

Using a Photo's Impact to Influence Commenting



Agenda



What is Impact



Formulating Comments



Storytelling Comments



Creativity Comments



Composition Comments



Technical Comments

Chane Cullens
Chane@CCullens.com

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Handouts and recording at
Group.NECCC.org/judge

Why have a “You Be the Judge Episode” on Comments?

Due to an NECCC 2021 survey that revealed comments are the most important part of club competitions!

Why Do Camera Clubs Have Competitions?

*Source: 34 NECCC clubs
November 2021 Survey*

1. Educational –
Constructive comments from experienced photographers
2. Self-improvement – Individuals can see if their photo quality is improving
3. Awareness – Viewing what top photos look like
4. Competitiveness – Incentives to push for improvement

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Storytelling Comments

What
Finding
Practice Easy
Practice Hard
Extra Examples



Creativity Comments

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Composition Comments

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Technical Comments

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What Is 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 many attributes are working **together** in concert.



Photos with impact don't just happen. They are thoughtfully **created** and nurtured and cultivated through the careful attention to photographic principles.



The impact of a photo is subjective and can vary from person to person based on individual experiences, perspectives, and cultural backgrounds. There is no magic formula, but there are photographic principles we can all leverage.

What Creates Impact?

Inspired by Professional Photographer Association's 12 Elements of a Merit Photo.

Think of **Impact** as a stool supported by these four legs.



How strong is the stool?

With 4 legs: Hard to knock over.

With 3 legs: Still very strong.

With 2 legs: Hard to stand up.

With 1 leg: Falls over.

With 0 legs: It's a snapshot.

Storytelling

The photo's ability to evoke imagination.

Creativity

The fresh expression of a scene conveying an idea or message.

Composition

Bringing all the visual elements together to express the purpose.

Technical

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

Strong Alignment with Rick's Episode 1 & 2 Terms!

Episode 1 – *Evaluating Nature Images*

[View Recording and Handouts](#)

Episode 2 – *Making Competitive Nature Images*

[View Recording and Handouts](#)



- The stronger the nature story the better
- Unique story
- Story, Story, Story

Storytelling

The photo's ability to evoke imagination.

- New perspective
- Unique
- What makes it different

Creativity

The fresh expression of a scene conveying an idea or message.

- Focus on the eye
- Focus point
- Distracting elements
- Control viewer's eye
- Composition
- Simplicity
- Leave room

Composition

Bringing all the visual elements together to express the purpose.

- Depth of field
- Exposure
- Color
- Lighting
- Whites perfect
- Dark has detail
- Focus
- ISO
- Shutter speed
- Mirror slap

Technical

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

Photography Principles Overlap

Impact



Storytelling

Technical

Creativity

Composition

Changing focus can alter any pillar

- **Storytelling** – Adding motion blur to an object can enhance what your mind sees.
- **Creativity** – Putting specific items in focus or not in focus, to enhance uniqueness.
- **Composition** – Focus can be used to direct the viewer's eye to the main subject.
- **Technical** – Focus may be altered using many aspects of your camera – shutter speed, aperture, camera motion. Also, focus changes in post-processing using focus stacking and blurring.

Is the Impact Stool Standing Strong?

- ✓ Lighting
- ✓ Focus
- ✓ Color

Technical

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

- ✓ Breathing space



Composition

Bringing all the visual elements together to express the purpose.

Putting too much weight on any one leg of the impact stool can lead you into the danger zone.

Creativity

The fresh expression of a scene conveying an idea or message.



Storytelling

The photo's ability to evoke imagination.

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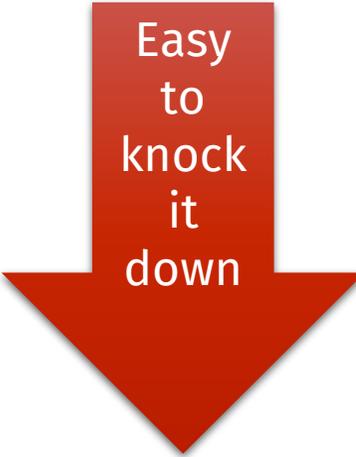


Technical Comments

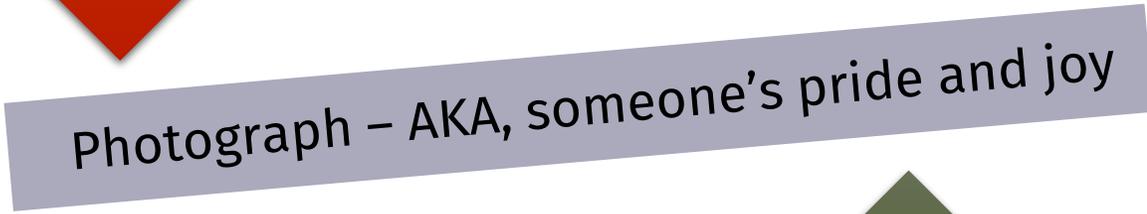
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Comments Can Help or Hurt

It's easy to point out a defect.



Easy
to
knock
it
down



Photograph – AKA, someone's pride and joy



Harder
to
lift
it
up

Providing educational comments requires careful consideration and wording of both the good and not so good qualities of the photo.

Formulating an Educational Comment

Careful consideration and wording of both the good and not so good qualities of the photo.

1

Be Specific

What and Why

2

Be Positive

Focus on suggesting improvements, not the faults

3

Align to Score

Unless a perfect score, the judge has improvement ideas

4

For the Audience

While about one photo, you're helping everyone



Poor – *“It’s all blown out in the snow!”*
The audience can already see this and it’s not much advice on how to improve or why it’s an issue.

Educational – *“To make the snow look more natural, you might want to try lowering the exposure to capture more detail.”*

What to Say

Start with a positive comment. Include Why.

The positive comments with “Why” linked to photographic principles to help the audience understand what ‘good’ is.



Then one or two improvement suggestions, for before the shutter was clicked. Include Why.

The subject, composition, exposure, perspective, story ...



If needed, suggest a simple improvement done in post-processing. Include Why.

Crop, brightness, contrast, shadow, color or other sliders ...

Improvement ideas are suggestions, not rules. Try to use words like: Maybe, Might, Consider, Possibly, It Could Be, I Wonder If ...



Great aperture choice to make the squirrel stand out from the background.

I like your exposure choice to capture detail in the white parts of the squirrel and the snow.

The composition might be improved by leaving more breathing space on the left for the squirrel to move into and by including all of its tail on the right.

What to Avoid Saying

Don't simply describe a photo back to the audience

There is no value since everyone can already see the photo
Not: *It's a dog next to a fireplace at Christmas*

Avoid words like Always, Never, Must ...

