

A Guide To Evaluating Photographs

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This guide was developed by:

John Dean, FPSA, Spokane Valley Camera Club
Max Burke, Boise Camera Club
Carol Todd, Oregon Coast Photographers

Gordon Battaile, Forest Grove Camera Club
Rick Charlton, Oregon Color Slide
Ed Gervais, 4Cs Vice Chair, Boise Camera Club

This document is a brief summary of considerations for evaluating image quality. It is not intended to be comprehensive; if you seek a through guide, there are many other sources available to you in bookstores, libraries, or from members of your club. However, much of the evaluation of images, especially in a camera club context, can be distilled into a relatively small number of concepts. All photographers benefit from at least considering the following points, and judges in particular should be used to thinking about them.

When you are judging prints, you have the actual print quality to evaluate as well as the image content.

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 exposure, sandwiching, panning, or cross processing used effectively?
- If the image is digitally manipulated, is the manipulation done well?

Composition

- 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?
- Are there distracting elements in the picture that could be eliminated?
- Are there too many unrelated elements? Too few elements?
- Does the composition make effective use of leading lines?
- Is depth used (or not used) to good advantage?
- Does the composition make use of repeating forms?
- Does the framing work? Mergers?

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?
- Color interest?
- 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

- Does the image effectively tell a story or convey a mood?

Printing Technique

- Is the contrast level appropriate for the image?
- Are there artifacts that make any dodging and burning or sharpening too noticeable?
- Is toning well handled?