



Sharing the Awareness of Nature through Photography

SANP Photography Challenge Guidelines for Judges

SANP Photography Challenges are supposed to be fun for everyone, including the judges. You don't need to be an expert judge or even an experienced judge, but you do need to be an honest and fair judge.

We recognize that judging photography is subjective. To bring some objectivity into this process, we ask that you:

- Respectfully consider each photograph based on the criteria provided here.
- Give credit for what is done well and penalize for poor workmanship [e.g., bad exposure, out-of-focus subject, poor lighting, bad processing, obvious retouching or manipulation (except for an obvious creative technique)], but don't over-penalize for minor flaws.
- Look for balance between the subject matter and technique; neither should overpower the other.
- Reward a creative approach when it is effectively used and provides impact.
- Be as objective as possible, basing your evaluation on the elements explained below.

Photographic Elements to Consider When Judging

Impact—The image has immediate and lasting impact and evokes an emotional response. The photographer's intent is clear. The message is not weakened by competing ideas and distractions. Original and creative choices come from a solid technical foundation. Texture, shape, color, and tone contribute to the overall effect.

Composition—The arrangement or organization of the visual elements of line, form, shape, tone, pattern, color, and texture are done such that they work together to achieve the photographer's purpose. (Edward Weston once said, "Good composition is when the photograph looks right.")

Lighting—The natural lighting captured or supplemental lighting used for the photograph is effective. The photograph captures the full range of light between the highlights and shadows with some detail in both. Good modeling light creates three dimensionality of the subject(s). The lighting captured creates a mood in the image. The lighting and exposure used by the photographer should convey the photographer's message.

Design—Traditional elements of composition (line, form, shape, tone, color) work together to reinforce the photographer's statement. Creative deviations from traditional composition carry the message without being frivolous. The photograph's setting is optimum for the subject and the intent of the image.

Cropping—The apparent cropping eliminates distracting or unnecessary parts of the image to focus the viewer's attention on the subject or emotion in the image. Unusual or nontypical cropping can be effective if it enhances the image's impact or storytelling. (*Tip:* Most often the image being judged has not been cropped enough, but some images are obviously cropped too much.)

Storytelling—The photographer uses many of the elements described above to communicate a message or impart information to the viewer in a visually interesting way. The design of the image should support the obvious subject of the image. The purpose, or story, being communicated to the viewer should be apparent.

Processing—The photographer processes the digital image file to produce the final image. Poor processing techniques can result in obvious flaws. Proper technique can improve image cropping, exposure, color balance, sharpening, and other attributes of the image. Typically, processing techniques should not be apparent in the final image.

Additional Things to Consider

An effective judge should not just think/say, “I don’t like that image.” As a judge, ask yourself why you like or don’t like the image. What has the photographer done that you like/don’t like in the image? Is it good/bad composition, exposure, lighting, etc.? A judge should never score on a like/dislike for a specific subject or technique (e.g., “I hate snakes.” “I love baby birds.” “I dislike motion blurs.”). Score every photograph on the seven elements given above and how well they are used.

In general, as a judge, if you feel that a photograph does not conform to the Challenge rules, it is appropriate to penalize or even disqualify the image, regardless of its overall quality.

Scoring

You will assign a score between 1 and 10 for each entry independently after viewing the images on Zenfolio at the link provided by the Challenge Administrator (Administrator). The relative ranking of each entry will then be determined by the Administrator from the sum of the scores from all judges.

You should use a common philosophy for the range of scores to be assigned. To do otherwise may result in disproportionate weighting of the composite scores by the scores from a single judge. To assure validity in the rankings, it is suggested that you use the following guidelines to score the entries.

- Entries that are similar in quality should receive similar scores.
- Entries that have only subtle differences in quality should have small differences in their scores.
- Entries that have more pronounced differences in quality should have proportionally greater differences in their scores.
- Extreme scores of 1 and 10 should be reserved for entries that are among the very worst or the very best in photographic achievement. In practice, scores of 1 and 10 are rarely used.
- If you start using a scoring range of 2 to 9 for images, you should not then change to using a range of 4 to 8 at any time during the same challenge. **Remember:** You should never only use a high score for what you like and a low score for what you don’t like.

Recognizing that judging is very subjective, these guidelines are not an attempt to cause every judge to assign the same score to each entry, but rather to encourage each judge to make a concerted effort to place each entry in its proper place along the scoring scale relative to the other entries in the challenge.

Rules for Placement

1. Each Challenge will have 1st, 2nd, and 3rd place winners.
2. The entry with the highest score is awarded 1st place. If there are tie scores, the Administrator will award two or three 1st places or more as indicated by the scores.
3. The entry with the second highest score is awarded 2nd place. If there are tie scores for second, the Administrator will award two or more 2nd places.
4. The entry with the third highest score is awarded 3rd place. If there are tie scores for third, the Administrator will award two or more 3rd places.

General Advice for New Judges

Some judges squint when they first view an image to partially blur the image and let the forms, shapes, lines, patterns, tones, etc., in the image become apparent and not hidden by the details. This reveals the overall interaction of gross parts of the image. Then the judge can examine the individual parts and subjects in the photo.

A judge can also look away and then quickly look back at the image, and then be aware of how the eyes are attracted to parts of the image and travel through the image over the first few seconds. This is an indication of how well the photographer created the composition and processed the digital image file. In a successful photograph, the viewer is attracted first to the main subject and then the eye moves around inside the image.

