

An introduction to judging

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Who judges?

- We all judge
 - We judge our own photographs
 - What do we like/not like about our photographs
 - What do we want to change
 - Why do we think other people might like it
 - We judge other people's photographs
 - Do we use the same criteria as we used on ours ?
 - Or different ...
 - We compare our photographs to others
 - Do we compare using same criteria
 - Do we do it fairly
 - Are we biased ?
 - What do we like photographs of
 - What styles do we like
 - What do we not like

What does Judging mean ?

The Noun:

one appointed to decide in a contest or competition (**The judge's decision is final**)

The Verb:

form an opinion or conclusion about

If you do not want to enter competitions, you may still want to become better. So by judging (using a set criteria) your own images, you can improve.

Remember

A good photograph is not necessarily a competition photograph.

- Think about picture postcards - probably the landscape as everybody remembers it.
- Or photos of your kids – they mean a lot to the family.
- But are they competition worthy?

Caveat: By entering a competition, your image will be judged. It will be critiqued. It might not make you feel good when you hear the judge's remarks. Or it might be the basis for learning.

Or you might win !!

Criteria defined for Model Railways Association of America

Impact – This is best explained by the "I wish I'd taken that picture" reaction.

Composition – The arrangement of the forms within the photo should be pleasing to the eye

Artistic Approach – This subjective area is where a strongly graphic or symbolic composition may move one judge and a "typical calendar shot" may be more moving to another

Lighting – In photography, light is law. It is the only thing that makes it possible to expose film or activate the sensor in a digital camera

Exposure – If a print appears washed out, or shadow details are obliterated, it is obvious the negative was improperly exposed.

Focus – Model photographers should strive to maximize the appearance of sharpness throughout the photo to achieve realistic results.

Difficulty – In prototype shots, this relates to motion, lighting conditions (including weather), selection of an appropriate viewpoint, inherent danger and the knowledge of special techniques and equipment.

Special Effects – This would apply to deliberate blurring or panning to accentuate motion, long exposures at night to create light streaks, multiple exposures, shooting through smoke or fog, using filters, print toning, or any other special effects limited only by the photographer's imagination.

Technique – Is the color pleasing, correct, or believable

Finish – Consider the impact of the presentation award."

Critieria defined for Wilderness Contest

Basic Technique

Is focus appropriate for the subject? Is depth of field appropriate?

Is it exposed in a way that works for the image?

Special Techniques

Are special techniques like multiple exposures, sandwiching, panning, or cross processing used effectively?

If the image is digitally manipulated, has the manipulation altered composition or only technical issues (exposure, focus, etc), which could be also accomplished by conventional techniques?

Composition

Is the composition skillful and dynamic?

Is the image balanced or unbalanced? Is the balance level appropriate? If there is a main center of interest, is it well placed in the frame?

Lighting

Does it show off the subject well?

Is the contrast level appropriate?

Is there lighting that would work better for the subject?

If the lighting is controlled, is it well controlled?

Subject/Interest

Does the subject have interesting connotations or associations?

Are the colors and patterns effective?

Interesting textures?

Interesting juxtapositions?

Originality

Does the image show an original subject or an original approach to a standard subject? Is it anonymous, or does it show a visual signature or convey a personal vision?

Story/Mood

How well does the photograph capture or illustrate the {topic of contest}?

Does the image effectively tell a story about {topic of contest} or convey a mood or value?

Criteria defined in InkJet Printers comp

Impact is the sense one gets upon viewing an image for the first time. Compelling images evoke laughter, sadness, anger, pride, wonder or another intense emotion.

Creativity is the external expression of the imagination of the maker by using the medium to convey an idea, message or thought.

Style is defined in a number of ways. It might be defined by a specific genre or simply be recognizable as the characteristics of how a specific artist applies light to a subject. It can impact an image in a positive manner when the subject matter and the style are appropriate for each other, or it can have a negative effect when they are at odds.

Composition is important to the design of an image, bringing all of the visual elements together in concert to express the purpose of the image. Proper composition holds the viewer in the image and prompts the viewer to look where the creator intends. Effective composition can be pleasing or disturbing, depending on the intent of the image maker.

Print Presentation affects an image by giving it a finished look. The mats and borders used should support and enhance the image, not distract from it.

Center of Interest is the point or points on the image where the imagemaker wants the viewer to stop as they view the image. There can be primary and secondary centers of interest. Occasionally there will be no specific center of interest and the entire scene collectively serves as the center of interest.

Lighting (the use and control of light) refers to how dimension, shape and roundness are defined in an image. Whether the light applied to an image is manmade or natural, proper use of lighting should enhance an image.

Subject Matter should always be appropriate to the story being told in an image.

Color Balance supplies harmony to an image. An image in which the tones work together effectively supporting the image, can enhance its emotional appeal. Color balance is not always harmonious and can be used to evoke diverse feelings for effect.

