Using the Elements of an Excellent Photo for Judges

All photos © Chane Cullens

Impact	Technical Excellence	Presentation
		Lighting
		Technique
		Color Balance
	Composition	Center of Interest
	Creativity	Style
	Story Telling	Subject Matter
		Title

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

These elements create a framework to help the photographer improve their photo and help judges evaluate a photo.

Chane Cullens – Chane@CCullens.com
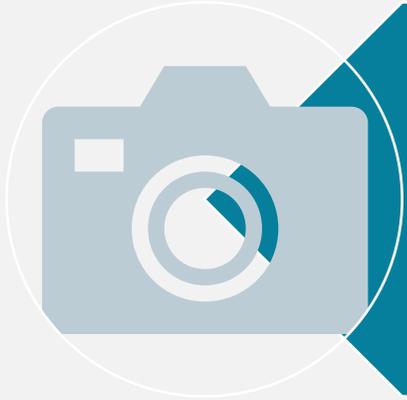Presentation – ccullens.com/judge

February 9, 2022

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 just the photographer

Agenda

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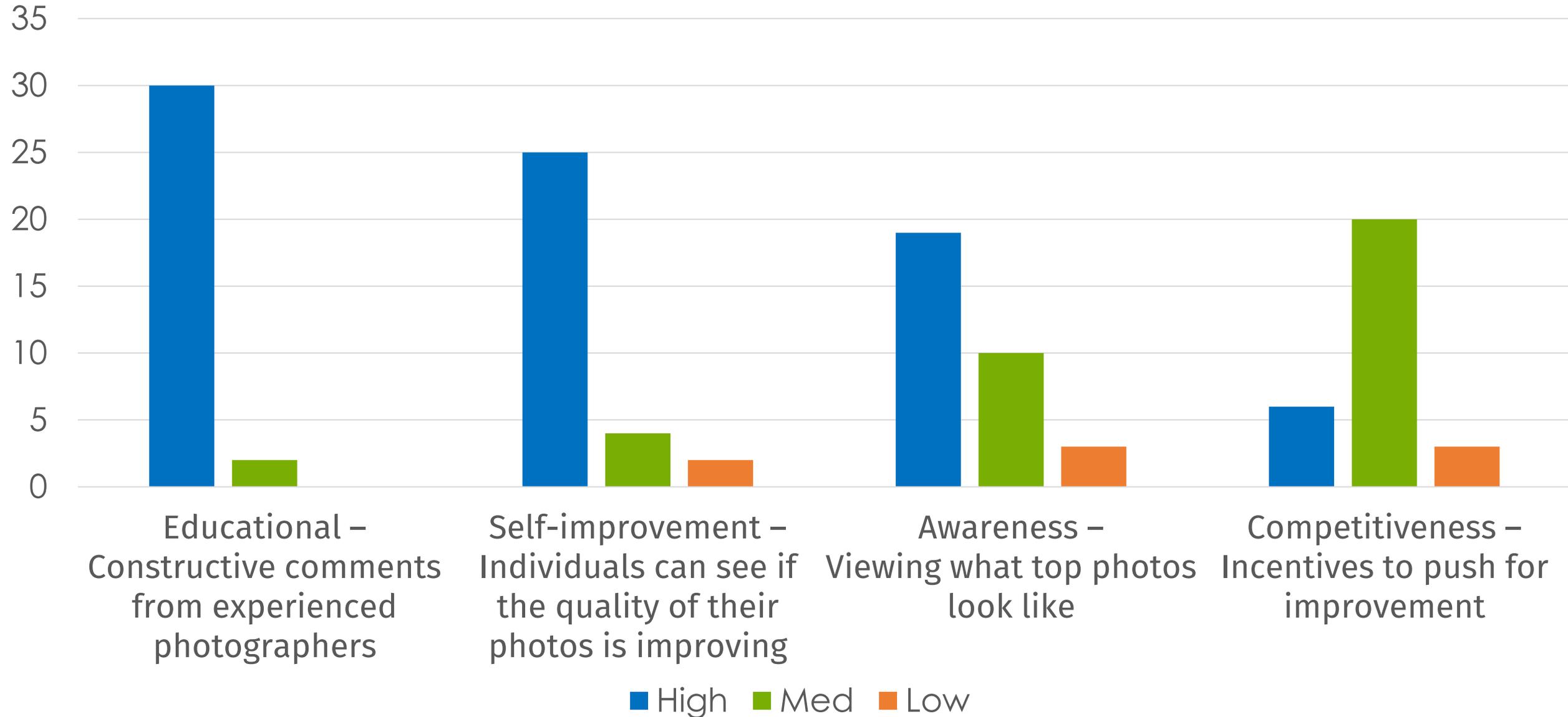- Formulating an Educational Comment
- Deciding on a Score
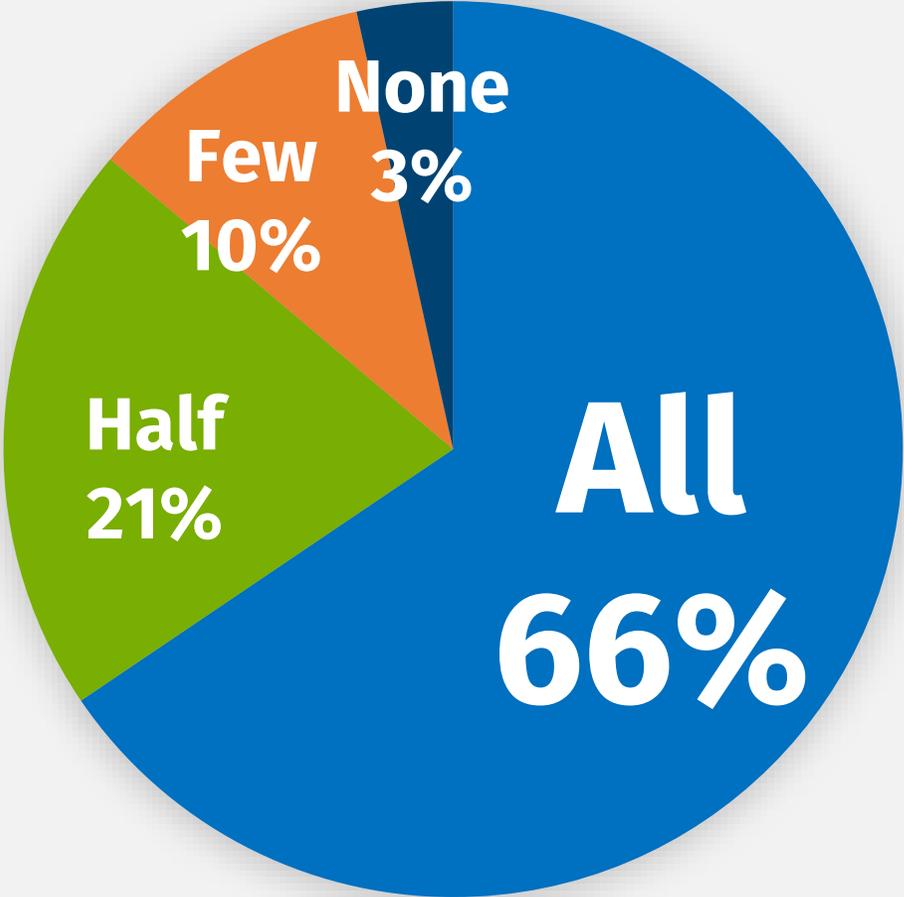- Understanding the Elements with Interactive Activities

