

CLUB COMPETITIONS

Once photographers leave the ranks of “taking a snapshot,” they usually start making photos they hope are of general rather than personal interest. Few photographers can impartially evaluate their own work. Hence, they seek competent opinion. Camera club competitions fill this need. But such contests serve many more functions. They are a means of measuring ability and a yardstick for improvement. They provide the stimulation and photographic education so necessary for the less experienced. Observing the efforts of others broadens one's viewpoint. Competition is excellent training for those who desire to progress to competition exhibiting. Therefore, regularly held contests, coupled with constructive criticism and discussion, are an important part of club activities.

EVALUATION OF COMPETITION IMAGES

Competition is a double-edged sword. It can encourage entrants or it can stifle their ambition and replace it with a sense of futility. How a club conducts its contests determines whether this vital activity is kept within healthy bounds.

Not everyone can be a winner. But to all photographers, their pictures are of utmost importance. They have taken considerable time and effort to make. In seeking assistance, photographers expect to have their work impartially and constructively evaluated. Entrants deserve judicious criticism by those whose opinion is respected. Suggestions should be on the level of the entrants ability to perform. Humorous comments can enliven proceedings but ridicule should never be tolerated.

The primary objective of club competitions should never be forgotten. Competition is educational and not a means of garnering honors. It provides the incentive by which club members can improve their photographic endeavors. Friendly rivalry should be encouraged but unless it is kept as such, it will defeat the purpose of contests.

BUILDING THE FOUNDATION

Efficient, smooth-running competitions are the result of adequate planning. Each club must establish procedures that best fit its particular group. Because so many factors are involved (number of entries and media, degree of members' proficiency, frequency of meeting, etc.), no one system can serve all clubs.

Most competitions are progressive activities that run from the beginning to the end of each club year. Therefore, it is important that the procedure not be changed during this period. To avoid any misunderstanding, contest rules should appear in a Guidelines document that can be posted on the club web site. They should be clear and concise.

Competition policy should be established by the club as a whole, not by a few members. While more proficient members are in an excellent position to offer advice, welcome suggestions often come from the less experienced. Heed their words. They usually are in the majority.

The responsibility for operating competitions is normally placed in the hands of a committee for this purpose. The most capable member available should be appointed its head. There should be enough assistants to minimize and spread the workload.

If a club has both print and projected image competitions, it is best to have a separate committee for each group. Some clubs also appoint an additional committee whose duties pertain to the equipment used.

FIRST DECISIONS

Because club members are from beginner to exhibition entrant, and because prints vary in size, many organizations divide contestants into various groups to make competition as fair as possible. This is comparatively simple for larger clubs but often quite difficult for smaller ones.

In establishing classifications by ability, the more experienced workers can be placed in Level A and the less-experienced in Level B. With a number of successful exhibitors in a club, it is often necessary to establish an upper Level AA. Members receiving major awards at the conclusion of annual contests should automatically be moved to the next higher level the following year. Some clubs have Beginner, Novice, Advanced, and Master groups.

A sound procedure is to place a limit on the number of entries one entrant may submit. The deciding factor is how many entries can be handled efficiently during an evening's contest. Most club limitations run from two to six entries.

Some clubs place a time limit on when images were taken, for example, not more than 24 months prior to the competition.

THE BASIC STEPS

Regardless of how a club runs its competitions, the following half-dozen operational steps are necessary:

- * Collection of entries
- * Display or projection for judging
- * Judging
- * Scoring (digital scoring machines are available)
- * Compilation (software is available that will compile the results)
- * Return of prints

*** Collection of Prints & Projected Images**

A smooth-running competition depends upon entries being received at a specific time that allows gathering necessary data without confusion. In a sense, club competitions are "theatre" and should be so handled. Keeping an audience waiting too long will dampen enthusiasm. Time limit for receipt of entries should be definitely established and enforced.

Entries should be identified through an entry number. Extreme care should be exercised in handling all print material. Loss or damage of entries causes embarrassment and hard feelings.

Some clubs require entries to be submitted several days ahead of the competition to allow time for proper identification, arrangement, and placement in the judging program. Others merely require that they be submitted on a CD or Travel Drive a reasonable time before the meeting starts.

*** Display Prints for Judging**

Both monochrome and color prints can be displayed for judging either on an easel, in a print box or on a wall or rack. The color temperature of the incident illumination should be between 3200° and 5500° Kelvin. Ordinary incandescent bulbs provide a color temperature below 3000° K and are not suitable to be used alone. These guidelines are set forth in PSA's Uniform Practice B1.1B (Rev: 2007). As lighting temperature and wattage are marked on the lamps themselves, it is not necessary to use a color temperature meter to check the Kelvin rating for judging or exhibition. Additional print box judging information is available by accessing the PSA Uniform Practice reference.

