Judging Camera Club Competitions

Using the 12 Elements of an Excellent Photo

Agenda

- Role of Judging Camera Club Competitions
- Formulating an Educational Comment
- Deciding on a Score
- Understanding the 12 Elements with Interactive Activities

"The 12 Elements of a Merit Image" from Professional Photographers of America

Presentation At

https://group.neccc.org/judging-camera-club-competitions

Chane Cullens – Chane@CCullens.com

April 4, 2022

Who Should Watch This Presentation?

New Judge

- A framework to use

Experienced judges

- Ideas for improvement

Photographers

- Thoughts to keep in mind when creating photos

Please ask questions at any time!

It’s an opportunity for everyone to learn.

Viewpoint – Competition is Educational

Photographers want to learn

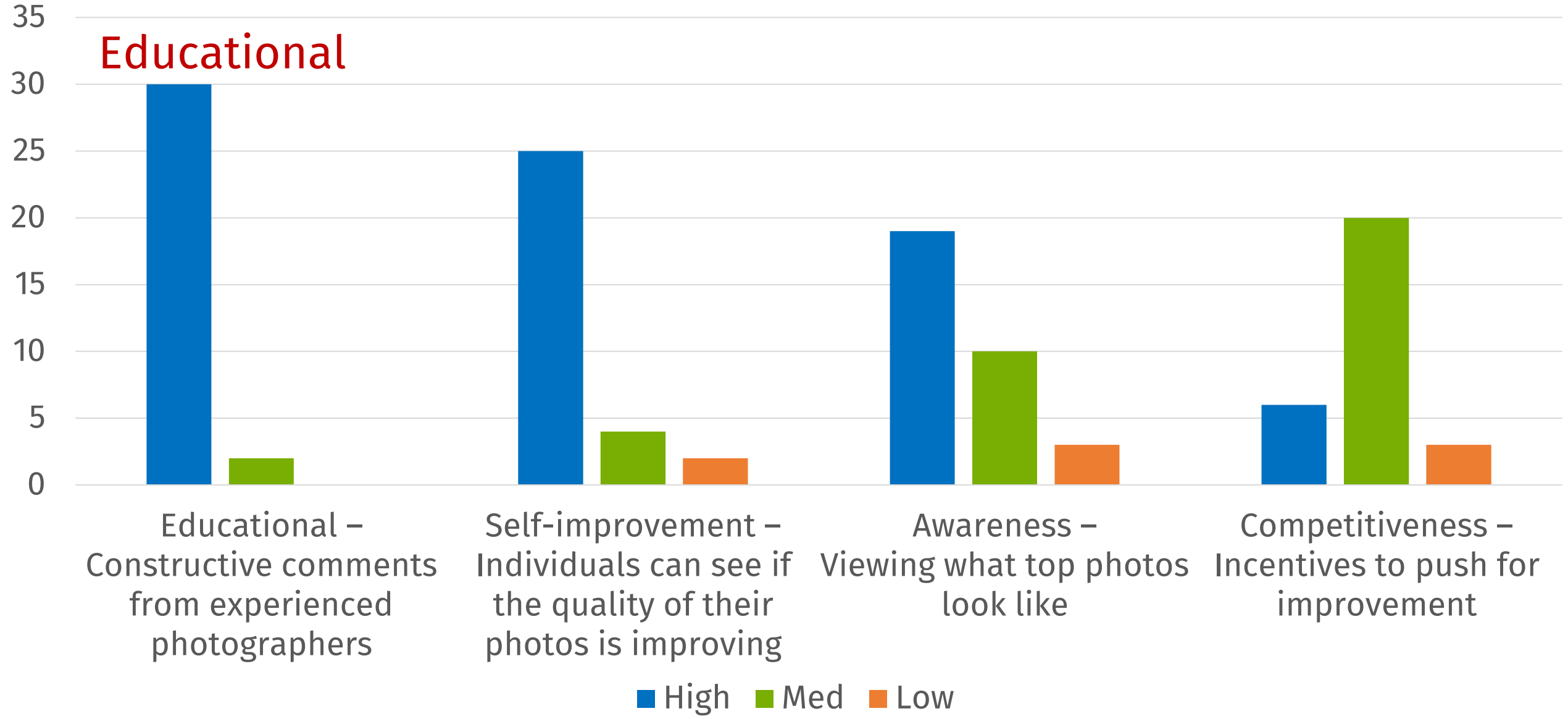
Comments provide insight to the whole audience, not only the photographer

Agenda

- Role of Judging Camera Club Competitions
- Formulating an Educational Comment
- Deciding on a Score
- Understanding the 12 Elements with Interactive Activities

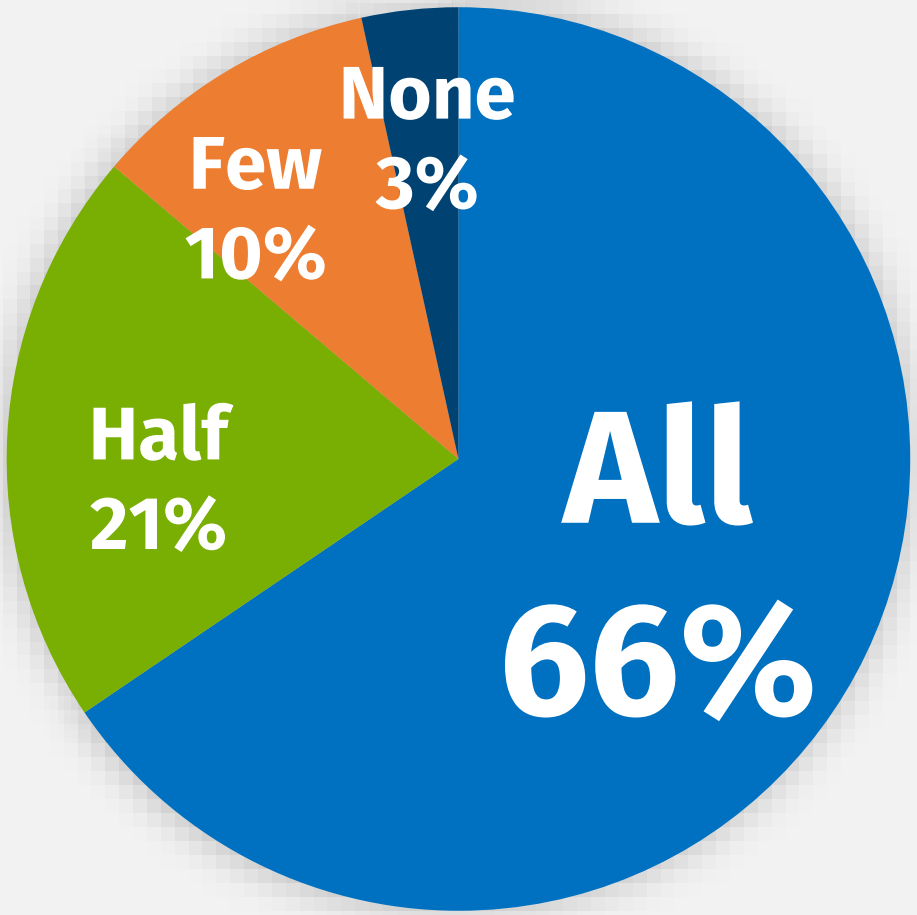
Why Do Camera Clubs Have Competitions?

Source: 34 NECCC clubs, November 2021



How Often Do Judges Comment on Photos?

