

The Judging Process

Draft 4

June 2021

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DPAGB LRPS BPE4* EFIAP

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Introduction

The judging process is the subject of many assumptions and frustrations and is often not explained or fully understood by many of the participants from either side of the process which often leads to dissatisfaction from all the interested parties.

This document is based on my own personal experiences as a judge, a chairman, and as a competition participant. It is not meant to be the definitive answer, but to get everybody to think more deeply about the competition process.

This document is not meant to be static and dead, but is intended to be a living document and will continue to be updated and improved over time as more feedback is received and integrated.

Please do feel free to reach out and share your feedback with martinpatten@outlook.com

I also want to thank Chris Forster, Damon Guy, Peter Prosser, Terri Adcock, Steve Galvin and Kath Phillips for their input and feedback to this document.

Purpose of the Document

This document, whilst not exhaustive, has been written to help participants understand more about the judging process. Generally, the implicit aims, needs and purposes of the judging process are not well understood and many participants in the process understandably only look from their narrow perspective. If the judging process is to be successful, we need to improve the level of understanding of the whole process.

This document was designed for:-

- Judges (New and Old)
- Competition participants (Beginners through to advanced)
- Club Committee Members

How to use this Document

This document is designed to be shared with the participants in the competition process. Using it to level the playing field within a club might be extremely useful. Either presenting or sharing a PDF and then having an open discussion about the judging process could help everyone: -

- Understand more about the process
- Understand the implicit needs of the process from different perspectives
- Reduce their frustration with the process
- Increase their satisfaction of the competition process

I might even go so far as to suggest that clubs engage with a senior respected judge to help facilitate and lead this discussion on a club evening to explore the topics raised in this document.

Photographic Assumptions

Reasons for photography

Photographers take images for many different reasons.

- Documentation – photographs to record details or memories
- Commercial – photographs produced to a customer brief
- Artistic – photographs for personal expression and interpretation
- Fun – to share with my friends and social media
- Competition – photographs to be compared and ranked against expected (or Club) standards

These reasons are not exclusive, and any photograph may contain a blend of the reasons listed above. Images taken solely for one of the reasons above may not be suitable/successful in a photographic competition.

Competition Assumptions

Assumption 1

Generally, there are a few reasons photographers enter competitions

- 1) Images carefully crafted and chosen to win the competition
- 2) Images the author would like feedback on
- 3) Images to participate in the process

Often the reason is driven by the experience and time spent within a camera club so may be different for beginners through to advanced members/photographers.

Assumption 2

Generally, there is an expected standard for competition photographs which is not always understood by all members. The standard may be different for beginner and experienced sections and different for club competitions and exhibitions. The standard may change with time as new processes, styles and trends become accepted. The standard will be influenced by photographic judges, current standards styles, and influences.

Assumption 3

Every club is different. The standard within a club can and often does vary to large extent. The overall quality of a club in comparison to others can also vary dramatically. The way competitions are integrated into a club's programme can make a huge difference in how seriously or not competitions are taken.

Expected Standards

This table is to give some examples of the difference between the standard levels most clubs use today.

	Beginner	Advanced	Exhibition
Consideration Time	The judge has a couple of minutes to assess each picture and give feedback	The judge has a minute to assess each picture and give feedback	Selectors have seconds to assess each picture
Subject Matter	Maybe biased to just recording the subject or for feedback only	Anything and everything, but typically crafted to compete	Anything and everything, but carefully chosen and crafted to compete
Technical Quality of entries	Expect some technical problems	There may be a few minor technical issues	Nearly always exceptional
Apparent User Input	This may not be obvious	It should be possible to see the choices made, both at the moment of capture and during any postproduction	Obvious personal choices in view, instant “wow” factor. Usually, an uncomplicated picture with a strong story, lighting, composition
Emotive Connection	Often limited by the choice of subject matter	The judge should connect with the image at some level	Instant “wow” factor. Usually, an uncomplicated picture with a strong story
Feedback	<p>Feedback should offer advice on subject matter, approach, and postproduction to give more ownership of the image.</p> <p>Technical issues should be addressed with succinct and constructive feedback.</p> <p>Feedback could include suggestions to improve the emotional connection</p>	<p>Should offer suggestions to improve content, composition, and editing.</p> <p>Suggestions to improve the technical quality may also be required</p>	No individual feedback
Scoring	Scoring against the other images in the class. Scoring may be on the generous side to encourage the participants	A wide and consistent set of scores to reflect the range of quality in the competition.	Scoring is largely down to gut reaction informed by experience, expectation and feeling

Why we need photographic judges

For the club

- To rank pictures
- To provide entertainment and interest
- To bring standards from other clubs and the photographic world

For the photographer

- To understand how their photograph compares with the expected standard
- To gain encouragement and education (beginner)
- To gain incentive (experienced)

What does the photographic judge need to be aware of?

- The bedrock definition and assumptions 1, 2 and 3
- Achievable technical quality of an image
- Expected standard of photography for each competition/entrant/class
- How to effectively communicate judgements to an audience
- How to empathise with the emotion and the experiences of the entrants
- Understanding of standards of photography across clubs and the region
- The requirement to deliver appropriate constructive critique

The Judging process

Introduction

To fully understand the judging process, we must understand the implicit needs of the participants who both run and enter competitions.

