

## JUDGING PHOTOGRAPHS

Being asked to judge the photographic works of another person can be an intimidating experience. It is something that one needs to grow into. But that growth has to have a starting point, and a major objective of our photo society is to foster growth among our members in various areas. Judging requires one to think critically about the important qualities of an image and its presentation and is an excellent contributor to growth as a photographer.

First off, no one should be reluctant to participate in the process we have defined. It is a low stress, low stakes program. No one's career or reputation is at stake, and the judging is secret and you don't have to explain yourself. So you think you don't know enough or are advanced enough to judge others? Don't sweat it. Everyone knows something and your interest in photography would indicate that you have some ideas of things you like and things you don't like. Maybe you can't define your reasons precisely or state them eloquently, but you know when you look at a photo whether you like it or not, even if you can't identify why. That's a starting point. And if everyone votes for the ones they like the most, it contributes to the process.

Let's think about some of the things that might influence your vote.

The first thing is that the photo should have impact. When you first look at it, it should catch your attention and make you want to look again or look longer. If not, then it just doesn't say anything to you. The next thing is to try to figure out why it caught your attention, or did not. Maybe it was a bold pattern, or a bright color, or a beautiful child, or a dramatic sunset. You can begin to learn what kind of things have that initial impact and grab your attention, and that can help your own work. Sometimes you might wish that you had taken that photo. Other times you might be glad you did not.

In your further analysis of the photo, there are other things to look for. One is the technical quality. Is the image sharp, is it well focused, does it have an appropriate level of brightness, does it have excessive noise, are highlights blown out or shadows blocked up, is it blurred from camera or subject motion, is the depth of field appropriate to the image, are there obvious sharpening artifacts? In terms of composition and content, does it have extraneous objects in it, is it cluttered and have excessive extraneous detail, is the primary subject emphasized with lighting, focus, framing, leading lines or other techniques, is there a pleasing arrangement of objects, consider use of things like Rule of Thirds (not always appropriate), S-curves, and other compositional techniques.

Maybe you can make yourself a list of things to consider when you look at the photos to help you arrive at a score. But in the end, it comes down to whether you like the photo or not, and how much in either direction. If you are just neutral about the photo, give it a neutral “5” score and move on. If you are negative toward the photo and think it should have been left on the cutting room floor, so to speak, give it a lower score commensurate with your degree of negativity. If you react positively to the photo, give it a higher score, again commensurate with your level of positiveness. But please give each photo a score. Maybe at first all you can do is give it an 8 if you like it, a 2 if you don’t and a 5 if you are neutral. So, do that. You can grow in your ability to evaluate and score photos, and that will surely help you evaluate and improve your own photos. And that is why we have the Grayling Photographic Society.

On the other side of this issue, please do not be reluctant to enter photos into the judging. We all want to see each other’s photos, and we can all learn. Judging results are presented only by identifying the highest-ranking photos. No scores of the other photos are released (unless you ask for your own scores). So no one’s entry gets the award of Worst Photo!