

Guidelines for Judges

Summary

Monthly competitions are grouped into four categories – Pictorial/Open, Creative/Altered Reality, Nature, and Themed. Each Category and Class (B, A and AA) shall be judged separately.

Judges in our regular monthly competitions are asked to provide no more than 30 seconds of constructive criticism. Judges should score each image on its own merits against only the other images in the same class and competition. The main objective is to provide the photographer with some concrete ideas about how the image could be improved. It is preferable to say “the photographer might have considered this or that,” as opposed to “I would have done this or that.”

Scoring

Five factors should be considered in arriving at the score for each image:

- **Impact:** Interest, emotion, immediacy, drama, appeal
- **Originality:** Creativity, style, unusual perspective, uniqueness
- **Technical quality:** Focus, depth-of-field, exposure, framing, lighting, contrast, shadows, highlights, detail, use of color – white balance, hue, saturation
- **Composition:** Storytelling, center of interest, leading lines, curves, use of color, lack of distracting elements, simplicity
- **Relationship to theme:** Only for competitions with assigned topics

In scoring an image, judges should not rely on their personal likes or dislikes for any particular subject or photographic technique. Points should not be deducted simply because the image depicts a subject that is frequently photographed.

While the full range of scores is 0 to 30, each image should receive a point score between 18 and 30. Ideally, the scores for each Class and in each category should be distributed across a broad range from the highest to the lowest as opposed to a narrow range (e.g., all 23-26 or 27-30). There is no required scoring curve that must be followed, but consistency in scoring is essential.

18-21 range for an image of **below average** quality

22-25 range for an image of **average** quality

26-29 range for an image of **superior** quality

30 for an image of **exceptional** quality that **stands out among others**

In any class and category, it is within the judge’s discretion whether to score any image as a 30, and whether to score more than one image as a 30.

If the judge does not believe a particular image complies with any of these Competition Guidelines, it is appropriate to award a score of 18 rather than a score of 0 to 17. All scores awarded by the judge are considered to be final.

Categories

Gateway follows New England Camera Club Council's (NECCC's) Information for Judges, which states, "Scoring one type of subject (for example, nature) higher than others or failing to give credit to one type of photograph, for example, creative photographs, because you don't personally shoot or care for such photographs does a disservice to the competitors." All types of images, therefore, are meant to be judged equally.

Pictorial/Open: Any image that is the maker's work is permitted even if the image would qualify in another category.

Creative/Altered Reality: The emphasis is on imaginative skill and originality. This category is about altering what can be seen by the human eye in a creative way, rather than taking a photograph of a quirky or creative subject. It is not required that the image be recognizable as an object, place or person; it may abstract.

Creative images must have been obviously manipulated or modified during or after exposure with experimental, digital, in camera, or darkroom techniques. Composite or merged multiple images and collages are acceptable for creativity even if each component is not altered reality as long as the end image is clearly not a single image and represents altered reality.

Images whose sole creativity is infrared, monochrome, High Dynamic Range (HDR), or use of wide angle or fish-eye lenses, or long exposure are not eligible in this category. Techniques such as panning/zooming or unique staging ALONE are NOT considered creative UNLESS they are used to create an abstract effect.

This category is about altering a normal photographic image in a creative way, rather than taking a photograph of quirky or creative subjects.

Techniques or effects that alter reality must be evident. Scoring, however, should be based on the overall impact of the effect and resulting image, not on the amount of manipulation required to achieve the effect.

Nature: While sharpness and technical quality are essential, the story-telling value of the image is of paramount importance. In addition:

- There can be no "hand of man" visible in the Nature category (roads, fences, buildings etc.), unless a human element is integral to the Nature story (owls in a barn, tagging on birds etc.).
- No techniques that add, relocate, replace, or remove pictorial elements (e.g., rocks, debris etc.) except by cropping are permitted.
- Techniques that enhance the presentation of the photograph without changing the nature story or the pictorial content or without altering the content of the original scene are permitted, including HDR, focus stacking and exposure control (dodging/burning). Also, techniques that remove elements added by the camera, such as dust spots, digital noise, and film scratches, are allowed.
- Feral and domestic animals, human created hybrids and cultivated plants and flowers are permitted so long as they appear to be in the wild.

Themed: The most important criteria in scoring this category is to reward images that capture the essence of the theme, as spelled out in the definitions provided.