Source: 34 NECCC clubs, November 2021



66% of NECCC Clubs Comment on **all** photos

Summary - *Role of Judging Camera Club Competitions*

Agenda

- Role of Judging Camera Club Competitions
- Formulating an Educational Comment
- Deciding on a Score
- Understanding the 12 Elements with Interactive Activities

Formulating an Educational Comment

Be Specific	• What and Why
Be Positive	• Suggest improvements, not faults
Aligned to Score	• Unless a top score, the judge has comments for improvement

Comments – What to Say

Start with a positive comment

"I like the photo" must have a "Why"

Think about improvements before the shutter clicks.
The subject, composition, lighting, perspective, story …

Improvement ideas are suggestions, not rules.
Use words like *Maybe*, *Might*, *Consider* …

Comments – What to Avoid & Removing Personal Bias

- Avoid words like Always, Never, Must …
  Comments are suggestions not rules
- Remove personal bias **by not saying …**
  I've seen this photo before, I know the location, I love cat photos, I don't do abstract
- Avoid complex post-processing suggestions
  Since they exclude half of the audience
- Don't simply describe a photo back to the audience
  There is no value since everyone can already see the photo
- Rarely should more than one judge comment on a photo
  Avoid confusing the audience and avoid judge squabbling

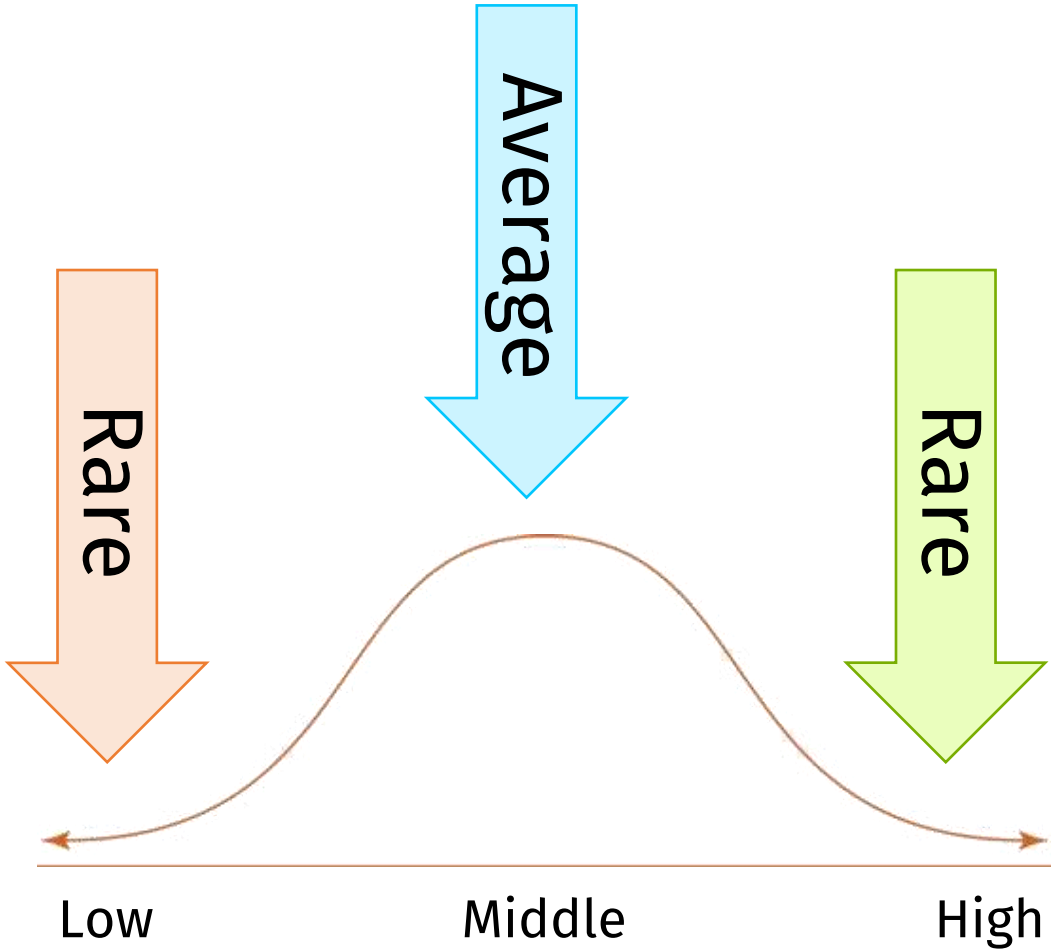
Agenda

- Role of Judging Camera Club Competitions
- Formulating an Educational Comment
- Deciding on a Score
- Understanding the 12 Elements with Interactive Activities

What Is the Role of a Photo's Score?

Ranking
– First, Second, Third, HM …

- Score range does not matter
  6 to 10, 1 to 10, 10 to 30, 60 to 100
- Class does not matter
  Beginner, advanced, master, super-duper
- Critical for the top few photos
  Less important for the bottom quarter of the photos



Deciding on a Score

Base the score on the merit of that individual photo

In this, and only this, single category

Use consistent reasoning in evaluating photos

Provides the ranking order

Strive to remove personal bias

Subject, specific technique, perceived difficulty, location familiarity

Understand the category’s requirements

Nature, monochrome, assigned subject …

How Long to View a Photo Before Scoring

Live – use as long as it takes to see a few major elements

- At least 5 seconds. Less than 20 seconds.

Offline – no time pressure

- Use scoring to find top photos. Then, rank the top photos by rescoring them.

How Long to View a Photo Before Commenting

Live – while scoring look for an element used and an underused element

- Prepare and keep the comments clear and concise.

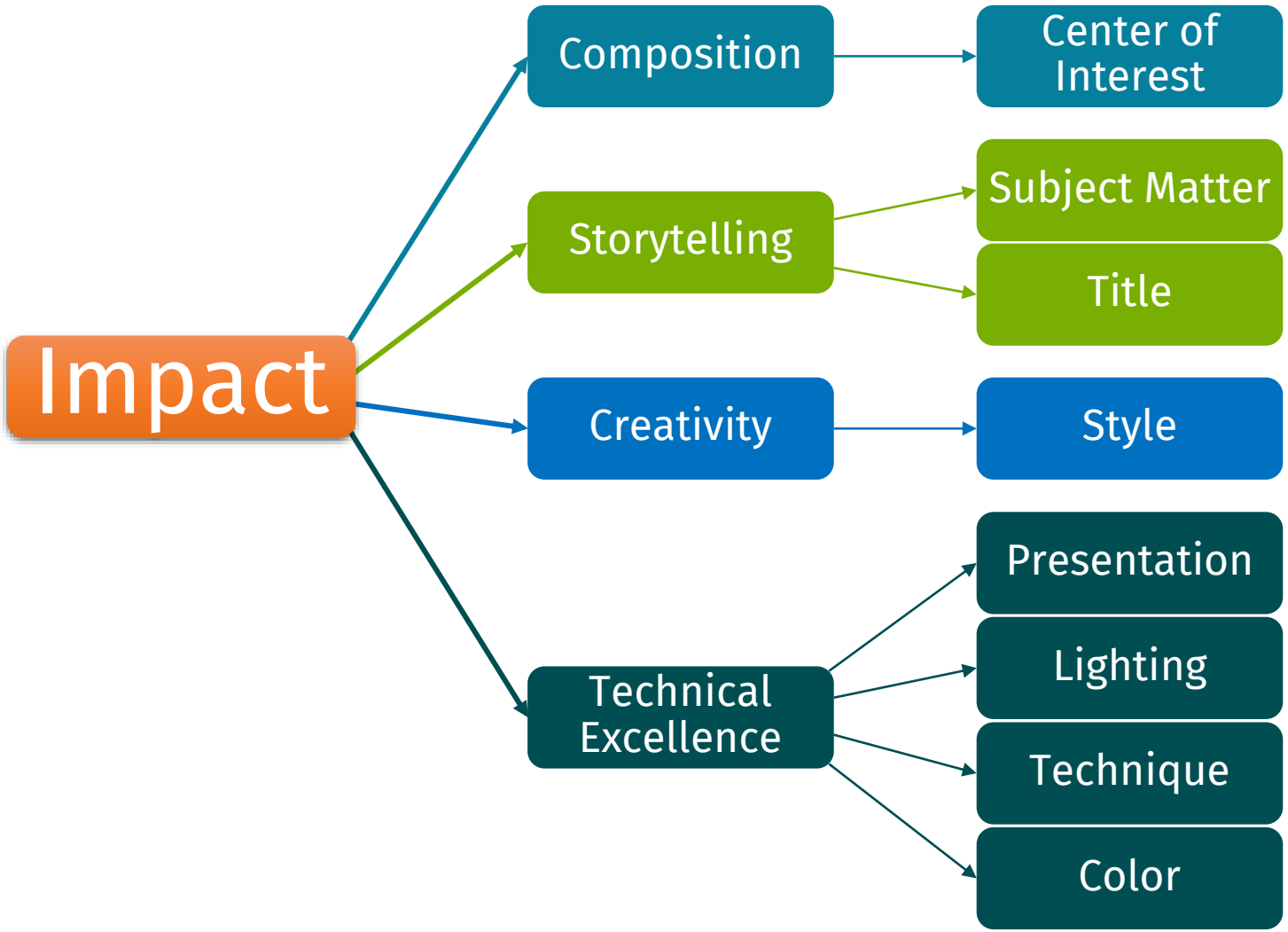
Offline – no time pressure

- When considering how to improve the photo, don’t forget the Why with the What.

