MODULE 5

M1 BA | M1 BB | M1 BC | M2 BA | M2 BB | M2 BC | M3 BA | M3 BB | M3 BC | M4 BA | M4 BB | M4 BC | M5 BA | M5 BB | **M5 BC** | M6 BA | M6 BB | M6 BC

ESSENTIAL
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COURSE
INTRODUCTION TO MODERN PHOTOJOURNALISM

MODULE 5
BOOK C
FIELD TOOLS

COURSE MATERIALS

FIELD TOOLS

INCLUDES
8 POCKET REFERENCE CARDS



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IMP.M5BC

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From Selections to Connections

Tools to help you refine your portfolio and build meaningful relationships.

Crafting a strong photojournalism portfolio is about more than showcasing your best images — it's about clarity, consistency, and connection. The tools in this section help you move from simply collecting work to actively shaping it into a coherent narrative that editors and audiences can understand.

Your portfolio is both a reflection of your past and a proposal for your future. It should highlight not only what you've seen, but how you see — your perspective, your values, and your capacity to tell stories with integrity.

As you refine your selection, think of it as building a bridge. Each image you include is a step toward an opportunity — an assignment, a collaboration, a publication. These tools are here to help you cross that bridge with confidence.

Use this section to stay organized, reflect honestly, and prepare to share your work with purpose. The pages ahead include evaluation guides, contact tracking tools, and reference sheets to support you in the field and during quiet planning days.

*You'll also find a set of **8 POCKET REFERENCE CARDS** — small reminders you can print and carry into the field whenever you need guidance.*



Are You Ready to Reach Out?

BEFORE YOU EMAIL ANYONE — PAUSE AND REFLECT

Building a portfolio is only half the journey. The next step — reaching out to editors, curators, or publications — requires clarity, preparation, and confidence. It's not just about hitting "send," but about making the right impression at the right time.

This checklist will help you assess whether your materials are in shape, your goals are aligned, and your mindset is ready for professional contact. It's a pause-before-action tool that can prevent missteps and boost your chances of being taken seriously.

Use this as a personal filter. If you can check most of these boxes, you're probably ready. If not — no worries. You'll know what to work on next.

Pre-Assignment Checklist

This is a self-evaluation tool to help you determine if you're truly ready to present your work to editors or potential clients. It covers the essentials — from the quality of your portfolio to your mental readiness — so you can send that first message with confidence and clarity.

- **PORTFOLIO READINESS**
  A focused, well-structured portfolio helps editors understand your voice, style, and the kind of assignments you're ready for.

- **COMMUNICATION PREP**
  Strong first impressions matter — this section ensures your message is clear, personal, and easy to engage with.

- **MINDSET & READINESS**
  Reaching out requires not just materials, but emotional clarity. This list helps you check your internal confidence and expectations.

- **FOLLOW-UP STRATEGY**
  Professional follow-up is part of building relationships. This list prepares you for both responses — and silence — with confidence.

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Are You Ready to Reach Out?

Pre-Assignment Checklist for Contacting Editor. Before you send that first message or portfolio link, take a moment to check your readiness. A strong first impression requires clarity, professionalism, and confidence. Use this checklist to make sure you're truly prepared.

PORTFOLIO READINESS

- ☐ *I've selected a focused set of images (5–15 max) that represent my style and vision*
- ☐ *My portfolio has a clean, intuitive layout and works well on all devices*
- ☐ *Each story or image set includes a title and a brief, relevant description*
- ☐ *My name, location, and contact info are visible and easy to find*
- ☐ *The portfolio reflects the type of work I want to be hired for*

MINDSET & READINESS

- ☐ *I know that silence doesn't mean failure — it's part of the process*
- ☐ *I'm open to constructive feedback — it's a chance to grow, not a reason to doubt*
- ☐ *I'm emotionally prepared for different outcomes — reply, delay, or no response*
- ☐ *I feel grounded in my story and can talk about it with clarity*
- ☐ *I'm reaching out as a peer, not pleading for approval*

COMMUNICATION PREP

- ☐ *I've identified the right editor or publication for this contact*
- ☐ *I've crafted a short, respectful message with a human tone*
- ☐ *I've included a direct link to my portfolio or project page*
- ☐ *I avoided attachments and kept my message clear and focused*
- ☐ *I tailored the message — it's not a generic email blast*

