



Image Judging & Critique Guidelines

Scoring Groups

Exceptional 95-100

Superior 90-94

Excellent 85-89

Deserving of Merit 80-84

Above Average 75-79

Average 73-75

Acceptable 70-72

Marginal 60-69

Below Standard 0-60

		<u>Guide to placing in Scoring Groups</u>	
		<u>General Guidelines for the Judges/Jurors</u> <u>>>>>></u>	Technical elements are Objective. All other Elements are Subjective. Because of subjectivity judges will have different opinions but they must leave their personal prejudices at the door. Judges first decide level and then a score in that level. <u>Judges are duty bound to challenge scoring discrepancies and discuss their supporting factors or concerns that may move an image up or down.</u> Make your point or counterpoint via the challenge and listen to other judges carefully. To maintain integrity of the system scores must be accurate in their assesment. For general guidelines see PPA Juror Charge video. http://www.ppa.com/competitions/content.cfm?ItemNumber=7430
	1% 50%	Exceptional 95-100	At the last Northeast district PPA comp only 2 out of 600 received a 100 score or 1/3rd of 1%. These images are hitting on all 12 cylinders/elements.
		Superior 90-94	<u>Only 1% reach a Superior or Exceptional Level.</u> The Cream of the Crop. These are images I would buy. These images must be unique. The technical qualities must be perfect. They will vary only in Impact or visual delight.
		Excellent 85-89	A step above a merit image but not quite Superior or Exceptional.
		Deserving of Merit 80-84	50% are this level or above. These are images I would hang if they were mine. A merit image is a very good image with virtually no faults . Technically they should be excellent with the only real difference in Impact and Creativity and Style. <u>Merit worthy images must be strong in all 12 elements.</u> The pros strive for Merit Images and are proud when they receive this level.
	50%	Above Average 75-79	50% are this level or below. Very good images that may have some technical issues or lack in presentation or creativity. These images may be very strong technically but lack impact or uniqueness. <u>These images can be missing the mark in one or several of the 12 elements.</u>
		Average 73-75	
		Acceptable 70-72	
		Marginal 60-69	
		Below Standard 0-60	

The Twelve Elements for FLCC Judging Criteria Sorted Into 4 Judging Categories

Impact, Subject, Story Telling

1. Impact is the sense one gets upon viewing an image for the first time. Compelling images evoke laughter, sadness, anger, pride, wonder or another emotion. There can be impact in any of these twelve elements.

9. Subject Matter should always be appropriate to the story being told in an image.

12. Story Telling refers to the image's ability to evoke imagination. One beautiful thing about art is that each viewer might collect his own message or read her own story in an image.

Creativity, Style, Presentation, Technique

2. Creativity is the original, fresh, and external expression of the imagination of the maker by using the medium to convey an idea, message or thought.

6. Style is defined in a number of ways as it applies to a creative image. It might be defined by a specific genre or simply be recognizable as the characteristics of how a specific artist applies light to a subject. It can impact an image in a positive manner when the subject matter and the style are appropriate for each other, or it can have a negative effect when they are at odds.

7. Print or Digital Presentation affects an image by giving it a finished look. The mats and borders used should support and enhance the image, not distract from it.

11. Technique is the approach used to create the image. Printing, lighting, posing, capture, presentation media, and more are part of the technique applied to an image.

Technical, Light, Color Balance

3. Technical excellence is quality of the image itself as it is presented for viewing. Retouching, manipulation, sharpness/softness, exposure, printing, mounting, and correct color are some items that speak to the qualities of the digital image or print.

5. Lighting—the use and control of light—refers to how dimension, shape and roundness are defined in an image. Whether the light applied

to an image is man made or natural, proper use of it should enhance an image.

10. Color Balance supplies harmony to an image. An image, in which the tones work together, effectively supporting the image, can enhance its emotional appeal. Color balance is not always harmonious and can be used to evoke diverse feelings for effect.