Agenda

- Role of Judging Camera Club Competitions
- Formulating an Educational Comment
- Deciding on a Score
- Understanding the 12 Elements with Interactive Activities

The 12 Elements of an Excellent Photo



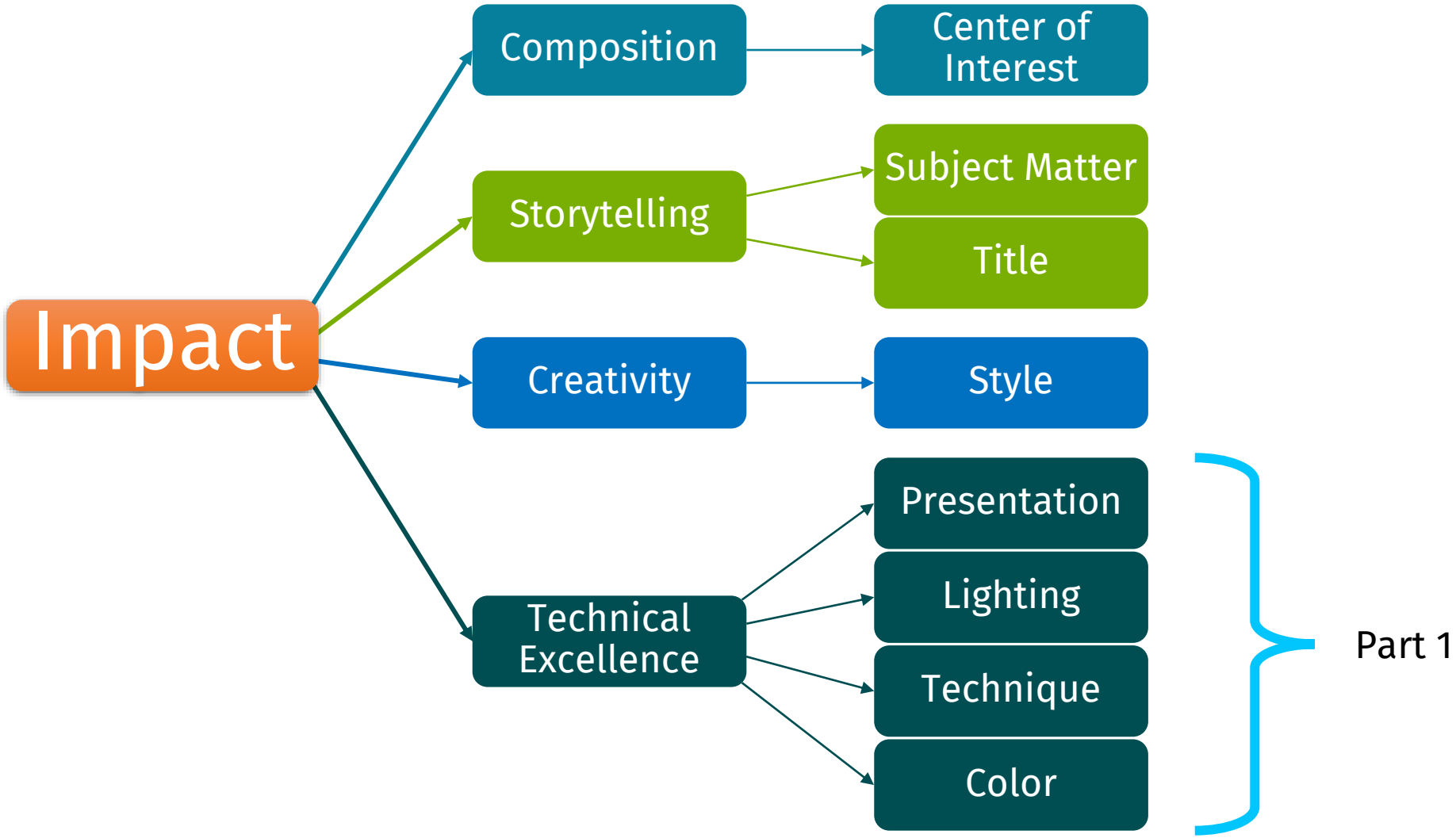
"Any art piece or photograph will reveal some measure of all elements, while a visually superior example will reveal obvious consideration of each one."

Based on work by the Photographic Exhibition Committee of the Professional Photographer Association (PPA.com) on The 12 Elements of a Merit photo.

"Impact is what you get when all the other elements are working together in concert."

Creates Impact = Pillars + Attributes

Part 1 – Technical Excellence Pillar



Technical Excellence — Presentation — Lighting — Technique — Color

Presentation

Comment Ideas

- Adding a border might help me better understand your composition.
- I want to focus on your main subject. However, the large orange border keeps forcing my eyes to the edge of the photo. Consider a thinner border which is just enough for the judge to understand where the edge is.
- In the beautiful blue sky, I'm distracted by blobs of gray that appears to be dust on your camera sensor or lens

Affects a photo by giving it a finished look

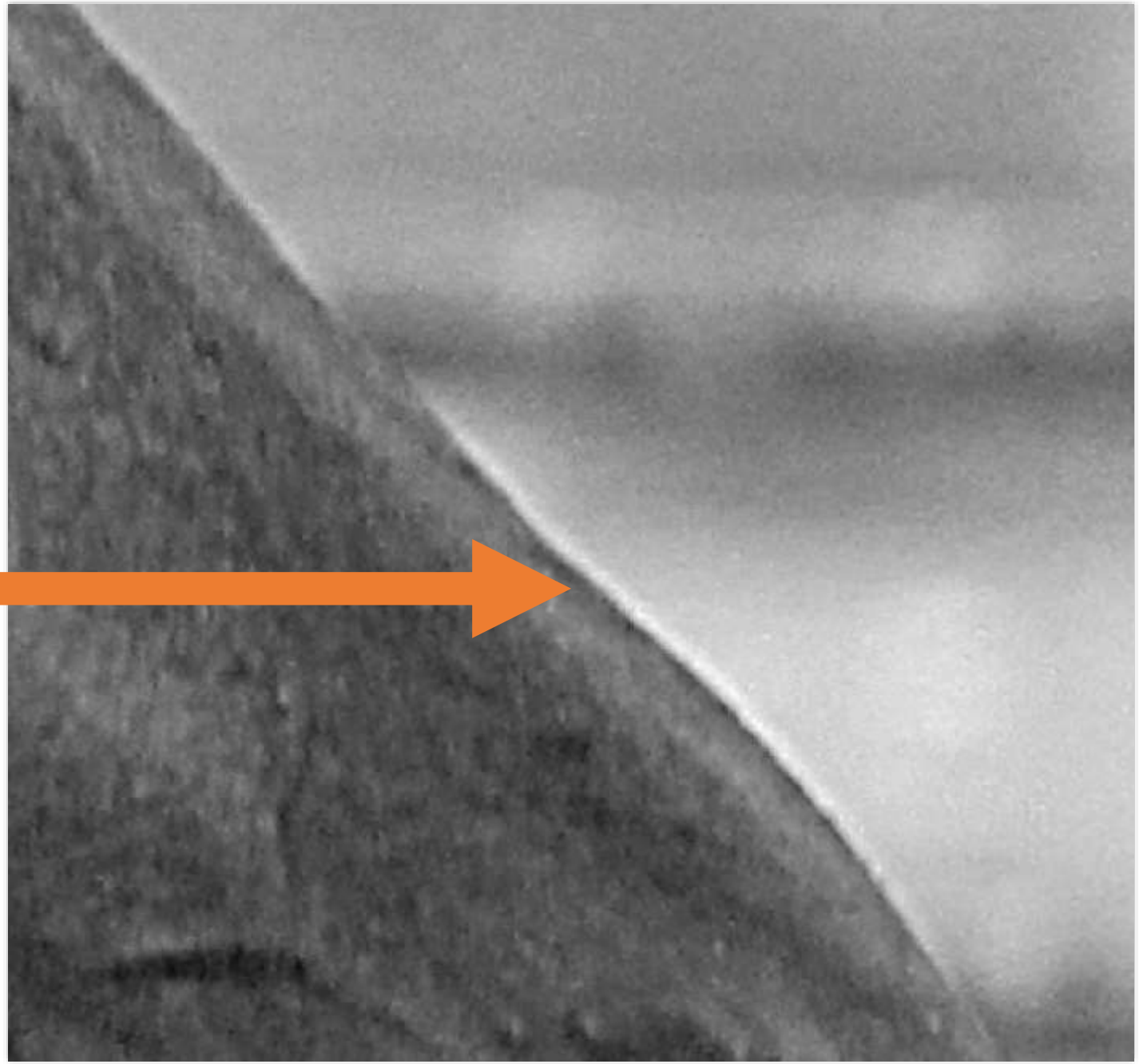
- The mats and borders used should support and enhance the photo, not distract from it
- Applying digital borders, customized for each photo, can either make or break your photo
- Making sure there is no dust (digital or analog) or scratches showing on the photo

Presentation

Awareness of fine details is critical.

