

Improving Your Photos

Using the 12 Elements of an Excellent Photo



All photos © Chane & Rhonda Cullens

Agenda



History of the Elements on an Excellent Photo



Technical Excellence

+ Group activity



Composition and Storytelling

+ Group activity



Style, Creativity and Impact

+ Group activity



Process Ideas for Creating Better Photos

**Presentation
At**

CCullens.com/elements

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May 6, 2022

**Please ask
questions at
any time!**

**It's an opportunity
for everyone to learn.**



Viewpoint – Beauty is in the eye of the beholder



The photographer directs the eye of the beholder to the beauty.



Today we are going to discuss how the ***12 Elements of an Excellent Photo*** to help everyone see the beauty.

Chane's Rules for Photography

Rule 1

Crafting an excellent photo is not simply math or science

It's art, it's subjective, it's self-expression

Rule 2

All photos will benefit from some guidelines

No photo will benefit from every guideline

Rule 3

There are no required rules

There are lots of guidelines and an unbounded set of ideas

Agenda



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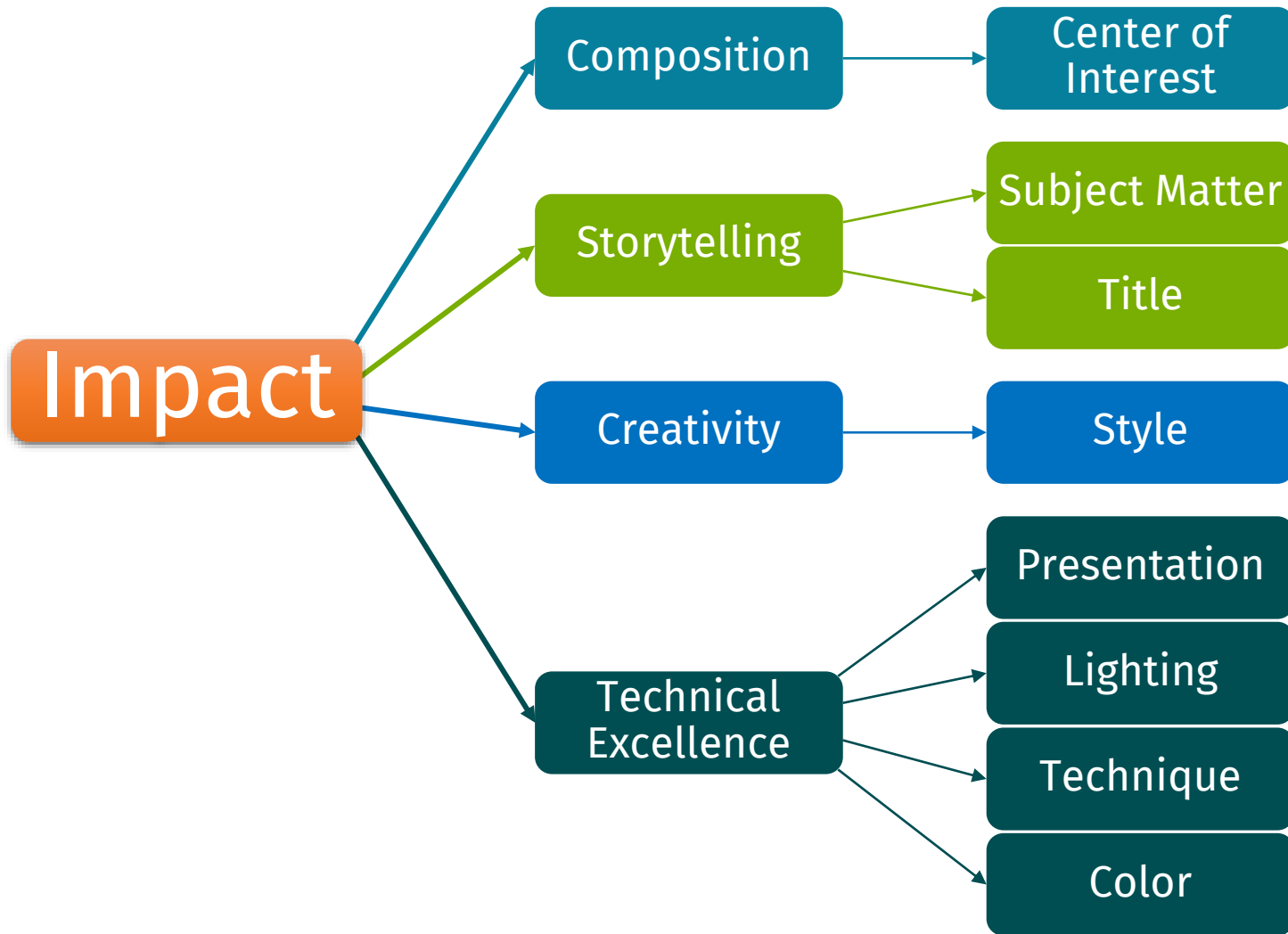
Style, Creativity and Impact

+ Group activity



Process Ideas for Creating Better Photos

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. Formalized in 2011.