Why Do Camera Clubs Have Competitions?

Legend: ■ High ■ Med ■ Low

How Often Do Judges Comment on Photos?

The More Comments, the More Learning

Top reason for competitions

- **Educational** – Constructive comments from experienced photographers

How many comments

- 66% Comment on **all** photos

Agenda

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 improvement comments

Comments – What to Say

Start with a positive comment

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

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

Be cautious of making assumptions about
the legitimacy of items in the photo
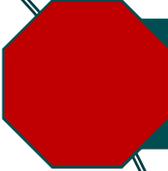
Your Turn Comments?

Start with a positive comment

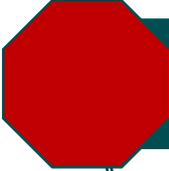Think about before the shutter clicks. The subject, framing, lighting, perspective, background ...

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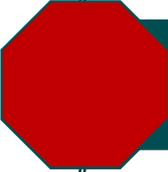the legitimacy of items in the photo

Comments – What to Avoid & Removing Personal Bias

Avoid words like Always, Never, Must …

Avoid saying - I've seen this photo before, I've taken this photo, I know the location, I love cat photos …

Avoid complex post-processing suggestions
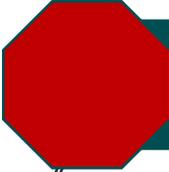
Rarely should more than one judge comment on a photo
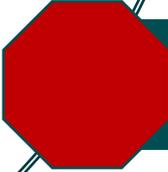
Don't simply describe a photo back to the audience

Agenda

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

What Is the Role of a Photo's Score?

Ranking – First, Second, Third …

- Score range does not matter – 6 to 10, 1 to 10, 10 to 30 …
- Class does not matter – beginner, advanced, master …

