



CREATIVE IMAGE GUIDE

FOR BBC PICTURES AND IPLAYER





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WHY DO IMAGES MATTER?

Images are a crucial part of the Audience's decision-making and mental shortlisting process.

The lead image in particular sells the primary qualities of your show in a very competitive marketplace.

Therefore, impactful images that tell a story and are of excellent technical quality are essential for driving an audience to your programme:

- Getting viewers to notice content
- Getting viewers to think about content
- Reassuring viewers on quality





WHAT IS THIS GUIDE FOR?

This is a hands-on guide to help you think creatively and strategically about your photography deliverables - whether you are working with a BBC Creative or delivering to our Asset Managers and no matter what your budget.

It's here to support you in making your images stand out in a crowded marketplace.

There is no single formula for success—this isn't a rulebook, but a source of insight into what our research and experience has shown works well.

The BBC Pictures team is always here to help guide you along the way
BBC Pictures

1 KEY ART

An image that encapsulates the programme brand. Used as the lead image on iPlayer, in the press, across social media at the start of the series.

2 PORTRAITS/ GENERIC

Portraits of key characters/ contributors. Generic images that aren't episode specific. Used across all media platforms.

3 EPISODIC

Key action shot from an episode, used on iPlayer to identify the episode, in the press on a weekly basis and on social media.

4 BEHIND THE SCENES

Candid shots from set, used by the press in editorial features and by social media throughout the series run.
* Only needed on scripted titles



The BBC requires a range of images to be delivered. However these requirements can alter depending on the programme format and genre, so please speak to your BBC Pictures contact before filming commences - [BBC Pictures](#).

1
KEY ART



Entice

This image needs to make the audience stop and engage.

2
GENERIC



Upsell

Supplementary generic images can help build the world of the show.

3
EPISODIC



Upsell

Episodic imagery gives the audience more insight on tone, story and range of characters.

4
BTS



Upsell

BTS can help the audience engage and feel part of the show "family".

Ensuring all the images throughout the user journey share the same visual language (colour, tone, treatment) gives a unified message and makes use of the multiple opportunities to sell in the proposition of the show.



KEY ART GUIDANCE

WHAT IS YOUR BRIEF?

The following pages will help give you direction on tone, style and content depending on genre.

Ahead of shooting it can be useful to pull together some reference imagery showing the composition and lighting style you want to capture.

WHERE AND WHEN ARE YOU GOING TO SHOOT?

Deciding well ahead of time on the location you intend to shoot in is useful to ensure it meets the needs of your idea.

Think about weather cover if outside.

Think about time of day and what the light will be like.

WHICH PHOTOGRAPHER WILL YOU USE?

The BBC Creative team can recommend photographers based on your Creative ideas, location and budget.

Will your photographer need lighting equipment? Have a conversation with the photographer to brief them and check what they may need to bring.

WHAT LEVEL OF POST PRODUCTION WILL YOU NEED?

If you are creating an image that is all in-camera it may need a light retouch that the photographer may be able to do for you.

If you are creating a composite image or including graphics you will need a designer. The BBC Creative team can recommend designers suitable to your brief.



SCRIPTED - DRAMA

B B C

KEY TAKEOUTS FOR DRAMA IMAGES

1

Images need to make viewers stop and **THINK** to drive audience engagement

2

Character is often the key to emotional connection

3

Artistic, curated imagery is increasingly expected

4

But must reflect the nuance of sub-genre – not one-size fits all

1

HOW MUCH DOES YOUR KEY ART NEED TO EXPLAIN THE PREMISE OF THE SHOW?

Creating intrigue in drama imagery is one of the most effective ways to draw an audience's interest. The ability to *hint* at the premise rather than fully *explain* it adds value. Consider whether your show's title gives you the freedom to be more suggestive and mysterious with your visuals.

2

WHAT SUB-GENRE IS YOUR DRAMA?

For content driven by clear, direct emotions, such as action or sci fi, imagery that leans more to being literal and unambiguous tends to resonate more strongly.

In contrast, for more intellectually engaging genres like thrillers, suggestive imagery that teases and hints can be more effective, sparking intrigue and building suspense through subtle clues.

3

IS YOUR SHOW A NEW SERIES OR ESTABLISHED RETURNER?

Launching a new series doesn't necessarily require an ensemble cast from the start. What matters most is introducing strong central characters and clearly establishing the tone. As the series evolves, additional characters can be introduced, or more abstract themes can be explored.

1

CHARACTER

The presentation of characters (how they look, what they are doing, how they relate to one another)



Characters drive the mood and tone, allowing viewers to make emotional connections.

Subtle cues in framing and expression can effectively convey interpersonal dynamics, establish tension, and elicit curiosity in the mind of the viewer.

2

CONTEXT

The framing and staging of the image (background, foreground content)



Context plays a nuanced role in drama.

In character-driven sub-genres, it should subtly complement character by adding simple hints and suggestions.

In more dynamic sub-genres, it more boldly grounds the narrative and characters within a defined time, place, or world.

3

AESTHETIC

The aesthetic design, style and tone of the image – use of colours, fonts, photography and graphic stylings



Obvious curation and thoughtful design are key to visual appeal.

Viewers respond to images that are artistic and polished, with a cohesive use of colour and composition to effectively convey tone.

4

CAST

The prominence and presentation of actors – how recognisable and how dominant do they need to be?



Showcase key cast to drive consideration, but in a way that feels cohesive and integral to the image as a whole.

Selling the tone, character & visual appeal remains fundamental to driving choice, so cast should be used to elevate rather than define the image composition.

**SUCCESSFUL IMAGES IN DRAMA OFTEN MAKE EMOTIONAL CONNECTIONS THROUGH CHARACTERS**

- Characters drive the Mood and Tone.
- Central Characters can clarify their relationships and elicit more connection than showing the full assembly.
- Expression, stances and framing can hint at character dynamics and motivations.

