



Criteria for Image Critique

The purpose of critique photographs is to encourage and to support people in improving their photography.

The criteria which follow can be used in a number of ways:

- as a tool for self-critique
- as a tool to inform one-to-one and group critique and discussion
- by selectors who are tasked with choosing a set of pictures for inter-club competitions
Hopefully, the criteria will encourage a consistent, well-informed and transparent approach to image selection.
- by judges of club competitions

The Criteria

The criteria have drawn on considerable research into many different critique approaches which are available online. Hopefully they cover the main elements which can be used to consider the quality of any photograph.

The criteria are organised in 4 main sections. The order of the items does not imply any order of importance. Nor do all criteria have equal importance. No attempt has been made in this version to quantify the value of the criteria and each 'critic' will assign their own value to each.

The list of criteria shown could be expanded considerably and many could be fleshed out in much greater detail. However, there is merit in brevity. (They fit on one side of A4!)

Not all criteria will be relevant to every image.

Each of the criteria is described more fully in the final section of this paper. Where necessary there is some information on what they mean as well as some exemplification of what would be good and poor results.

Using the Criteria

Many of the criteria are quite detailed but never overlook your initial general reaction to an image. It is often the most telling!

In every case it's important to distinguish between the intentional and the unintentional! Some things which are often regarded as errors may in fact be used deliberately to create a particular effect.

Making a judgement about an image is very subjective. Although some items may be easily described as right or wrong, many are impossible to comment on in that way. For example, while it is easy to say that there are visible dust spots in a sky, it is less easy to say that an image evokes or lacks atmosphere. Each critic will bring their own opinions to the task.

Using the criteria in a selection process

A separate paper outlines the club's approach here.

Using the criteria for self-critique and one-to-one or group critique

Where the critique is a discussion, a good starting point would be to ask the photographer (or ask yourself!) what were his or her intentions for any photograph. The criteria can then be used to assess whether or not these intentions had been successfully met. The discussion should focus on:

- The good points in any image
- The weak points in any image
- What might have been improved (when the photo was taken or later during post-processing)

Feedback should be a discussion rather than the handing down of a judgement.

Any comments made by a critic should be kind and constructive even if they relate to a poorer result. Encouraging or complimentary comments along with suggestions for improvement will **always** be better than simple criticism

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Criteria for Image Critique

Content

The image has a WOW factor.
The image tells a story or captures the 'moment'.
The image has original, beautiful and/or interesting content. The photographer has added value to the image.
The image captures action.

Composition

The image has a sense of balance.
The image exhibits strong compositional elements eg leading lines, natural framing, thirds.
The image has been taken using an interesting angle of view.
Picture elements are well organised eg horizon, horizontals and verticals are appropriate to the image.

Aesthetic

The image has real impact.
The image evokes atmosphere.
The image triggers an emotional response.
The image show originality.
The image shows good use of light.
Conversion to Monochrome has been done skilfully and is appropriate for the image.
The image gives a sense of what the photographer was intending.

Technical

The image is needle sharp where it needs to be.
Colour balance is correct and colour quality is excellent.
The image has excellent dynamic range, where appropriate.
The chosen Depth of Field is appropriate and enhances the image.
An appropriate shutter speed has been used to good effect.
Post Processing has been applied appropriately.
The image is clean and well-presented with no noise, fringing or dust spots.

The Criteria Explained

Content

This refers to the subject matter of any image.

Criteria	Comments
The image has a WOW factor.	If your instant response is WOW – then there is a wow factor! Images with a wow factor will nearly always have a very high visual impact.
The image tells a story or captures the ‘moment’.	This refers to the image’s ability to evoke imagination. Each viewer might create his or her own story.
The image has original, beautiful and/or interesting content. The photographer has added value to the image.	A good image will contain a subject(s) which many viewers will find interesting or stunning. The photographer has added value to the image in the way in which he has interpreted the subject. A poor image will contain mundane or clichéd subject matter or the image is purely a record shot.
The image captures action.	This will often mean some form of sports but could also include subjects such as children playing or animal behaviour.

Composition

This refers to the way in which the photographer has arranged the different elements of the image by selecting a particular focal length of lens, choosing the camera position and angle of view.

Criteria	Comments
The image exhibits strong compositional elements eg leading lines, natural framing, thirds.	The image has balance and the composition leads your eye naturally to the centre of interest. There are no distracting elements such as an over-busy background, points of brightness.
The image has been taken using an interesting or unusual angle of view.	The angle chosen adds to the visual impact of the image.
Picture elements are well organised eg horizon, horizontals and verticals are appropriate for the image.	The horizon, horizontals and verticals are straight unless the intention is otherwise.

Aesthetic

This refers to the photographer's artistic interpretation of the subject. It may be accomplished when the image is captured or with post-processing.

Criteria	Comments
The image evokes atmosphere.	
The image triggers an emotional response.	
The image show originality.	The image has been taken in an original and thoughtful way. It will show a different way of seeing.
The image shows good use of light.	The relationship between the photographer and light sources has been carefully considered.
Conversion to Monochrome has been done skilfully and is appropriate for the image.	
The image gives a sense of what the photographer was intending.	

Technical

This refers to the mastery of techniques involved in creating an image whether these are applied at the point of capture or in post-processing. It is often the case that good technique will get no extra points in a competition but poor technique will be noticed and penalised.

Criteria	Comments
Colour balance is correct and colour quality is excellent.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Colour looks natural and vibrant. <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Colour is washed out or 'over-cooked'. Image has an inappropriate colour cast
The image has excellent dynamic range.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Detail is retained in highlights and shadows. <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Highlights are blown out. Shadows are muddy and lack detail
The chosen Depth of Field is appropriate and enhances the image.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> The central subject is highlighted because the background is deliberately out of focus. Bokeh effects add to the visual interest. Alternatively, the entire image is deliberately in focus from foreground to background.
An appropriate shutter speed has been used to good effect.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Movement has been frozen and is perfectly sharp. Alternatively, a slow shutter speed has been used to good effect with moving subjects such as water, people, lights.
Post Processing has been applied appropriately.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> The image has been enhanced by post-processing. <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> The image is flat and shows a lack of post-processing. Alternatively, the image has been over-sharpened or overworked in post processing.
The image is clean and well-presented with no noise, fringing or dust spots.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> The image is noisy, has visible dust spots or has obvious 'fringing'