



Sequencing & Editing

A mini guide for photographers

Why editing your own work is the hardest skill

Editing your own work is hard, but curating it down to the best images is often even harder. You're emotionally attached to what you shoot. You remember the moment, the effort, the feeling. Naturally, you want to like everything you make.

The problem is that a strong series doesn't need everything you enjoyed shooting. It needs the images that work best together.

A photo can feel powerful in the moment, then fall flat on the screen later. That doesn't mean you failed. It means the camera didn't see what you felt. Learning the difference between those two things takes time.

Why editing your own work is the hardest skill

As photographers, we have to learn how the camera sees, not just how the moment felt. That gap can be frustrating. You might be convinced something worked, only to realize later that it doesn't hold up in the edit.

This is where letting go matters. If an image isn't adding anything to the series, it has to go. Even if you like it. Even if it meant something to you at the time.

You won't get it right every time - and that's not the point. The point is learning through the process. Each edit teaches you more about what you do well, what the camera responds to, and how to be more honest with your work.

The NOICE aesthetic: form, symmetry, novelty, humour

I started NOICE Magazine in 2015. At the time, I was tired of submitting my work to publications and never hearing back. So I decided to create my own space - one built around my own taste and what I genuinely enjoy about photography.

NOICE wasn't meant to be complicated. It was, and still is, an outlet for a specific way of seeing. A place for photographers who are drawn to everyday moments, subtle humor, curiosity, and a bit of absurdity. The work often has beauty in it, but not in a polished or traditional sense. It's usually candid, real, and a little tongue-in-cheek.

The NOICE aesthetic: form, symmetry, novelty, humour

That's where the NOICE aesthetic comes from. It's not a strict formula, but a way of filtering images. I'm drawn to photos with strong form or symmetry, something novel or unexpected, and often a sense of humor. Images that feel observed rather than constructed.

I'm less interested in studio-driven or heavily controlled work. To me, photography is strongest when it responds to the world as it is. As Gary Winogrand famously suggested, photography happens in the moment. Once it becomes too staged, it starts to feel closer to illustration than photography.

The NOICE aesthetic: form, symmetry, novelty, humour

NOICE focuses on the everyday and the mundane - the scenes happening around us right now. Life is always changing, and those fleeting moments are what make photography unique. You can photograph anything in any way you want, but if this way of seeing resonates with you, this approach to editing and sequencing probably will too.

Start with too many images

There's no exact number you need to start with. The point is to begin wide. Pull together all the photographs you're excited about and feel good about, even if that list feels excessive.

Starting wide is the easy part. It's fun. You're surrounded by images you like, and there's no pressure yet to decide what's best.

Start with too many images

This stage isn't about quality or refinement. It's about giving yourself options. When you have plenty of images you like, it becomes easier to let go of the ones that don't add much to the whole.

What matters here is removing attachment. Not every favorite belongs in the final edit. Ego, effort, or personal preference can make you want to hold onto certain images, even when they aren't doing any real work.

Remove obvious rejects

There are a lot of ways to approach this stage, but for me it starts with intuition. Over time, you develop a sense of what your strongest work looks like, and that makes the weaker images easier to spot.

Obvious rejects are usually simple. Technical issues are one part of it, but just as often it's about distraction. Too much happening at the edges. A background that pulls attention away. Something that breaks the focus or weakens the idea.

Remove obvious rejects

Sometimes you don't see this immediately. Stepping away and coming back can make the problems more obvious. That distance helps you judge the image, not the memory of taking it.

Near-duplicates are the easiest to deal with. Go through them quickly and keep the one that feels most resolved. Don't overthink it. This stage should be fast and casual. A simple yes or no. You're training your intuition, not debating every decision.

Don't get attached yet

Not getting attached to specific photos is as much a life lesson as it is an editing skill. Attachment brings ego into the process, and ego makes it harder to move forward and grow.