The horse’s head and front has a small white outline.

Became ugly on 24”x30” print. Fixed before I printed at 30”x40”.



Technical Excellence ← Presentation — Lighting — Technique — Color

Lighting

Comment Ideas

- The harsh lighting from the bright sun is creating distracting dark shadows on the horse, a different time of day or cloudy weather may have helped
- On my screen, the photo is too dark for me to see the details, changing the exposure or adding light would add more impact
- There are bright overexposed areas on the left side that block me from seeing the butterfly, consider cropping 20% off the left edge

Defines dimension, shape and roundness in a photo

- The strength of your subjects should be portrayed by the strong lighting choices you utilize
- Light from artificial, natural or added in post-processing, proper use enhances a photo
- Light also impacts the color of a photo because in low light human perception is monochrome

Technical Excellence ← Presentation — Lighting — Technique — Color

Lighting the cookies

Strive to remove personal bias

Subject, specific technique, perceived difficulty, location familiarity.

Focus on result, not how!

This was not used

This was used

Technical Excellence ← Presentation — Lighting — Technique — Color

Technique

Comment Ideas

- In this photo, having the main subject in focus helps me understand the story you are trying to tell.
- If possible, lowering your camera to the level of the rabbit's eyes would provide a better background without the trash can.
- ~~I know this beach, moving 20 yards left is a better place to take a photo.~~ ← Don't say this

The approach or perspective used to create the photo

- Focus, posing, angle, capture, posing, expression, skin tones are part of technique applied to a photo
- Including lens, choice of paper, digital noise, mono conversion, texture, sharpening
- Move, change your perspective, learn new ways to control what you capture

Technical Excellence ← Presentation — Lighting — Technique — Color

Color

Comment Ideas

- Using a harsh lime green with purple colors helped set the scary tone of the scene
- It appears the greens are oversaturated which takes about from the mood of the peaceful cowboy with his horse

Color tones working together enhance the emotional appeal

- Color tones are not always harmonious and can be used to evoke diverse feelings for effect
- Are your colors and corrections pleasing to the eye? Do they look like they belong together?
- Color balance can be used to supply a structure to a photo

Technical Excellence ← Presentation — Lighting — Technique — Color

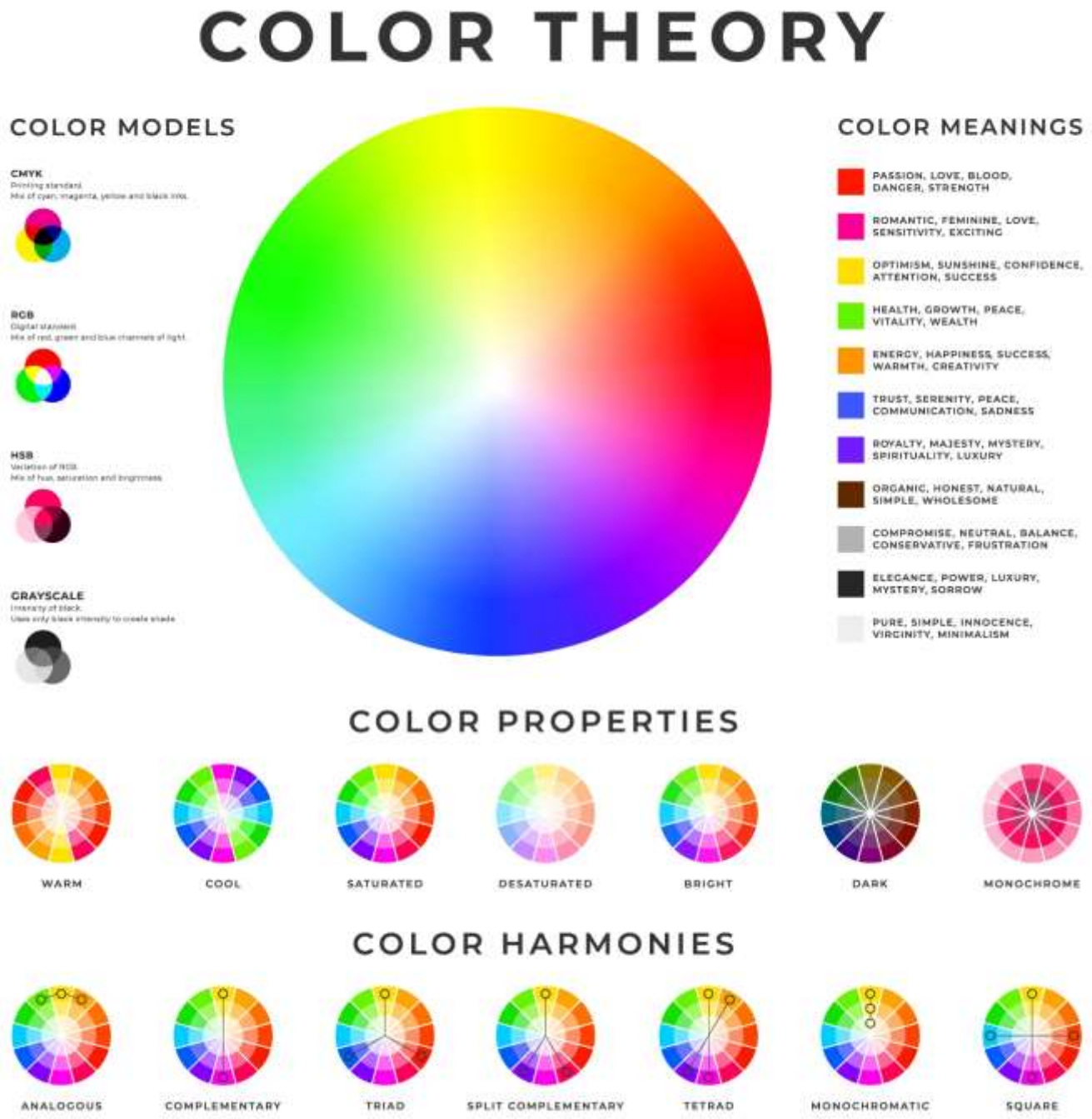
Color

aka

Color Balance

Color Harmony

Experiment at Adobe Color
https://color.adobe.com/create/color-wheel



Color - Monochrome

Comment Ideas

- It's an aggressive subject, the lion roaring, which is diminished by using mix of soft grays. Consider having parts fully black and fully white for a more striking photo.
- Given your historic subject, I'm wondering if using a sepia tone would have increased the storytelling.

Monochrome tones useful to remove harsh colors

- Color in monochrome is the range from fully saturated (black, sepia) to unsaturated (white)
- Do they look "bland" or "muddy" due to no areas on the left and right edges of the histogram?
- Add structure by altering the individual colors, for example should blue be light or dark

Technical Excellence ← Presentation — Lighting — Technique — Color

Technical Excellence

Comment Ideas

- The lighting and exposure are great, however the focus on the branch and not the bird hurts the overall impact.
- In this lake photo, the camera tilt takes away from capturing this amazing place and time.

The quality of the photo itself as it is presented for viewing

- Lighting, focus, exposure, camera motion, printing, mounting, color, retouching, manipulation ...
- The nuts and bolts of photography. Be wary of going too far with adjustments
- It's what makes you a pro. Lack of it can ruin a great scene.

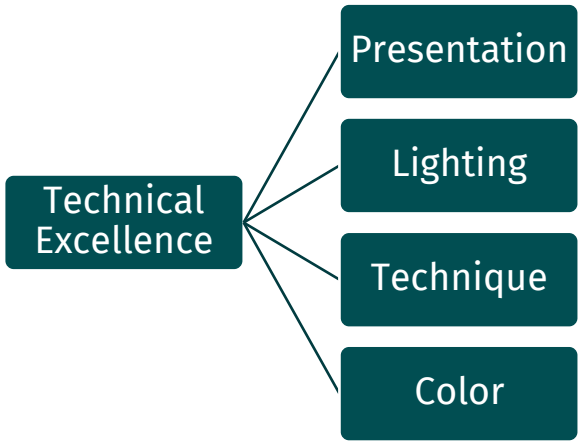
Kat Jane

Judging Group Activity #1

For each photo find these included or missing elements

If missing, suggest how the element would strengthen the photo

If included, why does it help



Your Turn Comments?