FOLLOW-UP STRATEGY

- ☐ *I've scheduled a polite follow-up (in 7–10 days, if needed)*
- ☐ *I have a short follow-up message ready — friendly, not pushy*
- ☐ *If I get a reply, I know how to thank them and move the conversation forward*
- ☐ *If I don't get a reply, I'm ready to reach out to another editor thoughtfully*
- ☐ *I'm treating this as part of a long-term relationship, not a one-time shot*

SEND WITH INTENTION, NOT HESITATION.

FIND YOUR PHOTOGRAPHIC VOICE 1

What themes, styles, and stories truly define you

Your portfolio is not just a collection of nice images — it's a reflection of how you see the world. The viewer should quickly recognize your style, your preferred subjects, and your visual identity. That's your voice.

Think about the images that represent your foundation. What connects them? What do your subject choices and aesthetics reveal? A portfolio is not everything you've shot — it's a curated selection that speaks for you.

Don't be afraid to go bold. Even if your interests are niche, your passion and consistency give your work power and personality.

BUILD A PORTFOLIO THAT TELLS A STORY 2

It's not a catalog — it's a narrative

Your images might be strong individually, but the order and context are what bring out their full impact. Think of your portfolio as a story — with a beginning, middle, and end.

Rather than throwing in a mix of unrelated images, group them by theme, mood, or narrative arc. Let one image lead to the next with purpose.

A story-driven portfolio stays with the viewer. Even a small set of images can be powerful when arranged with intention and emotional flow.

RETHINK YOUR ONLINE PORTFOLIO 3

A website is more than just a photo gallery

Your website is your professional hub. It should be simple, focused, and built around what matters — your photography and your contact info.

Avoid cluttered menus and over-complicated layouts. Your core pages should be: Portfolio, About/Bio, Contact, and optionally a Projects or News section. Make sure it looks clean and works well on mobile.

Be consistent in your visual language — fonts, spacing, tone of writing. Let your website reflect who you are: professional, clear, and confident.

CREATE A LIST OF TARGET PUBLICATIONS 4

Don't email everyone — choose wisely

Instead of sending your work randomly, build a shortlist of publications and platforms you truly want to work with.

Ask yourself: What stories do I tell? What are my values and visual strengths? Which magazines or websites align with my message and audience?

The better you know your dream publications, the easier it is to craft personalized outreach that stands out and fits their editorial style.

HAVE THE COURAGE TO MAKE FIRST CONTACT 5

Reaching out to editors isn't a test — it's a conversation

Many photographers wait too long to reach out, aiming for the "perfect" portfolio. In reality, you can start with a clear, engaging project that reflects your direction.

Your message should be professional, human, and warm. Editors are people — curious about new work, not looking for overly polished pitches.

Don't fear silence. A lack of response doesn't mean rejection. It's often about timing or bandwidth. The important thing is that you made yourself visible.

SEEK OUT AND PROCESS FEEDBACK 6

Critiques are tools, not verdicts

Portfolio reviews, editor comments, and audience reactions — all offer insight into how your work is perceived. Don't take feedback as judgment.

The most useful input is specific: "These images are too similar," or "The story flow feels disjointed." That's what helps you grow.

Choose reviewers you trust and who understand the field. And remember: you decide what to apply and what to let go. It's your vision.

NOT EVERY IMAGE BELONGS IN THE EDIT 7

The ability to cut is part of professionalism

Letting go of favorite images is tough. But a portfolio isn't a scrapbook — it's a deliberate edit shaped by purpose, audience, and impact.

It's not about quantity but cohesion. If a photo feels off in tone, doesn't connect thematically, or adds nothing new — leave it out.

Editors notice if you're able to self-edit. A strong portfolio is as much about what you exclude as what you include.

YOUR CAREER, YOUR PACE 8

Don't compare your path to someone else's

In the visual industry, comparison is everywhere. One person gets published, another wins a grant — your path may look different, and that's okay.

What matters is consistency and authenticity. Keep showing up, keep evolving, and build real connections over time.