Comments are suggestions not rules
Not: *Never have a holiday light background*

Avoid perceived personal bias **by not saying ...**

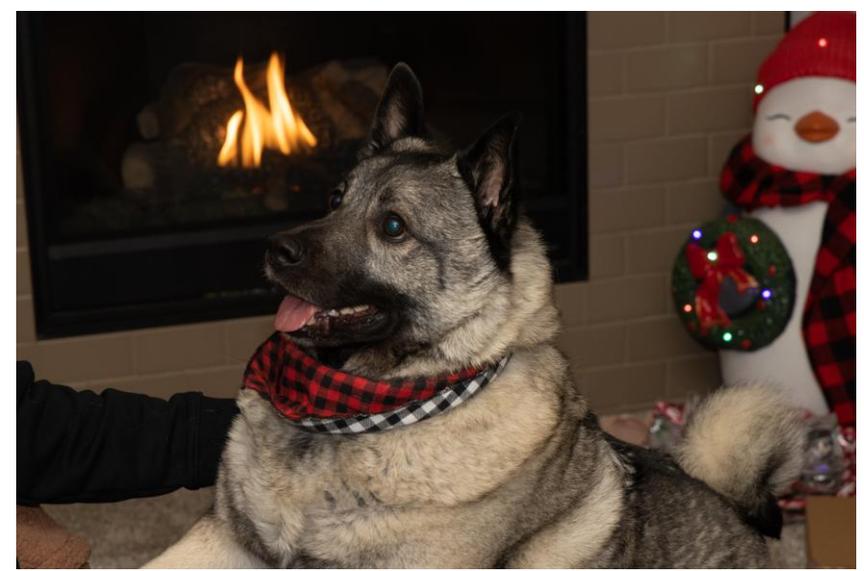
I've been there, I don't do monochromes, I love cat photos ...
Not: *Dogs are not as cute as cats*

Avoid complex post-processing suggestions & tool names

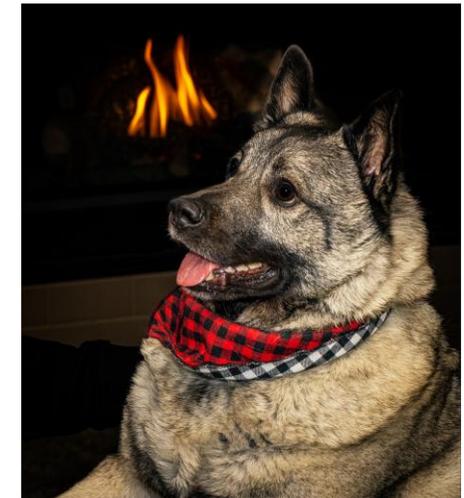
They exclude half of the audience, e.g., use "remove" for clone stamp, healing brush or content aware fill, and "editing tool" for Photoshop, Topaz, Lightroom, Snapseed ...

Rarely should more than one judge comment on a photo

Avoid confusing the audience and avoid judge squabbling



Instead, today we'll focus on how to create comments to help achieve a better photo like this one.



Differentiating Comments

When the photo is in the **bottom third**

- Choose about two important improvement suggestions. Avoid the minor.
- Focus on what you believe will have the highest possibility of being useful.

When a photo is in the **top third**, but not a perfect score

- Let the specific reason you did not award a perfect score guide you.

Consider **category** requirements

- Avoid comments that conflict with what is allowed in the category.
- For example, in PSA Nature, don't suggest removing items inside the photo.

Little need to differentiate by **class**

- While you may assume that commenting to an "expert" would result in a more in-depth Photoshop mini-tutorial, this is not always the case.
- Comments should be used to help most of the audience, rather than solely targeting the individual photographer.

Highly specific when **breaking ties**

- When breaking ties between the best photos, judge discussions are highly specific and focused on photographic principles.

Comment on Photographs as Presented

Factual comment

The dramatic sunset provides an excellent background to make the buildings more visible and separate from the background.



While being cautious with your assumptions

“It must have been wonderful to see a sunset like that!”

This is an assumption that could be incorrect.

With modern editing tools it is nearly impossible to understand the **difference** between what was “captured” and what is “presented.”



What About Photographer Effort in Commenting?



It is a slippery slope for a judge to include effort when commenting on a photo because assumptions must be made.

There is no way to know the actual effort

- Effort is highly dependent on the photographer
- Effort is highly dependent on technique
- Maybe it's a composite
- Maybe it's a controlled environment (photo ops, zoo)

Plus, effort also happens outside of photo capture

- Hiking all night uphill to capture the sunrise?
- Using Photoshop for 20 hours?
- Planning and learning for three weeks?



Was this a lot of effort? It depends on what is effort.

- Two weeks of thinking what is a great 'bricks' photo
- Reading the camera manual to learn what is possible
- Practicing without a brick or axe
- Waiting for afternoon shade

How did I capture this?

- Using video mode on my camera
- One take
- One brick destroyed
- One video frame used

The best choice is to comment on the photographic principles that you see.

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Storytelling

“One picture is worth a thousand words.”

The photo's ability to evoke imagination



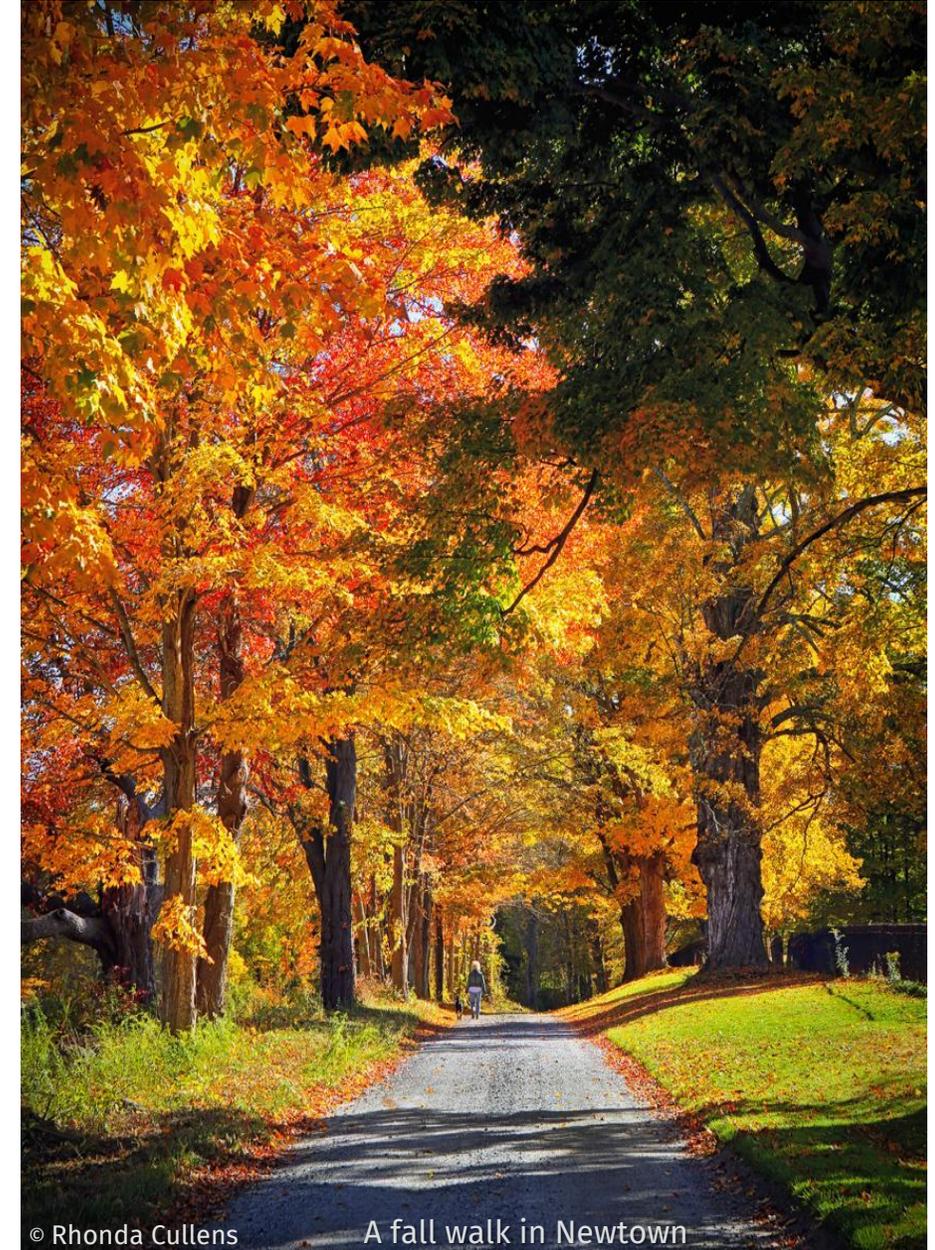
Take a **step back** to see what kind of stories you can create with your camera