Poor photographs often have confusing subjects or no apparent subject, and the eye doesn't move around inside the image or is led outside the image borders.

Sometimes photos with strong patterns may violate the previously described concept and the eye randomly moves around the image; in this case, the overall pattern **is** the subject.

A photographer may use one or more of the techniques below to influence the way the viewer looks at the image. Has the photographer used one or more of these to improve the image being judged?

- The viewer's eye is first attracted to the lightest part of an average image and then flows into the darker parts of the image. If the image is high key, then the eye will first go to the darkest part of the image.
- The viewer's eye is first attracted to areas of high contrast and then moves to areas of lower contrast.
- The viewer's eye is first attracted to areas with a pattern and then moves to areas without a pattern.
- The viewer's eye is first attracted to areas with high sharpness and then moves to areas with low sharpness.
- The viewer's eye is first attracted to areas with high color saturation and then moves to areas of low color saturation.
- Warm colors in an image appear to come forward and attract attention.
- Cool colors in an image appear to recede and become less important.

How to Score for New Judges

To help promote consistency, the following guidelines about applying specific numerical scores will be helpful to all members and especially to less experienced judges as they seek a foundation for developing their art of judging.

Even though judge's scores of 1 through 10 are available, it is hoped that SANP photographers will avoid submitting images that would score below 5. A score of 5 can be considered a "baseline" score for an average photograph without major flaws or strengths. Scores of 1 and 10 should be rarely used. A score of 1 indicates a truly horrible image without any technical merit or application of any of the elements described above. A score of 10 represents a perfect image with technical excellence, outstanding creativity, high artistic accomplishment, and no perceived flaws.

The generalized description of scores given below should help new judges develop their own techniques for judging photographs. Keep in mind that this is not a prescribed way to score photographs that all SANP judges must follow.

Score of 1 or 2—A score of 1 indicates a truly horrible image without any technical merit or application of any of the elements described on p. 1 of this document. A score of 2 is just barely better than an image without technical merit.

Score of 3—A score of 3 is awarded to a seriously flawed image. The image has multiple flaws that far outweigh the positive elements. Examples could include those images (1) that are extremely out of focus, (2) that have bad camera shake, (3) that have no apparent subject, (4) with exposure off by more than 2 f-stops.

Score of 4—A score of 4 is awarded to images that have several minor flaws or one major flaw. Without these flaws, the image could receive a score of 5. Examples could include those images with (1) very bad exposure, (2) the subject or whole image not in-focus, (3) verticals that are not vertical or a tilted horizon, (4) the composition not cropped enough or overcropped.

Score of 5—A score of 5 is awarded to images that have neither significant strengths nor significant flaws. The image demonstrates little or no photographic mastery and does not stir an emotion. Most competent photographers should be able to create this image, and most modern cameras set in “Auto” mode can produce the image technically. The photographer has created a well exposed and in-focus image in non-difficult conditions of lighting and subject composition. However, the image lacks advanced application of the elements discussed on p. 1. An image strong enough to score a 6 may have an obvious flaw that would drop the score to a 5.

Score of 6—A score of 6 is awarded to images that have more strengths than flaws (this is the level of photography that SANP members should try to achieve as a minimum). The image exhibits at least one element (see p. 1) being applied to an already technically correct image. The image’s flaws are minor and are compensated for by other strong elements. When “photographic guidelines” are broken, it is with intention that works to enhance the image. Examples could include (1) effective subject selection, (2) effective lighting, (3) dramatic composition, (4) freshness and creativity.

Score of 7—A score of 7 is awarded to very good images that are technically correct and apply several of the elements described on p. 1. Any minor flaws in the image are compensated by the application of other elements in the image. When “photographic guidelines” are broken, they increase impact in the image. Examples could include an image (1) with proper handling of difficult exposures, (2) that uses selective focus and depth-of-field effectively, (3) with no indication of poor digital processing, (4) that tells a story.

Score of 8—A score of 8 is awarded to an excellent image that has all the attributes of a score of 7 and more. There are few artistic flaws, and those are compensated by the application of many elements in the image. The image must have no technical flaws. The elements of the image work together to create impact and emotion. Advanced photographic techniques are common in such an image. It is obvious that the photographer gave experienced thought to the creation of the image.

Score of 9—A score of 9 is awarded to an exceptionally strong image that displays photographic mastery. It does not need to be an artistically perfect image, but it must be a very outstanding image. The image must be technically perfect. 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 of any kind. The use of advanced photographic techniques is common in such an image. The image has an impact and elicits strong emotion in the viewer.

Score of 10—A score of 10 is awarded to a perfect image, that is, one with technical perfection, with outstanding creativity, with high artistic accomplishment, and without any perceived flaws. This image is a score of 9 amplified toward perfection, and the difference is typically one of impact and emotion generated by the image. The judge awarding a score of 10 might fall in love with or be awestruck by the image. Photographers should know that a score of 10 is possible to achieve. A score of 10 is a 9 on steroids.

Additional Resources

Here are some online links with information that might help you improve your judging confidence.

- <http://www.nanpa.org/twenty-five-questions-to-think-like-a-photo-competition-judge/>
- <https://www.guillenphoto.com/en/2-methods-for-judging-a-photo.html>
- https://www.caccaphoto.org/judging_guidelines.php
- https://www.caccaphoto.org/pdf_files/pdf_docs/judging_handbook.pdf