Rare

Average

Rare

Low

Middle

High
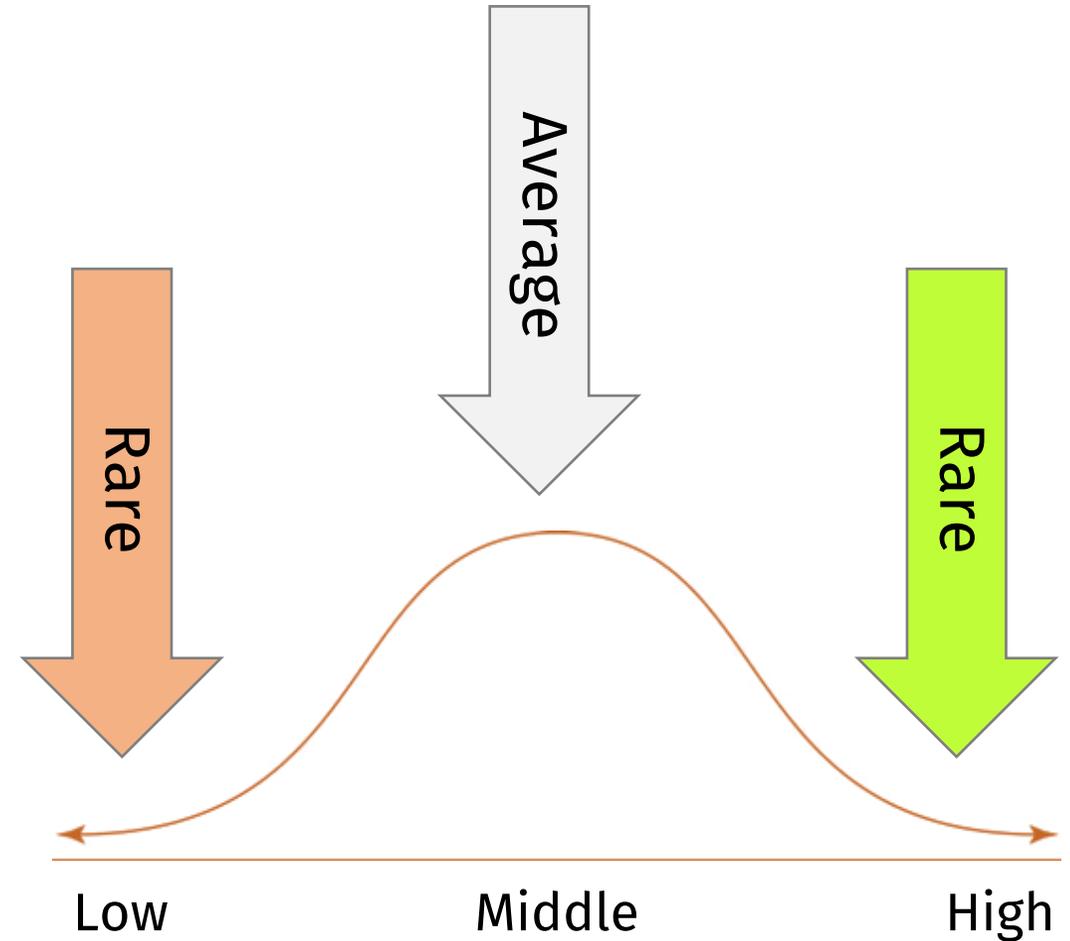
Deciding on a Score

Base the score on the merit of that individual photo. In this, and only this, single category.

Use consistent reasoning in evaluating photos. Consider "The 12 Elements of a Merit Image" from Professional Photographers of America we are about to discuss.

Strive to remove personal bias, such as subject, specific technique, perceived difficulty or location knowledge.

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. Then rescore the top photos.

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 Elements with Interactive Activities**

The Elements of an Excellent Photo

Impact	Technical Excellence	Presentation
		Lighting
		Technique
		Color Balance
	Composition	Center of Interest
	Creativity	Style
	Story Telling	Subject Matter
		Title
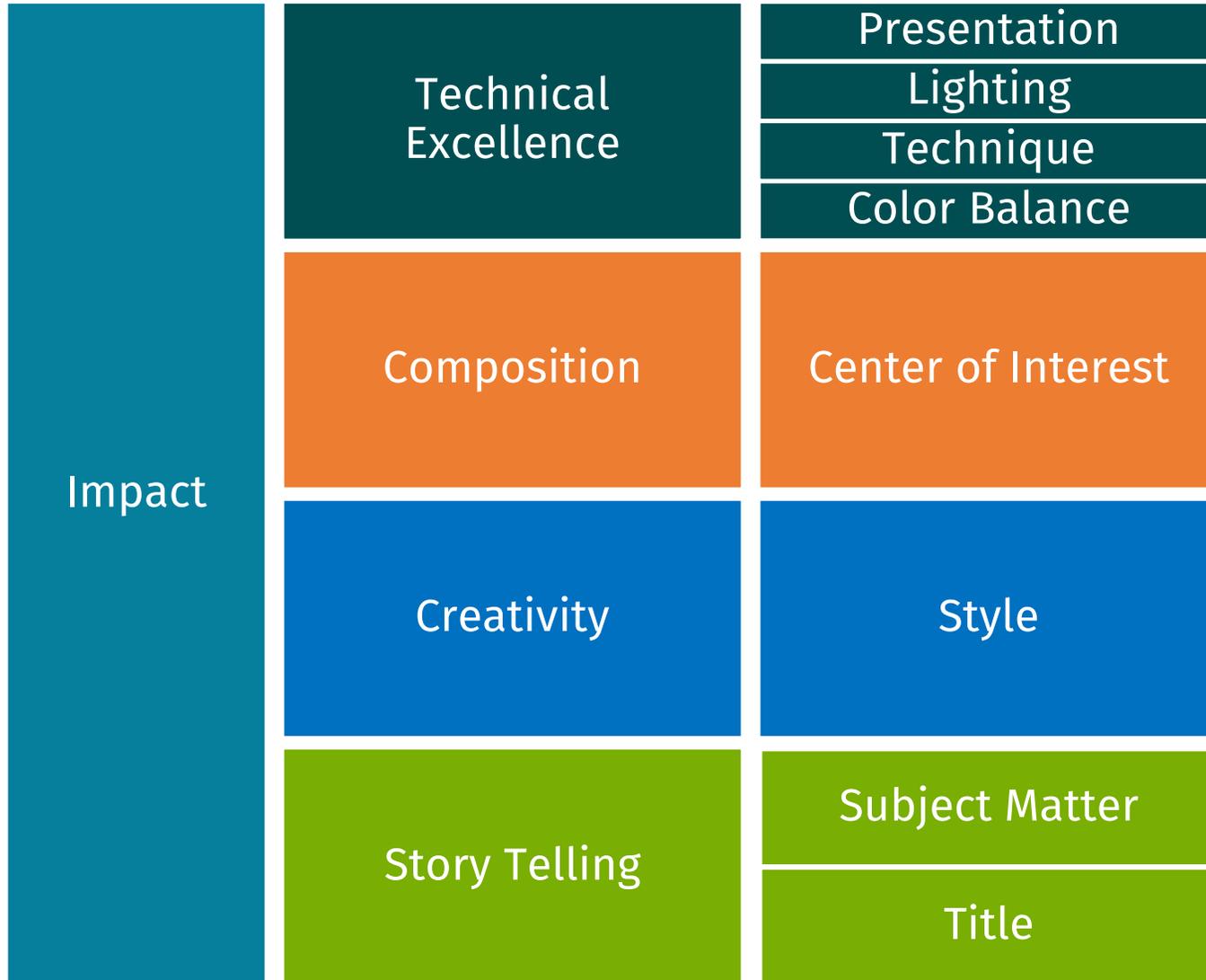
Create Impact = Pillars + Attributes