One beautiful thing about art is that each viewer might create their **own** story



Look at the photo as if it is your **first time**, find the story elements and make them noticeable



© Rhonda Cullens

A fall walk in Newtown

Subject – Keep it interesting and appropriate. Pretty doesn't mean it's right.
Title – Use to provide an emotional connection to the photo.

Storytelling

The photo's ability to evoke imagination



Take a **step back** to see what kind of stories you can create with your



One beautiful thing about art is each viewer might create their **own** story



Look at the photo as if it is your **first time**, find the story elements and make them noticeable

Photographer Tip

Downplay your emotional attachment to the story to sense what the audience sees.



© Rhonda Cullens

A fall walk in Newtown

Subject – Keep it interesting and appropriate. Pretty doesn't mean it's right.
Title – Use to provide an emotional connection to the photo.

Storytelling – How to Find the Story

Ask yourself if it is easy for you to tell a story about the scene?

If you find it hard, the storytelling can use improvement.

Yes, taking a stroll on a beautiful fall day.

Is the main subject clearly defined?

How is the subject helping to launch the story?

Yes, a fall scene.

Are there supporting elements?

Do they help? How do they help?

Yes, the road suggests a journey, and the person helps me look inward.

Is there interaction or activity helping the story?

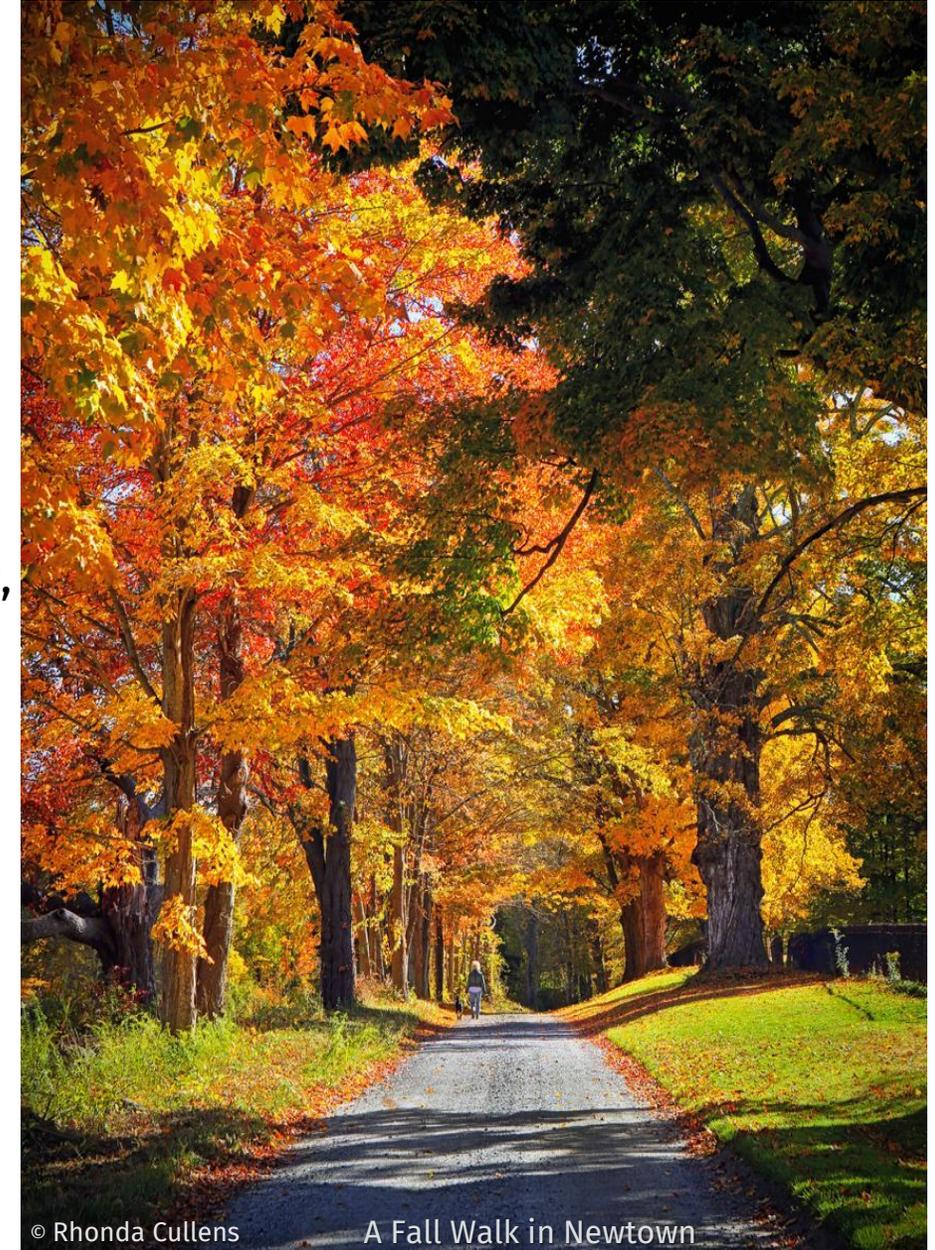
Runner standing vs Runner passing vs Runner finishing

Not much, but she is taking a step and on the left side to remind us cars use the road.

Did the title help start the story?

Why or Why not?

Yes, it is exactly what I was thinking.



Storytelling Only – You Be the Judge #1

Ask yourself if it is easy for you to tell a story about the scene?
If you find it hard, the storytelling can use improvement

A little. More if you know the category is “Thrill of Victory or Agony of Defeat.” Expression is sad or “defeated”.



Is the main subject clearly defined?
How is the subject helping to launch the story?

Maybe, the expression on her face. Bright, easy to find.



Are there supporting elements?
Do they help? How do they help?

The horse, clothes and the fence help explain the setting.