Technical Excellence is the print quality of the image itself as it is presented for viewing. Sharpness, exposure, printing, mounting, and correct color all speak to the qualities of the physical print.

Technique is the approach used to create the image. Printing, lighting, posing, paper selection and other elements are part of the technique applied to an image.

Storytelling refers to the ability of the image to evoke imagination. One beautiful thing about art is that each viewer might collect his own message or read her own story in an image.

Criteria defined for Woodland California

Photo **fit** and relevance to category

How well does the photo meet the **criteria** of the category it is in?

Composition

Are the items of interest **placed well** in the photo?

Are there **distracting** elements?

Creativity

Is the subject matter pictured in a unique way or is a common item shown from **an interesting point-of-view**?

Does the photo demonstrate **originality**?

Has the photographer used **light** in interesting ways?

Technical quality

Is the photo in **focus**?

Is lighting in balance?

Is **depth of field** considered/used?

Shutter speed varied or adjusted to be appropriate for the photo?

Overall Impression

Is the photo able to grab the **viewer's attention** and hold it?

What is the **wow factor**? Are there any special effects, or extras?

Scottish Photographic Federation - What SPF judges should be looking for

1. **DO I LIKE THIS PHOTOGRAPH? WHY?** Perhaps 50% of the decision . Does it tell a story? Does it make a statement? Does it elicit an emotion? It doesn't need to be a big statement. It could be "What a pretty flower." Is it creative? Does it show the subject in an unusual attractive way? Does it use an interesting, fresh approach? Does it utilise interesting techniques? But ... what could be changed to do this better? There is a "rightness" about good pictures which is difficult to quantify and which often defies the "rules".
2. **SUBJECT MATTER AND CONTENT** Perhaps 25% of the decision. Is this something that will provoke interest in others? Something the viewer may not get to see – travel/early rising/field craft/etc. Something you don't notice because it is ordinary or familiar but shown in a new way. Subjective E.G. Displaying Bird v Striking Flower v Pretty Girl (or boy)
3. **PRODUCTION VALUES (NOT JUST THE TECHNICAL STUFF)**. Perhaps 25% of the decision. Everything that goes into the creative process; How was it made? How difficult was it? How much thought went into it? Composition Lighting Colour (or not) Perspective Viewpoint Depth of Field Angle of view
4. **TECHNICAL (CRAFT, EXECUTION, PRESENTATION)** Takes points off or moves you down the order Is the focus accurate and the exposure appropriate? Is the centre of interest (subject) the sharpest point? Is it appropriately sharpened? Is it "over sharpened" Does the Depth of Field enhance the subject or distract from it? Does the overall (and specific area) contrast suit the subject? Are dark areas blocked up? Are bright areas burnt out? Are the colours pleasing? (Not necessarily correct). Good Technical Quality and Technique do not in themselves ensure a good photograph but without them you reduce the chances considerably that the judge will view your work with respect. Equally if a judge does not point out technical deficiencies it suggests a lack of qualification to do the job. Mainly though Judges should constantly strive with their comments to encourage club members to take even more, and even better, photographs and to have FUN doing it.

Scores and Marking

Some competitions give marks, some credits, some only 1st, 2nd and 3rd ... or a mixture
Some competitions give scoring guidelines on how to allocate marks but most do not

What should an image score?

Using an example:

I got an 18 in the monthly competition and I only got a 14 in the annuals?

Images are compared against the other images in a competition.

You got an 18 because it was better than most of the other images entered.

You got a 14 because there were a lot of other images better than yours.

Open Subject

Remember you could be judging: Portraits, Landscapes, Still Life, Nature, Sport, etc against each other

Thinking about the criteria you use is important so you judge fairly.

Set Subject

If it is a set subject, does the image match the subject?

The judge will have their own interpretation of what the set subject means.

Sometimes entries are vetted by the Competition Secretary beforehand

Some basic areas to check to help with scoring

Approximately what I use

➤ Overall

- What is this image of? What is it about? What makes it a good image?
- Is the image interesting? Does it have that Wow factor? Does it need a Wow factor? Or is the image a little boring?

➤ Composition

- Which areas of the image do you focus on when looking at it? Does your eye get lead in to certain area?
- Overlapping – separation is nice
- Distractions – things that you keep noticing
- Is it a colour or mono image? If it is mono, why?
- Format: Landscape, portrait, square, letterboxAnd why has it been chosen

➤ Technical and Camera Work

- Exposure triangle of Aperture, Shutter Speed and ISO. Which is the most important in this photo and has it been used well?
- Lighting – especially in images that you have control over
- Colour representation – does it look real
- Editing/Processing – has it been done well? Does it add to the image

➤ Presentation checks

- Make sure the horizon is level. Having the sea draining off to one side is not a good idea.
- Check around the edges. Are some “things” cut off?