Evaluating Armature Photography

Photography is subjective, art is subjective—but it can be judged. The photograph must speak for itself; regardless of the photographer, the equipment, or the history of the shoot. Photographs can be reviewed based on the following criteria: technical quality, composition, flow, texture and light.

**Basic questions to judge a photograph by:**

1. Have a reason for why everything in that photo is there. Why is the subject there?
2. What is the object, or the point, or the ‘effect’, or the emotions?
3. Does anything detract? Is it a clean shot? Can something be removed by the angle at which the amateur photographer shot?
4. Is the photo just of what you wish it to be?

Amateur photographers: Think about what the shot is all about. Less is more.

**Technical Guidelines to consider:**

**Visual Impact:** Does the image have the “Wow!” factor? How effectively does the image capture and hold the viewer’s attention? Is there a readily identifiable center of interest? Is the subject immediately apparent?


**Composition:** Does the photograph follow conventional standards of strong design, such as the rule of thirds, simplicity, clean backgrounds, and the use of leading lines to guide the viewer’s eye? Does the image include distracting elements?

**Color:** The effective use of color helps determine the overall mood of an image. A photograph with rich, saturated colors will convey a different feeling than one with delicately shaded tones – and, of course, black and white has its own palette of tones and textures.

**Contrast:** Certain areas of the image may appear too bright or too dark. Similarly, loss of highlight or shadow detail will drag a good image down. In black-and-white images, high contrast with rich detail can be visually powerful.

**Technical Execution:** Are there any serious, unintended flaws? Is the main subject in focus? Is the image over- or underexposed? Have important elements been unintentionally cut off at the borders? Will the viewer perceive color and tones as being natural (i.e., what one’s eye might actually see)?

**Use of Light:** How creatively is lighting exploited or used to enhance the overall mood and visual impact of the image? Are there any distracting “hot spots” caused by excessive illumination?

**Originality:** Is the image similar to others, or does it have its own personality and vision? Another good photograph of Mount Rushmore will likely bore the judges of a print competition.
Consider the photographer’s goal… then evaluate based on:

- **Point of view** – location on camera in relation to subject. Did camera placement present a unique and interesting point of view? Did placement help eliminate distracting elements in the picture?
- **Distance from subject.** Did subject distance strengthen or weaken the picture?
- **Composition and cropping.** Did use the rule-of-thirds guideline to place the point of interest? Did cropping help strengthen the picture?
- Did photographer recognize dominant lines and shoot or crop to strengthen the photo?
- **Camera movement.** If sharpness was desired, was camera held steady? If camera movement was intentional (panning with subject, for example), did the technique add to the impact of the picture?
- **Subject speed** (if adjustable). Was appropriate shutter speed used to stop movement, or to emphasize subject movement?
- **Aperture setting and resulting depth of field** (if adjustable). Did photographer choose appropriate aperture setting to help achieve goal? A small aperture yields a greater range or depth of focus; a large aperture yields a shallower depth of focus. Also called depth of field.
- **Focus point** (if adjustable). Is the photo sharp where it is suppose to be sharp?
- **Posing a human subject.** Does the subject look natural and comfortable? Is the subject engaged in an activity or just staring at the camera?
- **Lighting** (flash vs. natural light). Did photographer choose lighting to enhance the subject? Was bounce flash used to reduce harshness of flash?
- **Time of day photo was shot.** Lighting and atmospheric conditions vary greatly during the day. Did exhibitor choose a time of day that strengthens the photo’s impact?
- **Digital manipulation.** Did photographer choose appropriate manipulation to add interest and strength? Depending on the goal, was manipulation overdone?
- **Mat color, size, neatness.** Does the mat color or size enhance the photo? Or, does the mat draw attention away from the photo?

Below is a link to a very informative article concerning evaluating photography for contests and exhibits:


**Sources:**