The area immediately adjacent to and surrounding the print should be a matte neutral gray of 50% or less reflectance. The illumination at the edges of the print should not be more than 0.5 EV less than at the center of the print. Glare should be minimized by adjusting the angle of the illumination or the print. Lights should be shielded to protect judges seated 5 to 10 feet from the display depending on the print size.

With reference to a print viewing box, proper color temperature can be achieved with a mix of incandescent bulbs and deluxe cool white fluorescent bulbs with 25% of the total wattage coming from the fluorescent bulbs. All judging should take place under identical conditions. The lighting for displaying an exhibition of prints should duplicate as nearly as possible the conditions used for judging the prints.

*** Screens for Projected Images:**

The screen should be at least 70" x 70" and should have a matte, beaded, lenticular, or other commercially manufactured projection surface. Either a matte or beaded screen may be used but remember that the best viewing angle is much narrower with the beaded screen. If your meeting place is long and narrow, a beaded screen will be fine, but if not, a matte screen is more satisfactory. Check your screen periodically to be sure that it is still pure white. Nothing degrades color as much as a poor screen. Many use tiny computer lights over the laptops used for the judging projection program and score keeping.

*** Display Digital Images for Judging:**

It is recommended that a jpg compressed image file size be established by the club that will provide manageable file handling and adequate quality. The maximum pixel size recommended by the club needs to be established. Some use 1024 pixels/dots in the horizontal dimension and 768 lines/pixels in the vertical dimension; others use 768 pixels max in either direction. A digital projector, used in judging or showing digital images in public, should have the following specifications: Resolution-XGA 1024 x 768 pixels (minimum); Brightness-1000 Lumens (minimum); Contrast Ratio-400:1 (minimum); and have Keystone Correction either automatic or manual. More details on Digital Image projection is available in PSA's Uniform Practice B3.1A (Rev: 2007).

*** Display Slides for Judging:**

Clubs should follow PSA'S Uniform Practice B2.1A (Rev: 2007) for Judging and Projecting Photographic Slides. With room lights off, the brightness of a projected light on a 70" square screen should provide a light value (EV) of 8.5 +/- 0.5. The EV can be measured with a reflection photographic light meter. At the edges of the projected area the EV should not differ more than 0.5 EV from that at the screen center. Slides submitted for competition should bear the maker's name and address as well as a thumb spot.

JUDGING

The availability of competent judges governs the method clubs select to evaluate images. Three general systems are in vogue today and are described below:

- * A single judge is frequently used. This method is the most informal and any scoring system can be employed. The judge usually comments on each entry.
- * A panel of three judges using numerical scoring.
- * "Popular Voting" where each member casts a ballot using a pre-selected scoring method.

SCORING

For many years, clubs adhered to the 1st, 2nd, 3rd, and Honorable Mention method of making awards. More recently, many clubs have replaced this system with making all winning entries of equal value. Thus any specific number, for instance, the six best will receive the designation of "Honor" or "Award" and an equal number of points.

Any scoring system is acceptable. Some employ the process of elimination; others rely on a set of numerical values to determine scores. In a numerical system, the club decides on a scale of values it will employ. There will be a minimum of points an entry may receive, and a maximum which will denote the top-rated entries. Thus, each entrant is able to see how their entry compares with others. Two widely used scales are 1 to 5 and 3 to 9. Elimination of 1 and 2 in the latter system offers an incentive to low-scoring entrants. If a three-judge panel is using the 3 to 9 scale, the lowest score an entry could receive is 9 and the highest 27.

Some groups divide the components of a picture into arbitrarily conceived elements: Interest (subject matter appeal), Technical quality, and Composition. To each of these they assign a separate point or percentage value.

RESULTS

Because records are usually cumulative until the end of the year, it is wise to place one person in charge of the tabulation. It is recommended that clubs acquire the software available to PSA-member clubs to record and tabulate the competition scores. To order, see PSA Club Services web site, PSA Judging Services webpage. With this efficient system, it is not long after the judging that the scores can be announced to the audience. Cumulative totals can be ready to be included on the club web site and/or the club newsletter for posting on the web site.

RETURN OF PRINTS

This is the final step in a club competition. If the contest has been well run without confusion and distractions and if the print entries are returned to their owners promptly, in the same condition they were originally presented, the evening will be a successful one, regardless of whether one is a winner or not.

RECOGNITION

Presenting awards, either modest stickers, moderately priced ribbons, or more elaborate trophies; is a recognized method of stimulating competition and rewarding performance. However, never overlook the fact that club contests are for all members, not for a few. Be wary of the same members continually winning the top awards. This will stifle healthy competition. Before this occurs, create a special group for especially talented contestants.

It is the responsibility of the club officials to see that the primary objective of club competitions, the improvement of members' photographic endeavors, is carried out to the best of their ability.