**SIMPLE, CHARACTER LED IMAGES THAT SET THE CONTEXT AND REVEAL JUST ENOUGH CAN INTRIGUE VIEWERS AND INVITE THEM TO IMAGINE THE BIGGER STORY.**

- Draw viewers into characters' personalities or suggest their narrative struggle.
- But be careful of being too ambiguous.

**EXPRESSION IS KEY TO SELLING THE TONE OF THE SHOW AND REVEALING MORE ABOUT THE SUBJECTS AND THEIR CHARACTER**

- The drama sub-genre will influence your character expressions e.g. Muted expressions for Thrillers, ambiguous to give suspense in Action, serious in police procedurals.

THE IMPORTANCE OF CONTEXT CAN RANGE FROM LITERAL TO INCIDENTAL, DEPENDING ON THE SUB GENRE.



ACTION AND SCI FI IMAGES CAN BE MORE LITERAL IN THEIR USE OF CONTEXT AS IT'S THE WORLD OF THE SHOW THAT DRAWS VIEWERS IN.

- Using recognisable iconography associated with the world provides a shortcut for viewer engagement.
- The background and setting can do the heavy lifting of conveying the premise of the show.



WITHIN MORE CHARACTER LED GENRES, IT IS IMPORTANT THAT BACKGROUND AND SETTING DO NOT CONFUSE OR DISTRACT

- Uncluttered and simple settings are often successful.
- For more cerebral content a suggestion of discordance or something threatening the status quo can spark intrigue.

WHILE THE STYLE AND TONE OF EFFECTIVE DRAMA IMAGERY VARIES ACROSS SUB-GENRES, ONE CONSISTENT TREND IS THE IMPACT OF VISUALLY ARTISTIC OR CONCEPTUALLY CLEVER IMAGES. THESE ARE OFTEN PERCEIVED AS THOUGHTFUL AND INTENTIONAL, SUGGESTING A MORE REFINED AND HIGH-QUALITY VIEWING EXPERIENCE.

THRILLS



Minimalist aesthetic implies quality, sophistication & a cerebral experience.
The most appealing images utilise dark, saturated tones that suggest suspense & intrigue

POLICE PROCEDURALS



Thoughtful composition & artistic merit that feels more immersive & evocative.
Appealing imagery sells genre cues of grit, crime & mystery through more muted colour palettes or black & white contrasting tones

ACTION



Images should feel more active & dynamic.
Dialling up the colour & brightness is suggestive of more dynamic action led content, while darker tones, shadows & light suggest danger & suspense

YOUNG



Imagery that feels grounded, relatable & less produced.
In a diverse sub-genre, appealing images are those that clearly signpost tone through colour i.e. washed out/dark cue drama, while brighter tones cue a lighter & more comedic show

SCI-FI



Imagery that is high- concept & stylised appeals as it effectively sells context.
Appealing imagery is that which implies mystery or thrills and is reflective of the tonality, pace & character of the show



KNOWN CAST CAN BE AN INDICATOR OF QUALITY AND ACT AS A SHORT CUT FOR CONSIDERATION.....



.....**BUT** RECOGNISABLE CAST IS DEEMED LESS CRUCIAL IN DRIVING CHOICE THAN CHARACTER, CONTEXT AND AESTHETIC.



YOUNGER AUDIENCES CARE MORE ABOUT “GOOD ACTING” THAN THE ACTORS THEMSELVES.

	CHARACTER	CONTEXT	AESTHETIC	CAST
THRILLS	Utilise as the key driver of interest – expression & dynamic drives intrigue through uncertainty	Utilise as complementary to character to imply & suggest tone & character motivation or circumstance	Adopt a minimalist, fresh & simple composition that conveys tone & stands out	Hero cast, but license to play with framing, expression & design to land context & tone
POLICE PROCEDURAL	Add layers to lead characters through expression & framing. Should feel more like a character study	Pique interest by establishing tension & conflict through character interaction with environment. More incidental	Simplicity & thoughtful composition that champions lead character in an evocative way will appeal	Frame cast front & centre to emphasise character driven nature of genre
ACTION	Utilise character to complement context & sell tone of the show	Utilise context to world build & frame/ground the character & narrative	Permission to feel outlandish, dynamic & less relatable	Cast should feel an active part of a more cohesive & dynamic image
SCI-FI + FANTASY	Root the character firmly in the context. Utilise as a supporting component of the whole image	Establish the world through the context in a way that sets the scene and that poses key questions	Utilise colour to convey tone & pace & license to use strong, distinctive font that is integral to image.	Cast is less integral to imagery so presence & familiarity less essential
YOUNG SKEWING	Drive relatability & in turn appeal, through character & their depicted circumstance & dynamic	Context should add layers to the characters through ambiguity and by driving intrigue	Establish mood & vibe through simplistic scene setting	Cast should feel grounded & relatable



SCRIPTED - COMEDY

B B C

1

Images need to make viewers stop and **THINK** to drive audience engagement

2

Character is key to portraying humour and establishing an emotional connection

3

Simplicity is effective in allowing the characters to shine.

4

But there is nuance in each sub-genre – not one-size fits all

1

WHAT SUB-GENRE IS YOUR COMEDY?

This will drive how the type of comedy within the show is conveyed through the portrayal of the characters, the context and the aesthetic feel of the image.

2

WHO ARE THE KEY CHARACTERS OF YOUR COMEDY?

Portraying multiple cast in your Key Art is most effective when the Comedy and narrative are rooted in relationships. In shows centred around a single protagonist, audience engagement is best achieved through a strong focus on that lead, without the need for supporting cast.

