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The following questions and advice is for guidance only. The aim is to minimise the inclusion of errors a judge would look for.

This list has been compiled from our members own experiences and with particularly useful suggestions from Ed Cloutman the WPF Judges and Presenters Secretary 2017 (available from the Welsh Photographic Federation website) – italicised in red.

COMPOSITION ON THE DAY

- In your opinion is it an interesting photograph?
- Does it tell a story? Does the subject convey an event or mood.
- Does it lead the eye towards the subject or point of interest?
 - Leading Lines or Curves
 - Rule of Thirds
 - Triangles
 - Interesting regular or irregular patterns
- Is the image well balanced?
- Could it have been shot from a better angle / position e.g. lower or higher?
- If present, is the horizon at the correct position or could it be better placed (or removed)?
 - Is the horizon level to the frame?
- LIGHTING
 - Is the lighting appropriate for the subject? (could it use fill flash or reflected light?)
 - Is there a need for more than one exposure e.g. a bright sky with darker foreground?
- FOCUS
 - Is the image correctly focused (or blurred) appropriate to the subject?
 - Does the depth of field show enough detail?
- Are the main elements within the frame suitably separated - no overlapping ?
- WILDLIFE / SPORT
 - Is there sufficient 'natural environment' in the scene to add to the subject?
 - Allow space for moving objects / wildlife to 'move into'
- LANDSCAPES
 - Would it benefit from a long exposure?
- PORTRAITS / PEOPLE
 - Are the eyes suitably highlighted and sharply focused?
 - Is the character of the subject portrayed well?
 - Do the hands dominate or distract?
- If possible allow room for future cropping.
- If the competition is themed does the image fit the criteria?

PRE PROCESSING

- Would the image be better in Colour or Monochrome?
- Can the viewer clearly identify the subject?
 - **Subject** - The part/parts of the image that the story is about and the viewer is drawn to - usually forms part of the title:
 - Does the subject stand out from the background?
Suggestion: use correct aperture at time of shooting.
Use PS to diffuse the background.
Darken or lighten the background compared to the subject.
De-saturate the background or alter the colours.
 - Are there any burnt-out areas on the subject, or areas with no detail?
Suggestion: use the lasso tool to isolate the faulty area and adjust exposure, or use low opacity clone tool to cone-in missing detail.
 - Does the subject have background objects conflicting with it (posts out of head etc)
Suggestion: move the subject in PS or clone out the offending object.
- Would the subject be stronger as central, off-centre or portrait?
- Is it suitably cropped?
 - **Cropping** - probably the first and one of the most important things you will do. Think about it:
 - Have you cropped out marginal distractions?
 - Have you cropped to place the subject in a strong position in the image?
 - Are there areas in your picture that do not enhance the overall image?
 - *Example: foreground areas of vegetation with little interest, out-of-focus foreground, or a large area of the picture with nothing in it.*
 - Are you cropping to fit a standard mount?
Advice: Please don't. This is one of the most common faults and judges constantly have to say that there are/were better ways if displaying your picture. By using pre-cut mounts you are confining your print to a standard format which may not suit the subject. For example a letterbox shape may be more suitable, or a square format (the latter can be very attractive). You would not confine yourself in this way for a PDI.
 - Try alternative crops Square, Letterbox, Portrait, Landscape
 - Try narrowing or widening the crop to see if the image gets stronger
- Are there any bright or dark areas that should show more detail?
 - **Background** - the part of the image that so often gets forgotten when shooting:
 - Does it conflict with the subject?
Suggestion: see subject section above.
 - Are there any bright areas to draw the viewer's eye?
Suggestion: tone down or clone out the bright areas.
Cover with a foreground subject.
 - Are there any bright colours to conflict with the subject or draw the viewer's eye?
Suggestion: change the colour and/or tone it down or clone it out.
 - Is it a complicated/busy background?
Suggestion: change or simplify the background or look to see if you have a simpler image to use.
- Always adjust a RAW image to your lens profile to minimise distortion effects.

POST PROCESSING

- Does the image show signs of cloning such as repetitious areas?
- **Focus** - Is your picture really sharp? There may of course be reasons to deliberately soften the image, but the original should be sharp.
Reason: it could be camera shake - have a look at the metadata and see what exposure you used and correct in future or use a tripod.
Reason: it could be that the autofocus locked on to the wrong part of the image - try manual focus. You cannot correct an out-of-focus image by sharpening in PS.
Reason: You may have enlarged the picture too much for the quality of your equipment. This is a very common fault and will lose you lots of marks. Print smaller and do not try to fill a pre-cut mount or sheet of expensive A3 paper.

Note! In wildlife photography a judge will insist that the image is sharp, except in cases where depth of field will not allow the subject to be completely in focus such as in macro-photography, or perhaps the tips of wings in a flying bird. Some allowance will occasionally be given.