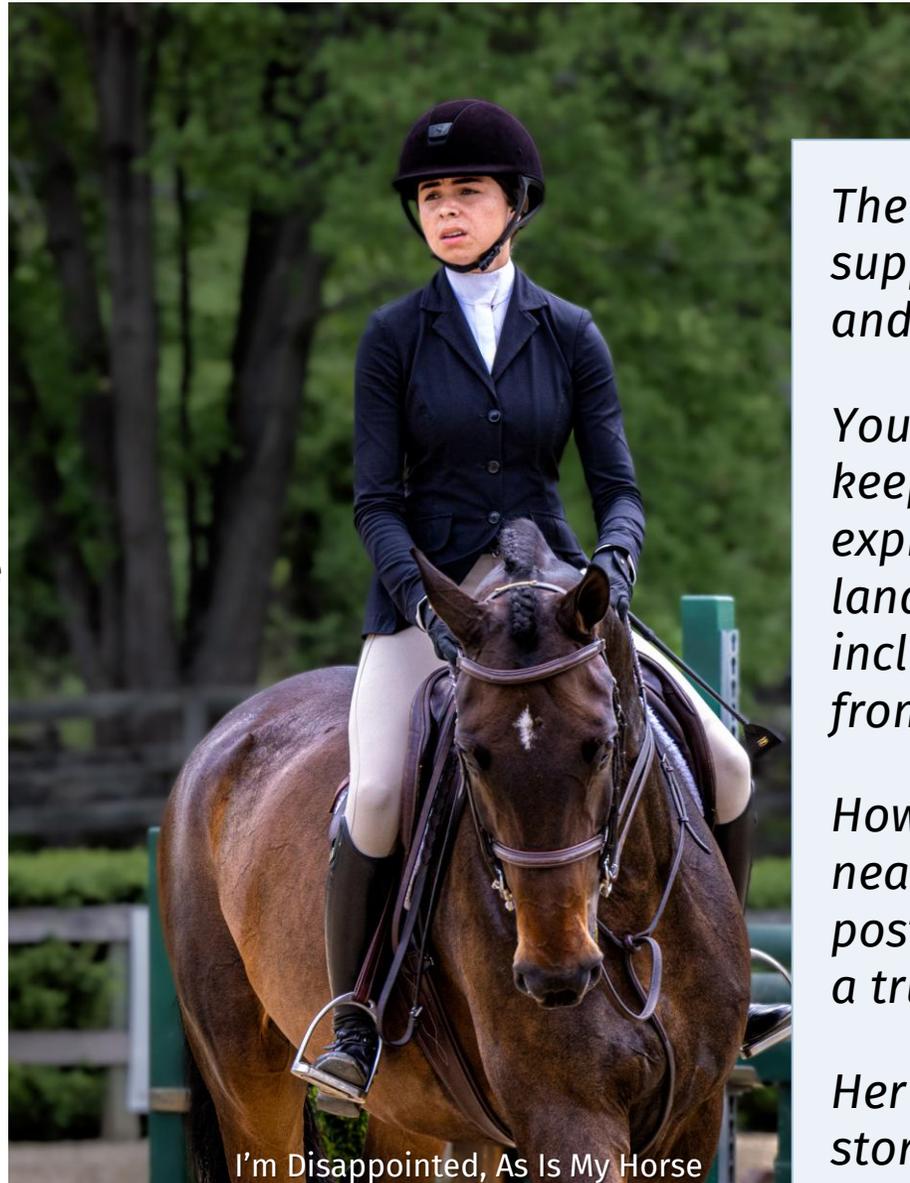
Is there interaction or activity helping the story?
Runner standing vs Runner passing vs Runner finishing

Nice that the horse is looking down and defeated as well.



Did the title help start the story?
Why or Why not?

The title directs the judge to focus on her face and the horse’s posture, telling the story of disappointment.



I’m Disappointed, As Is My Horse

The story of defeat is clear and supported by her expression and the horse’s posture.

Your choice of a portrait crop keeps the story on her expression, whereas a landscape crop may have included objects that distract from the core story.

However, it seems like her nearly upright upper body posture does not fully support a truly agonizing defeat.

Her clothes also help tell the story of a formal racing event.

Storytelling Only – You Be the Judge #2

Ask yourself if it is easy for you to tell a story about the scene?
If you find it hard, the storytelling can use improvement

Not really, simply a lighthouse on a nice day.

Is the main subject clearly defined?
How is the subject helping to launch the story?

Is the subject the living quarters, the lighthouse or the rocks?

Are there supporting elements?
Do they help? How do they help?

Not for storytelling.

Is there interaction or activity helping the story?
Runner standing vs Runner passing vs Runner finishing

No people, no activity, no storm.

Did the title help start the story?
Why or Why not?

The title talks about living at the lighthouse which is not well supported by the scene.



I'm not sure what story you are hoping I would imagine. Maybe try capturing it from another angle and including additional items would help me understand more.

Your title suggests a story about living at the lighthouse. I wonder if adding people would help me sense that.

This photo probably has a personal significance to you. However, I'm having difficulty grasping your intended meaning. Consider looking for additional ways to let the audience see and feel what you did.

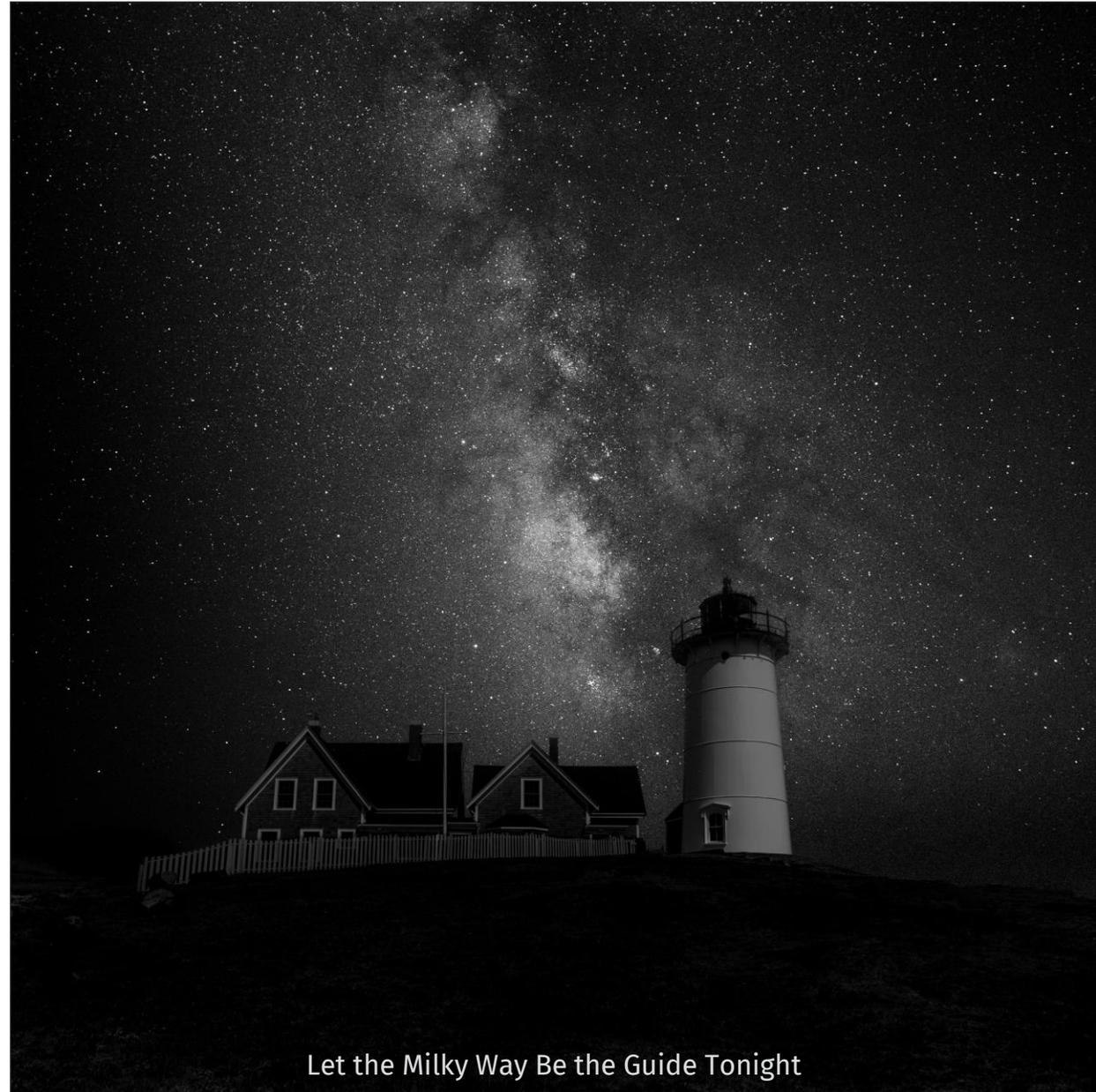
As the Photographer, You Can Insert a Story