3

IS YOUR SHOW A NEW SERIES OR ESTABLISHED RETURNER?

For new series, there is arguably a greater need to feature an ensemble cast in the series image. Longer running series can feature 1 or 2 established characters who can act as a shortcut. Additionally, establishing a tone that links to previous Key Art can help with audience recognition.

1 CHARACTER

The presentation of characters (how they look, what they are doing, how they relate to one another)



Characters are at the heart of any comedy and key to successful images. Focusing on one main character, or the interplay between relationships will depend on the sub-genre of the comedy.

2 CAST

The prominence and presentation of actors – how recognisable and how dominant do they need to be?



Recognisable cast can play a really important role in identifying the show as a comedy. This is especially apparent in sub-genres that cross the boundary between drama and comedy or other sub-genres that defy classification.

3 CONTEXT

The framing and staging of the image (background, foreground content)



Context is not a critical driver of choice in comedy imagery. The Key job of showing the setting in comedy imagery is to either frame and showcase the key characters or drive home the comedic narrative.

4 AESTHETIC

The aesthetic design, style and tone of the image – use of colours, fonts, photography and graphic stylings



Successful images in comedy feature a range of aesthetic styles, reflecting the nuanced nature of the genre overall. Using the right aesthetic style for a show's sub-genre can help create a short hand for audience understanding.



CHARACTERS ARE AT THE HEART OF COMEDY AND SHOULD BE THE MAIN FOCUS OF KEY ART.

- Showing interplay between characters is most successful where comedy & narrative are rooted in relationships
- Buy-in to a show's concept or understanding its offbeat tone is delivered best through strong focus on the main character.



FACIAL EXPRESSIONS AND PROVIDING HINTS OF CHARACTER RELATABILITY PLAY A BIG ROLE IN CONVEYING TONE.

- Focusing on the protagonist's face helps images establish tone and comedic style and can convey subtle emotions
- Reflecting themes within the character's lives helps drive relatability.



ENSEMBLE CASTS CAN BE TRICKY...

- Using a creative approach to the composition helps drive intrigue when creating an image with a lot of characters, is there another POV you can try?
- Ensure there is a focal point within the group to lead the eye in.



KNOWN CAST CAN INDICATE THAT THE SHOW IS A COMEDY AND ACT AS A SHORT CUT FOR CONSIDERATION, THIS IS ESPECIALLY IMPORTANT IF THE COMEDY STRADDLES DIFFERENT GENRES.



RECOGNISABLE COMEDIC TALENT CAN SIGNPOST THE TONE OR SUB-GENRE OF THE COMEDY.



WITH EMERGING CAST IT IS IMPORTANT TO PUT MORE FOCUS ON THE CHARACTERS, CONTEXT OR AESTHETIC TO DRAW IN AUDIENCES.

WITH THE CHARACTERS DELIVERING THE LAUGHS, CONTEXT TAKES A LESS IMPORTANT ROLE IN COMEDY.



THE KEY ROLE OF CONTEXT IS TO HELP SHOWCASE THE CHARACTERS, BUT IT CAN HELP REFLECT THE TONE OF COMEDY AS WELL.

- Playing with the context to create contradictions and tensions can signpost comedic content.
- Subverting the norms of the context can drive a fresh aesthetic that attracts a younger audience.



SITCOMS AND DARKER COMEDIES CAN BENEFIT FROM LEANING MORE HEAVILY ON CONTEXT TO HELP VIEWERS UNDERSTAND THE PREMISE OF THE SHOW.

- Subtle context can provide enigmatic plot hints, creating intrigue.
- Context can add a sense of a 'Bigger Story' to sitcoms and familiar settings can draw in an audience.



CLEAN, SIMPLE BACKGROUNDS CAN SHOWCASE CAST AND SIGNAL FRESH BOLD TONE, BUT THIS LEAVES A LOT OF HEAVY LIFTING FOR THE CHARACTER.

- Ensuring characterful expressions and dynamic poses can mitigate this risk.

EFFECTIVE COMEDIC IMAGERY SPANS DIVERSE AESTHETIC STYLES, FROM BOLD AND QUIRKY TO SUBTLE AND SURREAL, ECHOING THE RANGE OF SUB-GENRES WITHIN COMEDY. WITHIN EACH SUB-GENRE IS LICENSE TO PLAY WITH STYLE AND TONALITY DRIVEN BY THE ARTISTIC APPROACH OF THE SHOW ITSELF.

COMEDY DRAMA



Appealing images are often more polished, suggesting high production values and a slick, fast-paced show. For more niche content, images that embrace a more contemporary, off-beat aesthetic successfully position the show as quirky and sophisticated.

CRINGE COMEDY



Showcasing the character is key, so simple, singular colour schemes that allow the character's personality to shine work well.

DARK COMEDY



Layered images that suggest complexity, or a psychological element work well. Juxtaposition of everyday imagery with the extraordinary also appeals by driving intrigue

SIT COM



Appealing imagery often features a muted colour palette, and less stylised photography suggestive of faded snapshots which build the sense of a real moment frozen in time

YOUNG



Younger viewers appreciate a more overtly bright and impactful approach. Bright colours suggest vibrant humour and reflect the strong personalities or roles of characters. Permission to use contrasting tones to drive impact