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

Creates Impact = Pillars + Attributes



Agenda



History of the Elements on an Excellent Photo



Technical Excellence

+ Group activity



Composition and Storytelling + Group activity

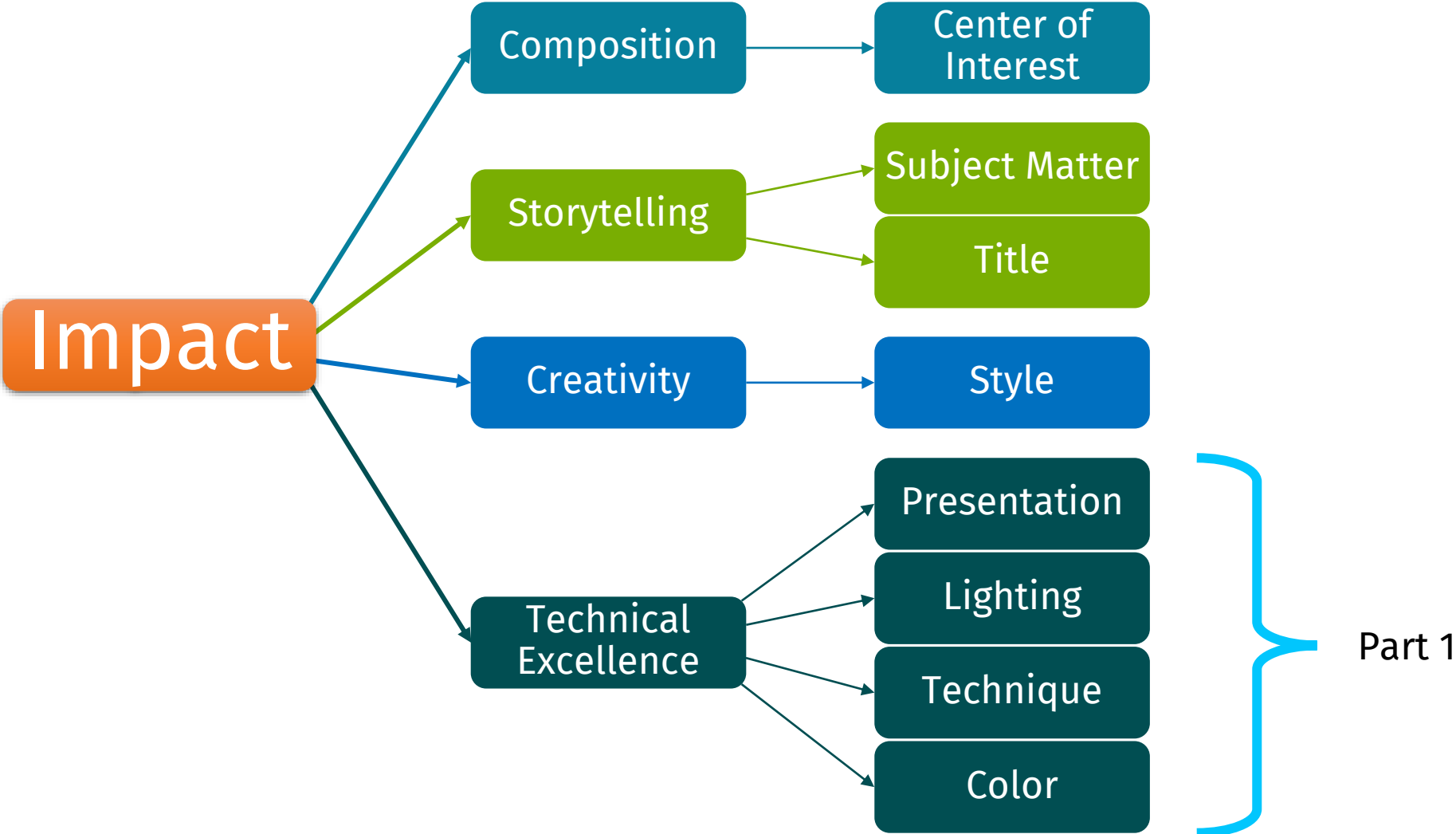


Style, Creativity and Impact + Group activity



Process Ideas for Creating Better Photos

Part 1 – Technical Excellence Pillar



Presentation



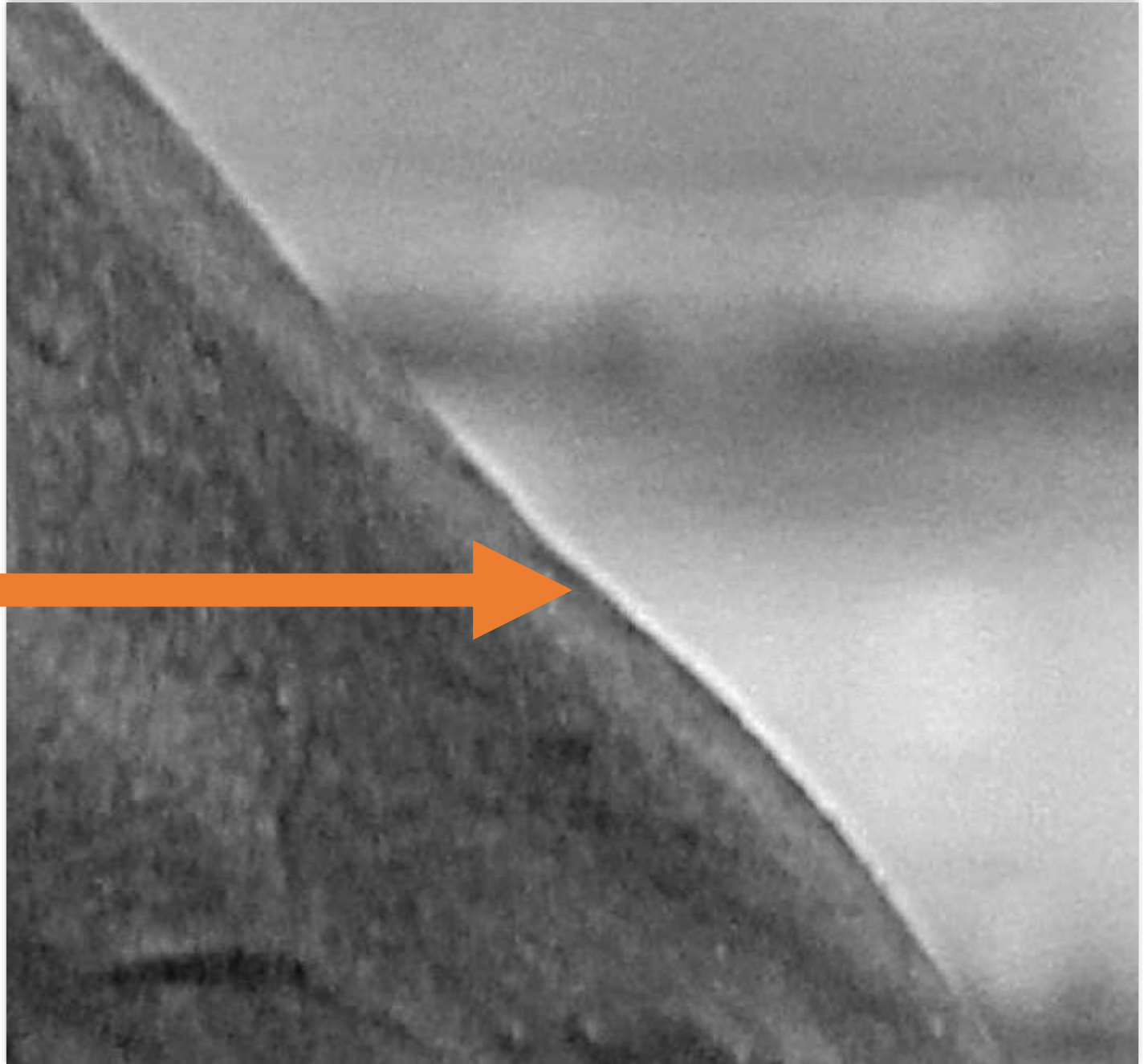
Affects a photo by giving it a finished look

- 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".



Lighting



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

Lighting the cookies

Start by thinking about what you are trying to achieve. Then experiment! Then try again. Light dimension, shape, roundness, depth ...



