The essence of most professional advice on the subject of portfolios and presentations is easy enough to summarize: impact counts; less is more; where excellence is required, pretty good is worthless.
- Art Directors caution against showing a hodgepodge of styles.
- Limit your presentation to whatever number of prints and slides you can show in a maximum of 10 minutes
- Succeeding in photography is much akin to building a credit rating. You have to get that first credit card in order to gain access to the system and be considered an acceptable risk.

## The Rule of Twelve's

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We all want something to “happen” in our artistic lives. Perhaps we want to publish our photographs; get a new photographic job; be chosen for a grant or some combination of the above. Think about what you want to “happen” in your artistic life. Whatever your goal, it will probably require you to take your creation and send it out into the world, to be accepted or, perhaps more often rejected.

Perseverance and more perseverance are your only friends in this situation. But how, in the face of **Rejection**, do we continue. My solution has been the Rule of twelve's. Today, using the “Rule of 12's”, you will each begin to construct your own list of actions for short-term artistic development goals.

If you always have twelve balls in the air, twelve eggs in your basket, or twelve seeds that you are cultivating, you will find that rejection is not so powerful and the goals you are pursuing are not so distant or difficult.

The two dangers in pursuing a goal are:

1. Getting a rejection and stopping
2. Getting an acceptance and stopping

We need to keep our momentum, and the rule of 12's is a key to creating and keeping momentum. If you wanted to have a flower for your table, would you plant one seed? Of course not.

Right now, I would like you to choose one goal, it doesn't have to be “the” goal, or a big goal, just a goal that you would like to achieve in your professional life.

My primary goal right now is to have a book of my work published. I would also like to promote my artwork and get museum shows. Perhaps you will pick goal such as to be published, to get a grant, be accepted at a school for transfer or have a one person show.

OK. Now there are different actions you can take to realize any goal. The rule of twelve means that you try and have twelve “actions” happening at any one time. Why twelve? I'm not sure—perhaps because it is a dozen or its more than ten or... whatever, but by having twelve eggs in my basket, I have been seeing results. I do my rule of twelve's about once a month; you could do it more or less often, although results seem to come from consistency.

Right now to write three actions you have taken or could take to reach your goal. The only limitation is that one of these actions, you should be able to do *today* or at the latest tomorrow. Remember, you must create momentum and action is the way to get momentum.

There is no “right” or “wrong” action—It could be research to make your goal possible, sending out a letter, talking to a mentor, getting published, whatever. This is a personal record for you of how hard you are working to make your goal become reality.

**DO IT NOW!**

*.....yes, right now!*

## Rule of Twelves

* 1	Date	Action
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3		
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12		

## Rule of Twelves

* 1	Date	Action
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