Photographer Tip

Creating the story before
clicking the shutter
is often easier
than adding it
later.



Living at the Lighthouse



Let the Milky Way Be the Guide Tonight

Additional Storytelling Comment Suggestions

While the photo tells the story of a happy birthday party, the sad expressions on some faces seem to conflict with that story and distract me.

The assigned subject is [something], however, this scene reminds me of [something else].

I don't see how the [lighting, focus, border, perspective ...] of the subject supports the story you are trying to tell.

Consider including [something] to make the story clearer.

Perhaps adding [something] would enhance the story.

It appears the [background, foreground, some object] distracts from the story, I wonder if using [something] would help.

Your title increased my understand of your story to let my imagination run wild.

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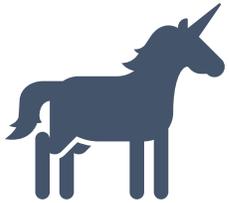
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Creativity

*“Creativity is a wild mind
and a disciplined eye.”*

The fresh expression of a scene
conveying an idea or message



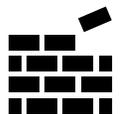
The ability to see beyond the physical
reality in front of the camera and create
something **unique and interesting**



Creativity will manifest itself in your mind
as something is a bit **different**.



May use unconventional perspectives,
experimenting with light and shadows or
playing with composition.



Style – how you use lighting, posing, composition or perspective to enhance the creative impact.



The Creativity Principle is not the same as a Creative Category focused on Altered Reality



Creativity Principle



Not talking about Creative Altered Reality

How to Find the Creativity

Why it is unique or interesting to you?
If you find it familiar or boring, creativity can use improvement



What specifically is unique?
The perspective, the alignment of elements, the lighting style ...



How else is creativity expressed in secondary elements?
Do they help? How?



What about lighting, color, focus depth, patterns, ...
What else would help express the creativity?



Is the creativity aligned with the competition category?
Why or Why not?

Mostly, the exploding objects are rare.

The high shutter speed to freeze the motion dust.

The axe tells you how it happened. The pieces flying show impact strength. The dust makes it look real.

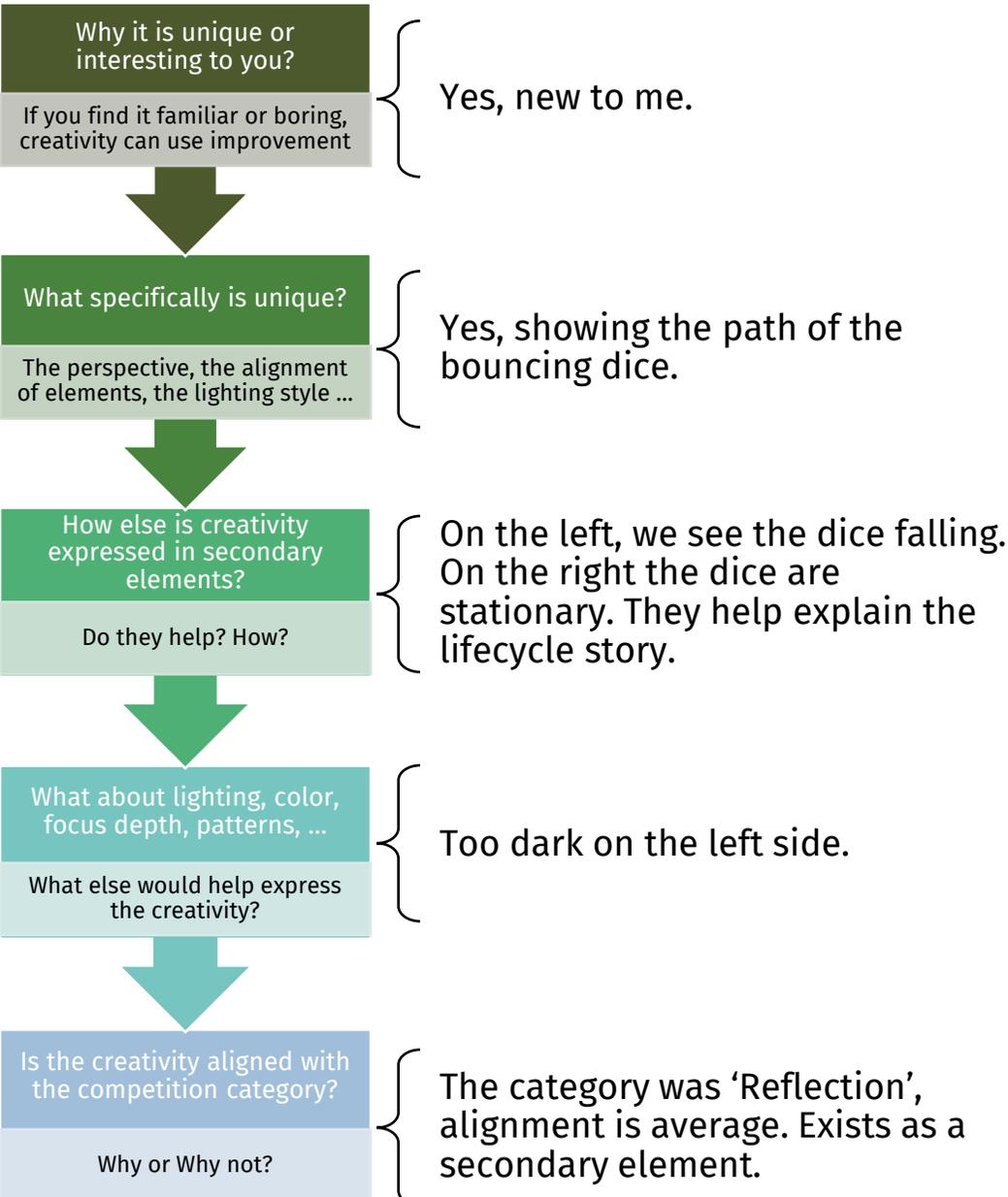
The simple white background does not distract, instead it enhances clarity of the objects.

