

Western Counties Photographic Federation (wcpf)

Guidelines for Judging

These guidelines should be read in conjunction with those for “competition organisation guidelines for clubs”. We should stress again that a successful competition is a partnership between the club and the judge. One sets the rules the other delivers a considered and unbiased decision.

Most judges on our lists will have attended a judging seminar and received detailed training on the judging process. Ken Holland ARPS has written an excellent booklet on the subject entitled "Looking at Photographs: a personal view of appraising and judging photographs" This is still available from him. It should not be necessary to repeat details from the seminar or the booklet other than to stress that a judge should look at photographs in the following way.

A Judge should not initially look at how the picture was made but why the image was made in the first place and what the photographer was trying to show. He should be looking at and into the image and responding to its emotional content. This is not to say that the technical aspects of the photograph should be ignored. These play an important part when comparing one picture with another prior to making a final decision and the technical attributes/problems of the images can offer the opportunity for comment.

These guidelines concentrate on the judge’s responsibilities to ensure a successful outcome to a competition.

The Club is expecting the following attributes from you as a judge. You should be fair, informed, helpful, interesting unbiased and a good time manager. They want you to give your subjective opinion on the photographs entered in the competition. You may wish to give a brief outline of your photographic background but you have not been asked to use the event as a platform to further your views on photography.

In the Club guidelines we have discussed in great detail the information which needs to be shared prior to the competition. The most important decision you as the judge have to take after all this discussion is, do I want to do it? If you don’t like the system, don’t accept the invitation.

Strategies for Judging

Until experienced do not judge cold. This gives you time to sort the entries and work your timings. Arrange the pictures in bands. Select the winners from the top band. At this stage you may decide to write brief notes on each image. This is a ploy to concentrate your mind and act as an aide-memoire and you should not read directly from these notes on the night. Think of 3 positive things to say about each picture and you should start your comments with these. Use constructive criticism only and use terms like "have you thought of" rather than "you should". Keep criticism to a minimum and analysis to a maximum. Keep your approach friendly, light-hearted and respectful, in short be "A Critical Friend". Having announced your decisions don't go back. Many photographers use competitions to hear informed, unbiased comment on their images and less experienced photographers will appreciate hearing helpful analysis and technical comments on the entered images. This input can be most instructive but remember not all images require cropping and so-called rules of composition are made to be broken. There are some clubs now using a system of projecting digital versions of the prints onto a screen to aid the audience viewing and the projected image may vary substantially from the actual print. You must judge the print and not the projected image.

On the night, arrive in good time at the venue. Be confident, honest, avoid repetition, waffle and admit if you don't know. Be sure to avoid all forms of physical and verbal mannerisms and those much hated clichés. When delivering the results keep the work in order but hold back the top band. Gradually eliminate from this band explaining your reasons to end with the winner. Above all be efficient and organised. Don't mumble, obstruct or describe the images and remember don't use the evening as a soapbox for your views.

Judging projected digital images creates its own special problems. Particularly if you have been sent the work in advance and viewed it on a laptop. In this case be prepared to change your decisions when the images are projected on the screen. You must judge the projected digital image as viewed on the night by the audience not the image seen by you in private.

Check with the Club which software they are using to project the images there may be problems if you can't hold images back or view the top band in some form of light box. If you do use a light box to make your decisions ensure that when announcing the results the images are projected full size.

There have been complaints of judges who have altered images entered for competitions to illustrate how they think the picture should be shown. The PAGB recommend that under no circumstances should this be done without the express permission of the Club. The WCPF endorse this recommendation.