Specific without Stereotyping.



01 / THE CHOICE

Make a person more than evidence of place

A location can be recognizable while the people inside it remain generic. Clothing, food, architecture and music can all be relevant details. They become shortcuts when the work expects them to stand in for a person's motivation, authority or relationship to the product. A scene needs more than proof that the art department found a setting.

Specificity comes from consequential choices: what someone is trying to do, what they notice, what they refuse and how they affect the outcome. This guide asks you to build those choices before collecting visual signals. It does not offer a list of acceptable cultural objects or imply that ordinary familiar details should be removed from every frame.

Invented teaching scenario: Frame is a portrait studio that offers a planning conversation, a sitting and a choice of final photographs. An independent bicycle mechanic, Amal, needs a portrait for her workshop website. The studio wants a short film showing how it helps people arrive at a photograph they can use. Amal is an invented character, not an account of Ahmed's work or a claim about a real person. Her goal and decisions will provide the scene's specificity; she will not be asked to represent all women, mechanics or people in a particular city.

02 / POINT OF VIEW

Ask who gets to decide

An image includes some things and leaves others outside the frame. That selection affects what a viewer is invited to notice. Berger and his collaborators draw attention to how seeing, image-making and interpretation depend on a point of view. Applied here, the useful question is not whether a photograph is completely neutral. It is whose purposes organize the scene.

01 Name the protagonist's goal without using an identity category. Amal wants a portrait that makes sense beside her workshop's booking information.

02 Identify the choice that changes the action. She rejects a pose that does not feel useful for that purpose and proposes another.

03 Check who has knowledge. The photographer understands lighting and framing; Amal understands how she wants her work represented. Neither needs to be foolish for the other to contribute.

04 Check the outcome. The studio helps create options, and Amal selects the image. The brand provides a service rather than granting her confidence or an identity.

This is a practical scene review, not a universal definition of good representation. Some stories concern people who lack power or face constraints. Showing that can be truthful. The question is whether the work understands those constraints or merely uses a passive person to make another character or the brand appear generous.

03 / THE WEAK TREATMENT

Find the detail doing no work

Invented first draft: a montage moves through an unnamed city. Bright fabrics, a tray of refreshments and ornate doors fill the frame. A silent woman enters a studio. The photographer hands her a large wrench, turns her shoulders and tells her to smile. The endline reads, 'We capture the real you.'

The problem is not that fabrics, refreshments or doors are forbidden. The treatment gives none of them a relationship to the protagonist's task. The viewer learns more about a broad visual mood than about the person. The wrench announces a job but is treated as a costume accessory. The photographer makes every consequential choice, while the line claims access to a supposedly definitive self.

Mark each detail with its current job: establish the appointment, explain the work, create a decision, reveal a relationship or orient the viewer. A detail may serve atmosphere too, but atmosphere should not be the entire account of a person or place. Ask what disappears from the story when that detail is removed.

Keep the workshop if it explains why the portrait is needed. Keep a meaningful tool if Amal chooses to use it. Remove the city montage if it consumes the time needed to show the planning conversation. Editing away decorative shorthand can create room for a more particular human action.

04 / THE REWRITE

A portrait chosen for a purpose

Invented thirty-second film treatment. Opening: Amal adds a new booking button to her workshop website. The adjacent portrait space is empty. She closes the laptop and arrives at Frame carrying a clean workshop shirt, not an armful of symbolic props.

Actual scene rough

Photographer: 'Where will the picture live?' Amal turns the laptop toward them. 'Here. People usually meet the bike before they meet me.' The photographer proposes a standing portrait. They take a frame and look at it together. Amal: 'Can we try sitting? That's how we talk through a repair.' She pulls a plain chair into position. The photographer adjusts the light. Cut between two finished options. Amal chooses one and drops it into the empty website space.

Endline: 'A portrait with somewhere to go.' Supporting copy: 'Plan the sitting. Try the options. Choose your photograph.' Button: 'See portrait sessions'. The real service must confirm what planning, selection and final files are included before using that invitation.

The scene makes Amal's knowledge consequential without making the photographer inept. Her profession explains the website and the seated conversation; it is not simply indicated by a wrench. The brand contributes expertise and a process. The outcome is a selected photograph for a specific use, not a claim to reveal a person's complete identity.

05 / THE DETAIL REVIEW

Keep what the story has earned

Once the scene works, review casting, wardrobe, language, setting and sound as actual production choices. A clean workshop shirt can connect the portrait to Amal's day-to-day work. It should not become a claim that every mechanic dresses alike. Ask the performer and relevant contributors what is plausible for this individual situation, then keep the answer attached to that scope.