	CHARACTER	CAST	CONTEXT	AESTHETIC
COMEDY DRAMA	Use ambiguous facial expressions to convey intrigue and allow room for viewer interpretation	Position known cast as indicators of quality for the show, and as hooks for viewers	Context should be used to inform viewers on the tone of the show, and support how the character is portrayed	Use slick design to draw the viewer in, land 'drama' cues & drive quality perceptions
CRINGE COMEDY	Place character prominently, utilise facial expression to exhibit character personality	Presence of known cast is less important here, but should feel natural if utilised and not forced in	Background should drive attention towards the character's expression, to get the viewer to focus there	Use punchy and bright colours, but use in a way that ensures character remains focus of image
DARK COMEDY	Use the character's eyes, & facial expressions to create a connection between viewer and character	Know cast is less important here, so more focus should be on overall composition, and aligning all elements	Utilise subtle or more overt indications of dark comedy tone to symbolise the subgenre to the viewer	Utilise aesthetic to demonstrate suspense through the tone of the image, and align with context
SIT COM	Make characters appear relatable to create affinity between viewer and image	Know Cast should be an integral part of the image to reassure viewers	Context should complement the character, providing depth and intrigue, and provide indication of setting	Use the appearance of character(s) to let viewers know what to expect of the show itself
YOUNG SKEWING	Demonstrate characters personalities and hint at relationship dynamics	Cast should feel relevant and suitable/ targeted to the age group	Utilise context to support and complement how characters are portrayed in the image, but keeping the focus there	Utilise big bold colours, and bold clear-to-read fonts to provide quick and easy understanding of the show



UNSCRIPTED - FACTUAL

B B C

1

Images need to make you stop and **THINK** to drive audience engagement

2

Images need to be authentic in their depiction of the content.

3

The context of the programme needs to be clear.

4

But there is nuance in each sub-genre – not one-size fits all

1

WHAT FACTUAL SUB-GENRE IS YOUR SHOW?

This will drive the portrayal of the presenters and contributors, the context and the aesthetic feel of the image.

2

WHO'S STORY ARE YOU TELLING?

The audience want to know who's story they are following, is there a single main protagonist, is the excitement and intrigue in seeing a group of people in competition or is there a Key Presenter who is bringing the story alive?

3

WHAT IS THE USP OF YOUR SHOW?

Key art should visually capture the essence of the show. Showcasing one central theme or subject is the most effective way to guide audience choice and spark interest.

1 PRESENTER/ CONTRIBUTOR

The prominence and presentation of presenters and contributors



Presenters and Contributors are key to engaging viewers and establishing credibility in Factual imagery. Including contributors in a clear, uncluttered way adds energy, broadens appeal, and gives audiences a sense of the show's content. The play between and inclusion of presenters and contributors depends on the sub-genre of the show.

2 CONTEXT

The framing and staging of the image (background, foreground content)



Contextual imagery helps clarify a show's premise and setting, especially when it's not obvious from the logo or presenters/contributors alone. The level of context needed depends on the sub-genre, but subtle, relevant hints about the topic can make visuals more effective without being overly literal.

3 EMOTIONAL TONE

The **mood** of the image.



Imagery should match the emotional tone of the show e.g.reserved for mystery and True Crime, serious for authored docs, and dramatic for Reality. There is room for vibrant or humorous visuals where appropriate to reflect the show's emotional range and core appeal.

4 AESTHETIC

The aesthetic design, style and tone of the image



Authenticity should guide the creative approach to all factual imagery. Depending on the sub-genre, there is room for abstract or conceptual approaches as long as the topic is clear, and the tone of the show is reflected.



FEATURE WELL-KNOWN PRESENTERS OR CONTRIBUTORS WITH A CLARITY OF TONE THAT REFLECTS THE PROGRAMME'S CONTENT.

- If the presenter is well known outside the field of TV, it is important to feature them, but in a way that makes it clear that this is not the story of their life, or an interview.
- Ensure expressions are appropriate to the tone and content of the programme.



FEATURE THE REAL PEOPLE AT THE HEART OF THE STORY.

- Representing the main character within a show is important, for Ob Docs and True Crime the audience want to know who's story they are following.
- If the person is well known this can be powerful, but real people telling their story is also hugely relatable and should be the focus.



CONTRIBUTOR REPRESENTATION PAIRED WITH RELEVANT PRESENTERS BOOSTS ENERGY AND APPEAL IN REALITY & COMPETITION SHOWS

- Showing the breadth of contributors helps drive energy and excitement.
- Coupling contributors with known presenters, especially if they have an association with the skill or premise of the show, can help drive viewing.

CONTEXT IS KEY FOR FACTUAL IMAGERY, THE SUB-GENRE WILL DETERMINE HOW HEAVILY CONTEXT IS NEEDED TO COMMUNICATE THE PREMISE OF THE SHOW TO THE AUDIENCE.



TRUE CRIME AND OB DOCS RELY HEAVILY ON CONTEXT.

- For True Crime Well-known presenters can add context and appeal, but using abstract, graphic visuals can spark intrigue and effectively convey the show's depth in a more engaging way.
- In Ob Docs, placing the main contributor in a dynamic, real-world setting helps convey the show's theme and taps into the audience's curiosity about other people's lives.



STRIPPED BACK IMAGES OF THE KEY PRESENTER WORK WELL FOR AUTHORED DOCS.

- However, subtle context helps clarify the subject matter. This doesn't need to location or props, it could be conveyed through expression, lighting, or an unexpected wardrobe choice like showing a sports star in smart/casual attire to signal a shift in tone or perspective.



REALITY AND COMPETITION SHOWS NEED CLEAR CONTEXT TO HIGHLIGHT THEIR UNIQUE APPEAL.

- A well-known presenter can attract viewers, but it's essential to use location, props, or graphics to clearly communicate the show's unique context and distinguish it from other programmes featuring the same presenter.
- In competition shows, highlighting a diverse range of contributors draws interest, but it's just as important to clearly signal the skill or passion at the heart of the show.

AN IMAGE'S EMOTIONAL TONE - SHAPED BY COLOUR, LIGHTING, EXPRESSION, AND COMPOSITION - SIGNALS THE MOOD AND CONTENT OF THE PROGRAMME IT REPRESENTS. IT MUST AUTHENTICALLY REFLECT THE PROGRAMME'S TONE TO RESONATE WITH THE AUDIENCE.



