

Elements of Good Competition Prints

One of the most exciting and rewarding events a photographer can participate in is the print competition. First of all, participating in print competition is a great way to sharpen your skills and to improve your photography. Secondly, it is a way to gain attention in your profession and your community by winning awards and trophies. The “Print Rules” are designed to closely match those on the state, regional, and national level so that prints you enter at the Forum Print Judging will be eligible for judging there.

So, pay close attention to the rules. Then, read the following information...

Make Sure Your Prints Have...

Impact - Is there something about the print that catches a judge’s eye as soon as it is shown? Does it have an element of excitement? Critical points can be earned up front if the print has good impact and “breaks the boredom” for the judges.

Creativity - The concept as well as the print itself should demonstrate creativity on your part. The image should show that you did more than just copy some other photographer’s style.

Unique & Interesting Style - This goes along with the initial impact. Does your print reflect a style of photography that is interesting and unique?

Correct Composition - A dead-centered, static-looking print will never fly. Utilize the “rule of thirds” when composing your image. The viewer’s eye should naturally be drawn to the center of attention.

Good Color Balance - Colors should be realistic and lifelike. White areas should be white and black areas should be black. Colors should harmonize and not clash.

Correct Lighting - Basic lighting principles should be followed. If a subject needs short lighting, it should be used. If a subject needs broad lighting, then it should be used. The light used for “modeling” should be properly placed and should show you have a firm command of correct lighting technique.

Outstanding Subject Matter - Judges see tons of prints of women and children and brides because those seem to be the most popular types of subject matter photographed and entered. So, if you photograph something that a lot of other people are using, try to find a subject that is really extraordinary and that stands out among all the rest.

Exceptional Print Quality - If your lab is unfamiliar with printing competition prints, find one that is! Remember that a good print starts with a good negative (or digital file). It must be properly exposed before the lab can do the best job of printing. You should view your prints under lighting conditions similar to those at the print judging itself to make sure it will not “wash out” under the bright judging lights. Also, avoid the traditional flat matte finish. Consider a very high gloss finish.

Make a Statement or Tell a Story - A print that tells a story or makes a statement is more exciting and interesting than just a nice print of a nice looking person. The image should stir the emotions and imagination of the judges. Therefore, the title can often be as important as the print itself. Be as creative as possible when coming up with a title. Make sure it goes with the image.

Center of Attention - The judges’ eyes should naturally be drawn to a center of attention which is the main subject matter. Any leading lines should lead to that point without making the judges’ eyes jump back and forth around the image.

Watch Out For - Watch out for poor subject matter, poorly posed hands, cropping that is too close, poor clothing selections, obvious artwork and titles that don’t match the image.

Most Importantly - Follow the rules to the letter!