This was **not** used



This was used



Technique



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

Color



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

Color

aka
Color Balance
Color Harmony

COLOR THEORY

COLOR MODELS

CMYK
Printing standard.
Mix of cyan, magenta, yellow and black inks.



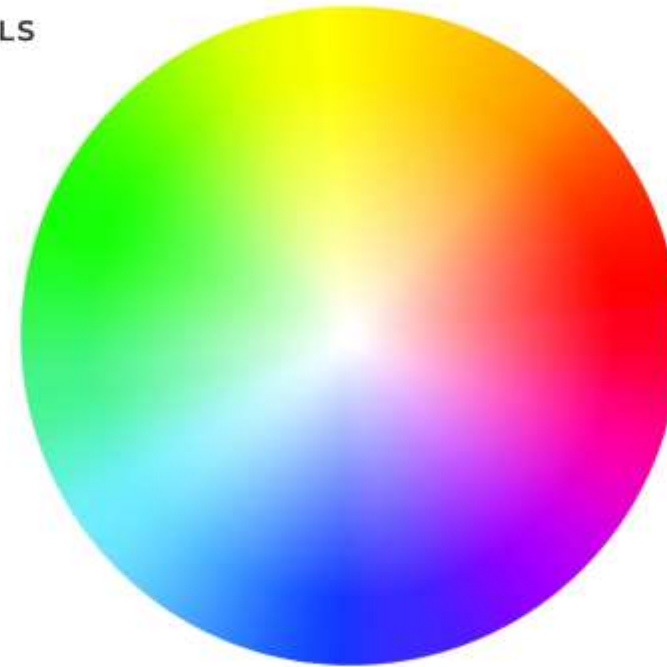
RGB
Digital standard.
Mix of red, green and blue channels of light.



HSB
Variation of RGB.
Mix of hue, saturation and brightness.



GRAYSCALE
Intensity of black.
Uses only black intensity to create shade.



COLOR MEANINGS

- PASSION, LOVE, BLOOD, DANGER, STRENGTH
- ROMANTIC, FEMININE, LOVE, SENSITIVITY, EXCITING
- OPTIMISM, SUNSHINE, CONFIDENCE, ATTENTION, SUCCESS
- HEALTH, GROWTH, PEACE, VITALITY, WEALTH
- ENERGY, HAPPINESS, SUCCESS, WARMTH, CREATIVITY
- TRUST, SERENITY, PEACE, COMMUNICATION, SADNESS
- ROYALTY, MAJESTY, MYSTERY, SPIRITUALITY, LUXURY
- ORGANIC, HONEST, NATURAL, SIMPLE, WHOLESOME
- COMPROMISE, NEUTRAL, BALANCE, CONSERVATIVE, FRUSTRATION
- ELEGANCE, POWER, LUXURY, MYSTERY, SORROW
- PURE, SIMPLE, INNOCENCE, VIRGINITY, MINIMALISM

COLOR PROPERTIES



COLOR HARMONIES

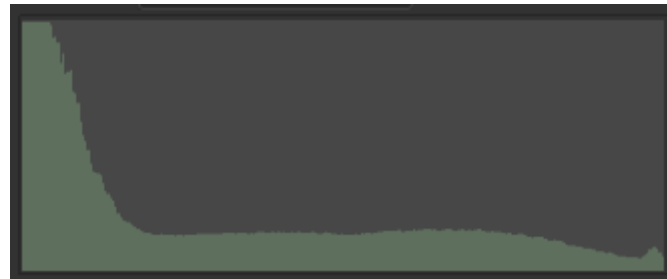


Experiment at Adobe Color
<https://color.adobe.com/create/color-wheel>

Color - Monochrome

Black

White



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



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.