REAL LIFE, REAL EMOTION: AUTHENTICITY IS AT THE HEART OF OB DOCS

- Of all the sub-genres, Ob Docs thrive most on emotional storytelling grounded in real life. As such Imagery should feel true-to-life, with subtle stylisation only where it deepens the narrative.
- The tone doesn't need to be overly positive; realism and rawness is key.



REALITY & COMPETITION: EMOTION-DRIVEN IMAGERY THAT CAPTURES DRAMA, JOY, AND TENSION

- Reality thrives on drama and confrontation, bold, glossy imagery helps heighten the drama.
- Competition shows benefit from visuals that reflect a wide emotional spectrum, from joy and humour to vulnerability, allowing for vibrant or gentle tones that match the heart of the show.



TRUE CRIME: SUBTLETY AND STORYTELLING

- Viewers respond best to imagery that evokes mystery and sparks intrigue.
- Glossy visuals with context perform well, there is licence to feature either the victim/criminal or go more abstract into illustrated images, as long as the topic is clear.

IN FACTUAL IMAGERY, AUTHENTICITY IS KEY. HIGH-QUALITY PHOTOGRAPHY FEELS MOST GENUINE, BUT WELL-CRAFTED GRAPHICS OR COMPOSITES CAN BE EFFECTIVE, AS LONG AS THEY TRUTHFULLY REFLECT THE SHOW'S TONE AND CONTENT.

TRUE CRIME



True Crime visuals should be subtle and refined, sparking intrigue without revealing too much. High-quality graphic or abstract imagery can be effective if thoughtfully designed to reflect the theme. Symbolic elements can hint at the story while maintaining visual restraint

AUTHORED DOC



Authored docs favour considered, studio-lit visuals with recognisable faces. These high-end images convey quality, with context delivered more through composition, lighting and expression than location or props.

SKILLED COMPETITION



Skills-based competitions benefit from realistic, concept-driven visuals with subtle tones. Avoid over-polishing as authenticity matters, but ensure high production values to uphold the programme's quality.

REALITY



Reality formats benefit from glossy, context-rich visuals. Carefully considered use of Graphics, backgrounds and settings used in partnership with key presenters or contributors help convey the show's premise.

OBSERVATIONAL DOC



Ob-doc imagery should balance context and visual appeal. In-situ shots add authenticity, while vibrant colours can enhance standout when used thoughtfully. Avoid overly plain designs, understated is fine, but it must still feel considered.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES SUMMARY ACROSS FACTUAL

	PRESENTER/ CONTRIBUTOR	CONTEXT	EMOTIONAL TONE	AESTHETIC
TRUE CRIME	Can either show the victim / criminal or abstract / conceptual images, as long as the topic is clear.	Viewers appreciate subtlety, so ensure that the image has a level of intrigue and doesn't spell out the entire crime at first look.	Viewers are attracted to reserved images that elicit emotions around mystery and intrigue.	Visually subtle and well-crafted, using symbolic or abstract elements to evoke intrigue.
AUTHORED DOC	Recognisable talent to give credence to the programme and communicate subject matter.	Subtle visual cues like expression, lighting, or unexpected wardrobe can convey context and theme without relying on props or location.	The emotional undertone for authored docs should be one which is more serious in nature, reflecting the tone of the content.	Studio-lit, high-quality visuals with recognisable faces, where tone and context are conveyed through composition, lighting, and expression rather than props or setting.
SKILLED COMPETITION	Show both talent & contributors to create a sense of tension and energy.	Contextual images can help communicate what the premise of the show is and tap into peoples' passions.	Aim to demonstrate the range of emotions that will be experienced by viewing and what the show is at its core.	Realistic, concept-led visuals with subtle tones. High production values are essential, but over-polishing can compromise authenticity
REALITY	Recognisable talent can be helpful, but contributors are key.	Context in Reality images is important as it helps explain the premise or location of the show.	Reality viewers are drawn to images that promise excitement, drama and confrontation.	Well-composed visuals where graphics, backgrounds, and settings work in harmony with key cast to clearly convey the show's premise.
OBSERVATIONAL DOC	Lead with contributors, but only put the people at the heart of the story in the image, so the audience know who they'll be following.	Ensure the image provides enough context to give viewers a sense of what the programme's about. Showing contributors in situ can help.	Ob Docs rely on emotionally grounded, true-to-life imagery, with subtle stylisation used only to deepen the narrative without compromising realism.	Considered and authentic in context, with in-situ shots adding realism and vibrant colour used selectively to enhance standout without compromising tone.



UNSCRIPTED - ENTERTAINMENT

B B C

1

Images need to make you stop and **THINK** to drive audience engagement

2

Images need to drive excitement through bold visuals.

3

The context of the programme needs to be clear.

4

But there is nuance in each sub-genre – not one-size fits all

1

WHAT ENTERTAINMENT SUB-GENRE IS YOUR SHOW?

This will drive the portrayal of the presenters and contributors, the context and the aesthetic feel of the image.

2

IS THERE A LEAD PRESENTER?

Key presenters are the most important sell in Entertainment, their brand is synonymous with the brand of the show. Utilising known presenters within the context of the show in the Key Art will attract an audience through recognition and emotional connection.

3

WHAT IS THE USP OF YOUR SHOW?

Key art should visually capture the essence of the show. Showcasing one central theme or subject is the most effective way to guide audience choice and spark interest.

1 PRESENTER/ CONTRIBUTOR

The prominence and presentation of presenters and contributors



Placing a recognisable presenter prominently in the Key Art instantly conveys tone, builds trust, and attracts audiences through recognition and emotional connection, especially when the show's identity is closely tied to their personality or fanbase.