"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."

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".
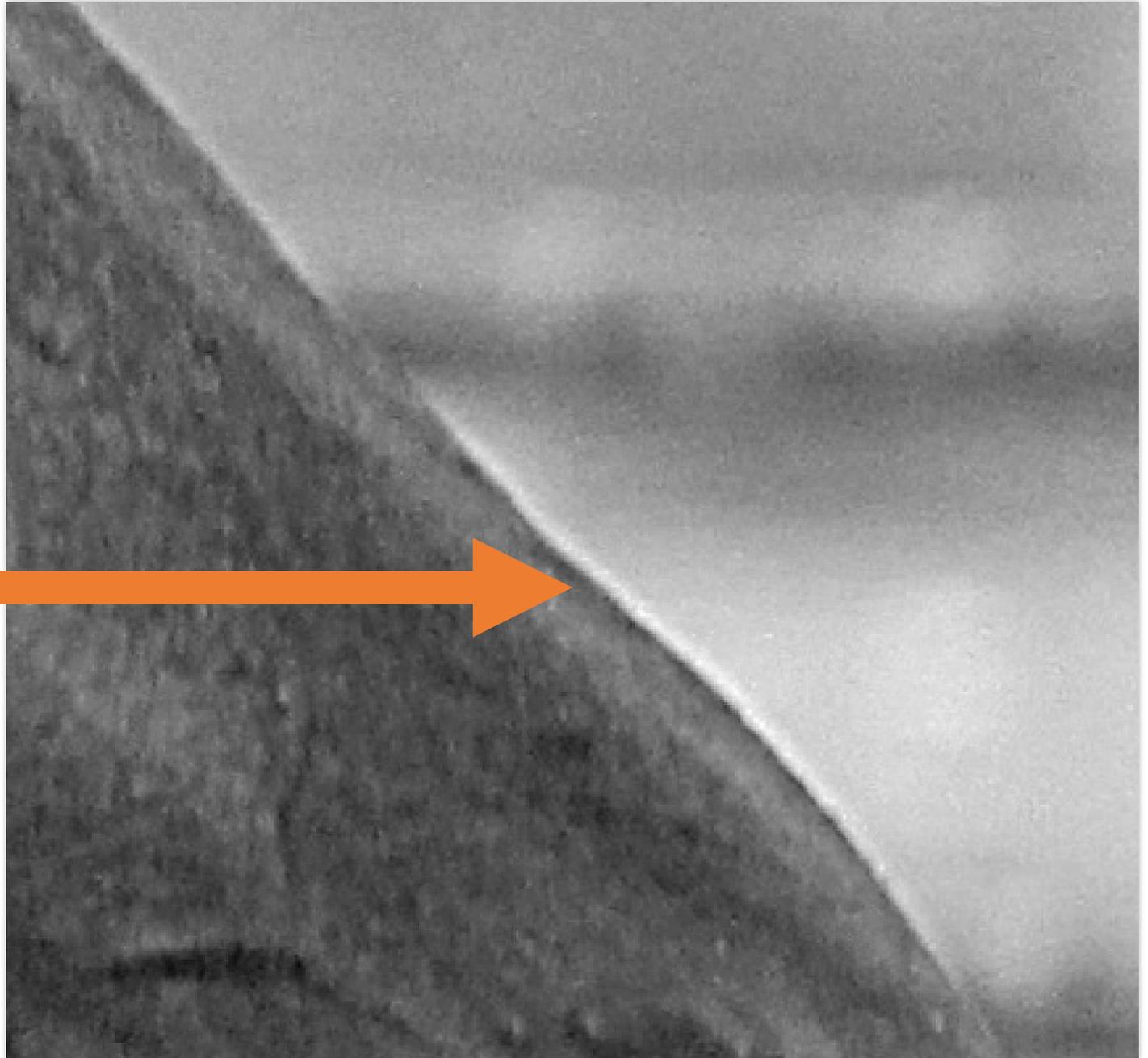
Lighting

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

This is not needed!