Yes, the category is 'bricks', and this is unique among the other brick photos



Breaking an Old Brick

Creativity – You Be the Judge #1



The Journey of Three Dice

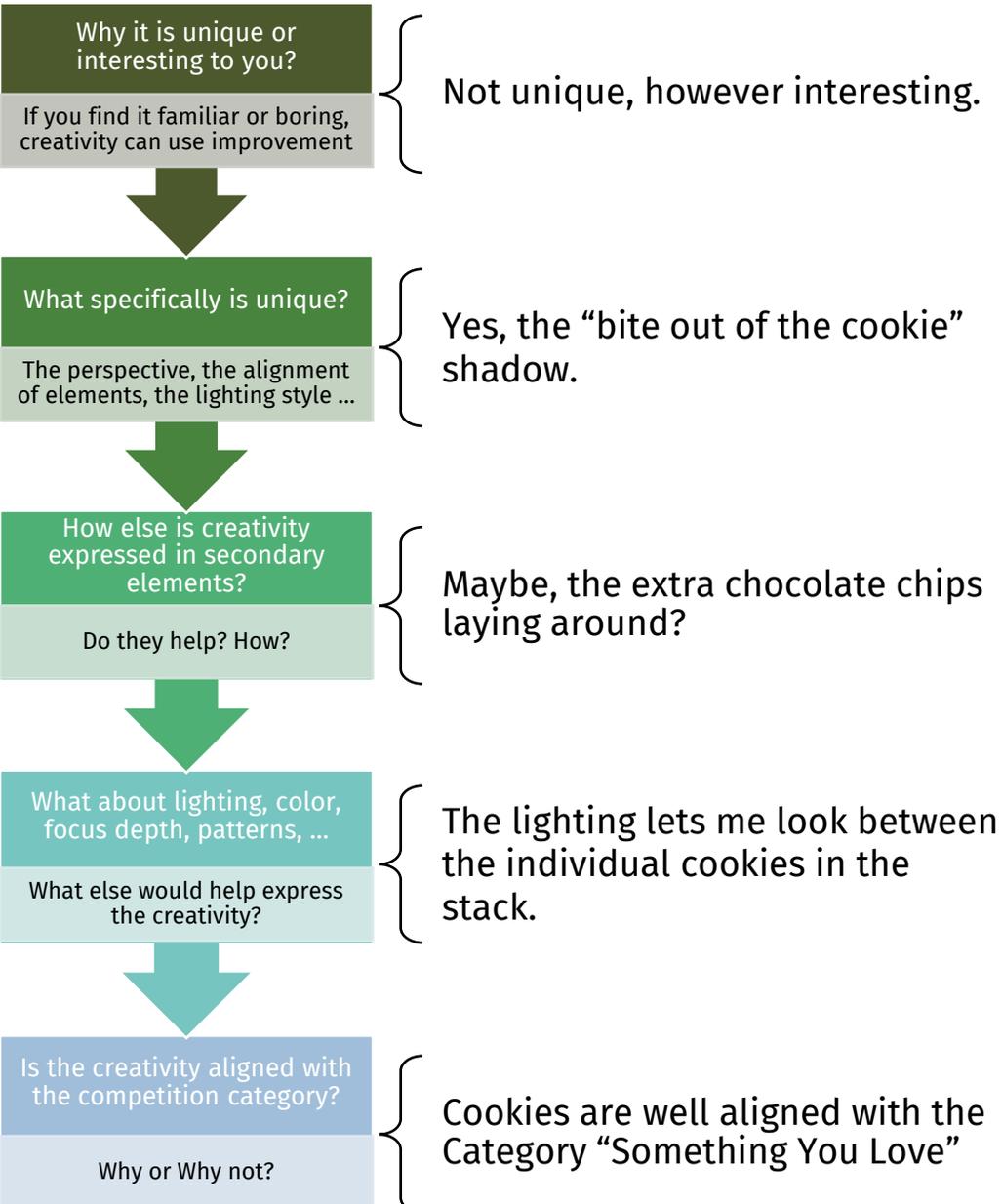
This is very unique! I've never seen the act of throwing dice captured like this before.

I wonder, if seeing the hand that threw the dice would add more impact?

Consider adding additional light on the left side to provide more visibility about what is happening.

Using motion blur when moving, yet sharp and well lit when stopped, adds to the magic.

Creativity – You Be the Judge #2



Your choice of adding the “bite out of the cookie” shadow on the milk glass is a great creative idea.

I wonder, if the creative power of the loose chocolate chips would be improved, if they were in front of the milk glass as well.

Your choice of side lighting that makes the cookies look almost 3D adds to the creativity.

Creativity Is Possible Even with Cookies



Additional Creativity Comment Suggestions

I was looking for more creativity by possibly changing the camera's [perspective, location, exposure] to show a new way to look at this common scene.

Don't be afraid to break the photography composition rules to show more of your unique idea.

Play with the lighting to create mood and drama to make your capture of [the subject] original.

Look for unexpected or unconventional ways to capture [the subject] in a fresh and unique way.

Ask yourself how can I capture this scene in another way. Then, think of changing the [perspective, lighting ...] in ways that would be more creative.

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Composition

“Seeing and composing the beauty is what separates the snapshot from the photograph.”

Bringing all the visual elements together to express the purpose of the photo.



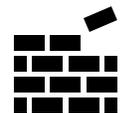
Holds the viewer in the photo and prompts the viewer to **look** where the most important element is placed.



How items are **arranged**. The choices made on what to include or exclude.



There are a few dozen composition rules. However, you can **break** them to help succeed in your vision.



Center of interest – The point or points where the viewer should stop as they view photo

How to Find the Composition

Ask yourself if overall your mind understands the layout?

Is the scene pleasing to look at?

Yes, it feels good.

What specifically is the center of interest?

The point or points where your eyes stop to view the photo

The bird's eye. While there is a lot of color, the duller eye is obviously the center interest.

How did you find the center of interest?

Leading lines? Rule of Thirds? Focus? Lighting? Left to Right?

Most of the feathers are leading lines. The eye is on the rule of thirds intersection.

How do other items in the photo support or distract from the layout?

What has your eyes jumping somewhere they don't need to go?

The background is not distracting. I want to look at the feathers, but I always jump back to the eye.

Are there other composition rules you think would help?

Symmetry, Patterns, Negative Space, Breathing Space, Framing, Vignette, Rule of Odds ...

The cropping supports rule of thirds, also negative space and patterns.



Composition – You Be the Judge #1

Ask yourself if overall your mind understands the layout?
Is the scene pleasing to look at?

Mostly, I was expecting more water from a lighthouse seashore scene.



