

# “I want my HCB” Key

Henri Cartier-Bresson was born on August 22, 1908 just outside Paris, France. He studied painting before taking up photography and film making as a career in 1931. Arguably the greatest photographer of all time, HCB worked with only a 35mm camera and a 50mm lens. He wrote and published *L'Instant décisif* in 1952. The essay is probably the most influential work, in regard to photography, ever written. It has been said that HCB's instinct of the decisive moment combined with his understanding and compassion for human nature, is his greatest contribution to photography. Using the essay, answer the following questions:

1. According to HCB, what does the picture-story involve in order to depict the content of an event and to communicate impressions? (3pts)  
*A joint operation of the brain, the eye and the heart.*
2. What two kinds of selection are made by photographers (be specific for part two)? (3pts)  
*a) When we look through the viewfinder at the subject and  
b) secondly after developing and printing, when we separate the pictures that aren't the strongest.*
3. Photography is a means of expression that does what? (3pts)  
*Fixes forever the precise and transitory instant.*
4. Explain the main difference, according to HCB, between writers and photographers. (3pts)  
*Writers have time to reflect, accept, reject and accept again.*
5. From what fact stem the anxieties and strength of being a photographer? (3pts)  
*The fact that what has gone, has gone forever.*
6. What does the profession depend so much upon? (3pts)  
*The relations the photographer establishes with the people he's photographing.*
7. What happens if the subject is uneasy? (3pts)  
*The personality goes away.*
8. What do portraits enable us to do? (3pts)  
*Trace the sameness of man.*
9. What is necessary for a photographer to have a chance of achieving a true reflection of a person's world and what must the sitter do? (4pts)  
*a) The subject should be in a situation normal to him and  
b) the sitter must be made to forget about the camera and the man who is handling it.*

10. What are the principle factors in the making of a good portrait? (3pts)  
*The decisive moment and psychology, no less than camera position.*
11. Why does HCB say it would be difficult to be a portrait photographer for paying customers and what is the result? (4pts)  
*They want to be flattered and the result is no longer real.*
12. What two things is a photographer trying to do when shooting a portrait? (3pts)  
*Searching for the identity of his sitter, and also trying to fulfill an expression of himself.*
13. In a photograph, what recognition is implied? (3pts)  
*The recognition of a rhythm in the world of real things.*
14. In a photograph, what is composition? (3pts)  
*The result of a simultaneous coalition, the organic coordination of elements seen by the eye.*
15. According to HCB, what are the only valid angles in existence? (3pts)  
*The angles of geometry of composition and not the ones fabricated by the photographer who falls flat on his (her) stomach or performs other antics to procure his (her) effects.*
16. How is technique important? (3pts)  
*You must master it in order to communicate what you see.*
17. What do people think far too much about and also not enough about? (3pts)  
*People think far too much about technique also not enough seeing.*
18. What does HCB say knowledge of the camera and its functions should be like? (3pts)  
*As automatic as the changing of gears in an automobile.*
19. What is “trompe l’oeil?” (1pt)  
*Trick of the eye.*
20. Besides the photographer, what two positions are responsible for photo-stories published in newspapers and magazines? (3pts)  
*The editor and the layout man.*

21. How does HCB define photography? (3pts)  
*The simultaneous recognition, in a fraction of a second, of the significance of an event as well as of a precise organization of forms which give that event its proper expression.*
22. HCB says that through the act of living what can happen? (3pts)  
*The discovery of oneself is made concurrently with the discovery of the world around us (which can mold us, but which also can be affected by us).*
23. According to HCB, what two things must we communicate? (3pts)  
*The world inside and outside us.*
24. In your own words, what is the decisive moment? (6pts)  
*There is one moment at which the elements in motion are in balance. Photography must seize upon this moment.*
25. Using the rest of this page and the back if necessary, write a critique of *Behind the Gare Saint-Lazare, Paris, 1932*. Let your eyes move through the frame. Look for repeating patterns, shapes and forms. Think about and address the following: How you feel when you look at the image. Think about being the photographer. What happened before you pressed the shutter? Why did you take the picture when you did? (25pts)

**Bonus 5 points**

What is HCB's favorite journey?

*Escaping 3 times as a prisoner of war.*

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