Composition, Center of Interest

4. Composition is important to the design of an image, bringing all of the visual elements together in concert to express the purpose of the image. Proper composition holds the viewer in the image and prompts the viewer to look where the creator intends. Effective composition can be pleasing or disturbing, depending on the intent of the image-maker.

8. Center of Interest is the point or points on the image where the maker wants the viewer to stop as they view the image. There can be primary and secondary centers of interest. Occasionally there will be no specific center of interest, when the entire scene collectively serves as the center of interest

The Twelve Elements for Judging Criteria

1. **Impact** is the sense one gets upon viewing an image for the first time. Compelling images evoke laughter, sadness, anger, pride, wonder or another emotion. There can be impact in any of these twelve elements.
2. **Creativity** is the original, fresh, and external expression of the imagination of the maker by using the medium to convey an idea, message or thought.
3. **Technical excellence** is quality of the image itself as it is presented for viewing. Retouching, manipulation, sharpness/softness, exposure, printing, mounting, and correct color are some items that speak to the qualities of the digital image or print.
4. **Composition** is important to the design of an image, bringing all of the visual elements together in concert to express the purpose of the image. Proper composition holds the viewer in the image and prompts the viewer to look where the creator intends. Effective composition can be pleasing or disturbing, depending on the intent of the image-maker.
5. **Lighting**—the use and control of light—refers to how dimension, shape and roundness are defined in an image. Whether the light applied to an image is man made or natural, proper use of it should enhance an image.
6. **Style** is defined in a number of ways as it applies to a creative image. It might be defined by a specific genre or simply be recognizable as the characteristics of how a specific artist applies light to a subject. It can impact an image in a positive manner when the subject matter and the style are appropriate for each other, or it can have a negative effect when they are at odds.
7. **Print or Digital Presentation** affects an image by giving it a finished look. The mats and borders used should support and enhance the image, not distract from it.
8. **Center of Interest** is the point or points on the image where the maker wants the viewer to stop as they view the image. There can be primary and secondary centers of interest. Occasionally there will be no specific center of interest, when the entire scene collectively serves as the center of interest.
9. **Subject Matter** should always be appropriate to the story being told in an image.
10. **Color Balance** supplies harmony to an image. An image, in which the tones work together, effectively supporting the image, can enhance its emotional appeal. Color balance is not always harmonious and can be used to evoke diverse feelings for effect.

11. **Technique** is the approach used to create the image. Printing, lighting, posing, capture, presentation media, and more are part of the technique applied to an image.
12. **Story Telling** refers to the image's ability to evoke imagination. One beautiful thing about art is that each viewer might collect his own message or read her own story in an image.

Redefining the 12 Elements of a Merit Image

The world of photographic competitions can seem like a tricky place to navigate. How can pieces of artwork be judged? Isn't it all up to aesthetics and personal preference? On the surface it would seem so, but overall there are 12 elements that have stood the test of time to make an art piece or image successful - regardless of personal taste. We're here to give you the road map (of sorts) to create the most successful images so that you can merit at your next competition!

1. Impact:

Definition: the sense one gets upon viewing an image for the first time.

Compelling images evoke laughter, sadness, anger, pride, wonder or another intense emotion. There can be impact in any of these 12 elements.

What it really means: This is the eye candy, the wow factor, the reason we love it. We enjoy art because it moves us. It makes us feel something-whether it brings us joy, sadness or anger (or any other emotion aside from blasé for that matter). What emotions does your piece make people feel? This can also be described as the "wow-factor," it draws a person in and captivates their attention.

2. Technical excellence:

Definition: the print quality of the image itself as it is presented for viewing.

Retouching, manipulation, sharpness/softness, exposure, printing, mounting and correct color are some items that speak to the qualities of the image.

What it really means: This is the nuts and bolts of photography.

Exposure, focus, lighting, Photoshop skills, and so much more! It's what makes you a pro. But you can take it too far--be wary of going too far with corrections.

