

# **A Guide to Judging and Scoring Photographs in 4Cs Competitions**

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Most of the clubs in the Columbia Council of Camera Clubs participate in interclub judging of images. This guide has been developed with the objective of assisting individuals and clubs in the 4Cs with their judging responsibilities. It presents a set of guidelines for judging and the reasons behind them, an overview of the scoring system, and scoring guidelines. It also includes a single page summary of judging information for clubs to copy and share with members.

## **Judging Overview**

Anyone can decide whether a photograph is appealing, but skilled judging is about more than a personal reaction: it requires a good understanding of how photographs communicate. For a description of characteristics to look for in evaluating a photograph, see the 4Cs document “A Guide to Evaluating Photographs”.

When you have been selected to be a judge, this means a group of your peers think enough of you as a photographer to ask you to judge their work. This is the ultimate honor your peers can confer on you as a photographer. Always treat the invitation accordingly.

## **Judging Guidelines**

The 4Cs asks that judges of 4Cs competitions observe the following eight guidelines.

- 1) Use the 9-point scoring system described later in this document.
- 2) Be consistent: do not change your scoring in the middle of a session.

This most often occurs when a judge notices that his or her scores are generally higher or generally lower than the scores of the other judges. The goal for a judge is to score the images so that, in the judge’s best opinion, all of the 9s are better than all of the 8s, all of the 8s are better than all of the 7s, and so on all the way down. If a judge changes scoring in the middle of a session, this will not be true. It may even become embarrassing if you find that your scores are much different than the other scores, but you must stay consistent throughout the entire judging session for complete fairness of the competition.

- 3) Set aside your personal biases on subject and style.

A judge has the simple but serious challenge of being as fair as possible to all photo entries regardless of personal biases or emotional response to a subject. Even though art is subjective, simply reacting to the image is not adequate; it is important for a judge to analyze his or her reaction to an image, screen out any personal biases, and using

consistent reasoning in evaluating the image. This is not easy, but is critical for fair judging.

4) Do not indiscriminately apply the “Rules of Composition”.

The “rules of composition” are one-size-fits-all guidelines that in many cases are completely inappropriate for a given image. Evaluate composition based on how it works in the image, not how it follows or fails to follow the rules.

5) Do not give a disproportionate number of high and low scores.

It is possible for one judge to single-handedly determine the winners in a competition by giving only scores that are either very high or very low. This is not an acceptable practice in 4Cs competitions. For almost any collection of images, the majority of the images will fall in the middle of the group, fairly close in quality to the average for that particular group. Every judge’s scores should reflect this.

6) Take line, dirt, and fungus into account if significant.

It is the responsibility of the slide and print chairs for each club to make sure the images submitted for competition are clean and are shipped such that they will arrive clean. So if there is a lot of material on the image, score it down to the extent that the debris is distracting.

However, realize that even a clean slide may pick up a small amount of debris during projection. So if the amount of debris is limited, give the photographer the benefit of the doubt.

7) Take scratches into account.

It is the responsibility of the slide and print chairs for each club to make sure the images submitted for competition are free of significant scratches. So if an image has a noticeable scratch, score it down to the extent that the scratch is distracting.

8) If you see an image that looks like it was computer generated or manipulated, score it normally: this is okay in 4Cs competitions.

### **Scoring Overview**

A 4Cs competition should use a panel of three judges, each using the 9-point scale described below.

Ideally, a judge should not know how another judge has scored an image before presenting his or her own score. As a result, verbal scoring is discouraged. Where possible, use scoring machines, individual scoring sheets for each judge, or score cards. If verbal scoring is the only option, rotate the order in which judges call out their scores.

Most judges will find it helpful to preview all the images in a competition before starting to score; previewing makes it easier to maintain scoring consistency throughout a session. If time allows, you may opt to preview them multiple times.

### **Scoring Guidelines**

All 4Cs competitions should be judged on a 1-9 scale. Please use the following guidelines in giving scores:

- 1 – Use this score to disqualify an image. An image may be disqualified if it clearly infringes on another artist's copyright or if it is submitted for a category competition and you feel that it clearly does not fit.
- 2 – The image shows serious technical defects: gross under- or over-exposure, very poor focus or significant (and clearly unintended) camera movement, or similar problems.
- 3 – The image either has significant technical defects, serious shortcomings in image content, or some combination of these problems. Because most of the photographers who complete in 4Cs competitions have at least some photographic experience, this score and lower scores are rarely awarded in 4Cs competitions.
- 4 – The image does not have significant technical defects or serious shortcomings in image content. However, it may have minor technical defects, and the content (composition, lighting, etc.) is not well handled.
- 5 – The image is acceptable in most respects but does not create any significant interest.
- 6 – The image is reasonably solid, creating at least a little interest. Technical aspects and image content all competently handled. This is generally the average score for 4Cs competitions.
- 7 – The image is very strong. Handling is a notch above competent, and the image rewards contemplation.
- 8 – The image is exceptional: unique and worthy of special recognition. You should feel excited about the image.
- 9 – The image is of the very highest quality, equal to the best you have seen. You feel that it should win a medal in salon competition or slide of the year in 4Cs competition. This score is awarded only rarely in 4Cs competitions.

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