A useful swap question is: if this detail changed, what would change in the story? Changing the website to a private family album would alter the portrait's purpose. Changing the chair's color may not. This helps prioritize decisions; it does not mean identity is disposable or every detail without a plot function must be removed.

Also check the pattern across the whole campaign. One scene may give a person agency while a series repeatedly assigns expertise, mistakes or authority to the same narrow group. Review who speaks, who decides and who is seen only as an audience. A single diverse cast photograph cannot answer those questions.

Invite informed review while choices can still change. Ask about a specific gesture, word or action rather than asking someone to certify that the campaign is culturally authentic. No individual can approve an entire population's experience. A contributor can explain their own knowledge and identify a concern worth investigating; keep that distinction intact.

06 / PRACTICE

Turn a symbol into a choice

Invented exercise: an advertisement for bookable rehearsal rooms shows three musicians from different backgrounds silently holding instruments. A narrator says, 'Every culture has a rhythm.' The business can provide rooms by the hour, but makes no claim about cultural expertise. Rewrite a fifteen-second scene around one musician's practical purpose. Keep the room's actual role clear.

Model scene: a drummer records a difficult four-bar passage on a phone, listens, and marks one beat on the sheet. She checks the remaining session time and starts again. The camera stays for the improved transition, then cuts to her booking another hour for next week. Endline: 'Time for the part that needs another try.' Supporting copy: 'Book a rehearsal room by the hour.'

Why this works: the musician makes decisions, and the service supplies practice time. The instrument is being used, not held as a badge. The narrator no longer assigns a single quality to multiple cultures. The improvement is a scripted event within the fictional scene, not a promised outcome of every booking.

Another good answer could show a band negotiating an ending or a singer testing a microphone, provided the service actually supports that use. Do not replace a sweeping cultural claim with a sweeping personal transformation claim. Keep the offered benefit and the person's agency proportionate to the story.

07 / WORKSHEET

Give the detail a reason

Use this on a treatment before casting or production design is locked. Write about the particular scene, not an entire country or community. If a detail comes from research or a contributor, record where it came from and the limits of that knowledge.

Protagonist, immediate goal and reason this moment matters

The choice they make that changes the action

Brand contribution and the knowledge each character holds

Three visible or audible details, with a reason for each

Who will review the scene, and which specific questions remain?

Read the scene without its identity labels. Then restore them. Check both the human action and the particular context; neither should replace the other.

08 / REVIEW

Look beyond the casting sheet

A finished scene should let the audience encounter a person doing something, not merely recognize that a demographic box has been filled. In the Frame example, the website, chair and selection process matter because they follow Amal's purpose. The details belong to a causal sequence rather than a display of local signals.

+ The protagonist has a goal that can be described without a stereotype.
+ The scene shows what they know or decide, even if they face real constraints.
+ The brand's contribution does not depend on diminishing the person it serves.
+ Clothing, objects, language and setting have been reviewed as specific choices.
+ The pattern of roles across the campaign has been considered, not only one favorable frame.

This guide cannot certify representation as universally acceptable. People can reasonably disagree about a portrayal, and commercial constraints can limit the stories a team tells. The method creates questions that can be answered and revised. It is especially limited when writers lack access to the people or situations they depict; acknowledge that gap rather than using a moodboard as a substitute.

Leave with a rewritten scene, a short detail rationale and a few precise review questions. A useful final question is: what do we learn about this person from a choice they make? If the answer comes only from the costume, casting description or narrator, give the person more to do.

READING / PRACTICE / CONTEXT

Where the thinking starts

The methods, teaching scenarios, exercises and worksheets here are original synthesis. The books below inform particular decisions; their authors do not endorse this guide. Page references locate the supplied PDF editions and may differ from printed page numbers.

John Berger, Sven Blomberg, Chris Fox, Michael Dibb and Richard Hollis / Ways of Seeing

PDF pp. 5-12; credits p. 166

The essays' attention to selection, point of view and the relationship between seeing and interpretation informs the image review. The guide does not present the source as a cultural representation checklist or a neutral theory of every image.

Jon Steel / Truth, Lies, and Advertising

PDF pp. 13-18

The emphasis on involving consumer perspectives informs the call for specific, scoped review. One contributor is not treated as a representative of a whole population.

Pete Barry / The Advertising Concept Book

PDF pp. 8-11

The priority of a clear concept over polished execution informs the treatment rewrite. All scenes and detail-review exercises here are original, not adaptations of the book's campaigns.

Make the tools your own

Read the worked example, try the exercise before its model response, then use the worksheet on a real assignment. Print the worksheet at 100% or annotate a copy digitally. Check your actual product facts, audience context and production conditions before applying the advice.

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