3. Creativity:

Definition: the original, fresh, and external expression of the imagination of the maker by using the medium to convey an idea, message or thought.

What it really means: In photographic competitions, you get bonus points for creativity and originality. Stand out! Look at an ordinary subject and find an extraordinary way to portray it.

4. Style:

Definition: defined in a number of ways as it applies to a creative image. It might be defined by a specific genre or simply be recognizable as the characteristics of how a specific artist applies light to a subject. It can impact an image in a positive manner when the subject matter and the style are appropriate for each other, or it can have a negative effect when they are at odds.

What it really means: Your work can be anything from traditional to surreal, candid to abstract. What style does your work fall into? Is it a great representation of that style?

5. Composition:

Definition: is important to the design of an image, bringing all of the visual elements together in concert to express the purpose of the image. Proper composition holds the viewer in the image and prompts the viewer to look where the creator intends. Effective composition can be pleasing or disturbing, depending on the intent of the image-maker.

What it really means: Do you follow the standard rules of composition? When you break them, does it enhance the image? Don't break the rules just to be cool--only go rogue if it enhances the image. And don't be afraid to break the rules.

6. Presentation:

Definition: affects an image by giving it a finished look. The mats and borders used should support and enhance the image, not distract from it.

What it really means: Even in a digital age, applying borders to your work can either make or break your image. Try a few different treatments and see what they enhance, but do not take away from the image. As you can see from the examples throughout this post, it's best to keep it simple, but customized for each image.

7. Color Harmony:

Definition: supplies harmony to an image. An image, in which the tones work together, effectively supporting the image, can enhance its emotional appeal. Color balance is not always harmonious and can be used to evoke diverse feelings for effect.

What it really means: Are your colors and corrections pleasing to the eye? Do they look like they belong together? It doesn't mean you have to

go monochromatic, but don't go crazy with tones and shades that distract from the image.

8. Center of Interest:

Definition: the point or points on the image where the maker wants the viewer to stop as they view the image. There can be primary and secondary centers of interest. Occasionally there will be no specific center of interest, when the entire scene collectively serves as the center of interest.

What it really means: Center of interest can be very subtle or very strong, regardless; they draw your focus into the image and allow the eyes to pause in certain, preconceived areas.

9. Lighting:

Definition: the use and control of light refers to how dimension, shape and roundness are defined in an image. Whether the light applied to an image is man made or natural, proper use should enhance an image.

What it really means: This is the stuff that separates the professionals from the amateurs. The strength of your subjects should be portrayed because of the strong lighting choices you utilize.

10. Subject Matter:

Definition: should always be appropriate to the story being told in an image.

What it really means: The subject matter keeps it interesting and appropriate. Just because it's pretty, doesn't mean it's right.

11. Technique:

Definition: the approach used to create the image. Printing, lighting, posing, capture, presentation media and more are part of the technique applied to an image.

What it really means: Techniques are not only after capture manipulation but they can be camera angle, lens choice, a certain style such as forced perspective.

12. Story Telling:

Definition: refers to the image's ability to evoke imagination. One beautiful thing about art is that each viewer might collect his own message or read her own story in an image.

What it really means: It's always great to take a step back to see what kind of stories your images can create. Imagine it is the first time you're seeing your work--what would the stories behind the image look like?

Although many of these image elements are important on their own, it's also necessary to remember in more than one case, they overlap. Your subject matter directly relates to your story, your technique and color balance are also equally intertwined. It goes to show that in order to have a merit-worthy image, your work has to be strong on all 12 elements.

10 Secret Rules to Judging

1. Sharpening is a Two Sided Blade

The judges want the main elements of an image to be sharp. So for instance, if it is a portrait, the eyes, and lips need to be sharp. There are numerous ways to sharpen an image. Unfortunately some of them cause more problems than they fix. Sometimes sharpening will cause haloing, a herringbone pattern or white sharpening lines, all of which are bad. You need to sharpen your images without creating these negative side effects.