This was used,
headlamp over chair
with a piece of tape
to create a tiny light

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 Balance

Color tones working together enhance the emotional appeal

- Color balance is 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 Balance

COLOR THEORY

COLOR MODELS

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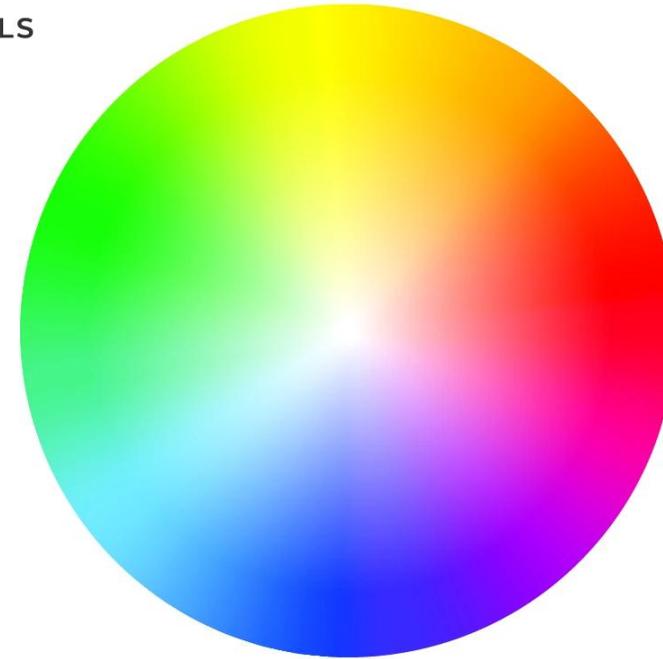Mix of cyan, magenta, yellow and black inks.

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

WARM COOL SATURATED DESATURATED BRIGHT DARK MONOCHROME

COLOR HARMONIES

ANALOGOUS COMPLEMENTARY TRIAD SPLIT COMPLEMENTARY TETRAD MONOCHROMATIC SQUARE

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

Color Balance Monochrome
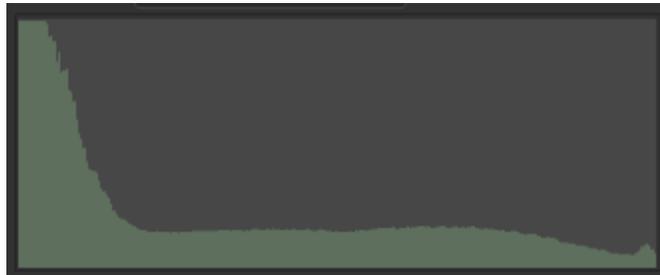
Black   White

Monochrome tones useful to remove harsh colors

• Color balance 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.