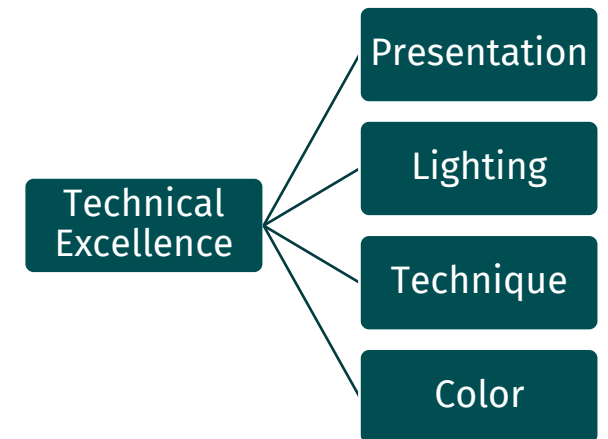


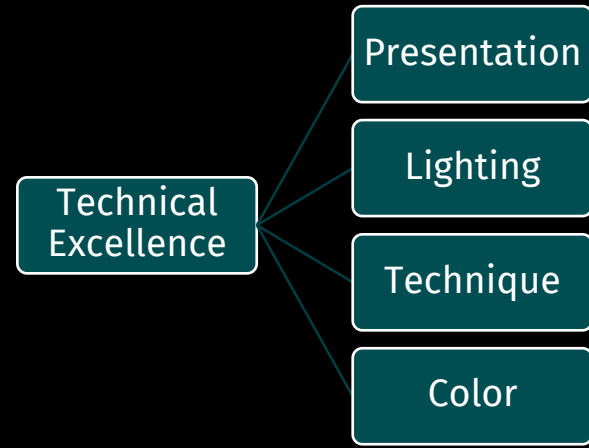
Judging Group Activity #1

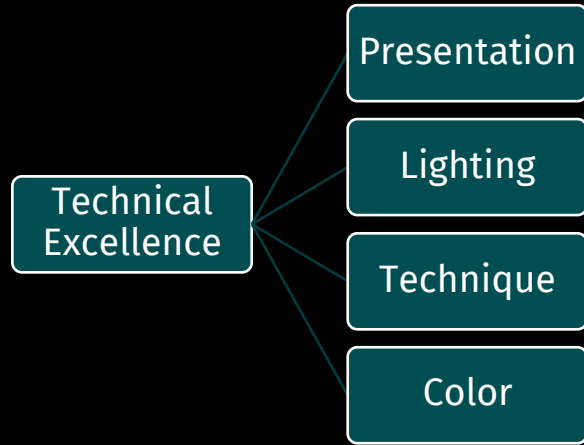
Find one of these elements in the photo

Or

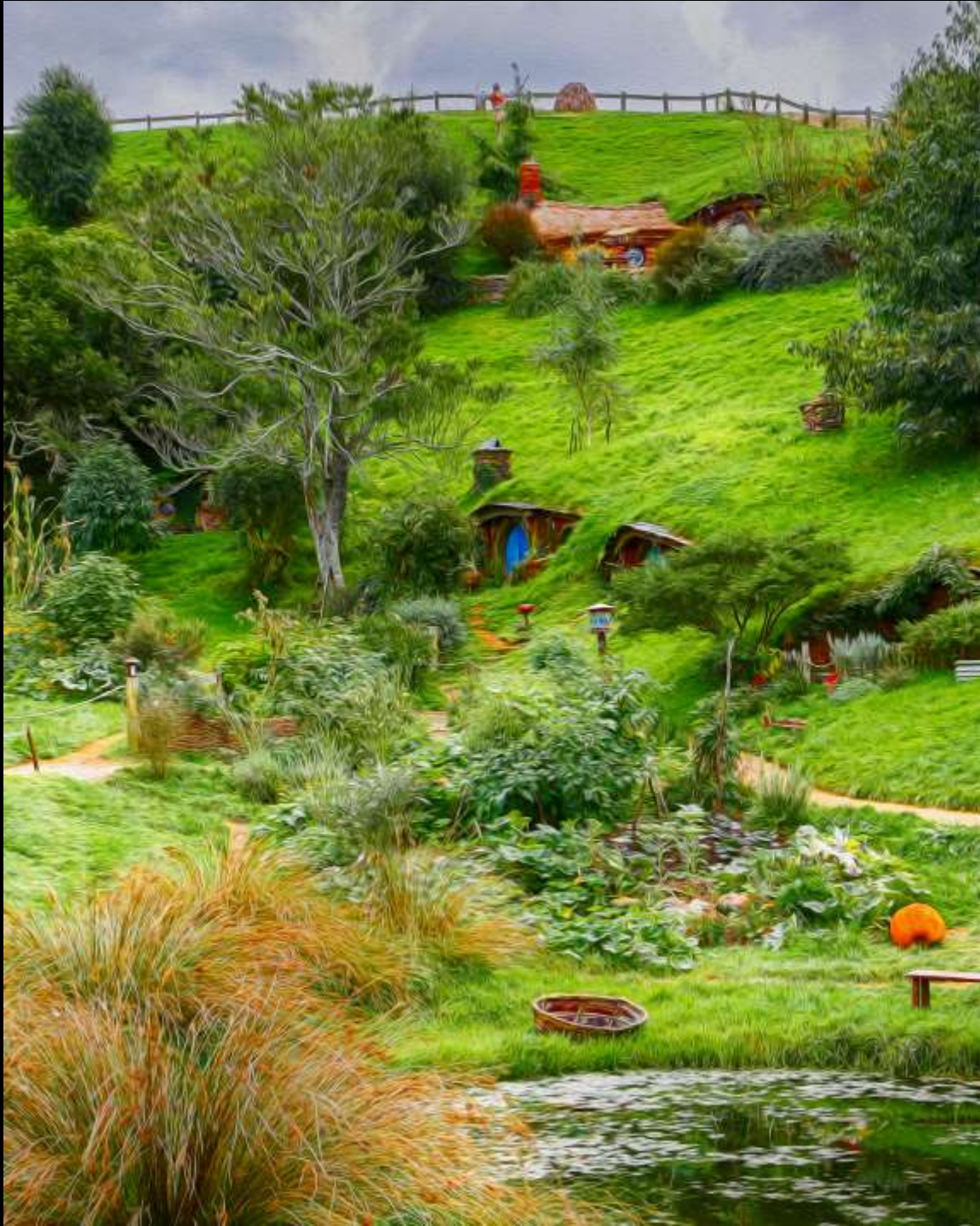
Identify one of these elements that could be improved in the photo