Included in appendix 1 are a set of tables designed to help all the interested parties fully understand the needs of the judging process. I would encourage you to read this before continuing further in this document.

Clubs direction

Clubs need to decide why they are holding competitions and how they integrate with the overall direction of the club. Clubs can have vastly different aims and directions based on the wants and needs of their members. Some clubs are extremely competitive and want to enter external competitions, some clubs just want to improve their members photography and some clubs just want to have fun and some a combination of all these factors.

Club briefing

Clubs should consider briefing judges before a competition to ensure a close alignment between the clubs aims and the judging process. Here are some examples of what might be included in a briefing discussion/document.

- Expected scoring range
- Set subject guidance (see next section)
- Judge only against what is shown or Judge to an expected standard
- Guidance on the balance of technical and artistic feedback
- Balance of time between the general and any advanced group

A good briefing will ensure that the competition process supports the aims and directions of the club

Set Subjects

Set subjects are always an interesting competition. However, additional thought and briefing maybe required.

The club should supply a description of the set subject. This should include their guidance for images that do not meet the set subject in the judge's view.

The Judge may want to consider how they will judge against the briefing and the subject. Additional research maybe required to familiarise themselves with the subject.

My personal method is to imagine a book about "The Subject" then try to decide if the image would be included or not.

Judges opening statements

To maximise the satisfaction of the competition process we would suggest that the judge delivers an opening statement before they start judging. The judges briefing should align with the club briefing

- How they will be judging the images (club verses expected standard)
- How they will be scoring the images (explaining the mid-point can be especially useful)
- What the club has asked them to focus on
- Explaining what they will be looking for in the images
- How they will be evaluating the compliance to any set subject

What a club should expect from a judge

A club should expect the following from a judge before and during the judging process

- Accurate communications during the booking process
- Punctuality before and during the competition
- Alignment with the club briefing, including scoring range
- A fair, balanced, and unbiased judging of the images irrespective of subject or genre
- A rich and a varied vocabulary of language and appropriate terms
- The ability to give a varied and wide-ranging set of critique and constructive suggestions for improvement at the appropriate level being judged
- The avoidance of inappropriate comments or phrases

What a judge should expect from a club

A judge should expect the following from a club before and during the judging process

- Accurate communications during the booking process
- A timely reminder 1-2 weeks before the judging to include
 - location
 - Parking
 - start times
 - finish times
 - Zoom log in details timing etc.
 - A club briefing (Including scoring range)
- Common visitor courtesies
 - A welcome
 - An appropriate introduction of the judge (may include Qualifications)
 - A drink of water / refreshments
 - A thank you on the night
- A thank you after the evening (Email)
- Feedback if requested by the judge or federation
- Timely and unprompted payment of expenses on the night

Summary

The judging process has been around for many years. The level of understanding between the various stakeholders varies dramatically. This document should help create alignment, understanding and reduce the frustration of competitions for all the relevant stakeholders.

Appendix 1

Audience needs

Audience	Implicit Need	Judging Process delivers
The Club	The direction of the club	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Align with the stated aim of the club • Change the balance of the judging • Scoring alignment to the aims
	Assign a winner at the end of a season	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adhere to club scoring requirements • Consistent scoring scheme and range between judges • “Best” images scored highest • Broad range of scores to differentiate the quality of the images on the night
	Engage members in the competition process	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Open and encompassing approach • Supportive and encouraging commentary • Broad understanding of photography • Balanced approach between technical and Aesthetic appreciation of images • All styles judged appropriately and without personal bias
	Encourage member participation in competitions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Constructive feedback where appropriate • Avoid negative/destructive commentary • Avoid any negative Judge position (pontification, belittling of work, genre bias etc) • Do not focus on “camera club” style • Balance the weighting of perfection & Image impact/strength • Openness to new or different styles
	Produce high quality images for external competition (by this club)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The best images scored highest • Balanced approach between technical and aesthetic appreciation of images
	Entertainment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All the above • Engaging and confident presentation style • Lively but serious • Excellent critique • Elucidate, educate, entertain
	Improve members photography	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Explain what the criteria of a genre is as part of the process • Understand the language of critique • Deliver suggestions of improvements to help at the taking and the editing stage
	Experienced Members	Provide a challenge/reason to

	produce images	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Images scored appropriately • No genre bias
	Education / improvement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Balanced approach between technical and aesthetic appreciation of images • Good understanding of the genres • Ability to make “advanced” constructive feedback • Ability to make “advanced” improvement suggestions • Understand the language of critique
New or improving Members	New members want to participate	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Open and encouraging style • Constructive feedback where appropriate • Avoid negative/destructive commentary • Avoid any negative Judge position (pontification, belittling of work, genre bias etc) • Acknowledgement of new and emerging styles • Do not focus on “camera club” images • Balance the weighting of perfection & Image impact • Encourage new members to strive to improve their photography
	Education/improvement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Balanced approach between technical and aesthetic appreciation of images • Understanding of the genres to broaden their education • Ability to make “simple” constructive suggestions • Ability to make “simple” improvement suggestions • Suggestions for further exploration • Understand the language of critique • Explaining competition standards as per the club briefing