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

Technical Excellence
- Presentation
- Lighting
- Technique
- Color Balance

Technical Excellence
- Presentation
- Lighting
- Technique
- Color Balance

Technical Excellence
- Presentation
- Lighting
- Technique
- Color Balance

Staring into Wisdom

Technical Excellence
- Presentation
- Lighting
- Technique
- Color Balance
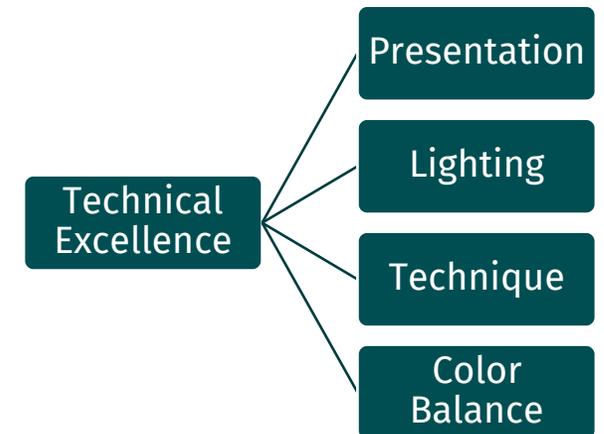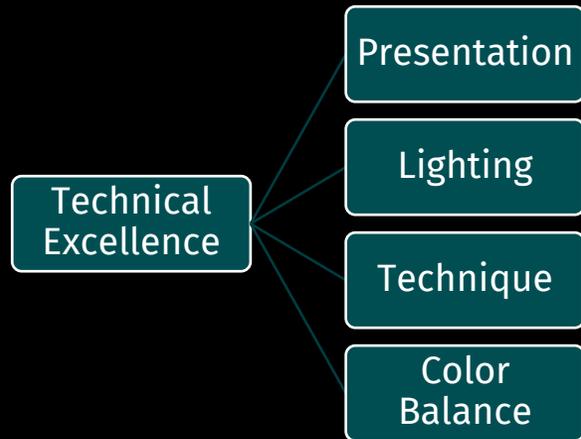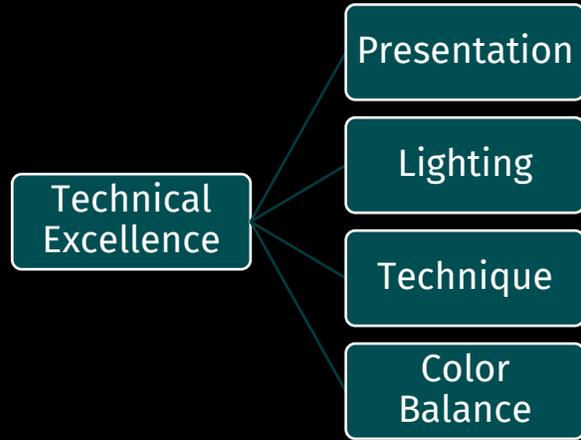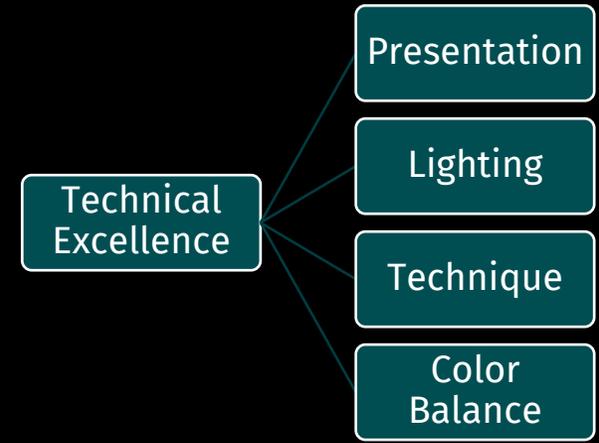
I'm Looking at You
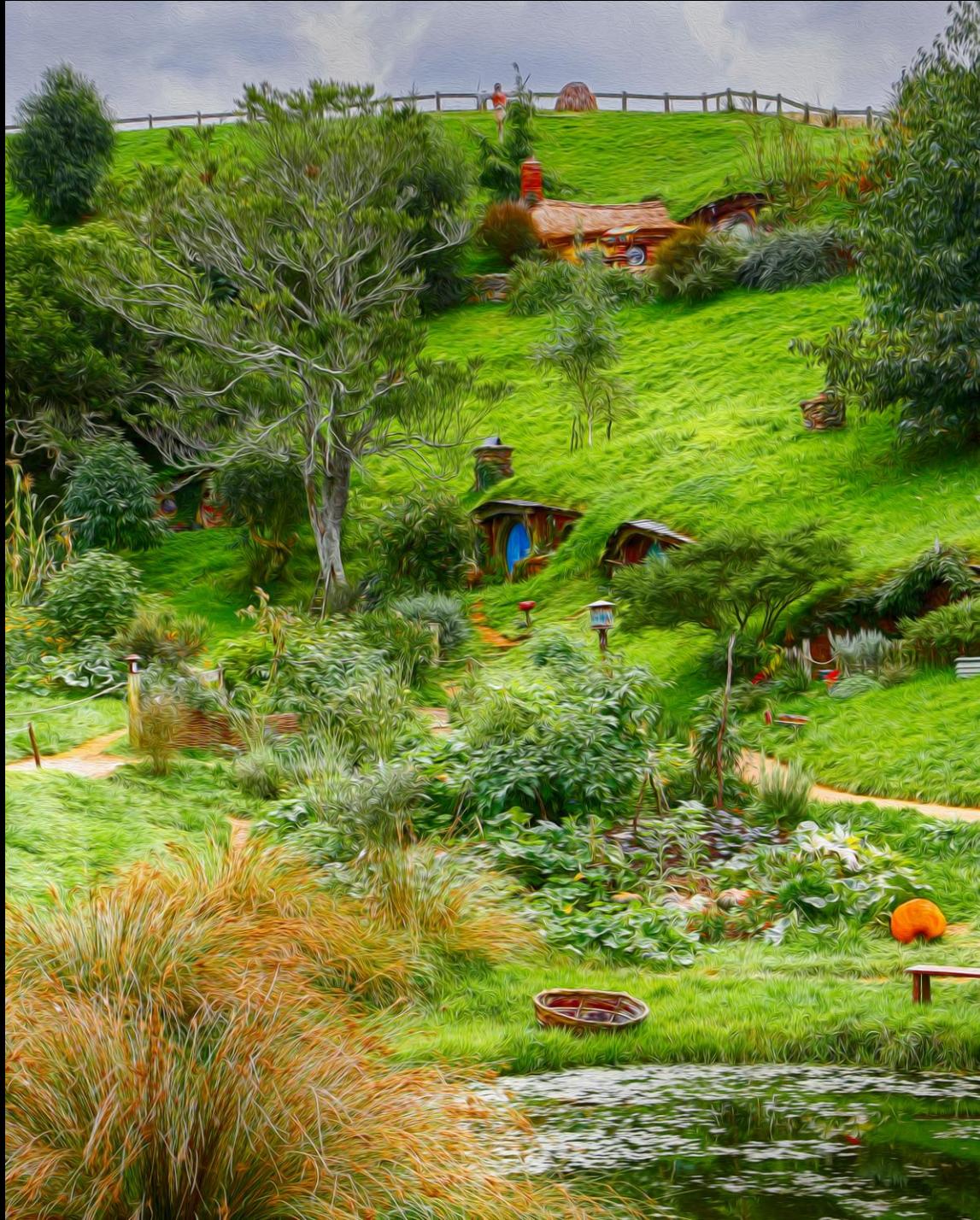
Technical Excellence
- Presentation
- Lighting
- Technique
- Color Balance

Dreaming of Hobbiton

Part 2 – Composition & Creativity 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. …
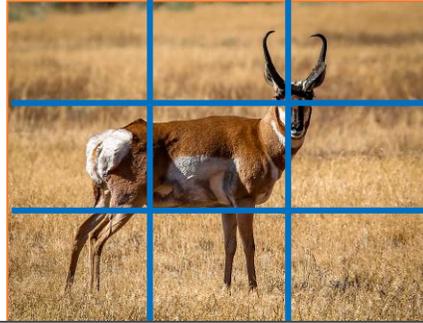
Rule of Thirds
Place the most interesting item on the lines or intersection