2 CONTEXT

The framing and staging of the image (background, foreground content)



Context is vital for entertainment formats as it communicates the show's tone, format, and emotional appeal, helping audiences quickly understand what to expect, connect with the concept, and differentiate it from others in a crowded market.

3 EMOTIONAL TONE

The **mood** of the image.



Imagery should match the emotional tone of the show so it instantly signals the viewer's expected experience, whether it's high-stakes competition, light-hearted fun, heartfelt journeys, or fast-paced excitement.

4 AESTHETIC

The aesthetic design, style and tone of the image



Entertainment Key Art typically features bold, high-energy visuals with bright colours, dynamic layouts, expressive faces, alongside format-specific elements to promptly communicate tone and personality.



FOREFRONT LEAD PRESENTERS TO ENGAGE THE AUDIENCE.

- Familiar faces build instant recognition. A well-known presenter can act as a visual shorthand for the show's tone, quality and sub-genre.
- Viewers often form bonds with presenters. Featuring them taps into that emotional bond, making the show feel more personal and engaging.



UTILISE LEAD PRESENTERS WITH A CLARITY OF TONE THAT REFLECTS THE PROGRAMME'S CONTENT.

- The way a presenter is styled, posed, or lit in key art can set expectations for the show's tone whether it's serious, playful, edgy, or aspirational.
- Their expression and body language can hint at narrative themes or dynamics.



CONTRIBUTOR REPRESENTATION BOOSTS ENERGY AND APPEAL IN COMPETITIVE REALITY SHOWS

- Showing the breadth of contributors helps drive energy and excitement, if the competitors are Celebrities it is important to show the range of familiar faces who are taking part.
- Coupling contributors with known presenters can help drive viewing.

CONTEXT IS KEY FOR ENTERTAINMENT IMAGERY TO ENSURE INSTANT RECOGNITION, EMOTIONAL CONNECTION, AND CLEAR COMMUNICATION OF THE SHOW'S FORMAT.



FAMILIAR FACES, DISTINCTIVE FORMATS, AND ICONIC SETS DRIVE INSTANT SHOW RECOGNITION

- Well-known presenters bring credibility and entertainment value, but it's essential to highlight the show's unique selling point so audiences can distinguish it from the presenter's other projects. Utilising familiar sets and logos in the Key Art helps with instant recognition and sets the show's tone.



PANEL AND GAME SHOWS: CLARITY AND FORMAT AT A GLANCE

- Key art should use bold graphics, clear symbols, and strong host presence to instantly communicate the show's format and tone - whether serious, silly, or fast-paced.
- A clean layout coupled with one or two contextual pointers is more effective than an overly busy composition.



COMPETITIVE REALITY SHOWS: CONVEYING CHALLENGE AND EMOTION

- Lean into multiple contextual clues, utilise the environment of the show (e.g. jungle), the stakes (e.g. money/survival) and the contestant dynamics.
- Immerse the presenter in the world of the show, either place them within the environment or have them interacting with key props.

AN IMAGE'S EMOTIONAL TONE - SHAPED BY COLOUR, LIGHTING, EXPRESSION, AND COMPOSITION - MUST AUTHENTICALLY REFLECT THE PROGRAMME'S MOOD TO RESONATE WITH VIEWERS AND REFLECT THE JOY AND ESCAPISM THAT ENTERTAINMENT PROVIDES.



EMOTION AND ENGAGEMENT: PRESENTERS ARE THE KEY

- In Game and Panel shows where the composition is clean and stripped back, the perceived emotional tone relies heavily on the presenter's facial expression, styling and pose.
- An expressive presenter, combined with subtle use of key contextual clues (logos, set design, props) will clearly represent the show's format and tone.



REALITY AND COMPETITION: EMOTION-DRIVEN IMAGERY THAT CAPTURES DRAMA, JOY, AND TENSION

- Reality thrives on drama and confrontation, bold, glossy imagery helps heighten drama.
- Competition shows benefit from visuals that reflect a wide emotional spectrum, from joy and humour to vulnerability, allowing for vibrant or gentle tones that match the heart of the show.



COLOUR IS KING (AND QUEEN)

- Entertainment is all about escapism and joy, so strong, bold use of colour not only grabs attention but also signals that these shows are mood-enhancing and up-lifting.
- Using colours that reflect the show's premise, set, or logo creates instant recognition and fosters an emotional connection with the audience.

KEY ART SHOULD BE BOLD AND POLISHED, SIGNALLING HIGH PRODUCTION VALUES AND ESCAPISM. MOST ENTERTAINMENT PROGRAMMES ARE SET IN STUDIO ENVIRONMENTS OR CONSTRUCTED REALITIES RATHER THAN THE REAL WORLD SO CONCEPTUAL AND GRAPHIC ARTWORK WORKS WELL FOR THIS GENRE AND RESONATES WITH THE AUDIENCE.

COMPETITIVE REALITY



Dynamic compositions and bold colour or lighting effects create a sense of action and tension. Contextual elements like the environment or props, should clearly reflect the show's unique selling point. The overall look is dramatic, immersive, and aspirational.

PANEL SHOWS



Bold colours and uncluttered compositions keep the focus on the presenter's personality. Subtle contextual details hint at the show's format, while the overall aesthetic remains witty and casual, capturing the relaxed but clever spirit of the genre.

GAME & QUIZ SHOWS



Bold and colourful imagery, using graphic elements from the set or logo to reinforce the show's identity. The presenter is important, but so are visual cues that instantly communicate the format. The result is punchy and kinetic photography that matches the energy and pace of the show.

TALK & VARIETY SHOWS



Imagery centres on the host, with polished, welcoming visuals that use warm tones and a touch of theatrical sparkle. The aim is to create an inviting, friendly atmosphere that draws viewers in and reflects the show's sense of occasion.