What specifically is the center of interest?
The point or points where your eyes stop to view the photo

The lighthouse.



How did you find the center of interest?
Leading lines? Rule of Thirds? Focus? Lighting? Left to Right?

Yes, the white lighthouse stands out by brightness and rule of thirds .



How do other items in the photo support or distract from the layout?
What has your eyes jumping somewhere they don't need to go?

The sunset background and rocks foreground support it. Tree is blocking part of the lighthouse



Are there other composition rules you think would help?
Symmetry, Patterns, Negative Space, Breathing Space, Framing, Vignette, Rule of Odds ...

The dark rocks don't add much, what about a square or landscape view that includes water and minimizes the black rocks.



Lighthouse at Sunset

Your choice to leverage the Rule of Thirds makes the lighthouse the clear center of interest.

Consider removing part of the bottom to better draw the viewer's attention to the lighthouse.

I wonder if a landscape composition with water would like the scene look more natural.

The lines in the clouds and the lines in the rocks act like leading lines to the lighthouse.

Composition – You Be the Judge #2

Ask yourself if overall your mind understands the layout?
Is the scene pleasing to look at?

It's vague, nice but not pleasing.



What specifically is the center of interest?
The point or points where your eyes stop to view the photo

Unknown, might be the bright sun, might be the sea stacks, the beach?



How did you find the center of interest?
Leading lines? Rule of Thirds? Focus? Lighting? Left to Right?

I'm still looking for it.



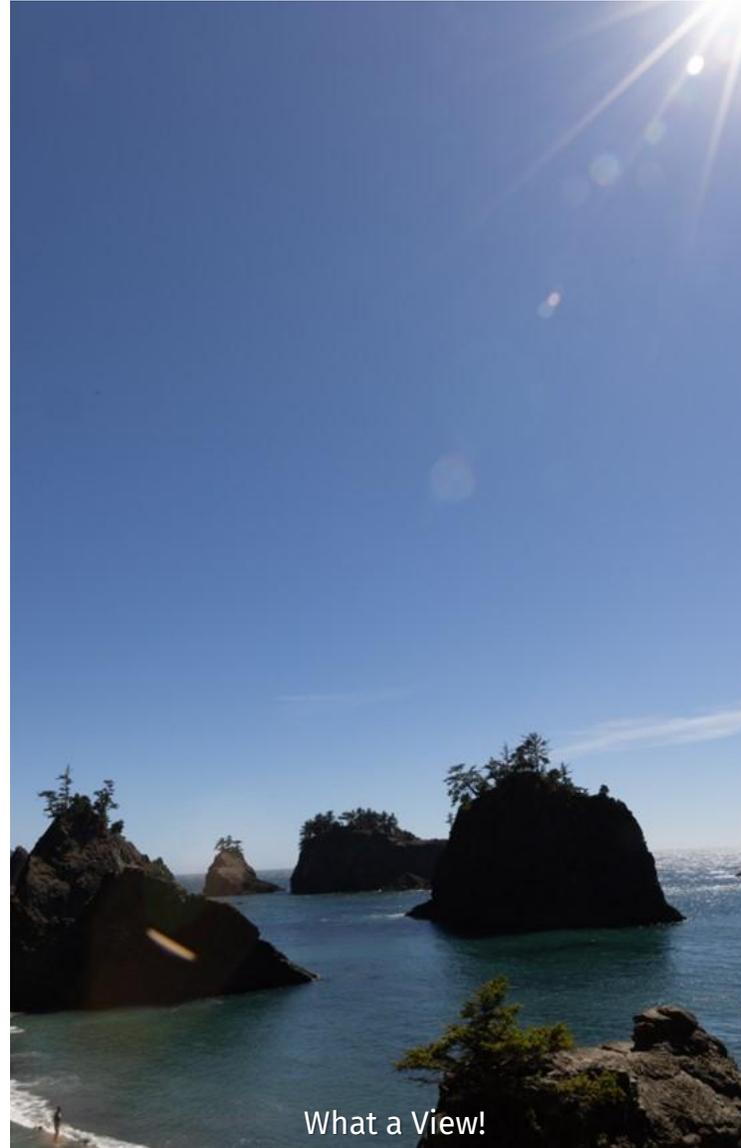
How do other items in the photo support or distract from the layout?
What has your eyes jumping somewhere they don't need to go?

Middle half of the photo is empty. My eyes are bouncing between the bright top right and lower left corners. The horizon is not level.



Are there other composition rules you think would help?
Symmetry, Patterns, Negative Space, Breathing Space, Framing, Vignette, Rule of Odds ...

Work the scene or wait for the sun to be lower in the sky. Then, Rule of Thirds or Triangles might work.



What a View!

I'm finding it hard to decide what to look at. My eyes are bouncing between the bright sun and the white waves.

Consider using only the bottom third of the photo. This might help the viewers understand the beauty you saw.

The rock in the foreground stops my eyes from seeing the rest of the scene. Maybe shooting from in front of it will provide a better composition.

I wonder if there is a way to position yourself to line up the sea stacks on a rule of thirds to direct me to the most important place to look.

One Possible Outcome from Comments



Additional Composition Comment Suggestions

Consider [a new position, arrangement, cropping] to enhance the finding of the photo's center of interest by using the [Rule of Thirds, Rule of Odds, Leading Lines, Negative Space, Breathing Space, Simplicity, Diagonals, Symmetry, Foreground, Background, ...] composition rule.

You have incredible control of how items in your photo are arranged by moving yourself or moving the objects. Maybe leverage that control to support composition rules, such as [Rule of Thirds, Rule of Odds, Leading Lines, Negative Space, Breathing Space, Simplicity, Diagonals, Symmetry ...].

I wonder if working the scene from other locations or angles would have improved the composition to better place [something] as the center of interest.

Don't be afraid to break the photography composition rules to show more of your vision and help me find the beauty in your photo.

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Technical

“There is nothing worse than a sharp image of a fuzzy concept.”

The visual presentation of the photograph.



Lighting, focus, exposure, camera motion, color, post-processing, printing, mounting, fine details ...



While focusing on the **nuts and bolts** of photography use caution to avoid excessive post-processing.



It's what makes you look like a pro. Even a great scene **falters** without technical excellence.

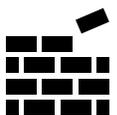


Presentation – finished look, crop, border or mat to enhance the look

Lighting – defines dimension, shape and roundness, also light impacts the color & tone

Technique – camera settings & perspective, focus, angle, pose, expression, skin tones, lens, texture, digital noise

Color – color choice, saturation, harmony and tones to enhance the emotional appeal and structure



How to Find the Technical Excellence

Ask yourself if overall, do colors, focus and lighting match the scene?

What technically makes the scene stand out?

The red and green colors *complement* each other, and green and blue are *similar* colors. Everything is in sharp focus. The lighting is bright with sharp shadows from upper left.

What specifically do you like about the lighting?

Are the important subjects easy to see and evaluate?

It creates depth with the shadows and deeper down in the shavings is naturally darker.

Is the center of interest technically excellent?

Focus, Color Harmony, Geometry, Light?

I don't sense a specific center of interest, other than the pile of shavings.

