

# The Power of Constructive Critique

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EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION WHEN EVALUATING IMAGES

# THE ROLE OF THE ‘Judge’”

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At these competitions, or assessments, an invited ‘Judge’ will be asked to assess, and make comments on the images presented.

The ‘Judge’ may then be asked to award images they consider worthy either a Merits, Credits or Acceptances.

In some cases you may be asked to give a point score for the image, depending on the club.

How the ‘Judge’ goes about commenting on and assessing an image can have a profound effect on both the photographer who’s image is being assessed, and the general satisfaction of the members of the club.

# Be positive and constructive

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It is easy to make positive comments about a competent images, but most often the less skilled images are those submitted by the new or developing photographers in the club.

These are the members who, if comments are presented in a constructive and informative way will get the most out of your assessments.

They are also the ones that can become discouraged when comments seem to demine and undervalue their photographic efforts.

# Use Positive and Constructive Evaluation

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It is always possible to start with a positive comment about any image.

Then you can make **your** suggestions on how the author of the image could adjust the image to ‘**Make it a stronger image**’, or ‘**better convey the ideas in the image**’.

Do not use statements that sound judgmental, like you ‘**you should or could have....**’ but use supportive statements like, ‘**Can I suggest that .....**’

# Explain your reasons for a comment

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If you think that there are things that could be improved in an image, explain the reasons for your suggestion in a way that the author has constructive feedback.

**Don't express your opinion as fact, but as a suggestion.**

**Assessment is a subjective process** so give legitimate reasons for your suggestions, but ones that are not absolute, as these are often based on personal taste or biases.

Be courteous in your assessment and the way you comment on the image.

# Be Balanced in your assessments

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It is not helpful to make judgmental, and personal comments about the authors skill when you assess a image.

On the other hand it is not helpful to making only positive comments about **every** image, or just describing the image without **assessment**.

This often leaves the members of the club confused, or disappointed when the 'Judge' distributes awards, in what seems a random and inconsistent way.

# Some Comments to avoid when judging

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“ I’ve been to this site and been able to get a better image than this” “when I was there the lighting was better”

“I have seen so many images of this subject”

“This is not really a competition image, just a family photo”

“This is just a record shot”

“would have been better if taken from a different position”

“Odd numbers make better compositions than even numbers”

“ I don’t like the Photoshop filter you have used in this image”

“This photo does not follow the rules”

“Just a tourist photo” “just a family album image”

# What these Comments really Convey

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These Comments are all **value judgments** of some kind based on –

The judges personal photographic experience.

The judges personal perceptions.

The judges strict interpretation of 'RULES' of photography.

The judges personal likes and dislikes.

Even if there is some truth in the comments, these truths are conveyed in a way that is not **CONSTRUCTIVE** and does not help the photographer develop their skills.

# How best to judge an image

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1 - Assess the image that is before you, and not what you have seen or taken yourself in the past.

2 - Be constructive in your comments and give reasons for your evaluation.

3 - If you want to point out where the image could be improved, phrase it as a suggestion and explain your reasons.

Don't be a 'Cropper' of images for the sake of it! The author may have chosen the format they have submitted for valid reasons.

# Stick to the time restraints while judging

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Do not ‘waffle on’ about an image. Be concise, and then move on to the next image.

The audience can see the image, so don’t use up time describing the details in the image.

In most cases when you arrive at the club where you are to judging, you will be given a time when the committee would like you to have completed your assessments.

If you are not sure, ask the contact person when you arrive what time they want you to be finished.

Follow the judging criteria that the committee has given you. It is disrespectful to ignore directions you are asked to follow.

# Presenting awards at a Photography Club

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The club will give you a range awards that you can allocate to the images being judged.

Some clubs will give a percentage, like 10% Merits, 20% Credits and 30% acceptances?

In some clubs you will be given a definite number of awards you can present, depending on the number of entries on the night.

You may also be given discretion to present the number of awards that you feel appropriate.

**When allocating awards, the standard you are judging to is not international, National, or your home clubs standard, but the overall standard of images placed before you on that night.**