

Valley Viewfinders
Judging Guidelines

September 2004

Value judgments concerning art are very subjective, and the opinion of every club member has worth. But in order for the club judging to be consistent and fair, we offer the following Judging Guidelines for consideration.

Scoring

Each judge awards a score of zero to nine (0 to 9) to a photograph. The Photographic Society of America uses the following criteria when determining a score:

Below average: “0” to “4”

- Out of focus (unless intentionally)
- Over- or under-exposed
- Not relevant to the theme (if entered in the “theme” category)
- Snapshot type of picture
- Little impact or imagination

Average: “5” to “6”

- Technically correct (focus, exposure, etc)
- Good color for the subject and background
- Little impact or imagination
- Relevant to the theme (if entered in the “theme” category)

Above average: “7” to “8”

- Technically correct
- Good presentation
- Good composition
- Good pictorial treatment
- Tells a story or creates a mood
- High impact to the viewer
- Exemplifies the theme (if entered in the “theme” category)

Outstanding: “9”

- “Knocks your socks off” quality of image
- Technically correct in all respects
- Outstanding composition
- Tells a complete story or creates a mood for the viewer
- High impact to the viewer on first sight

Exemplifies the theme (if entered in the “theme” category)
An image you would want to have in your home or office

What is a good photograph?

1. It must be interesting to the viewer and sometimes challenging. Some photographs cry for the photographer to answer “how did he do that?”.
2. It should have a sharp image and the subject should stand out from the background. This can be accomplished by either “depth of field” focus or color contrast. (A soft focus on a person’s face or a flower may still be considered sharp. This may have been the photographer’s intention when they made the photo).
3. The photograph should tell a story, make a statement, or set a mood. This may be one that is easily understood as seen in a landscape or may be abstract as seen in creative or contemporary work.
4. It should be properly exposed to show what the photographer intended. It should be done so that the public can understand what the intentions of the photographer were when they made the photo.
5. It should have good color rendition of the subject. This may be natural colors or colors that have been reversed or altered, but they must be complementary to the viewer’s eye and to each other.

Basic Judging and Critiquing Criteria

The following is a list of basic judging and critiquing criteria for photographs, compiled by George Kalem III, Manchester, New Hampshire. The items are given in descending order of importance.

Impact – what you see first; first impression; strong feeling of power; hold your eye.

Creativity – use of imagination; freshness of approach; unusual cropping/use of subject matter; invention, design, feeling and imagination that lifts the work into the realm of art; could be abstract.

Style – part that sets the work apart from others; different but consistent way of seeing; different approach; real, not contrived; experimental; individual.

Composition – good placement of subject; successful arrangement; harmonious proportions; use dynamic symmetry in placing the most important objects; good rhythm in repetition; color, spaces, moods, divisions of photograph.

Print Presentation – does presentation enhance the photograph?; good cropping; good color for matting or mounting; using something dynamic or very traditional; creative mounting.

Color Balance – good technique; good selection of color for subject matter; using very interpretive color (maybe not normal); creative use of color (complementary colors, dark against light, strong against weak)

Center of Interest – dominance of subject matter; grouping of subject and arrangement of objects so one center of interest prevails, subject hold the eye without distractions; mood or misty; strength and definition gives center of interest; secondary subjects don't overpower main subject.

Lighting – good statement of light; good portrait lighting; dynamic lighting pattern of light can enhance, create strong mood.

Subject Matter – outstanding interpretation for the subject matter; good camera angle; good selection of photographic model or object; contrast can be very creative in selection (old and young, warm and cold).

Print Quality – strong contrast; middle tones; good color balance; expressions and artistic lighting; simple statements are strongest; good angle on buildings; backgrounds in harmony with subject matter.

Technique – different technique for subject matter; technique is foundation of photography but knowledge of art principles are very necessary; using creativity and abstraction can help; design brings abstract ideas into concrete form.

Story Telling – complete story within photograph; successful presentation; achievement of purpose; complete meeting at first glance; strong mood or emotion using strong complementary colors next to each other; strong mood builds emotional response challenging your imagination.

Judging Critique

Safety – Don't make comments that might encourage the photographer to take chances to improve a photo, like "Bears aren't dangerous".

Be Positive – Remember you are looking at someone's pride and joy. Always start with a positive point in the photograph, such as "you have placed the subject very well in the frame", or "the ___ leads my eye directly to the subject without any distraction". Then let them know what little thing might have improved the photograph, such as "I think that late evening light might have given you a richer color and looked better, don't rush the time of day".

Don't Find Fault – Remember that you don't have to find something wrong with the photo. If it isn't an above average photo you can just let them know how it could have been improved. Sometimes they can't change what would have helped the photo (they can't move a mountain or a tree), but you can ask if they could have changed the angle or location when they took the photo and explain how that would improve it.

Exposure – Would the photo be better if the subject had been lighter or darker? Explain that the subject blends into the background and would have been better if they had taken the photo at a different time of day so that the light was better. If they wanted a silhouette then the other areas should not have details in them.

Focus – Is the image sharp or was it intended to be soft? It may be that the depth of field could have been changed to make a better photo. Maybe a soft focus lens was used to achieve a specific mood. Point out the benefits of using different depths of field and how it could improve or change the photo.

Personal Bias – Don't inject your personal bias into the judging and critique of the photograph. We all know that babies and bunnies are cute, but a landscape is just as beautiful and should be given the same respect. This is probably the hardest thing to leave behind when you judge, just remember you must be fair.

Difficulty Level – Don't let your personal perceived level of difficulty enter into the scoring of the photograph.

Summary

When you are asked to judge there are six simple things that you should remember:

- a. Is it sharp or intentionally soft?
- b. Is it properly exposed for the idea expressed?
- c. Does it tell a complete story? Can it stand alone?
- d. Is it properly composed?
- e. Be constructive in your comments!
- f. Be honest and fair to all subject matter.