You're always going to have images you feel excited about. That's normal. The problem comes when that feeling stops you from seeing whether a photo actually helps the larger body of work.

Don't get attached yet

An image can feel important in isolation and still do nothing for the series as a whole. This is especially true when you're building a collection, a zine, or a book. The work has to move as one, not revolve around individual favorites.

Editing works best when you stay fluid. Things change. Your understanding of the work evolves. Photos you once believed in might no longer fit, and that's okay. At this stage, think about the bigger picture. Stay loose. Stay honest.

What story are you telling?

This part is deeply personal. The story you see in your work - and the way you interpret the world - is unique to you. That's what makes the work feel like art instead of content.

For me, and for the work featured in NOICE Magazine, the focus is rarely on a literal narrative. It's more about the everyday, the mundane, and the slightly absurd moments of life. I'm not rigid about themes, and I think trying too hard to force a specific story can actually be dangerous. It can drain the fun out of the process.

What story are you telling?

I pay more attention to mood than plot. Mood is flexible. It can be playful, curious, awkward, quiet, or even bleak - but still beautiful. The images don't need to revolve around a single subject or idea to feel connected.

Rather than deciding the story in advance, I prefer to look at all the images first and let something emerge. The work usually tells you what it's about if you give it enough space.

Look for visual rhymes

This is one of my favorite parts of the process. It's where patterns start to reveal themselves and you begin learning from your own work.

Visual rhymes are those quiet connections between images - similar colors, shapes, gestures, or moods. Often it's not something you planned. It's something you notice once the images are placed next to each other.

Look for visual rhymes

At this stage, you start to understand what you're drawn to. A certain kind of humor. A tone that's a little offbeat or tongue-in-cheek. A feeling that repeats itself across different scenes. These connections tend to surface naturally if you're paying attention.

Intention and discovery work together here. You're intentional about looking, but open to what the work is trying to show you. It's less about forcing meaning and more about noticing it.

Step away and recalibrate

One important part of editing and sequencing is knowing when to step away from the work. Your eyes - and your brain - need time to rest and recalibrate.

When you stare at a screen for too long, your vision adapts to it. Color shifts. Contrast feels different. Your sense of balance gets skewed. The best way to reset isn't just closing the laptop - it's actually stepping away from the computer altogether.

Step away and recalibrate

Ideally, go outside. Get full-spectrum light on your eyes. Let your vision recalibrate naturally. Seeing the world again helps reset how you perceive color, form, and space when you return to the edit.

This is one of the overlooked benefits of shooting film. After finishing a roll, you had no choice but to wait. By the time you saw the images, you'd forgotten the moment. That distance made it easier to judge the photographs honestly. In the digital age, everything is instant. That makes it even more important to build distance into the process on purpose.

If two images say the same thing, pick one

At some point in the edit, you'll end up with images that feel very similar. They might share the same mood, emotion, or even look almost identical. When that happens, it's time to trust your intuition.

You don't need to spend a lot of time debating between two nearly identical images. If they're saying the same thing, the series only needs one of them.

If two images say the same thing, pick one

A simple rule of thumb is to keep the image with fewer distractions. Look at the edges. Look at the foreground and background. If one feels cleaner or more resolved, that's usually the stronger choice.

Too much repetition weakens the flow of a series. Instead of repeating the same idea over and over, it's more interesting to let the work breathe. Let similar themes bounce off each other without being obvious.

Strong images that don't fit the series

As you edit, you'll inevitably come across strong images that just don't fit the series. That doesn't mean they're bad. It just means they aren't contributing to the larger whole.

Editing is about reduction. Much like cooking, it's often better to simplify and work with fewer, stronger ingredients. Removing what's superfluous allows the best elements to stand out.

Strong images that don't fit the series

When an image isn't serving the series, let it go without guilt. That doesn't mean deleting it forever. Keep those images in your archive. Save them for a different project, a one-off print, a zine, or as supporting material for something else.