Your timeline is yours. This is a long-distance journey — not a sprint. Your portfolio will grow and change as you grow and change.

Don't Just Share a Story — Share the Right One

REFLECT BEFORE YOU PITCH — MAKE EVERY STORY COUNT

Evaluate your story before you send it out — with clarity, confidence, and purpose.

Before you send a project to an editor or include it in your portfolio, it's essential to reflect on how well the story holds up — emotionally, visually, and structurally. Not every story needs to be perfect, but you should understand its strengths and weaknesses.

This tool is here to help you ask the right questions. It focuses on core dimensions like clarity, relevance, emotional engagement, originality, and narrative structure. Use it to refine your pitch, identify gaps, or boost your confidence when you're ready.

Each story deserves thoughtful evaluation — and each evaluation helps you grow as a storyteller.

REFLECTION QUESTION

What makes this story worth telling — and how clearly does that come across in your current edit?

Story Evaluation Grid

A quick self-assessment to see if your story is ready to pitch or publish.

This grid helps you break down key storytelling elements and reflect on whether the story is emotionally strong, clearly structured, and aligned with your goals. It's not about chasing perfection — it's about being intentional.

Key Dimensions You'll Score:

- **NARRATIVE CLARITY**
  Are the beginning, middle, and end clear — or does it feel scattered?
- **EMOTIONAL CONNECTION**
  Does the story invite empathy, curiosity, or reflection from your audience?
- **EDITORIAL FIT**
  Does it align with the type of work you want to do — and the publications you're targeting?
- **VISUAL COHESION**
  Do the images flow together with consistency in style, tone, and focus?

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Story Evaluation **Grid**

Check each point on a scale of 1 to 5, where:
1 = **NOT AT ALL TRUE** / 5 = **Fully true**

CRITERIA	**SCALE**	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**
The story has a clear beginning, middle, and end		☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
It captures a compelling, real-life moment or issue		☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
It reflects a unique perspective or voice		☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
The images show strong technical quality		☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
There is emotional depth or human connection		☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
The theme is culturally or socially relevant		☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
It could fit within an editorial or journalistic context		☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
The subject is treated with respect and dignity		☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
The visuals are sequenced in a logical, flowing order		☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Captions or supporting text enhance understanding		☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
The story fits your personal brand or direction		☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
There's a central narrative or message		☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
The work has been edited thoughtfully		☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
It creates impact or raises questions in the viewer		☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
You feel confident presenting this story		☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
You can describe this story in three sentences		☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
It avoids clichés and overdone tropes		☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
The story shows growth compared to earlier work		☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
You've reviewed it with a mentor, peer, or editor		☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
It leaves a lasting impression		☐	☐	☐	☐	☐



STRONG STORIES DON'T JUST SPEAK — THEY RESONATE, REVEAL, AND REMAIN.



Strategic Contact & Follow-Up Planner

BUILD A SYSTEM, NOT JUST A MOMENT — EVERY MESSAGE IS PART OF YOUR CAREER

Sending your portfolio or a story pitch is not the final step — it's the beginning of a conversation. Whether you hear back or not, every message helps shape your professional presence. A clear plan helps you act intentionally, not impulsively.

Following up is not about pushing for an answer. It's about reminding editors you're committed and reliable — without being intrusive. Respect their time, but also value your own effort. A well-timed follow-up shows you're organized, confident, and serious.

Many photographers hesitate to follow up, fearing they might be annoying. But in reality, thoughtful follow-ups often lead to connections — or at least, recognition. It's about relationships, not transactions. This planner helps you stay consistent, professional, and calm.

Use this tool to track who you've contacted, when you sent materials, and when to follow up. This isn't about "results only" — it's about building a rhythm in your outreach efforts.

REFLECTION QUESTION

What kind of relationship am I trying to build — and how do I show up professionally in every message I send?

Good Follow-Up Practices

Stay kind, clear, and consistent. These reminders help you stay confident and respectful when following up with editors.

- **TONE MATTERS**
  Keep your tone friendly, not demanding — you're checking in, not chasing.
- **TIMING IS KEY**
  Wait at least 7–10 days before sending a follow-up.
- **BE BRIEF**
  Keep it short — no need to repeat everything from the first email.
- **NO PRESSURE**
  Never guilt-trip or pressure — just remind them you're available.
- **DETACH WITH PURPOSE**
  If there's no reply, it's okay. Move on, not emotionally — but strategically.