CELEBRITY COMPETITION



Imagery should showcase the range of personalities involved while accurately reflecting the show's context and tone. High production values and polished imagery promise an immersive, entertaining experience, signalling to viewers that they're in for a high-quality show.



	AESTHETIC	PRESENTER/ CONTRIBUTOR	CONTEXT	EMOTIONAL TONE
COMPETITIVE REALITY	Dynamic compositions, bold colours, and clear contextual elements	Show both talent & contributors to create a sense of tension and energy.	Bold use of contextual clues is important to signify the USP of the show. Using the environment, the set or symbols that represent the format is key.	Reflect the drama and emotions of the show through expressions, composition, lighting and colour.
PANEL SHOWS	Studio-lit photography with bold colours and uncluttered composition focuses on the presenter's personality, using subtle context to convey a witty and casual tone.	Forefront the presenter(s) as they are the unifying factor in a changing line up. They can also define the tone through expression, pose or reputation.	Subtle visual cues help differentiate the show from others featuring the same presenter. Logo or set colours or graphics are useful.	Panel shows are generally light-hearted escapism. Reflect this through colour, light and the presenter's expression.
GAME & QUIZ SHOWS	Bold, colourful visuals and graphic elements from the set or logo reinforce the show's identity, making the imagery punchy and kinetic.	As with panel shows, forefront the presenter(s) as they are the unifying factor in a changing line up. They can also define the tone through expression, pose or reputation.	Bold use of show's world, such as the set or location helps define the format and aid recognition.	Punchy imagery that reflects the energy of the show. Uplifting and escapist the tone should be inviting and joyful.
TALK & VARIETY SHOWS	Centred on the host, photography is polished and welcoming, using warm tones and theatrical touches to create an inviting atmosphere.	The presenter acts as a welcoming host to the viewers, they should be the main focus of the Key Art.	Subtle context through lighting or graphics that tie in with the logo or set is enough as the main focus is the Presenter.	Images should feel warm, inviting and intimate. Using friendly expressions, warm lighting and soft, theatrical graphics.
CELEB COMPETITION	Polished photography that highlights the range of personalities, using high production values to create an immersive, visually engaging experience that reflects the show's tone	Show the breadth of recognisable faces so the audience can get to know who's stories they will be following.	Ensure the image provides enough context through environment, costume, graphic elements or props to give viewers a sense of what the programme's about.	Reflect the tone of the show, excitement and glamour, or tough challenges through expressions, lighting and colour.



PHOTOGRAPHY & DESIGN

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IN-CAMERA PHOTOGRAPHY

Graphic or heavily post-produced imagery isn't appropriate for all titles.

Strong, considered photography is powerful and resonates with the audience - they understand it represents authenticity and when done well it reflects high production values.

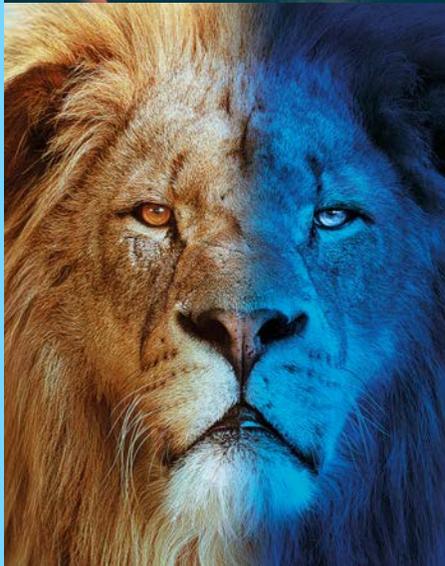
If your Key Art is to be caught all in-camera then preparation and good production values are even more important. You will need a professional photographer, a brief and time with the subject of your image.

SUBTLE GRAPHICS

If the photography doesn't quite deliver what you need, you can enhance with subtle graphics.

Carefully considered and applied graphic elements can elevate Key Art and add more context if needed.

Less can be more, allow good quality photography to still be the hero of the Key Art.





POST PRODUCTION & GRAPHICS

Sometimes a more graphic approach is needed, if you need to combine characters who don't naturally appear together, if you need to add a lot of contextual clues or if a graphic style adds context to the image.

Creating an image primarily in post production is time consuming and expensive, ensure you have quality photographic assets to work with and a clear idea of what you want to create.

USE OF AI

AI photo editing tools should be used with caution.

AI cannot be used to create or edit images for use in news, investigations or current affairs programming.

AI must not be used to manipulate images in any way that challenges the editorial meaning of the content, distorts the meaning of events, alters the impact of genuine material or otherwise materially misleads audiences.

AI tools must not be used to manipulate images of Presenters, Actors or Contributors.

Please flag with your BBC contact if AI has been used in the creation of the images you deliver.





PORTRAITS

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PORTRAITS

Close-up shots of recognisable talent are highly effective for audience engagement and widely used in press coverage.

Portraits captured on set or location help reinforce the show's identity and work best when styled consistently with the Key Art to ensure a cohesive campaign.

If you can't tie your portraits in fully with your Key Art, ensure that they reflect the tone of the show through environment, lighting and character/presenter expression and pose.

For scripted content, portraits taken against a plain grey or coloured seamless background are valuable for magazine covers and versatile for use across marketing, Key Art, and social media. These should include full-length, three-quarter, and head-and-shoulders shots.

Please note: seamless background portraits should complement, not replace, location-based imagery.



EPISODICS (UNIT)

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EPISODIC IMAGES

Episodic, or Unit photography reflects a compelling moment in the episode of a show. Each episode must have its own episodic so that the on-demand audience can clearly follow the series and the press can illustrate the programme on a week-by-week basis.