2. Details, Details, Details

The judges really like to see details in every piece of your image. So that means no cloudless skies and no blank or totally white areas. The exception is if you have successfully extracted your image and placed it on a completely white background for impact. If you do extract elements of your image, or create a composite, your masking has to be perfect and undetectable.

3. Controlling the Light

No hot spots whatsoever! The brightest part of the image needs to be the subject. Do whatever you need to do to tone down the puddles of light in your image. It can be painting, cloning, healing, whatever, but non-uniform bright spots will hurt your score. There can't be blown highlights or bright reflections...Also be careful with lens flares.

4. Presentation

You will hear the judges talk about 'presentation'. All this means is every projected image needs to have a mat and/or a stroke between the image and the mat. Printed images need a mat either cut to fit or created with the image file that is then printed out as part of the image.

5. Contrast

Blacks need to be truly black and whites need to be truly white, whether the image is produced in color or black and white. You also need to have a good tonal range between those two points. If you haven't already studied Ansel Adams' zone system, do so. For most images you need to make sure you have tonal representation for each zone. There are exceptions such as a foggy or low contrast image.

6. Saturation

The average person likes heavily saturated images. There are exceptions, but in general go easy on the wild colors.

7. Delicate Darkening and Lightening

There are numerous ways to darken and lighten aspects of an image. Even if the light makes sense in the story of the image, you will often hear a judge complaining about how the eye is drawn to a particular area of light. You want to draw the eye to the most important element of the image without being obvious. Learn to dodge and burn in subtle yet effective ways.

8. Composition

Google the Rule of Thirds, Donald Duck Golden Mean, Fibonacci; they all say sort of the same thing different ways. Off center creates tension, and therefore impact. But I've also heard judges grumble about 'there's too much room to the right' (or left or above). I know what the artist was doing, setting the image off center. But just setting it off center isn't enough; it has to make sense in the story. For instance if the image is of a boat, the extra space has to be in the direction the boat is moving, not above the boat or behind it. Just setting the image off center doesn't necessarily improve it.

And of course there are always exceptions, sometime dead center works, and when it does it can be magical.

9. Remove Distractions without being Obvious

Many images start out with distracting elements. It is our job as artists to remove them. If you clone, make sure there are no repeating patterns, if you patched make sure the tonal range matches, if you used the heal tool make sure there is still texture.

10. Be Prepared for Criticism

Listening to the judging, even when they aren't your images can be painful. I actually find that I learn more when I am listening to other people's images get judged, because I don't have any skin in the game. I am more objective when I view other people images. Use the comments to improve your own work.

Judging Terms

Aberration – Failing in the ability of a lens to produce a true image. There are many forms of aberration

and the lens designer can often correct some only allowing others to remain.

1. Distortion – pin cushion or barrel distortion, where lines may be distorted curved inward or out ward.
2. Chromatic Aberration – this aberration is caused by light rays of different wavelengths coming into focus at different distances from the lens. Blue will focus at the shortest distance and red at the greatest distance. Since the natural rays of light are a mixture of colors, each aberration will give a different value corresponding to each color producing blurred images with the various colors bordering opposite sides of the central image.

Artifacts - refer to a range of undesirable changes to a digital image caused by the sensor, optics, and internal image processing algorithms of the camera.

Banding – There are two types of banding referred to in judging. Print Banding and Banding Noise.

1. Print Banding – is a linear pattern that shows up in large areas of consistent colors such as the sky in an image. Print banding is commonly caused by the ink from one pass of the print head drying too quickly before the next pass can be made causing the inks from the two passes not to blend properly.
2. Digital Noise Banding - is highly camera-dependent, and is noise which is introduced by the camera when it reads data from the digital sensor. Banding noise is most visible at high ISO speeds and in the shadows, or when an image has been excessively brightened. Banding noise can also increase for certain white balances, depending on camera model.