Staring into Wisdom



Technical
Excellence

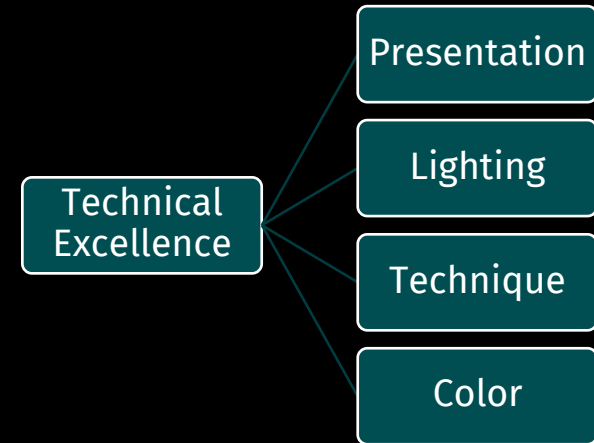
Presentation

Lighting

Technique

Color

Dreaming of Hobbiton



Buck Senses Danger

Agenda



History of the Elements on an Excellent Photo



Technical Excellence

+ Group activity



Composition and Storytelling + Group activity



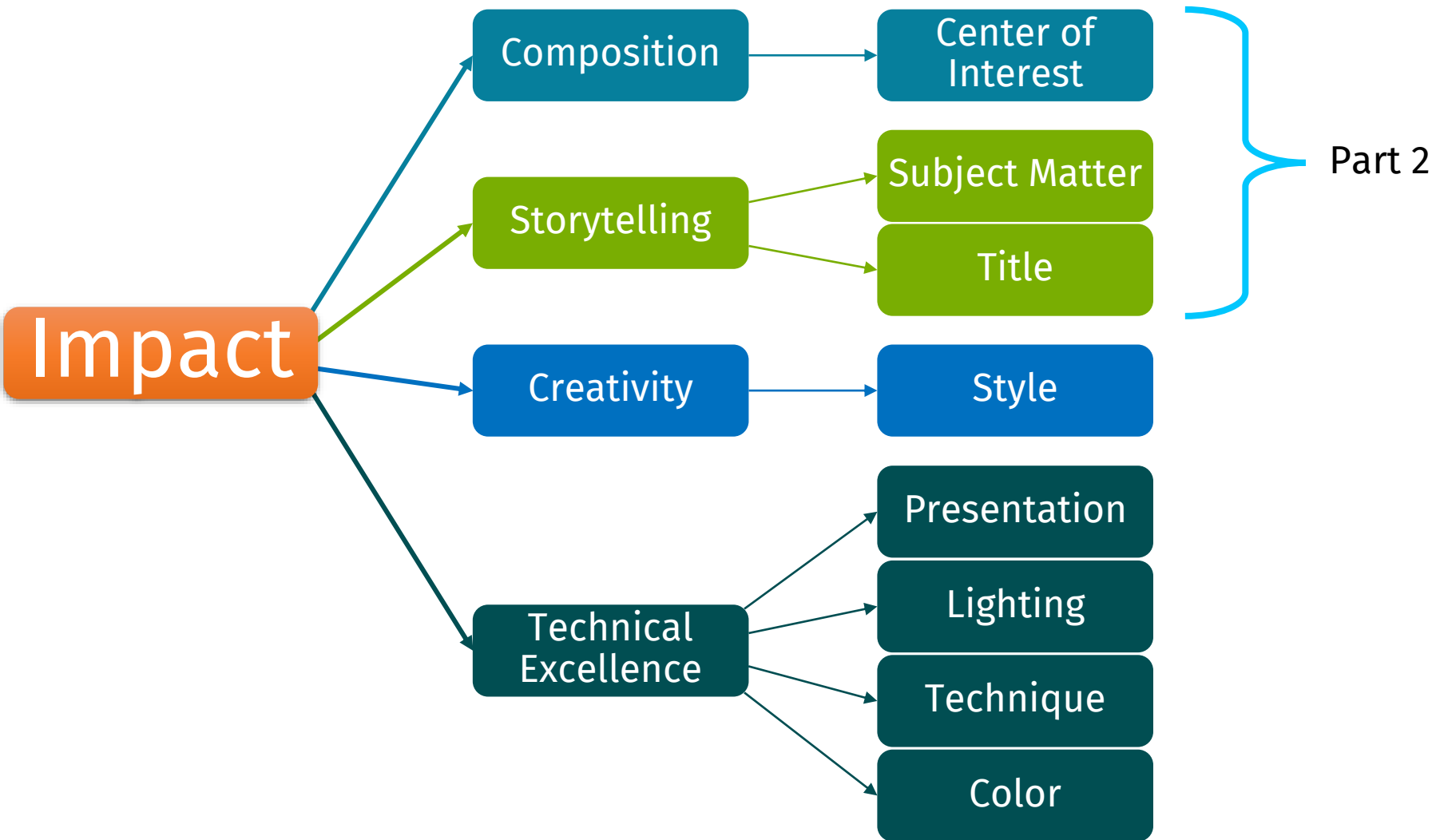
Style, Creativity and Impact

+ Group activity



Process Ideas for Creating Better Photos

Part 2 – Composition & Storytelling Pillars



Center of Interest



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

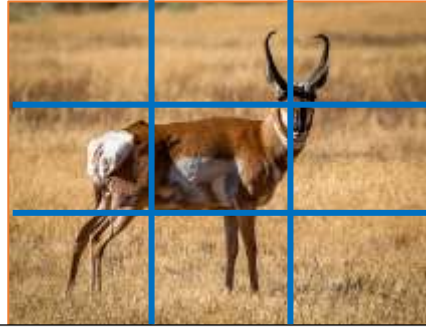


Bringing all the visual elements together to express the purpose

- 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 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



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

Title



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



Rhonda Cullens

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

Find one of these elements in the photo

Or

Identify one of these elements that could be improved in the photo

Composition

Center of Interest

Storytelling

Subject Matter

Title



Composition

Center of Interest

Storytelling

Subject Matter

Title

I'm Looking at You



Composition

Center of Interest

Storytelling

Subject Matter

Title

I'm Looking at You



Composition

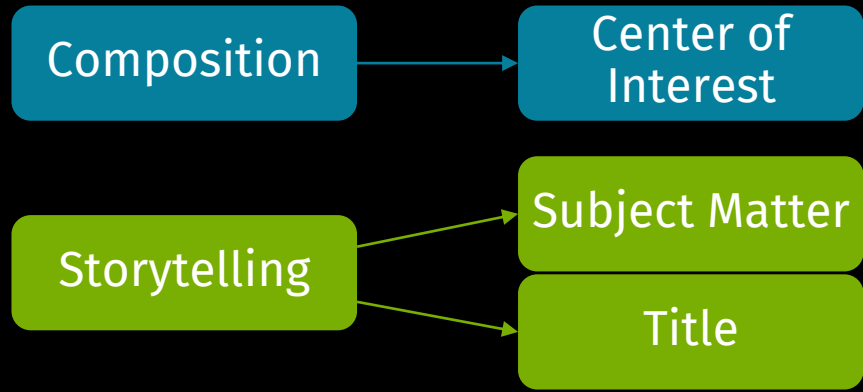
Center of Interest

Storytelling

Subject Matter

Title

Brooklyn Bridge Flag





Composition

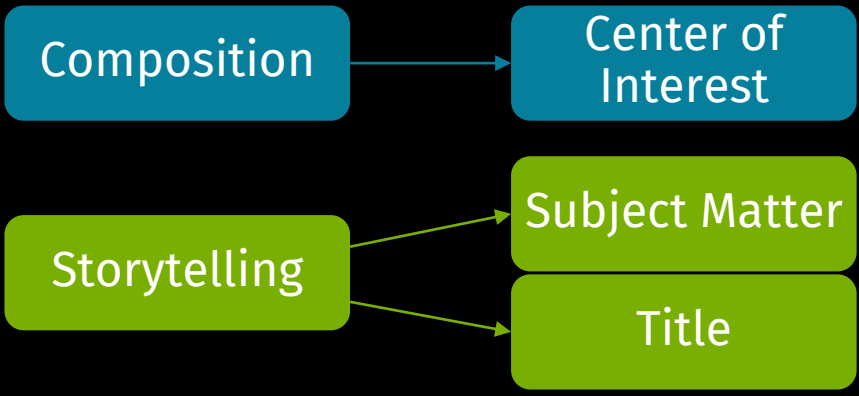
Center of Interest

Storytelling

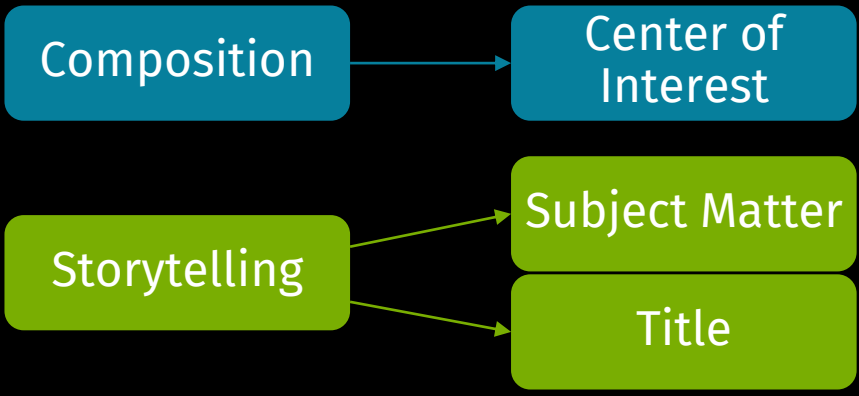
Subject Matter

Title

I Don't See Any Food



I Don't See Any Food



Look Mom, No Hands!

