

Judging at Club Meetings

Judging

- The club provides an atmosphere for learning, with the opportunity for association with others with similar interests, instructive programs, workshops, and club competition. Club competition provides the primary tool offered for members to improve their photographic skills by viewing the work of fellow members, and receiving reviews and comments on their own work. Meaningful competition requires committed and skilled photographic judging.
- Our club believes there is value, both in having your work judged, as well as being responsible for judging the work of others. Both of these activities challenge members to improve their knowledge and skills in the technology and art of photography. Thus, the club expects members to contribute through accepting the responsibility of judging when asked.

The Responsibility and Value of Judging

- We owe it to our fellow members to provide meaningful feedback, both through the judging process as well as any discussions addressing their work.
- While the photographic skills, experience, and education differ among members, this does not take away from the responsibility the member has accepted by volunteering to judge. This is part of the learning process.
- Thus by volunteering to judge, you are agreeing to accept the responsibility of taking the time to develop the skills and knowledge required to provide a meaningful assessment of a fellow club members' work. In fairness, if asked, you should be willing to give reasons for your assessment and offer constructive commentary. When commenting on an image, judges should strive to respect the dignity of the maker, recognizing the positive elements of the image, giving commentary that is uplifting and helpful while still being honest about the perceived weaknesses. This all requires thought and effort, a challenge for both the participant and the judge.

The Challenge of Scoring

- While a judge should be sensitive to the maker's feelings, the judge must be honest. Some judges are not willing to give a low score, or any negative feedback, because they fear that such will be demoralizing to the maker. A judge giving inflated "feel good" scores should realize that this unwillingness to give a deserved low score often results in the demoralization of another maker, one whose work truly deserved the higher score and is now having his or her work placed on the same level as a decidedly worse image. True learning does not come from false complements (or inflated scores), but honest appraisals.
- Recognizing that photography skills and art for various subject matter vary greatly, the club offers a number of Print and Projected Divisions. Some Divisions are further divided by Classes: Beginners Class (B), and Advanced Class (A). The definitions and restrictions for the various Divisions and Classes are clearly defined on the club's website. *These

should be studied and understood prior to judging. These issues are important, as they challenge the judge to be knowledgeable of the unique definitions for each Division, as well as the technical expertise and artistic talent to be expected for each type of photography Pictorial Color, Pictorial Monochrome, Nature, Photojournalism, and Photo Travel.

* <http://www.oklahomacameraclub.com/generalrules.html>

- The different Classes recognize the learning process in photography. Beginners are challenged to learn how to use the camera and photographic computer programs available, no different than artists, painters, sculptors, or writers are challenged to learn how to use the tools of their mediums. The challenge of judging must recognize beginners work focuses more on learning the craft of photography, while the work of the advanced should show more of the advanced technical competency and artistic values expected. The judge should recognize the difference in expectations by Class. While it is expected the overall scores in the Beginners class will not be as high as the advanced, it is just as appropriate for a score of 5 being assigned to an outstanding image in the Beginners Class as it is in the Advanced.
- Every effort should be made to judge without bias as to the subject matter, the maker, the technique employed, the difficulty of the shot, or what has been seen previously. A judge will undoubtedly be faced with the challenge of having to objectively judge subjects not favored, makers whose work is recognized, images already seen previously, subjects the judge has photographed, etc. While there is, undeniably, always some unconscious bias in every human being, judges should be personally committed to trying to be as objective and unbiased as possible. As much as everyone would like scoring and judging to be an exact science, it must be recognized that it is a personal assessment of an art form.
- The judges must understand the definitions for each division. If an entry violates these definitions, such as the improper showing of the hand of man in a nature image, the improper use of color in a monochrome division, it should be disqualified, not scored, and withdrawn from the competition. *[In our club, consultation consensus among all the judges is required prior to a disqualification (DG) being assigned.]*

Image Evaluation - assessing skill, craft, and artistry

- All photographic composition instruction includes the basic guidelines for good composition, the *rule of thirds*, *leading lines*, use of the *spiral curve*, *meaningful placement of the horizon*, etc. Without question, these guidelines provide meaningful guidance for the photographer for making the image. However, the judge must recognize they are judging the photographers work as shown in the image, not how these guidelines have been used, if at all. A judge is asked not only to be analytical, using long accepted standards of what makes a technically good image, but also to be open to freshness, artistry, and new visions.
- Three criteria the judges should evaluate include the *Impact*, *Technique*, and *Composition* of an image, individually as well as how they work together. The judge must evaluate each image to ensure they have properly valued the expected contribution each of the three criteria.
 - *Impact* - this is the "wow" factor. This involves a combination of

imagination, subject selection, and subject presentation. Ask yourself, how does the image make you feel; did it "knock your socks off". Impact might include originality, imagination, subject, mood, humor, fear, etc. A judge should not need to spend a lot of time debating impact, an image either has it or it doesn't.