Blocked Up – The loss of shadow detail. An area of an image is considered to be blocked up when a shadow area loses its separation of tone or detail. Detail is not always necessary in a shadow area, this can be seen in many successful paintings and photographs. However if there is information in the

shadow area that is important to the story or the image, proper exposure and printing should be used to maintain that detail.

Blown Out – A highlight area in an image that has NO detail. There are highlights that are acceptable to be without detail such as a specular highlight on a chrome bumper. Generally it is unacceptable to loose detail in highlights on a face, clothing, or on most any other object where highlight detail is important to the viewer to discern important information.

Burn – Originally a technique used in the darkroom to darken (burn in) an area. This was achieved in the darkroom by allowing light to strike specific areas of the paper longer than the overall exposure time during printing. Many times an image will have the outside edges / corners burned in or darkened to draw the viewers eye to the subject. Burning / Darkening can be a useful tool if used properly with a subtle touch.

Section V I Competition Rules & Entry Information rev. 1/4/15 DAH Page 95

Cloning Tracks / Marks – The obvious or sometimes not so obvious but visible repetition of a pattern or item created when the image has had not so great use of the cloning tool or healing brush in photoshop applied. Cloning is generally distracting once it is spotted.

Color Balance - In photography and image processing, color balance is the global adjustment of the intensities of the colors (typically red, green, and blue primary colors). An important goal of this adjustment is to render specific colors – particularly neutral colors – correctly; hence, the general method is sometimes called gray balance, neutral balance, or white balance. Color balance changes the overall mixture of colors in an image and is used for color correction; generalized versions of color balance are used to get colors other than neutrals to also appear correct or pleasing.

Color Shifting – A color cast that is incorrect or unusual for a particular subject or object in some or all of the image. Color shifting is often times caused by poor white balance, under or over exposure, photoshop plug-ins, and filter effects.

Contrast - The range of difference in the light to dark areas of an image (also called density); the brightness range of a subject or the scene lighting. It may

be also explained as tonal difference. Or another way to explain, a difference in visual brilliance between one part of the image and another; without contrast, there would be no such thing as a visible image; a line in a photograph is visible only because it is either darker or lighter in tone than the background; every distinguishable part of the image is the result of a contrast in tonal values.

Contrived – Obviously planned or calculated; not spontaneous or natural; labored.

Depth of Field - The zone of acceptable sharpness in front of and behind the subject on which the lens is focused; extends approx. one-third in front of and two thirds behind the in-focus subject; dependent on three factors: aperture, focal length, and focused distance; the wider the aperture, the longer the focal length, and the closer the focused distance, the less the depth of field, and vice versa; in comparison to a normal lens, wide angle lenses have inherently more depth of field at each f-number and telephoto lenses have less.

Since this element is very important, another simpler way to explain is the amount of distance between the nearest and farthest objects that appear in acceptably sharp focus in a photograph. Depth of field is determined by the lens opening, the focal length of the lens, and the distance from the lens to the subject or can explain as in simpler term as the zone of sharpest focus in front of, behind, and around the subject on which the lens is focused; can be previewed in the camera - very handy for critical work.

d-max. – The maximum density (blackness), a particular paper or negative can deliver. **d-min.** – The minimum density (whiteness), a particular paper or negative can deliver.

Dodge – Originally a technique used in the darkroom to lighten an area (dodge) an area. This was done by holding back light from the enlarger from striking the paper in the area to be lightened for a part of the exposure time during printing.

Section V I Competition Rules & Entry Information rev. 1/4/15 DAH Page 96

Flare -An overall decrease in contrast caused by light being reflected off, instead of transmitted through, a lens surface; controllable through the use of

multilayer coating of individual lens elements in a lens; aggravated by unclean lens surfaces on front and rear lens elements or filters.

Flat – An image lacking good contrast range. Also an image may become flat when it is lit poorly or when the light does not strike the subject in a way to create depth and dimension.

Fringing – an undesirable “rim” that surrounds areas of high contrast in a digital image. The most common is “purple fringing” or color fringing. Also referred to as “Chromatic Aberration”.

