

Typical questions that Judges have in mind (v2.6a)

Aesthetic

- **Does the image have Impact?** Does it evoke an emotion? Pleasing or disturbing?
- **Does it engage & tell a story?** Does it stimulate the imagination or have a story to tell?
- **Is the image creative?** Has the subject been presented with a fresh point of view?
- **Is the light being used effectively?** Does the light enhance the shape, form and texture?
- **Is the title appropriate?** A judge has only two things to go on – the title and the image. Don't waste the opportunity to use it effectively. Use it to inform, direct or inject an emotion.
- **Does the composition work?** Does it hold the viewers' attention? Note: there are no rules, just guidelines. (But do read up on the elements of art and design principles).

Composition

- **Where is the centre of interest?** Where do you want me to look? Images with no specific focal point must rely on the entire scene collectively. Avoid placing important elements near, or merging the subject itself with the edges of the frame.
- **Viewpoint sensible?** Avoid poor juxtapositions, e.g. lamp posts growing out of peoples heads!
- **Subject in the centre of a frame?** Does the subject look static? Try putting the subject off-centre. However, square crops and reflections work well with some centred objects.
- **Leading lines?** Do leading lines lead to something interesting or are they just fading away, or even worse, leading the viewer out of the image?
- **Horizon level?** If not level, ensure it is obviously intentional. (Dutch tilt)
- **Verticals?** Are the verticals leaning due to a tilted camera? Raise camera or correct in post.
- **Image depth?** Are there separate layers, i.e. foreground, middle-ground & background to add depth?
- **Background?** Backgrounds make the image, but should not distract, or overpower the subject by becoming the subject.
- **Representational images with blue or bland skies?** These tend to look like 'wish you were here' post cards. However, these photos sell well in travel brochures!
- **Figure Ground relationship (FGR)?** Is there adequate contrast / separation between the subject and the background? e.g. old masters used religious halos behind the head for that reason.
- **Subject in Focus?** Is the image sharp where it needs to be, with the appropriate depth of field? For portraits (human or animal) aim to focus on the nearest eye. Creatures – is the nose sharp as well?
- **Studio portraits?** In the studio the author has full control of everything – so no excuses! Is there a story or emotion in the image? Environmental portraits with a story tend to do well.
- **Images of works of art?** Has the photographer added their own interpretation of the artwork and showing something more? (e.g. Interesting lighting, juxtaposition, or post production).
- **Architecture?** Is the viewpoint and treatment suitable? Try for a more artistic and different approach, rather than a standard picture of a building. Treat it like a work of art.
- **Borders?** Guard your borders jealously. Patrol around the edges of the image. Look for highlights or anything distracting near the frame edges, (like a stray branch).
Generally, nothing should be part in or part out, it's either all in or all out.
Normally, we don't chop off the feet (or implied feet) of a person or animal!

- **Dust bunnies?** Does your sensor / lens need a clean? Small specks in plain skies, often repeated in every photograph, will give the game away.
- **Exposure?** Is the subject exposed in a way that works? How about the background?
- **Blown highlights?** Exposure errors which judges love to pounce upon. Specular highlights (reflections off shiny surfaces, street lamps etc) are usually OK, but some added colour might enhance them. Pure white areas can be deliberately used for compositional purposes. (Hi-Key).
- **Sufficient details in the shadows?** Deep blacks help to give a full range of tones, but large areas of black or dark tones with no detail are often frowned upon (e.g. dark clothing in a portrait). Note: shadows can be subjects in their own right. Not every scene needs a deep black – think of a foggy day. If used, blocked up shadows should be a deliberate part of the composition.

- **Distracting clutter?** Remove those ‘eye magnets’ that distract the eye from the main subject, either by cloning / healing or cropping. Note some genres restrict cloning, e.g. Nature / wildlife.
- **Cropping?** Does the subject have room to breath or is it cropped too tightly in a box? Does the subject have ‘nose room’ – a space to move into? Ensure any crop is obviously intentional and that any empty (negative) space adds to the image. For people or animals – don’t crop at the joints. Beware that cropping too deeply into an image reduces DoF & image quality.
- **Over-sharpening in post?** Compensating for poorly focused or soft images? Crunchy look?
- **Halos?** Are there any surrounding objects due to excessive use of clarity or sharpening?
- **Converging verticals – do they need to be corrected?** Distortion is caused when the camera is not square on to the subject. Normally, limit correction to $\approx 90\%$ of vertical for a more natural look. Be aware that correcting verticals in post may adversely crop the image.
- **Monochrome prints?** Is there a colour cast? A big no-no, although toning is OK, providing it suits the subject. (Correct printing techniques will often cure a colour cast).
- **Colour saturation?** Are the colours over saturated? Skin tones and green foliage are particularly singled out by judges. (Note that grass has lots of yellow in it, not just green).
- **Colour grading?** Is the grading sympathetic to the subject? e.g. warm high lights & cool shadows. Do the colour tones used enhance the emotional appeal? (Overdone HDR effect?)
- **Has the image been well presented?** Has a key line or other border been used (PDI)? For prints, does the choice of paper / mounting board enhance the image?
- **Watermarks?** For competition work, NEVER put a visible watermarks on the image. Generally that will mean an immediate rejection from a competition.
- **Judge’s Score.** A low scoring image does not necessarily mean it’s a poor image, it either means it needs more work or it just means that you may have the wrong judge for that particular image! Photographers need to recognise that not all our images are great. For a good competent image, you should only expect a score of $8\pm\frac{1}{2}$ / 10, and it’s a bonus when an image is held back, and given a higher mark. (Marks tend to vary according to the class (Club / Advanced) being judged)

All the above guidelines can be ignored for creative purposes.

Do it with intention, and to please yourself, not the judge
(unless you really want to win lots & lots of trophies).

(Note: the list is not exhaustive – just a brief guide!!)