

The Professional Photographers of America (PPA) provides as guidelines to print-competition entrants. Based on fundamental precepts for judging a photograph or other piece of fine art, these guidelines are meant simply to give entrants a basic understanding of what constitutes a good image.

1. **Impact** is the sense one gets upon viewing an image for the first time. Compelling images evoke laughter, sadness, anger, pride, wonder or another intense emotion.
2. **Creativity** is the external expression of the imagination of the maker by using the medium to convey an idea, message or thought.
3. **Style** is defined in a number of ways. It might be defined by a specific genre or simply be recognizable as the characteristics of how a specific artist applies light to a subject. It can impact an image in a positive manner when the subject matter and the style are appropriate for each other, or it can have a negative effect when they are at odds.
4. **Composition** is important to the design of an image, bringing all of the visual elements together in concert to express the purpose of the image. Proper composition holds the viewer in the image and prompts the viewer to look where the creator intends. Effective composition can be pleasing or disturbing, depending on the intent of the image maker.
5. **Print Presentation** affects an image by giving it a finished look. The mats and borders used should support and enhance the image, not distract from it.
6. **Center of Interest** is the point or points on the image where the imagemaker wants the viewer to stop as they view the image. There can be primary and secondary centers of interest. Occasionally there will be no specific center of interest and the entire scene collectively serves as the center of interest.
7. **Lighting** (the use and control of light) refers to how dimension, shape and roundness are defined in an image. Whether the light applied to an image is manmade or natural, proper use of lighting should enhance an image.
8. **Subject Matter** should always be appropriate to the story being told in an image.
9. **Color Balance** supplies harmony to an image. An image in which the tones work together effectively supporting the image, can enhance its emotional appeal. Color balance is not always harmonious and can be used to evoke diverse feelings for effect.
10. **Technical Excellence** is the print quality of the image itself as it is presented for viewing. Sharpness, exposure, printing, mounting, and correct color all speak to the qualities of the physical print.
11. **Technique** is the approach used to create the image. Printing, lighting, posing, paper selection and other elements are part of the technique applied to an image.
12. **Storytelling** refers to the ability of the image to evoke imagination. One beautiful thing about art is that each viewer might collect his own message or read her own story in an image.

Basic 3-Point judging guidelines

(Each category scores 0 to 3 points)

IMPACT: Initial Reaction / Visual Message

- **CREATIVITY**
- **STYLE**
- **SUBJECT MATTER**
- **COLOR**
- **STORYTELLING**
- **LIGHTING**

COMPOSITION: Element Content / Placement

- **CENTER OF INTEREST**
- **STYLE**
- **SUBJECT MATTER**

TECHNIQUE: Controls Used

- **TECHNICAL EXCELLENCE**
- **PRINT PRESENTATION**
- **LIGHTING**
- **CREATIVITY**
- **COLOR**

Scoring

Outstanding: “9”

“Knocks your socks off” quality of image
Technically correct in all respects
Outstanding composition
Tells a complete story or creates a mood for the viewer
High impact to the viewer on first sight

Average to Above average: “6” to “8”

Technically correct
Good presentation
Good composition
Good pictorial treatment
Good color for the subject and background
Tells a story or creates a mood
High impact to the viewer
Relevant or Exemplifies the theme (if entered in the “theme” category)

Below average to Average: “0” to “6”

Snapshot type of picture
Needs improvement in color, composition
Little impact or imagination
Technically faults (focus, exposure, etc)
Not relevant to the theme (if entered in the “theme” category)