Agenda



History of the Elements on an Excellent Photo



Technical Excellence

+ Group activity



Composition and Storytelling

+ Group activity



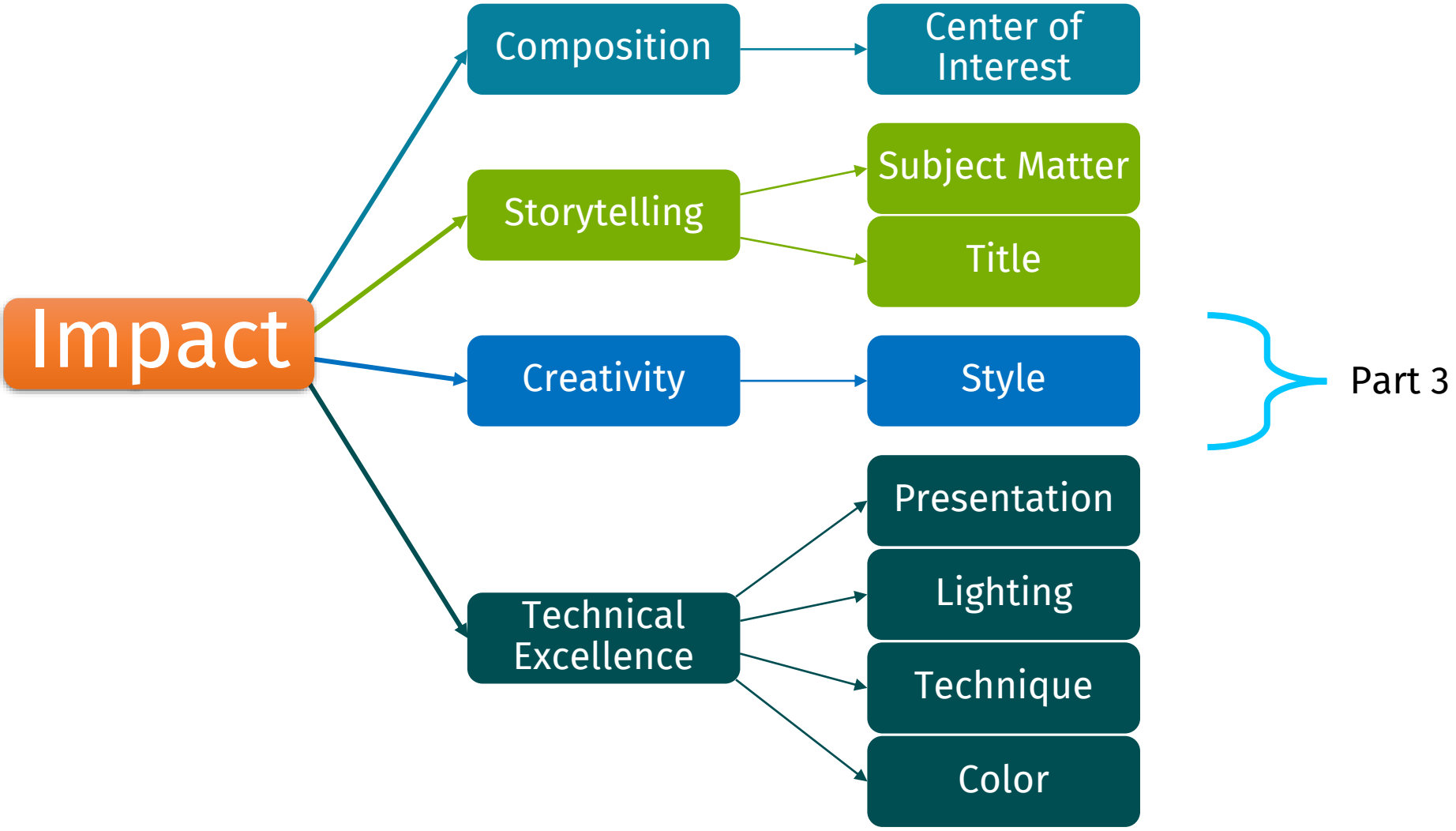
Style, Creativity and Impact

+ Group activity



Process Ideas for Creating Better Photos

Part 3 – Style, Creativity and Impact



Style

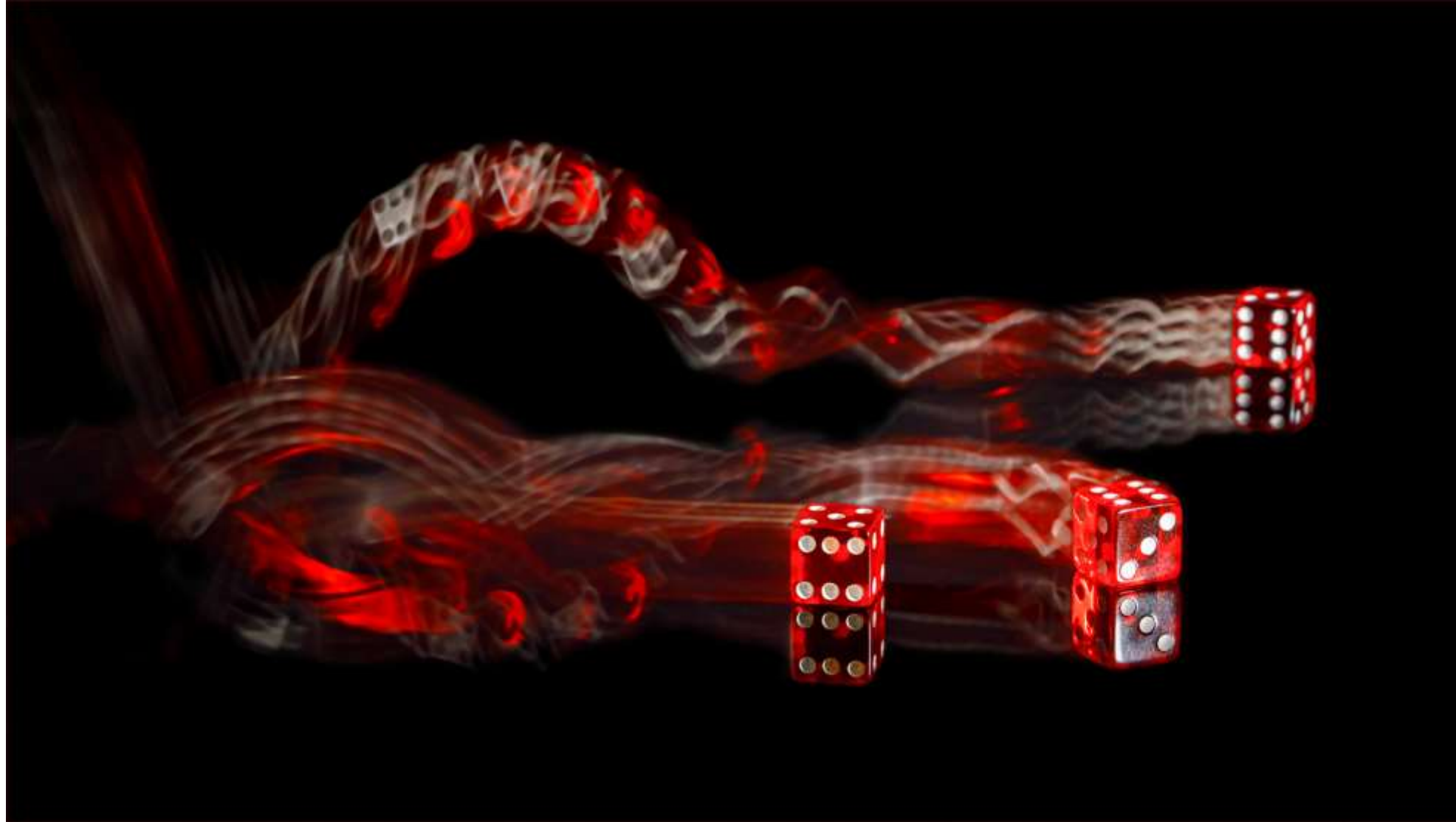


Rhonda Cullens

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



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



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



Creativity

Style

Judging Group Activity #3

Find one of these elements in the photo

Or

Identify one of these elements that could be improved in the photo

Impact

Composition

Storytelling

Creativity

Technical Excellence



Creativity

Style

Composition

Storytelling

Impact

Creativity

Technical Excellence



Creativity

Style

Composition

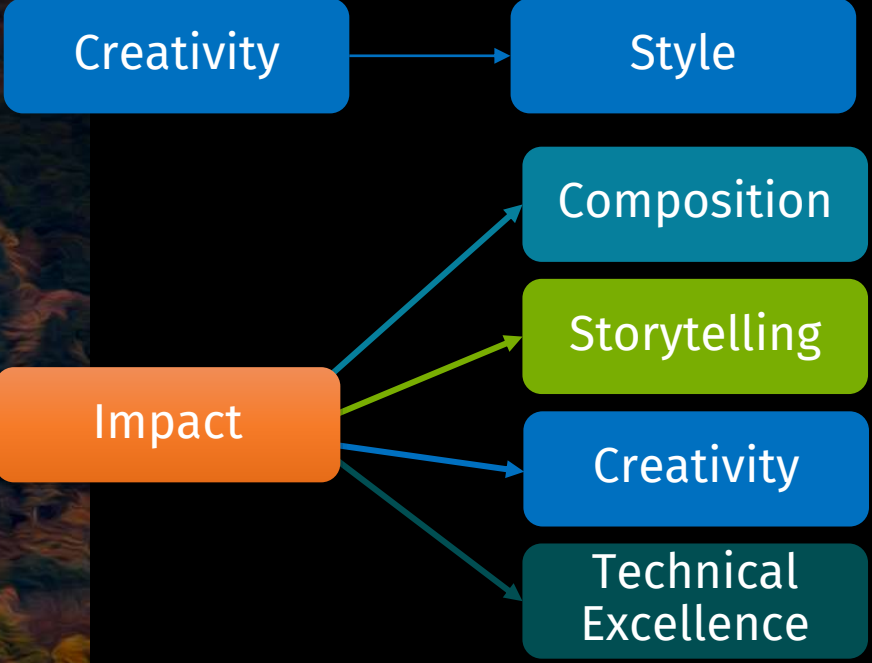
Storytelling

Impact

Creativity

Technical
Excellence

The London Eye



Historic Icons of Newtown

Creativity

Style

Composition

Storytelling

Impact

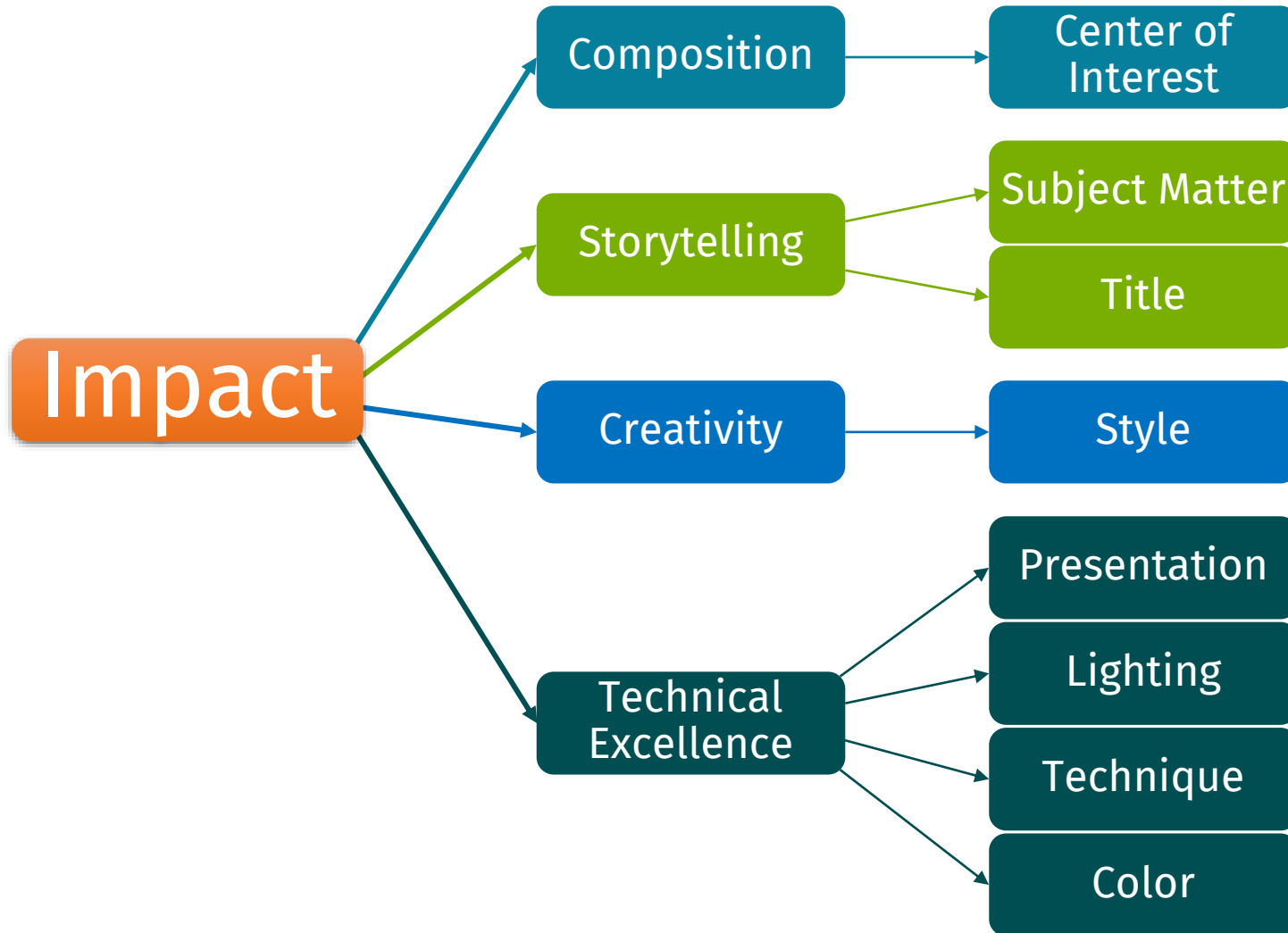
Creativity

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

Agenda



History of the Elements on an Excellent Photo



Technical Excellence

+ Group activity



Composition and Storytelling

+ Group activity



Style, Creativity and Impact

+ Group activity



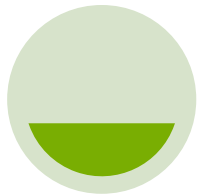
Process Ideas for Creating Better Photos

Ideas for Creating a Photo

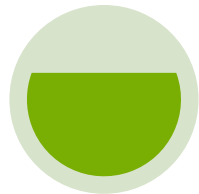