What technical issues distract?

Dust, Overly bright areas, Overly dark areas

There are small bright shiny lines on parts the pencil leads.

What is overly harsh or dull?

Sharpening, Contrast, Saturation, Light

The sharpening, contrast and saturation are on the edge of getting harsh.



Technical – You Be the Judge #1

Ask yourself if overall, do colors, focus and lighting match the scene?
What technically makes the scene stand out?

The tiger's orange color works well with the fall-colored background, where it needs focus, it has focus, lighting is natural.

What specifically do you like about the lighting?
Are the important subjects easy to see and evaluate?

Vignette helps, bottom of face and under face could use more light.

Is the center of interest technically excellent?
Focus, Color Harmony, Geometry, Light?

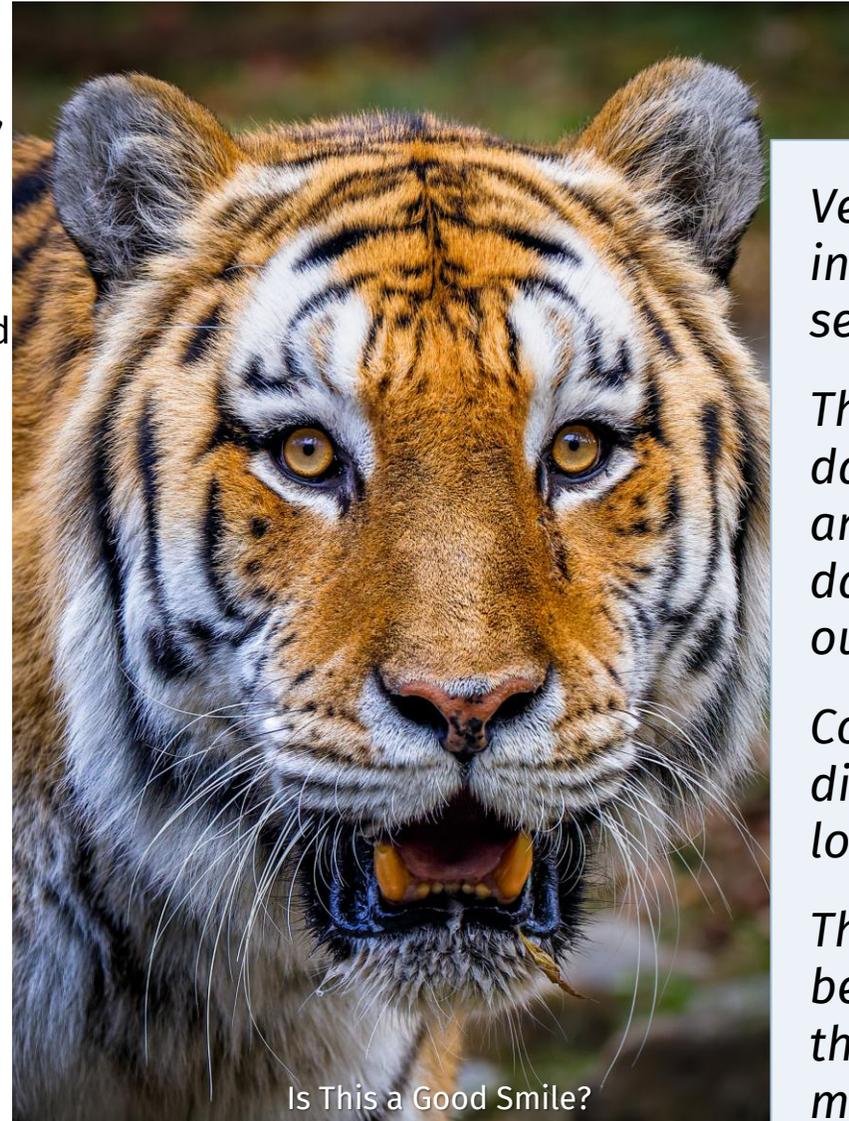
Good focus and texture, even texture in the white areas on the face, crisp whiskers, eyes level, looking at camera.

What technical issues distract?
Dust, Overly bright areas, Overly dark areas

The big dark blob in the lower right is a little distracting.

What is overly harsh or dull?
Sharpening, Contrast, Saturation, Light

All good, except the lighting from the lower left is dull.



Very good job keeping details in the white fur where I can see lots of individual hairs.

The bottom third is a little dark hiding detail on the chin and mouth, maybe a cloudy day would have helped even out the lighting.

Consider removing the slightly distracting dark object in the lower right corner.

The teeth look too orange to be natural, I'm wondering if this is because you added too much orange color in post-processing.

Is This a Good Smile?

Technical – You Be the Judge #2

Ask yourself if overall, do colors, focus and lighting match the scene?
What technically makes the scene stand out?

Colors are dull, focus is a little soft everywhere, sky overexposed.

What specifically do you like about the lighting?
Are the important subjects easy to see and evaluate?

Nothing. It's challenging due to the bright sky and the shade in the valley.

Is the center of interest technically excellent?
Focus, Color Harmony, Geometry, Light?

No, the valley is out of focus, colors weak, exposure is too low.

What technical issues distract?
Dust, Overly bright areas, Overly dark areas

Sky is too bright and the sky reflections in the water might be too bright.

What is overly harsh or dull?
Sharpening, Contrast, Saturation, Light

Not sharp. No contrast. Dull colors.



Smith Rock State Park

The valley is not bright enough to show off its beauty. It's possible that a different exposure at a different time of day, or in different weather would allow the valley to shine.

I find the focus everywhere to be a little soft, maybe this is from camera shake or aperture choice.

Maybe, reframing this to leave out the bright sky would allow for exposing for the valley darkness to show off the river and trees.

This is a very challenging scene with a bright sky and shadowed valley. Possibly, if your camera has an HDR feature it would compensate for the high dynamic range in the scene.

A Possible Outcome from Comments



Additional Technical Comment Suggestions

Consider using light from the [side, back, top, bottom] to better highlight the [something].

Possibly using a [smaller, bigger, colored] light source would add more perceived depth to your scene.

I wonder if a [higher, lower] exposure would show more detail in the [something].

Maybe using a [higher, lower] aperture number would improve the [background, foreground] to better [separate, highlight] the main subject.

On my screen, the colors are [over, under] saturated, so consider [decreasing, increasing] the color intensity.

The horizon appears not to be level. Often, especially when water is involved, our minds feel something is wrong with photo when the horizon is not straight.

Maybe try using monochrome to eliminate the distracting [something] and better increase the visibility of [something].

I'm distracted by the spots on the [water, sky, background, ...], these might be dust spots on your sensor or lens that needs to be cleaned.

Consider adding a border to separate your photo from the screen background to help me understand your composition choice better.

Comments are easier to craft and more helpful when you leverage the photographic principles of Impact!

Questions?



Impact

With 4 legs: Hard to knock over.
With 3 legs: Still very strong.
With 2 legs: Hard to stand up.
With 1 leg: Falls over.
With 0 legs: It's a snapshot.

Storytelling

The photo's ability to evoke imagination.

Creativity

The fresh expression of a scene conveying an idea or message.

Composition

Bringing all the visual elements together to express the purpose.

Technical

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