
Timeless Tips for Taking Better Images

By Carol Rusinek, IACC Member

These photography tips were originally written by Carol Rusinek, in her capacity as IACC's President in 2000/2001.

Composition

Some judges have learned the so-called rules of composition and use them to make all their decisions. Falling into this pit may be one of the most unfortunate habits of judges. Rule of thirds and centre of interest come to mind. Not every photograph needs to have a definite centre of interest, or have it placed in one of the four predetermined areas in the frame. An accomplished photographer will learn about good composition from several sources and apply parts that are appropriate to each individual photographic situation. Make sure your image contains all the information you want the judge to see. Most viewfinders do not allow you to see 100% of the area you are actually recording, but only 90 to 95%. So don't feel bad about not seeing that distraction at the edge of your image—it probably didn't show up in your viewfinder. With practice, you will learn what your camera "sees," and, until then, crop out the unwanted parts. Most of the time, placing a horizon dead centre in your image is not appealing, but sometimes it works. Experiment by taking several different angles and then decide which one is the most pleasing.

Exposure

Most judges look for images that indicate you have control over your equipment, and exposure is one of those controls. Grossly underexposed or overexposed images are not visually pleasing. However, if your aim is to present a soft image with pastel feeling, don't be afraid to experiment with overexposure. On the other hand, if you want to convey a brooding or moody image, or have richer, deeper colours, underexposing will enhance that feeling. Just keep in mind that you should still be able to see detail in both the light and dark tones of an image.

Colour Harmony

Many harsh colours can sometimes be visually confusing, while similar or complementary colours can refine your image and give it a cohesive feeling. You want the judge to appreciate the image, even if it is a disturbing subject, and colour harmony is a way to help make this happen.

Sharpness

Whether your subject is better portrayed with either shallow or great depth of field, your main subject should be relatively sharp. If you're photographing a fall scene with trees turning autumn colours against a backdrop of rolling hills, most of the trees should be in sharp focus. Imagine that scene with sharp rolling hills and fuzzy orange blobs on blurry dark columns— your message of the beauty of autumn will probably not be accurately received.

Impact

The photograph, which has qualities that seem to reach out and grab the viewer from the very first glimpse, will often fare better in a competition where the judges must make quick decisions. Even though another photograph might be one that you could hang on your wall for years, if it requires some study to appreciate its nuances, it probably will not fare as well in a competition when seen against those "grabbers."

References:

"Composition and Exposure," Carol Rusinek, President's Message, Reprinted with permission from *Imagery*, October 2000 25(2).

"Colour Harmony, Sharpness and Impact," Carol Rusinek, President's Message, Reprinted with permission from *Imagery*, November 2000 25(3).

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Depth

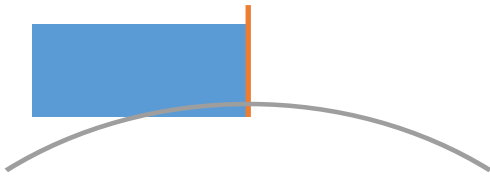
To give your 2-dimensional image a 3-dimensional feel, place the subject and context in different special planes by combining a distant background with a close foreground. Look for “leading lines,” such as a wall, fence or pathway to pull the viewer into the image. Photograph in the very early morning or evening as longer shadows enhance shape and texture, and help separate the subject from the background.

Presentation

The way an image is presented may not have anything to do with the quality of the image itself, but it does have meaning in a competition where your image is being compared to others. Entries that are presented well will score higher because they make a better impression and they have more impact. To start with, prints should be straight in the mounts and free of dust. Mats should be carefully cut and of strong material so that they will not buckle or flop on the judging stand. If you use coloured mats, make sure the colour is compatible with the colours in the print. If prints are mounted, they should adhere firmly to the backing so they won't slip during handling.

Reference:

“Depth and Presentation,” Carol Rusinek, President's Message, Reprinted with permission from *Imagery*, February 2001 25(5).



Michael Plumb, *Imagery*, January 6, 1989 14 (4)

“One realizes that photography, at its best, is a powerful vehicle for visual expression and that ultimately one must be true to oneself – what one must formulate and express is one's personal vision.”