Sometimes you're at the at the right place at the right time

However, even then you need think to **“create”** a great photo

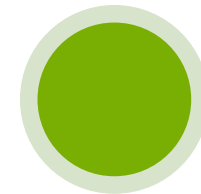
Here is a 3-step method to help in creating a photo



Vision



Prepare



Achieve

Creating a Vision



UNDERSTAND



VERIFY

- “Wow, it’s beautiful” is not a vision
- Strive for the clearest possible vision in your mind
- Simple, but clear
- With emotional impact
- What are the top three Elements to use

- Possible subjects - flowers, water, moon, tree, people?
- What subjects work, what subjects don’t work?
- What is the main subject?
- What is the foreground?
- What is the background?
- Audience?
- Why? Why? Why?

- Say it
- Pretend you are explaining your result to an audience
- Evaluate the vision on relevancy to your primary audience
- Get feedback from another person
- Iterate

A “Simple Things in Life” Starter Vision

- An enjoyable evening watching Netflix



- Feet up relaxing, some candy
- **Composition** – use feet as a leading line
- **Lighting** – dark, the TV, not the room
- **Center of interest** – is not the TV screen
- Then for the next week I tried to
 - Understand details
 - Verify if it makes sense with Rhonda
 - Finding ways to make it better

Vision Discussion Life”

Assignment “Simple Things in



- How would you improve this vision?

DEFINE

What impact on
the viewer

UNDERSTAND

Subject, Foreground,
Background, Focus,
Light

VERIFY

How to explain it
over the phone

Prepare



Figure out how to create it, in the camera and in post-processing

What weather?
What time of year?