Halation /Ghosting – A glow or contrasting tone edging subjects or lines. Usually caused through the use of soft focus filters, or softening effects applied in photoshop. There are many other methods or techniques that can cause this problem. The same as “aberration”.

Keyhole Effect - The overuse of dodging or burning creating a “keyhole”. **Keyline** – The border or stroke line or lines added around an image. Key lines are often used to separate the image area from the border or presentation.

Light Ratio – is the difference in exposure between the highlight side of the subject and the shadow side of the subject. and is usually expressed as a ratio (like 2:1, where the highlight side has one stop more light on it than the shadow side, the highlight side has 2 units of light on it compared to the shadow side that has 1 unit of light on it).

Milky – the appearance of an overall weakness in exposure and color saturation. Milkeness may also include a slight overall hazy white to hazy blue color cast that affects the clarity of the image. This is sometimes caused by a poor spray finish or a poor laminate finish.

Muddy – Weak or lacking good tonal quality or saturation in some or all of the mid tone to shadow areas of the image.

Noise – noise is the digital equivalent of film grain. It shows up on digital photographs as small colored blotches, usually in the darker areas of an image. Noise often goes overlooked in snapshots, but becomes very obvious if enlargements are made. Noise is worse in digital photos taken in low light.

It can be removed to some extent by software, but a better quality digital camera will usually produce less noise in the first place. Whereas film grain can add atmosphere to a photograph, digital noise is generally considered to be unattractive. Digital photographers looking for a “grainy” effect aim to start with a clean image (i.e. free from digital noise), and then add the grain effect afterwards using software.

Over Sharpening – This term is used to describe the degradation of an image when you can see a “halo” or strong contrasting line along the edge of contrast boundaries.

Section V I Competition Rules & Entry Information rev. 1/4/15 DAH Page 97

Perspective Distortion - takes two forms:

extension distortion and compression distortion, also called wide-angle distortion and long-lens or telephoto distortion, when talking about images with the same size. Extension or wide angle distortion can be seen in images shot from close using a wide-angle lens (with an angle of view wider than a normal lens). Object close to the lens appears abnormally large relative to more distant objects, and distant objects appear abnormally small and hence more distant – distances are extended. (This type of compression normally becomes a problem in portraits, where using too short of a lens distorts facial features).

Compression Distortion - long-lens, or telephoto distortion can be seen in images shot from a distance using a long focus lens or the more common telephoto sub-type (with an angle of view narrower than a normal lens). Distant objects look approximately the same size – closer objects are abnormally small, and more distant objects are abnormally large, and hence the viewer cannot discern relative distances between distant objects – distances are compressed.

Pop – When an image has extremely good contrast, color and exposure values it will visually jump out at you or “pop”.

Posterization - Representation of an image using a relatively very small number of different tones or colors which results in smooth tonal transitions being rendered as bands of different tones with areas of color. Seen where

the color range or grey-scale available are a long way short of what is needed to represent the image realistically e.g. where bit-depth of color monitor is too low.

Soft -politically correct way of saying Out of Focus.. **Specular Highlight** - These are extremely bright spots in a scene, created by a direct reflection of the sun or some other light source (like flash reflecting in a mirror, chrome or any highly reflective surface.)

Under Exposed - A photograph may be described as underexposed when it has a loss of shadow detail, that is, when important dark areas are “muddy” or indistinguishable from black known as “blocked up shadows”. Underexposed images often have a magenta or cyan cast in the shadow areas also.

	<u>Image Name</u>	<u>Score</u>	<u>Impact,Story,Subject</u>	<u>Creat, Pres, Technq, Style</u>	<u>Techncl,Light,Color</u>	<u>Compostn,Centr interest</u>
1						
2						
3						
4						
5						
6						
7						
8						
9						
10						
11						
12						
13						
14						
15						
16						
17						
18						
19						
20						
21						
22						
23						
24						
25						
26						
27						
28						
29						
30						

Judges Summary Work Sheet