The image should reflect motion, action or emotion – or all three! It doesn't always need to be a dramatic moment; tender, intimate scenes can be equally compelling.

For factual imagery showcase the programme's craftsmanship and expertise, using powerful imagery to demonstrate why it's worth the viewer's time and emotional investment.

When shooting unit material ensure it is the action of the episode that is being captured rather than posed shots of the cast, presenter or contributors. Images should offer a window into the key story of the episode – the audience want to feel part of the story, not a bystander.

Ultimately, across all genres, the goal is to capture moments that resonate emotionally and keep audiences engaged and coming back for more.

For a more in-depth guide to capturing Episodic Imagery please click [here](#).





QUALITY & SPECIFICATIONS

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QUALITY

For viewers, low quality image = low quality programme.

To make your programme stand out the imagery you deliver must be of the best quality.

As seen in this example, the low resolution area (Left) is dull, out of focus and is obviously poor quality - especially when compared to the higher resolution section on the right.

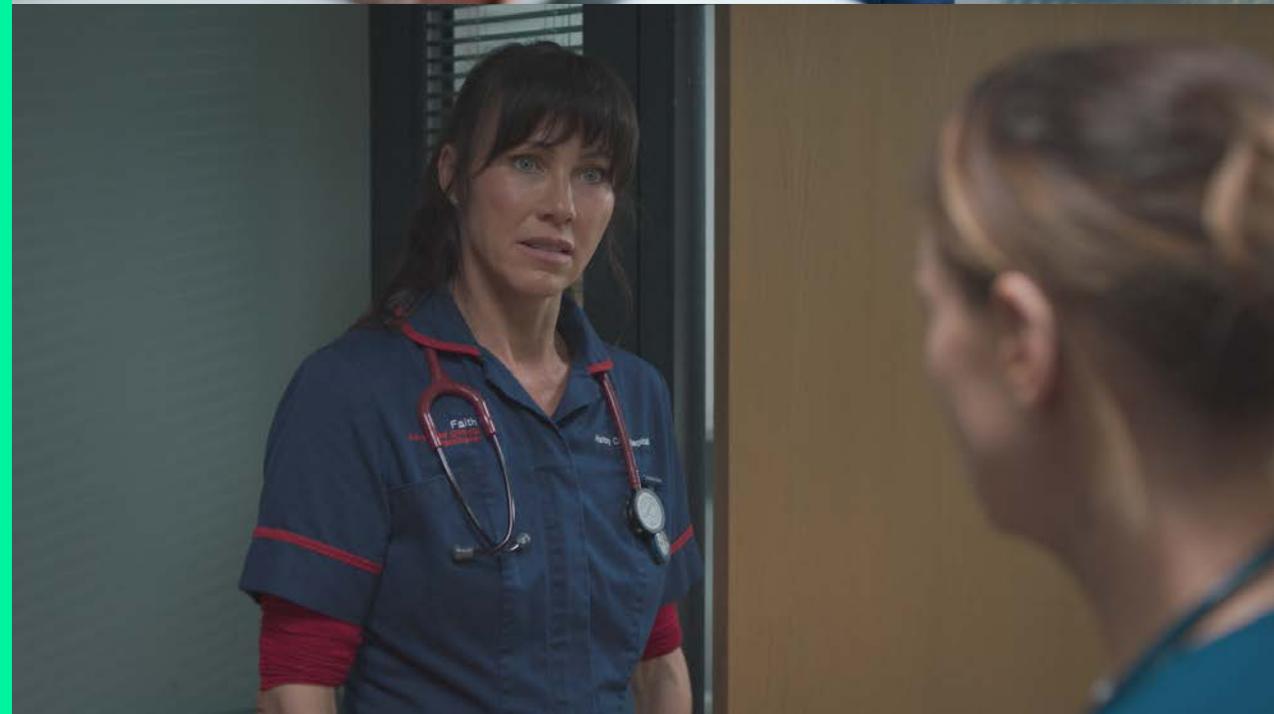
Ensure your photography is taken at the highest resolution and that your subject is well lit and in focus. Low resolution, badly lit and out of focus images won't be used by the press or by iPlayer.

GRABS

In some circumstances grabs can be useful, such as where a photographer can't travel or gain access, or if a key scene or character has been missed.

However, even if grabs are taken from the latest high resolution cameras the quality isn't comparable to true stills photography. The file sizes aren't big enough for our uses and the quality of the image in terms of sharpness, depth and clarity is inferior.

If grabs are being delivered this should be in addition to stills photography, and should never be used for the Key Art. Grabs should be sourced at edit at the highest resolution and saved without compression.



	EPISODIC	KEY ART	LAYERED ARTWORK	LOGOS
FILE SIZE & FORMAT	JPG Minimum 40mb or long edge of 4600 pixels at 300dpi compressed at 8.	JPG Minimum 60mb or long edge of 5610 pixels at 300dpi compressed at 8.	PSD Minimum 100mb or long edge of 7242 pixels at 300dpi. Fully layered PSD.	Layered PSD on a transparent background/Transparent PNG 40mb or long edge of 4600 pixels at 300dpi
ASPECT RATIO	3:2 Landscape 2:3 Portrait (standard DSLR format)	3:2 Landscape 16:9 Landscape 2:3 Portrait with and without logo	3:2 Landscape 16:9 Landscape 2:3 Portrait	N/A
RAW FILES	Minimum 45mb	Minimum 60mb	Deliver all files used to create the Key Art at the highest resolution possible.	N/A



Please contact us regarding your stills deliverables before filming starts.

Email us at: BBCPictureDesk@bbc.co.uk

For further information regarding stills deliverables and to see specific deliverables for your programme genre please visit the BBC's Commissioning **webpages**.