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

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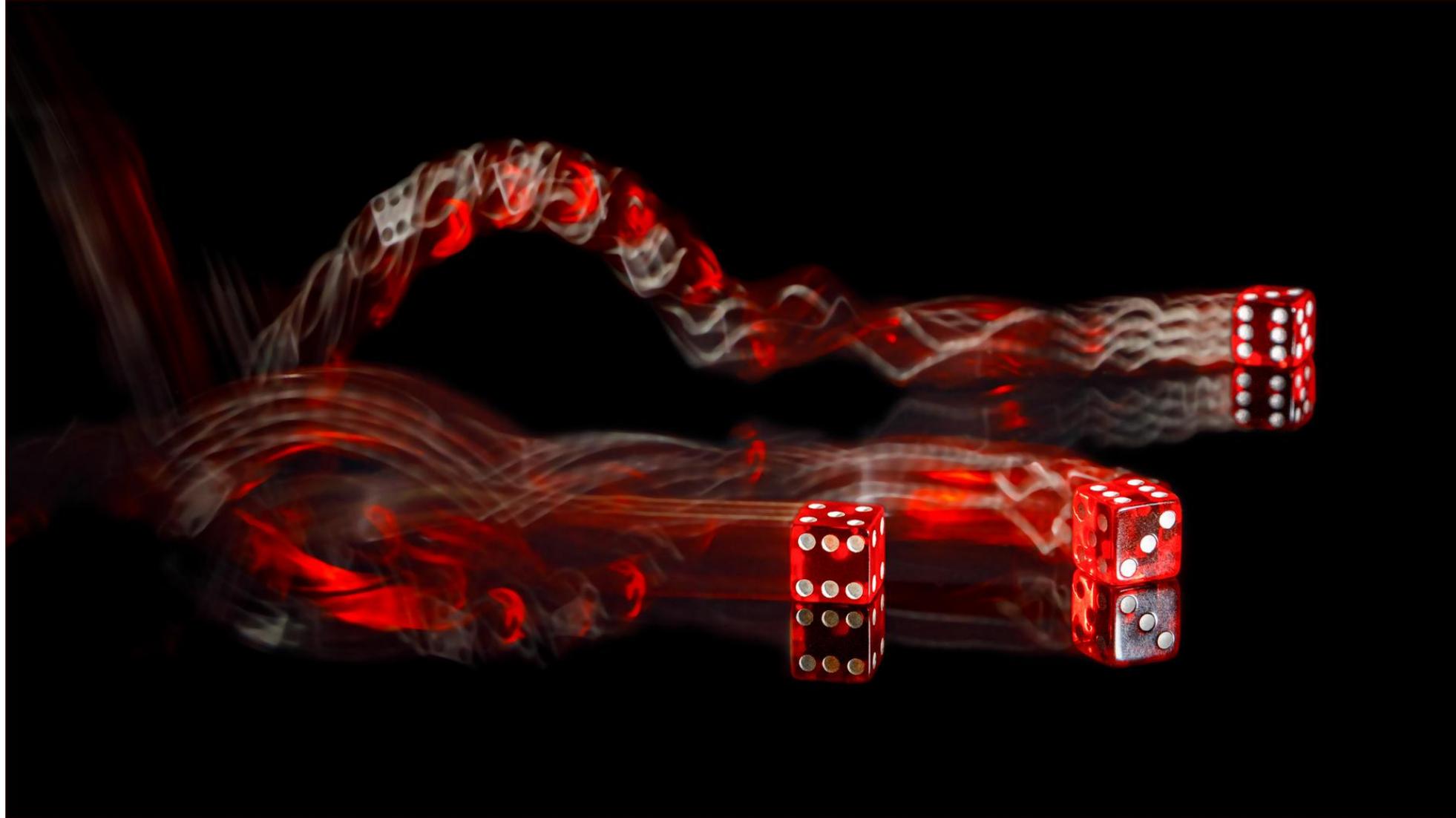
Fresh expression of imagination to convey an idea, message, thought

• 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

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

Creativity —— Style

Composition — Center of Interest

Creativity — Style

Look Mom, No Hands!