Be creative with where they live, but be honest about where they belong. Less is almost always more. Keeping only the strongest images makes the work clearer, tighter, and more confident.

Opening image: sets the tone

I usually decide on the opening image after the series is fully edited. I look at the work as a whole and ask: what is this actually about? Is it a place, a feeling, a subject, or a visual idea?

Once that's clear, the opening image becomes a hint of what's to come. It introduces the viewer to the world of the series without explaining everything all at once.

Think of it as a quiet entry point. It sets the tone, not the peak. The meaning of the series should become clearer as the viewer moves forward, not all at once on the first page.

Closing image: leaves a feeling

Much like the opening image, I don't think the closing image should be the strongest one in the series either. Instead, it helps to step back and think about what the work is really about - a place, a subject, a trip, or a mood.

The closing image is about what you leave the viewer with. It's less about ending on a favorite photo and more about ending on a feeling. Something playful, reflective, or slightly unresolved often works well.

Other times, the ending can quietly echo the beginning. You might start with one color and end with its complement. An open door at the start, a closed one at the end. These subtle bookends create rhythm without being obvious.

Pairings: what conversations happen between adjacent images?

Pairing images can change the meaning of the work, so it's something worth thinking about carefully. Not every image needs a partner. Sometimes a photograph is strongest when it stands on its own.

When you do pair images, there should be a reason. That connection might come from color, humor, subject matter, or even the way lines and shapes move from one image into the next. These relationships don't need to be obvious. In fact, a bit of ambiguity often makes the pairing more interesting.

Pairings: what conversations happen between adjacent images?

As you practice this, your intuition gets stronger. You start to sense which images naturally speak to each other and which ones don't. Pairing becomes less of a technical decision and more of a feeling.

Always ask yourself: does this pairing add something, or does it create confusion? If the answer isn't clear, remove the pairing and let the image stand alone. When in doubt, simplicity usually wins.

Can you describe the series in one sentence?

Being able to describe your series in one sentence is important. Not because it needs a slogan, but because clarity matters. Over time, it should become more obvious what you're drawn to and how you see the world, and that naturally carries through into your work.

For me, and for NOICE Magazine, that sentence often revolves around the everyday, the mundane, the absurd, or finding beauty in ordinary moments. It doesn't have to be complicated.

That sentence can be emotional rather than literal. Sometimes it's about a feeling or a tone more than a specific subject. What matters is that you can explain it simply and honestly.

Have you sat with it for 48 hours before submitting?

This is one of the most important steps, and it's easy to overlook. Giving yourself time away from a finished series matters just as much as stepping away during the edit.

After spending so much time with the work, your judgment can get clouded. Taking a day or two away helps reset your perspective and lets you come back with a clearer mindset.

Have you sat with it for 48 hours before submitting?

When you return, ask yourself if the work still holds up. Does your intuition still agree with the decisions you made? Do the images feel confident and resolved, or do certain ones start to bother you?

This pause helps you forget the process and focus on the result. You're no longer thinking about how the images were made - only about how they feel together. Like everything else, this becomes more natural over time. Building trust in your intuition comes from repeating this cycle. Step away, return, reassess.

Photographers to Study

Some photographers I've always admired: Gary Winogrand, William Eggleston, Ansel Adams, Vivian Maier, Joel Meyerowitz, and Stephen Shore.

What draws me to their work is how rooted it is in everyday life. They aren't overly concerned with directing subjects, posing people, or constructing scenes. Instead, they're observing the world as it unfolds - its humor, its absurdity, its beauty, and its imperfections.

Photographers to Study

I came to many of these photographers later in my own journey, and the more I looked, the more their influence made sense. Even someone like Ansel Adams, who's often associated with grand landscapes, shows a sense of playfulness and curiosity if you spend enough time with the work.

These are photographers you could study for a lifetime. Not just for their images, but for how they approached seeing. Their work reinforces the idea that photography can be playful, inviting, and alive.

Thank you for reading.