Start with a positive comment

Think about before the shutter clicks. The subject, framing, lighting, perspective, background …

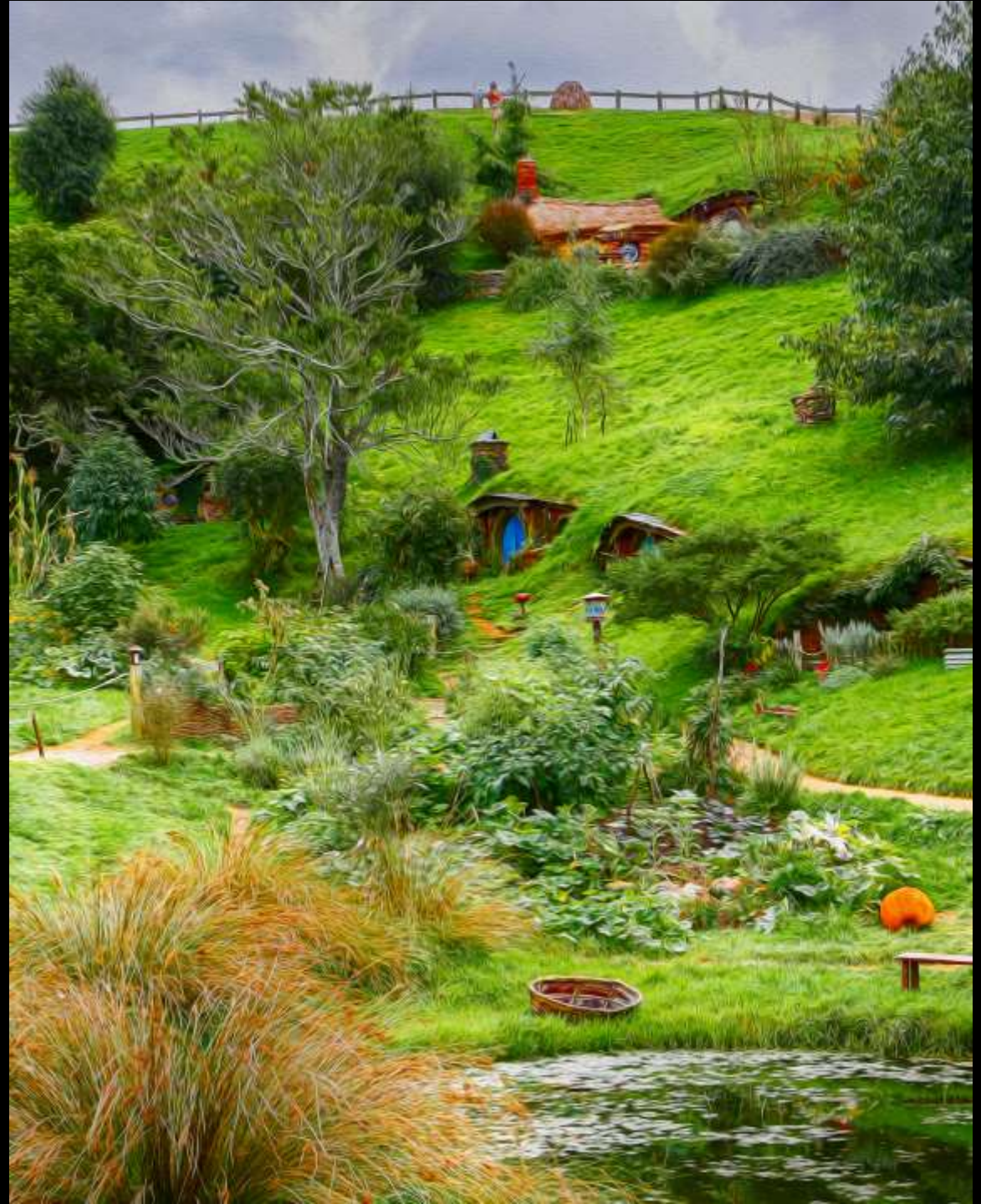
Improvement ideas are suggestions, not rules.
Use words like Maybe, Might, Consider …

Technical Excellence

- Presentation
- Lighting
- Technique
- Color

- Technical Excellence
  - Presentation
  - Lighting
  - Technique
  - Color

Staring into Wisdom



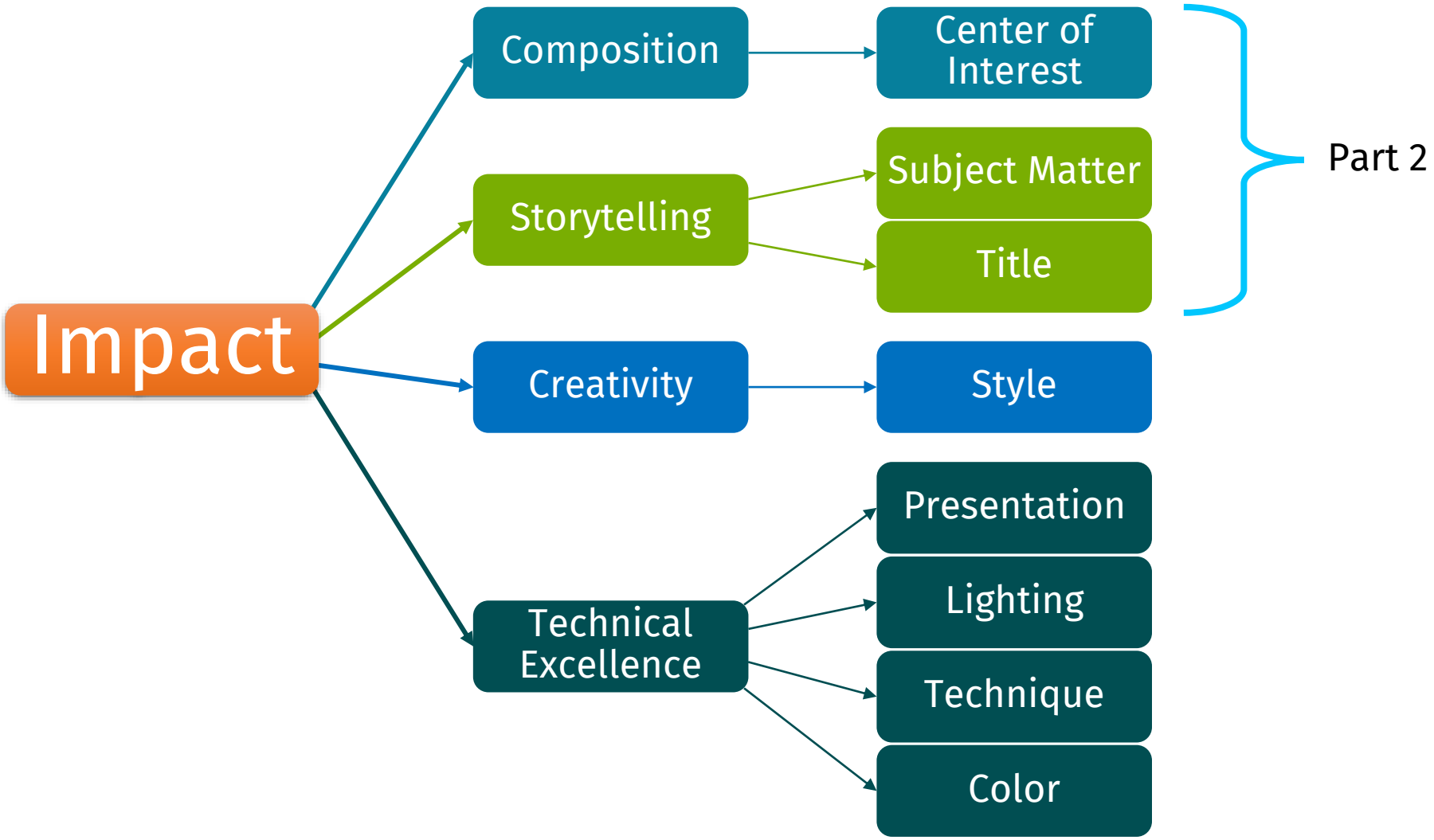
- Technical Excellence
  - Presentation
  - Lighting
  - Technique
  - Color

Dreaming of Hobbiton

- Technical Excellence
  - Presentation
  - Lighting
  - Technique
  - Color

Buck Senses Danger

Part 2 – Composition & Storytelling Pillars



Composition ← Center of Interest

Center of Interest

Comment Ideas

- My eyes can't find the center of interest to focus on. Consider a leading line to help guide the viewer to the center of interest.
- The salt on the left and pepper on the right have my eyes bouncing back and forth. Consider a way to link the two, maybe moving them closer together.

The point or points where the viewer should stop as they view photo

- Can be subtle or strong, regardless, they allow the eyes to pause in preconceived areas
- Occasionally there will be no specific center of interest (scene is the center, beautiful forest)
- Or there may be two, primary and secondary. Two primary centers of interests may confuse people.