- **Over sharpening** - a very common fault causing pixilation and lines around objects.
Suggestion: look very carefully with a magnifier if possible and look particularly where dark objects meet the sky. You can carefully clone these lines out, but it takes patience.
- **Over saturation** - often caused by increasing the contrast too much as well as just by increasing the saturation slider.
Suggestion: does the picture look natural when you view it. Try and compare it with other photographers' images or ask the advice of other people. View the print in overcast daylight, not artificial light.
- **Colour casts** - you MUST view a print in daylight, or under a daylight bulb, not in artificial light. Colour casts are very difficult to resolve and it takes practise and experience to even recognise them. To some photographers it comes easier than others. They are particularly noticeable in B&W pictures which should always be viewed in natural light, preferably on an overcast day. Magenta is the most common. Printing on different papers can cause a colour cast particularly with fine art papers.
- **Black and White** - there are so many ways of converting a colour image to B&W that they cannot be explained here. The art of B&W seems to have been lost with the change from darkroom to digital and judges frequently have to deal with poorly converted images.
Advice: get hold of, or keep by you a well produced B&W print (preferably a darkroom print) and use this as a guide when converting your image from colour. You will be surprised how helpful this is. ALWAYS check the final image in natural light (see above).
- **HDR, filters and other specialist software** - have you used any of these and if so does it really enhance your picture?
Advice: be sure you understand what you are doing when using these aids. They are easily overdone. A typical example is the number of portraits we see where the skin looks like a piece of old leather!
Suggestion: Keep your original image on a layer beneath the modified one and blend them using 'opacity' in PS.
- Are any vertical lines vertical (horizontal lines horizontal) to the frame?
- Check edges of objects for halos and chromatic aberration (rainbow colouring)

PRINTING AND MOUNTING

- Is your picture printed too large?
Advice: This is a common fault. Look carefully at your print. Can you see pixels? Remember if the image is at the limit of your equipment it is better to print smaller when it will look sharper. A3 paper is expensive and there is the temptation to try and fill the paper with your picture. Give your picture room in the mount - it looks so much better than with a narrow mount margin.
- Does the paper you are using suit the subject?
Advice: Think about the paper you choose to use. There are many papers out there - don't be afraid to try some. An artistic subject may require a fine art paper, mat and/or textured. An architectural subject may be better on a full gloss paper. Some papers suit B&W photographs.
- Are you using a ready-cut mount?
Advice: It is not advisable to use ready-cut mounts. By doing so you are confining yourself to a standard cropping regime which may not suit your picture (see CROPPING above).
- Have you got a fancy border around your picture?
Advice: Unless you are confident that your border enhances your picture, keep your border simple using the mount as the frame. It gives the judge less to criticise. DO NOT use a wide white border/keyline around a PDI. Either use no keyline or a one, two or three pixel line depending on the final production size
- Are you using a coloured mount (including black)?
Advice: Fashions change, but at present avoid coloured mounts unless you are confident you know what you are doing. Stick to white or ivory mounts. Black mounts can sometimes help to make B&W pictures 'stand out'.
- Double or single mounting?
Advice: If single mounting use ARTISTS FRAMING TAPE, not masking or parcel tape. The latter tapes can damage your competitor's prints.
- For monochrome prints check that prints don't have a tint of another hue.
- Is the mount aperture neatly cut with an internal clean bevel edge?

THE TITLE

The title is a compulsory part of the picture and while some judges say that it is un-important and the picture should speak for itself, a good title helps the judge understand what the photographer is trying to say and is certainly helpful when the subject is obscure.

- Does your title express the main point of the picture?
Advice and examples:
It is no use calling your picture 'Approaching Storm' if the sky only forms a tiny part of the image and is not very threatening or - 'Walking the dog' if the man and dog can hardly be seen in the picture, or - 'Reflections' when the main part of the picture is a straight scene or - 'The Frightened Widow' when the expression on the subjects face looks anything but frightened . Of course there are always exceptions to the rule. Rules are there to be broken, but need a lot of experience on behalf of the photographer to be carried out well.

PANELS

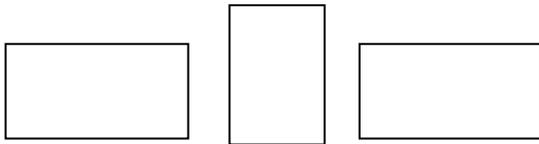
Panel Competitions feature a selection of individual images (usually between 3 and 5) that have some connection to each other, and are coordinated in such a way that they convey a balance.

For example, the balance could be by subject, story, colour, shape or mood etc..

The Panel is viewed as a montage of all the images as displayed on a 20" x 16" mount and **judged on that montage not on the individual images**. So, even if some of the images are really good, if one isn't of the same quality, clarity, exposure etc. points may be lost.

The other important balance is the physical size and position of the images in the layout.

If using 3 images you might lay them out as below:



However if the 2 outer images have different sizes That could count against your result as would a difference in the gaps between each image.

Using 3 or 5 images in a panel is often better than using 4 but that will completely depend upon your selection and what you are trying to convey to the judge.

Common features in panels are portraiture and animals and it's a good idea to make the faces of the subjects coordinated in the way they face e.g. try to get the faces to point inward to the centre of the montage to give focus to (say) the centre image even if that means horizontally reversing one or two of them.

GENERAL PROFESSIONAL TIPS

Turn your image upside down, close your eyes then open them and think about where on the image your eyes are drawn to. Simply by doing this you will become emotionally detached from your photograph and will spot any distractions that detract the eye from the main focal points.

View your DPI image at 100% and on the largest screen available (e.g. TV) as the judge probably will. This way you can often spot things like composition and camera errors such as dust spots, halos and post-production issues.