Composition — Center of Interest

Creativity — Style

Brooklyn Bridge Flag

Composition — Center of Interest

Creativity — Style

Lighting Up a Cave

Composition — Center of Interest

Creativity — Style
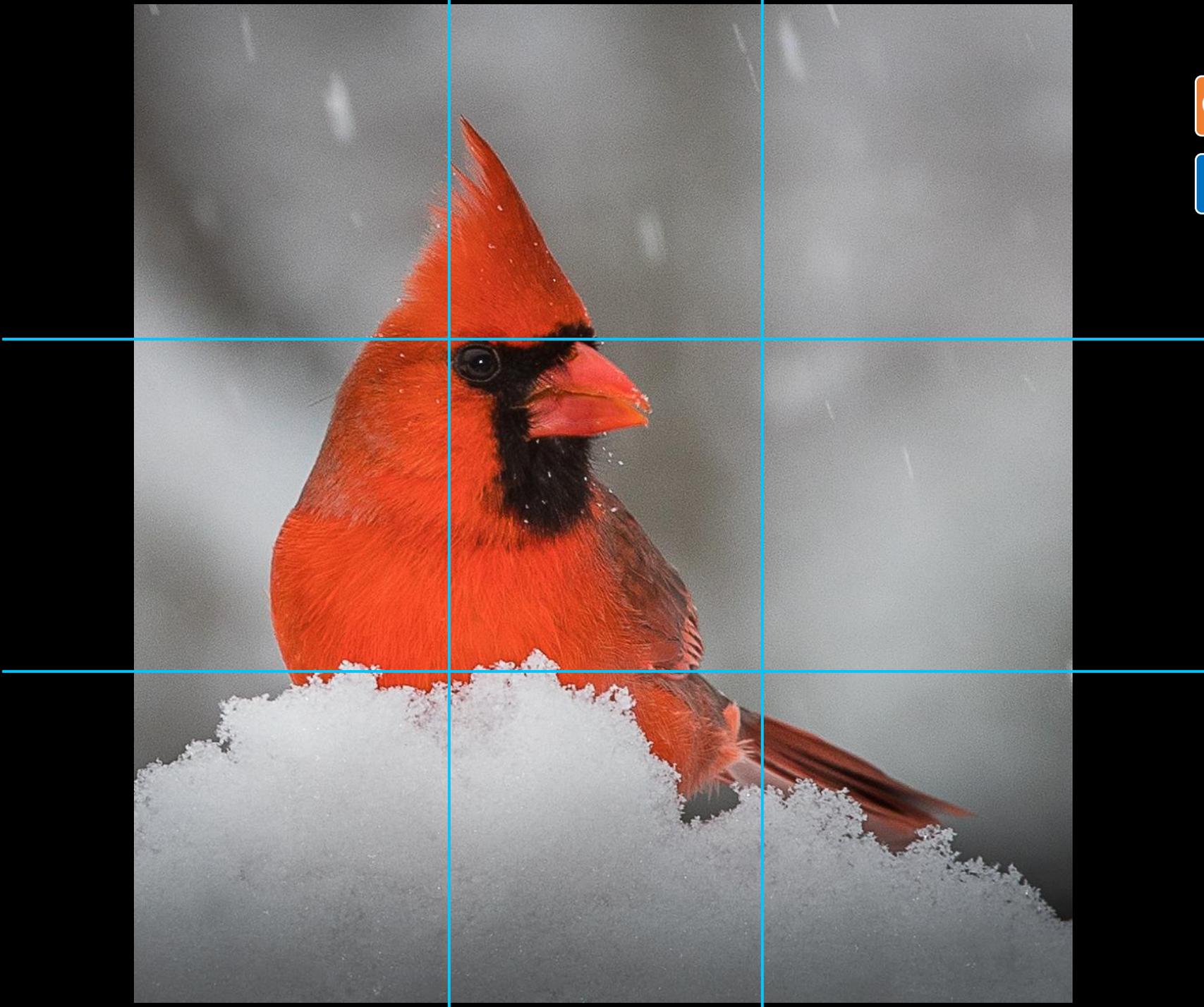
I Don't See Any Food

Composition — Center of Interest

Creativity — Style

I Don't See Any Food

Part 3 – Story Telling and Impact

Impact	Technical Excellence	Presentation
		Lighting
		Technique
		Color Balance
	Composition	Center of Interest
	Creativity	Style
	Story Telling	Subject Matter
		Title

Part 3

Subject Matter

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

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

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

Impact

Story Telling

Subject Matter

Title

Impact

Story Telling

Subject Matter

Title

The Baker's Magic Hands

Impact

Story Telling

Subject Matter

Title

The London Eye

Impact

Story Telling

Subject Matter

Title

Historic Icons of Newtown

Impact

Story Telling

Subject Matter

Title

Slicing Vegetables Reflection

The Elements of an Excellent Photo - Summary

Impact

Technical Excellence
- Presentation
- Lighting
- Technique
- Color Balance

Composition
- Center of Interest

Creativity
- Style

Story Telling
- Subject Matter
- Title

Each Element is important on its own

The more Elements you use, the stronger your photo becomes

Questions?

Chane Cullens – Chane@CCullens.com

Presentation – ccullens.com/judge

Professional Photographer Association, The 12 Elements of a Merit photo – First 6

**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
- There can be impact in any of these 12 elements
- This is the eye candy, the wow factor. It is the reason we love the photo. It moves us. We look inwards.

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.

Creativity – Fresh expression of imagination to convey an idea, message or thought
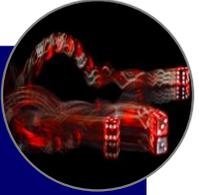
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Style - A specific genre or recognizable characteristic to showcase an artist

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Composition - Bringing all the visual elements together to express the photo's purpose

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Professional Photographer Association, The 12 Elements of a Merit photo – Last 6

Color Balance – Color tones working together enhance the emotional appeal

- Color balance is not always harmonious and can be used to evoke diverse feelings for effect
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- Color balance can be used to supply a structure to a photo

Center of Interest - The point or points where the viewer should stop as they view the photo

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Lighting - Defines dimension, shape and roundness in a photo

- The strength of your subjects should be portrayed by the strong lighting choices you utilize
- Whether the light applied is 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 switches to monochrome

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

Technique - The approach or perspective used to create the photo

- Focus, posing, angle, capture … are part of the technique applied to a photo
- Including filters, lens choice, a certain style such as forced perspective
- Move, change your perspective, learn new ways to control what you capture

Storytelling - 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