Composition ← Center of Interest

Composition

Comment Ideas

- Considering cropping in on the left and top to highlight the guitar.
- I sense a leading line, but it seems out of balance. Maybe because there are multiple leading lines in different directions.
- Not following the Rule of Thirds is perfect for this portrait photo.
- Consider leaving more room in front of the moving car to better imply motion.

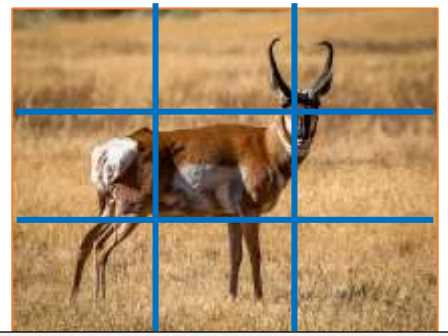
Bringing all the visual elements together to express the purpose

- Holds the viewer in the photo and prompts the viewer to look where the creator intends
- Do you follow the standard rules of composition? When do you break them to enhance the photo?
- Don't break the rules just to be cool, only use it if it enhances the photo

Composition ← Center of Interest

Composition Ideas

1. Balance
2. Centered/Symmetry
3. Color combinations
4. Depth
5. Distance
6. Fill the Frame
7. Framing
8. Isolate the Subject
9. Juxtaposition
10. Leading Lines
11. Left to Right
12. Patterns & Texture
13. Points
14. Rule of Odds
15. Rule of Thirds
16. Shapes – diagonals, triangles, golden ratio
17. Simplicity & Minimalism
18. Space – positive, negative, breathing
19. Tone
20. …



Rule of Thirds
Place the most interesting item on the lines or intersection

Leading Lines
Use a line to lead the viewer to the most interesting item

Rule of Odds
For visual balance and harmony use 1, 3 or 5 items

Leaving Space
Breathing room and implied motion

Subject Matter

Comment Ideas

- The assigned subject is moving water and this pond is still.
- The lighting, focus, border ... or perspective of the subject does not support the story you are trying to tell.

Should always be appropriate to the story being told in a photo

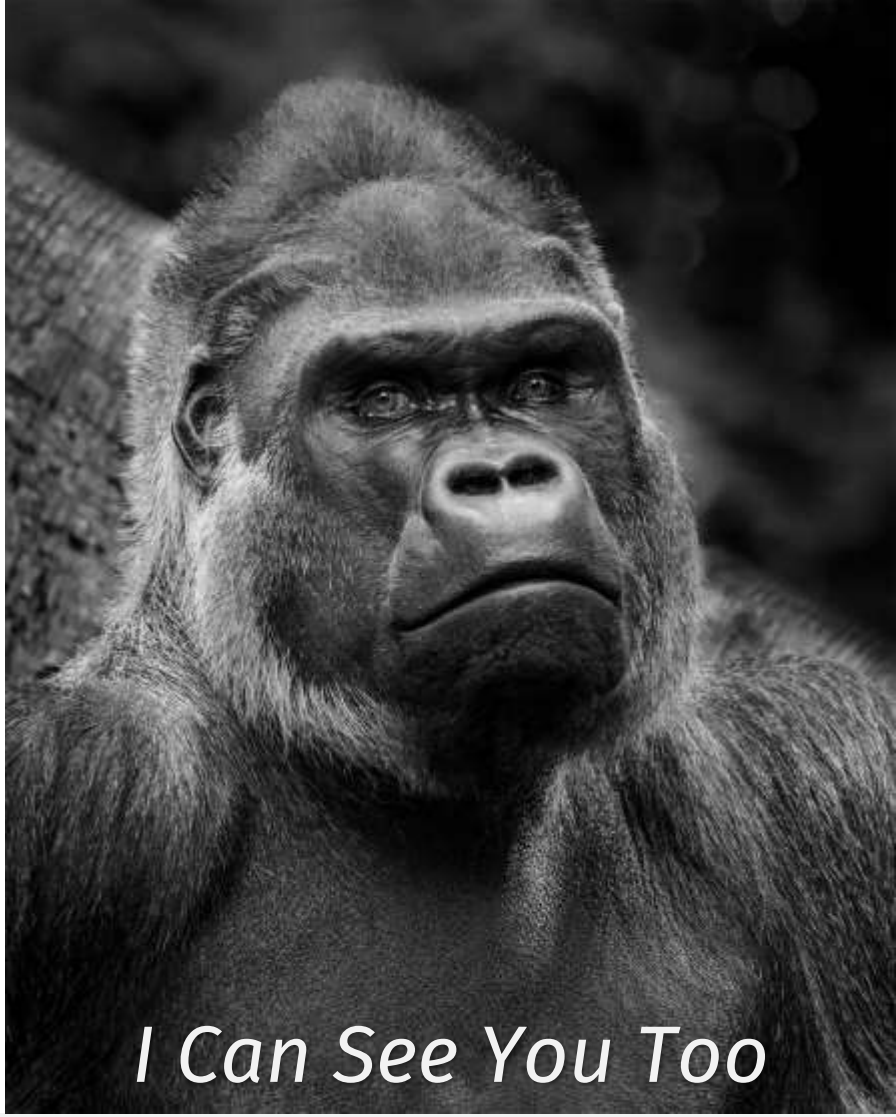
- Keep it interesting and appropriate. Pretty doesn't mean it's right.
- Subject matter is sometimes linked to the competition category or photo title
- Not everyone will inherently understand your subject, use additional elements to help the viewer

Storytelling ← Subject Matter — Title

Title

Comment Ideas

- Please don't comment on the title's spelling, grammar or punctuation.
- If the title is not aligned with the photo, generally you don’t need to comment on that either.


I Can See You Too

Use the title to provide an emotional connection to the photo

- At a minimum, use the title to tell the judges where to look when titles are announced before scoring
- It’s always good to try many titles, the best might be the first or the last, avoid common short titles.
- Don’t waste the title to name the location (Niagara Falls) or obvious subject (Gorilla)

Storytelling

Comment Ideas

- I could not sense any storytelling in the photo.
- While the photo tells the story of a happy birthday party setting and the expressions conflict.

The photo's ability to evoke imagination

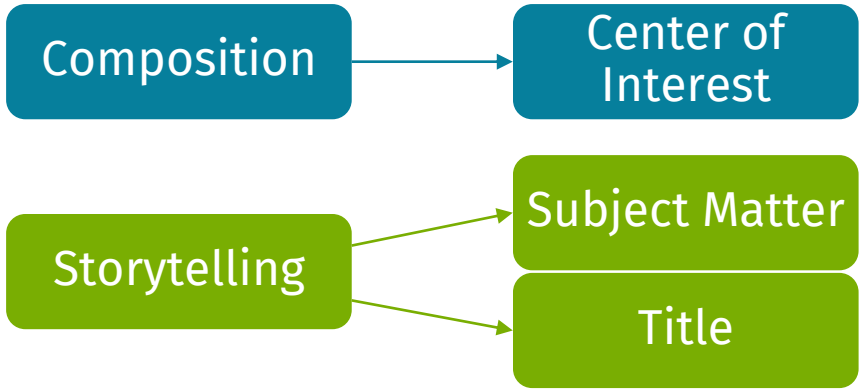
- Take a step back to see what kind of stories your photos can create
- One beautiful thing about art is that each viewer might create their own message or story
- Take a step back and look at the photo as if it is your first time, find the story and make it noticeable