What equipment?

Cost? Time? Effort?
Probability of success?

Knowledge – especially digital darkroom skills required

Honesty – leverage consideration of reality to drive creativity

Achieve



Time is always a limiting factor

Nature may be a limiting factor

Check & recheck equipment list

Plan alternatives

JUST DO IT.


The more times you try the more times you'll see improvements



What should I do differently next time?

Skipping Vision & Prepare = Suboptimal results and wastes time

Assignment Knife



Vision: Knife on a cutting board

Prepare: Standing up the knife

Achieve: Boring



Vision: Knife with things you cut

Prepare: Run out and buy some vegetables. Change lighting and surface

Achieve: OK



Vision: Finally realize that adding action is important

Prepare: Move the light over and over

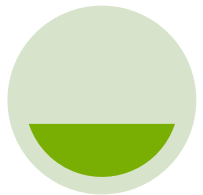
Achieve: 😊

Better vision would have reduced the whole day of shooting

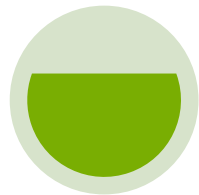


Ideas for Creating Excellent Photos – Summary

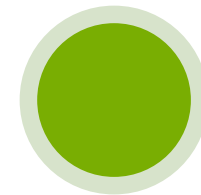
Envision the best photo possible from the scene, then figure out how to create it!



Vision



Prepare



Achieve



History of the Elements on an Excellent Photo



Technical Excellence + Group activity



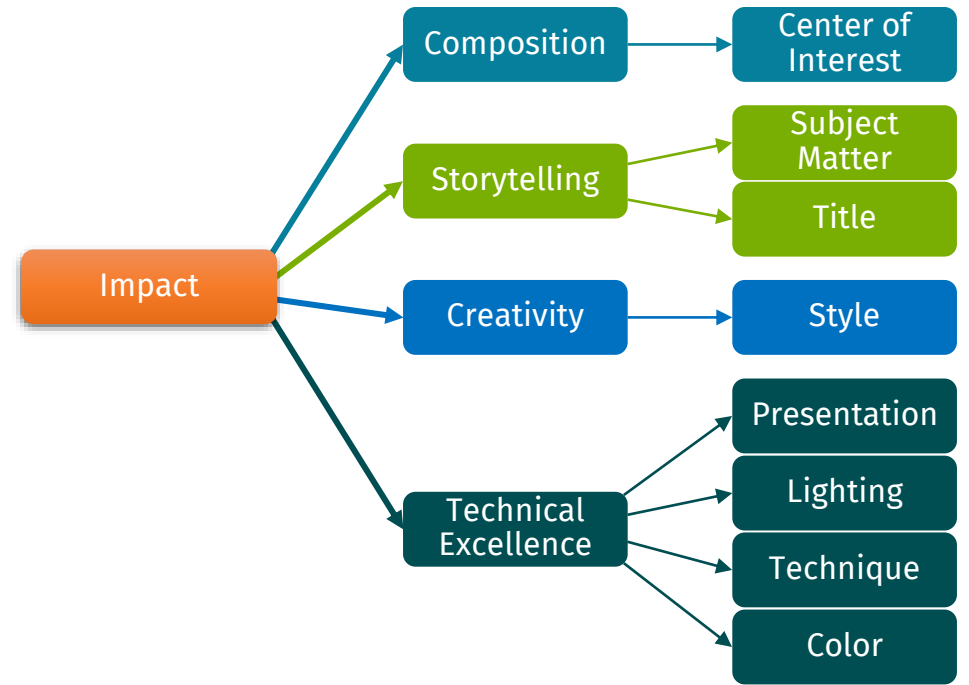
Composition and Storytelling + Group activity



Style, Creativity and Impact + Group activity



Process Ideas for Creating Better Photos



Questions?

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**Presentation
At**

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