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CONTACT TRACKER & FOLLOW-UP **PLANNER**

STAY ORGANIZED, FOLLOW UP PROFESSIONALLY, AND BUILD LASTING EDITORIAL RELATIONSHIPS.

Before you send your next pitch, track your outreach efforts clearly. This tracker helps you monitor where your portfolio or story has been sent, when to follow up, and how editors respond. Treat this process like a long-term network, not a one-time opportunity. Use this tool to spot patterns, improve your follow-up timing, and stay on top of your professional communication.

PUBLICATION	***EDITOR'S NAME***	***SENT*** *DATE*	***REPLY*** *DATE*	***FOLLOW-UP*** *DATE*

NOTES

PUBLICATION	***EDITOR'S NAME***	***SENT*** *DATE*	***REPLY*** *DATE*	***FOLLOW-UP*** *DATE*

NOTES

PUBLICATION	***EDITOR'S NAME***	***SENT*** *DATE*	***REPLY*** *DATE*	***FOLLOW-UP*** *DATE*

NOTES

TRACK YOUR OUTREACH. RESPECT THE SILENCE. BUILD CONNECTIONS THAT LAST.

Post-Submission Review

Evaluate, adjust, and prepare for your next move. Every submission — whether it leads to a reply or not — is an opportunity to refine your professional approach. Taking a few moments to reflect will help you identify what worked and what can be improved. This isn't about judging yourself. It's about building a consistent practice of reviewing your communication methods, evaluating timing, and improving clarity. With each message you send, you're building relationships and developing your long-term presence in the field. Make each step count by learning from the last one.

QUICK REFLECTION CHECKLIST

- ☐ *What was the most effective part of your message or portfolio?*
- ☐ *Was the editor/publication a good fit for your work?*
- ☐ *Was the timing aligned with their publishing cycle or coverage themes?*
- ☐ *Did the message feel clear, human, and personalized?*
- ☐ *Did you feel ready and confident when sending?*
- ☐ *Would you change anything next time — wording, portfolio selection, timing?*
- ☐ *Should you schedule a follow-up? When?*

ACTION NOTES

(Use this space to summarize key takeaways and plan your next step.)

What I'll repeat next time:

What I'll improve:

Next follow-up or new contact to reach out to:

EVERY MESSAGE IS A STEP FORWARD — IF YOU TAKE THE TIME TO LEARN FROM IT.

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When to Follow Up — and When to Let Go

KNOW WHEN TO REACH OUT — AND WHEN TO RELEASE

Not every unanswered email is a rejection. But knowing how and when to follow up — and when to step back — is part of building a sustainable career. There's always a moment of hesitation after you've sent your portfolio or story. Days go by. No reply. You start to wonder — should I follow up, or let it go?

This guide helps you navigate that quiet space. Sometimes a follow-up is the right next move. Sometimes, the best decision is to pause, shift focus, and protect your energy for the next opportunity.

Following up isn't just about getting an answer. It's about practicing consistency, respect, and long-term thinking — even when the outcome is uncertain.

REFLECTION QUESTION

When was the last time you followed up with someone — and how did it make you feel?
What could you do differently next time to balance confidence with patience?

Guiding Principles

These are not rules — they're smart, experience-based suggestions that help you navigate follow-ups with care and professionalism. Use them as a compass when you're unsure what to do next.

- **STAY FRIENDLY, NOT FORCEFUL**
  Your tone should be warm and professional — you're checking in, not chasing someone for a response.
- **WAIT BEFORE YOU NUDGE**
  Give at least 7–10 days after your first message. Rushing rarely leads to a better outcome.
- **BE BRIEF**
  Your follow-up should be short and to the point. No need to repeat your pitch — just gently remind them you're available.
- **NO GUILT TRIPS**
  Avoid language that pressures or implies obligation. Editors are busy. Kindness goes a long way.
- **KEEP MOVING FORWARD**
  If there's no reply after the second message, let it go. Not emotionally — but strategically. Each attempt is part of a bigger journey.

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