Judging Group Activity #2

For each photo find these included or missing elements

If missing, suggest how the element would strengthen the photo

If included, why does it help



Composition → Center of Interest

Storytelling → Subject Matter

Storytelling → Title

I'm Looking at You

Composition → Center of Interest

Storytelling → Subject Matter

Storytelling → Title

I'm Looking at You

Composition → Center of Interest

Storytelling → Subject Matter

Storytelling → Title

Brooklyn Bridge Flag

Composition → Center of Interest

Storytelling → Subject Matter

Storytelling → Title

Cascades

Composition → Center of Interest

Storytelling → Subject Matter

Storytelling → Title

I Don’t See Any Food

Composition → Center of Interest

Storytelling → Subject Matter

Storytelling → Title

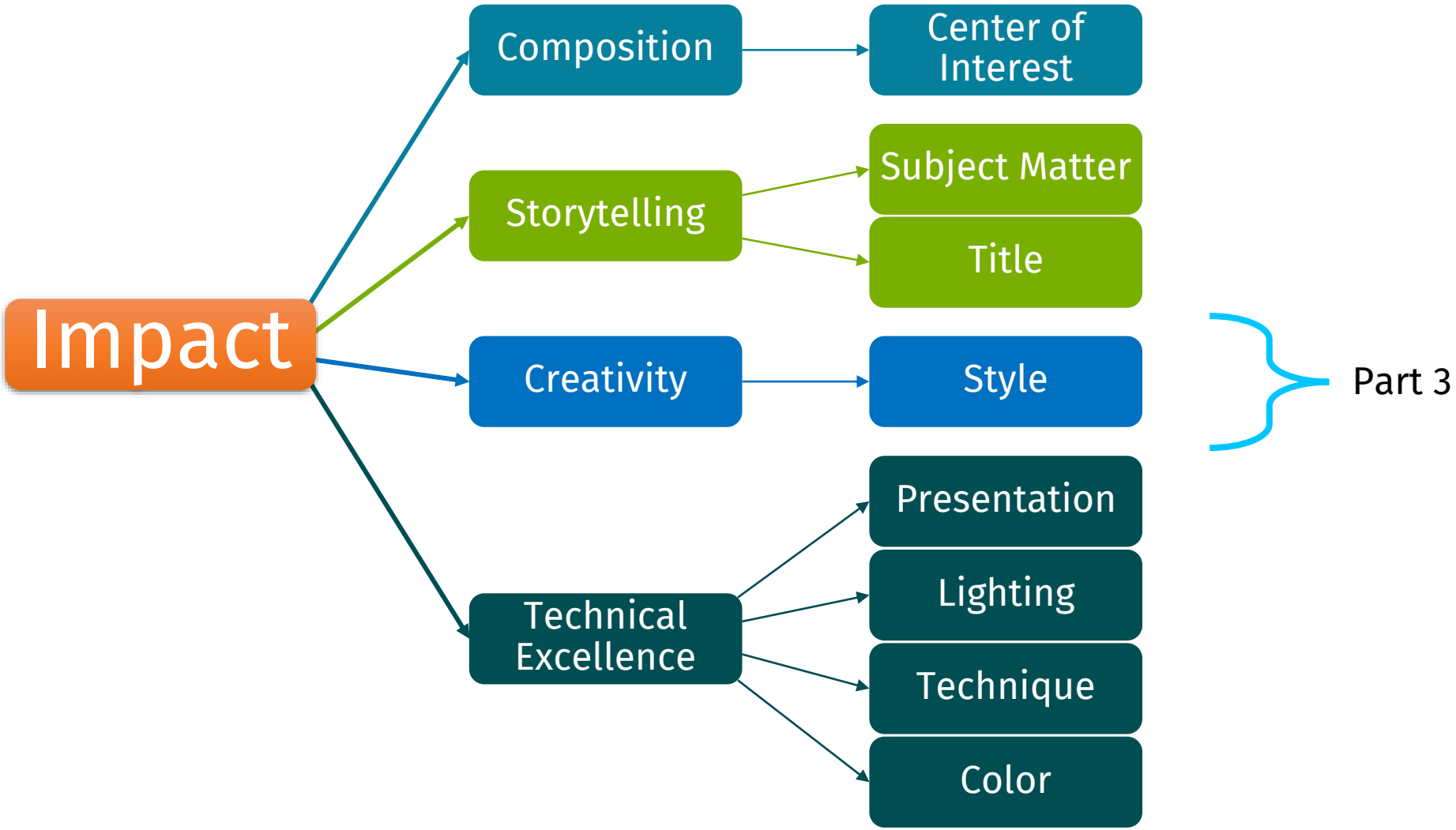
Composition → Center of Interest

Storytelling → Subject Matter

Storytelling → Title

Look Mom, No Hands!

Part 3 – Style, Creativity and Impact



Creativity ← Style

Style

Comment Ideas

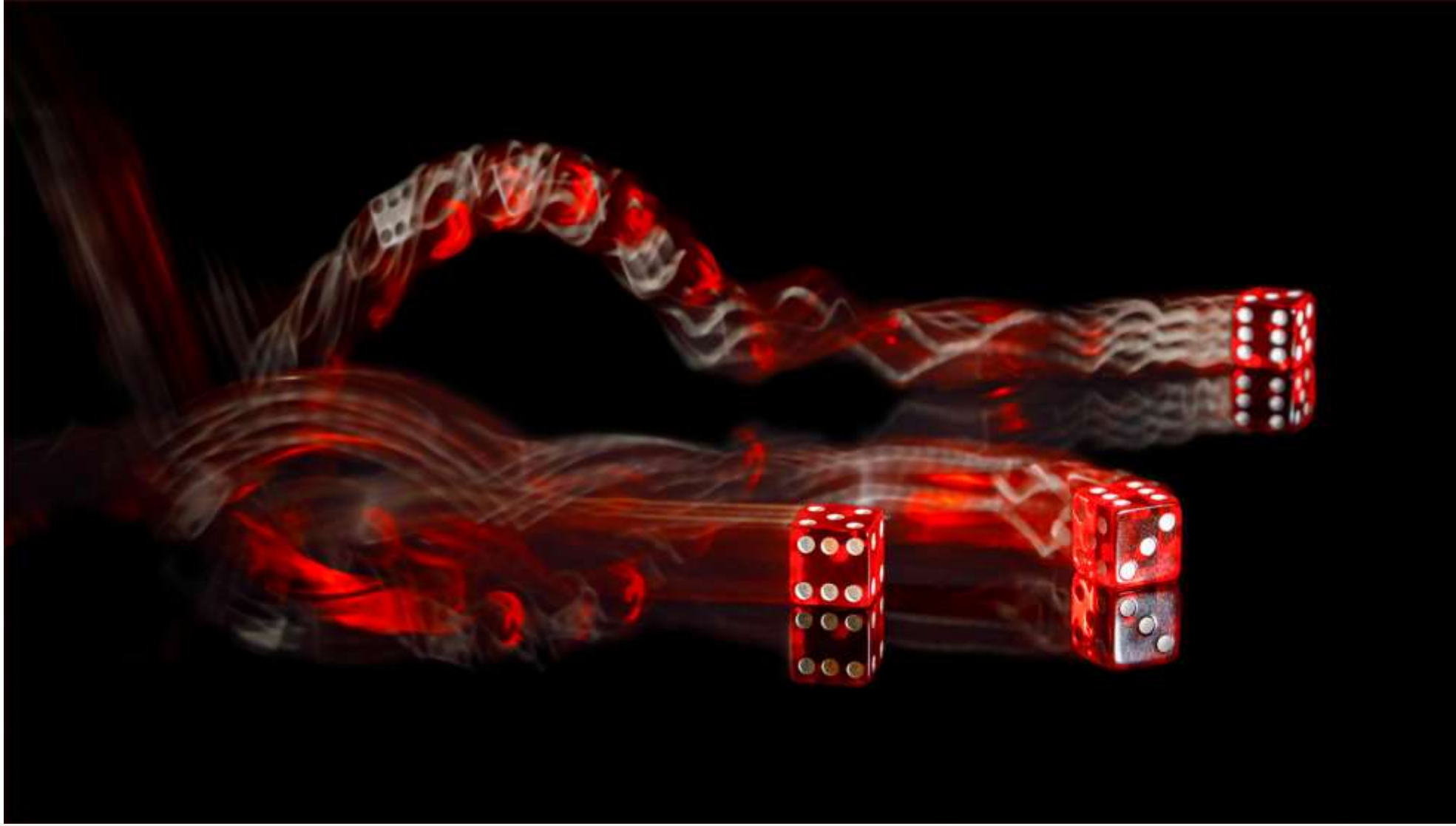
- The style of the harsh light in the photo reflects the decision required in the story being told.
- The fully saturated colors highlight the beauty of the evening sunset.

A specific genre or recognizable characteristic to showcase an artist

- Has a positive impact when the subject matter and the style are appropriate for each other
- Your work can be anything from traditional to surreal, candid to abstract, hard or soft light
- Use light or color in a special way, a blue tone in monochrome, high saturation, consistent angle

Creativity ← Style

Creativity



Comment Ideas

- This is very creating. I've rolled dice hundreds of times but never imagined this is what they look like in motion.
- This angle and camera settings is a unique way to view the subject.

Fresh expression of imagination to convey an idea, message, thought

- It's looking at an ordinary subject and finding an extraordinary way to portray it
- In photographic competitions, you may get bonus points for creativity and originality
- There are classic photos we have all seen, use creativity to differentiate yourself

Impact

Comment Ideas

- This photo took my breath away. The way you leveraged great technique to convey the story is amazing.
- While initially it made me laugh, when I looked closer, I found center of interest and lighting are lacking.