- Technique - focus, depth of field, lighting, color rendition, exposure, contrast, quality of the print or projected image, and the presentation of the image. With the vast array of programs available to modify or create an image, the judge must ask, does the technique used enhance or detract from the image message.
- Composition - the psychology and feelings in the correct arrangement of a photograph. This is the arrangement of all elements within the picture area. Is the subject matter shown in such a way that the image is a harmonious, well-balanced photograph, conveying a clear feeling or message to the viewer.

Scoring

- The club's scoring system requires the judge to assign a value of 1 (the lowest) to 5 (the highest) to each image. As our time is limited, we do not include commentary by the judges during the judging process. We encourage members to ask judges for their comments following the judging during breaks or following the meeting. The club schedules programs for the meaningful exchange of questions and answers that address judging along with the constructive assessment of members' images.
- **Score of One**

The score of one is highly unlikely and very rarely used. For the judges to award a score of one, the image must have several extremely serious flaws creating an image with the subject difficult to recognize. This may be created by extremely poor exposure and/or significant motion or clutter. Very few images should receive the score of one.
- **Score of Two**

This is an image that would have been a three if it were not for a significant flaw. The flaw might be, over or under exposure, a subject that might be out of focus when it needed to be in focus, an unintentionally blurred image because of subject or camera movement, composition which is cluttered to the point of distraction, or distracting elements which are overwhelming.
- **Score of Three**

A score of 3 would be awarded to an image that has no significant technical flaws, but which likewise has no significant strengths. Such an image is often referred to as a "record shot." It is acceptable, but does not generate any special interest or stir emotions. It is the quality of image we would expect most hobbyists would be able to take as a minimum standard. It has the technical proficiency that modern auto-exposure, auto-focus cameras allow. However it lacks those elements towards which all photographers strive for: achieving technical excellence, showing a knowledge of the importance of choice of subject, of good lighting, of dramatic composition, of handling depth of field effectively, of eliciting emotional impact, or exhibiting freshness and creativity.

➤ **Score of Four**

This is a good solid image; an image all members should be striving for as a minimum. Such an image is technically correct and more. It exhibits at least one element towards which photographers working at photographic art should be striving, showing a knowledge of the importance of choice of subject, of good lighting, of dramatic composition, of handling depth of field effectively, of eliciting emotional impact, of exhibiting freshness and creativity. The judge must recognize the nature and importance of these elements will vary by division of competition.

➤ **Score of Five**

An image worthy of a score of five must be an exceptionally strong image, true photographic excellence. While it need not be a "perfect" image, it does need to exceed just technical competence, it should convey strong emotion or recognizable story. The elements of the image must work together to form a whole that is far greater than the sum of the parts. There should not be any obvious flaws. In an effort to convey the image's message, it will likely include technical achievements such as difficult exposures, effective use of selective focusing and depth of field, as well as other advanced photographic techniques. The image exhibits many, if not all, of the elements expected for the score of four. While the score of five should not be given out without very good reason as it implies true photographic excellence, when a judge feels awestruck and immediately falls in love with it, he/she should give it a five with no apologies to anyone. Makers should not be made to feel that a five is impossible to achieve.

- One of the best compliments judges can receive is that their scoring is consistent. No matter whether an individual judges' scores, as a whole, are perceived as "high" or "low," the audience comes away satisfied because consistency allows them to understand that the judge has a particular point of view and applies it fairly and with uniformity throughout. However, consistency should not be confused with the unwillingness to risk giving a score other than three. Judges should use a full range of scores and should be supported when they are willing to objectively to do so. Each judge will have her or his own unique personal perspective which can be just as valid as that of the judge who chooses a different score. That is the primary justification for using three judges.