The sense one gets upon viewing a photo for the first time

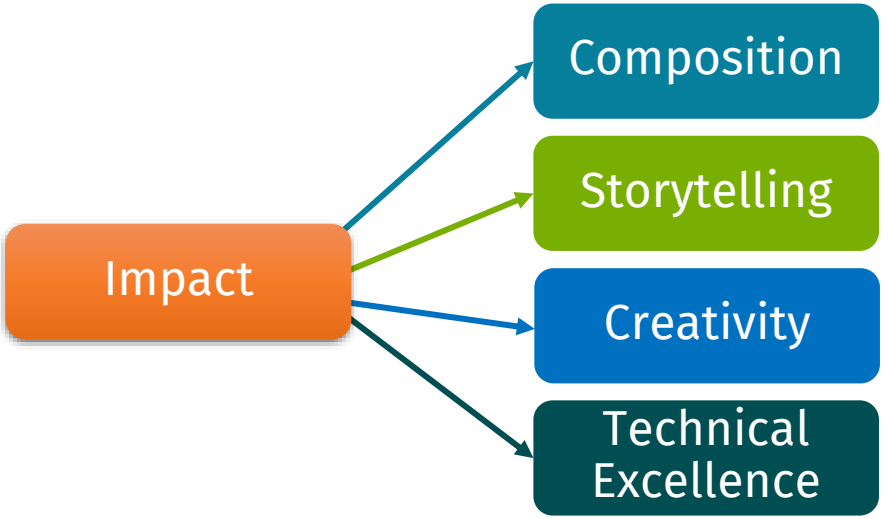
- Impactful photos evoke laughter, sadness, anger, pride, wonder or another intense emotion
- This is the eye candy, the wow factor. It is the reason we love the photo. It moves us to look inwards.
- Impact is what you get when all the other elements are working together in concert

Judging Group Activity #3

For each photo find these included or missing elements

If missing, suggest how the element would strengthen the photo

If included, why does it help



Creativity → Style

Impact → Composition
Impact → Storytelling
Impact → Creativity
Impact → Technical Excellence

The Baker's Magic Hands

Creativity → Style

Impact → Composition

Impact → Storytelling

Impact → Creativity

Impact → Technical Excellence

The London Eye

Creativity → Style

Impact → Composition

Impact → Storytelling

Impact → Creativity

Impact → Technical Excellence

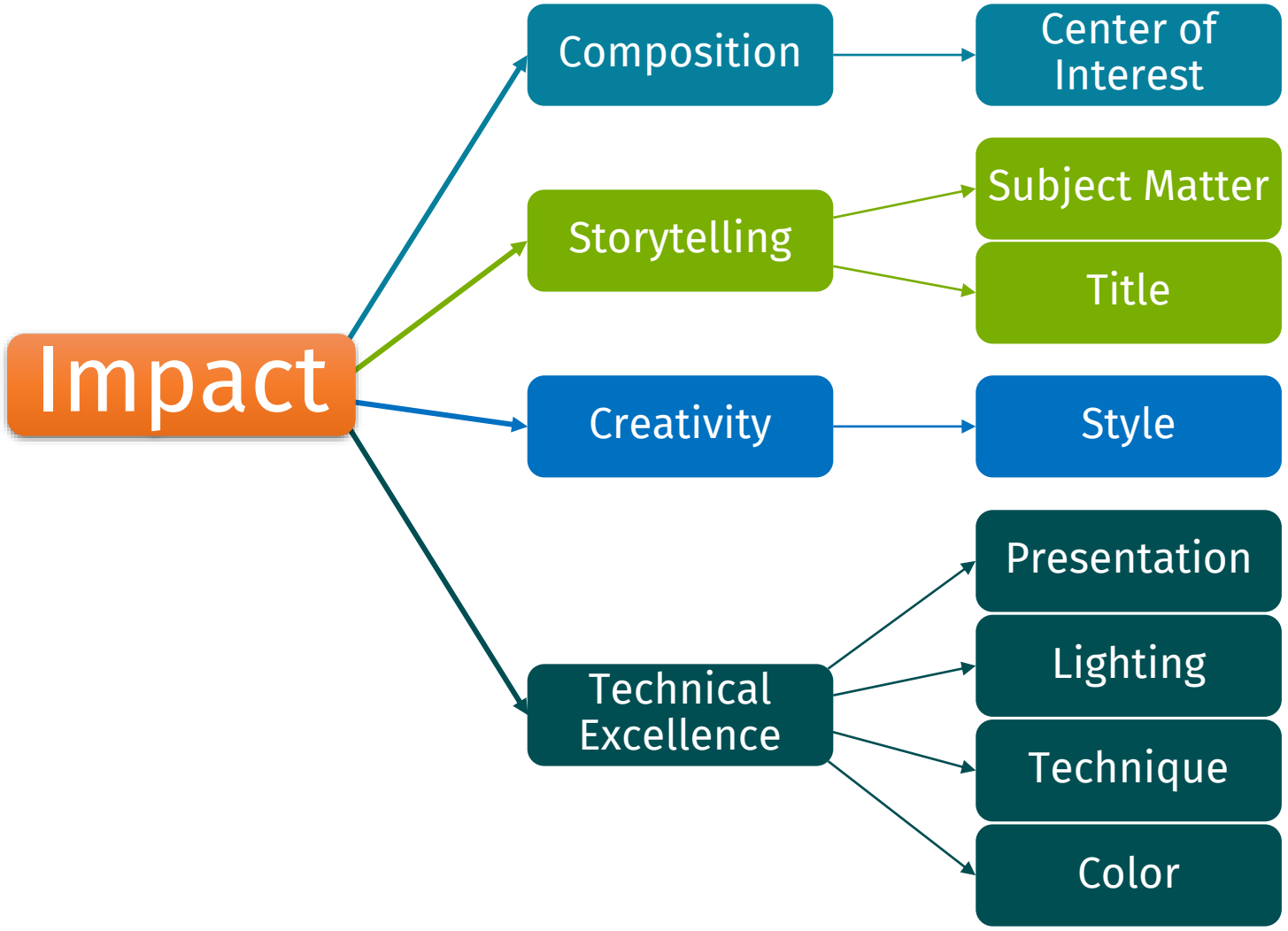
Historic Icons of Newtown

Creativity → Style

Impact → Composition
Impact → Storytelling
Impact → Creativity
Impact → Technical Excellence

Slicing Vegetables Reflection

The Elements of an Excellent Photo - Summary



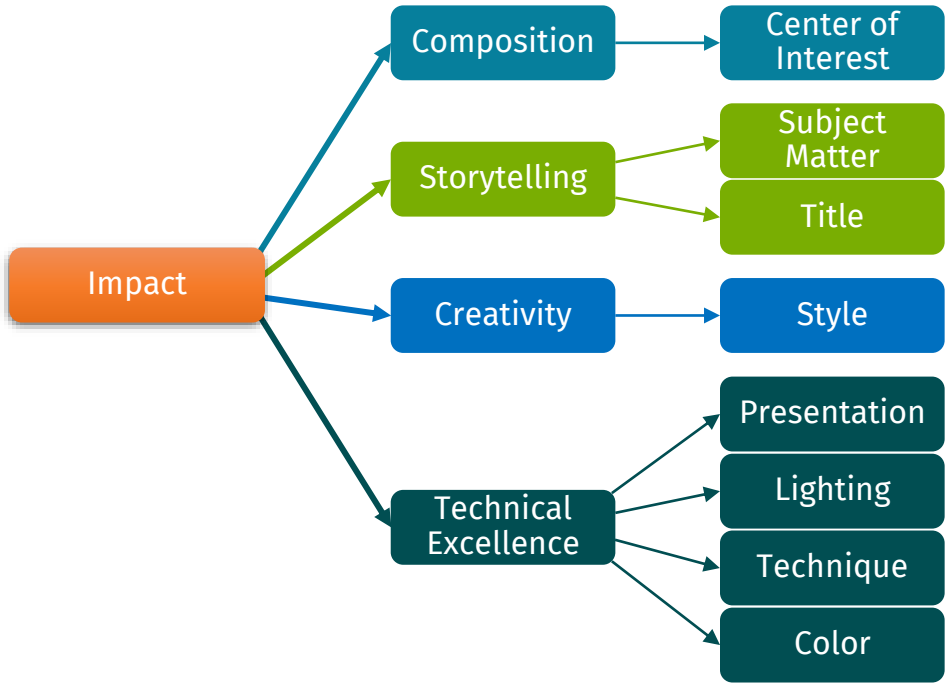
Each Element is important on its own

The more Elements you use, the stronger your photo becomes

- Role of Judging Camera Club Competitions — Educational
- Formulating an Educational Comment — Specific, Helpful, Aligned to Score
- Deciding on a Score — Ranking, Range Independent
- Understanding the 12 Elements with Interactive Activities — Framework for Creating Comments

Presentation At

https://group.neccc.org/judging-camera-club-competitions

Questions?

Chane Cullens – Chane@CCullens.com