



# Judges

How to beat them at their  
own game

- Why enter competitions?
- Background
- What does “good” look like to a judge?
  - The Basics
  - The Not-so-Basic
    - ✓
    - ✗
  - A Few Pointers
- As a judge, what do I look for (beyond the standard stuff)?
- The Aftermath
- What makes the ideal judge?
- How to approach competitions
  - Open
  - Set subject
  - Natural history
  - Creative
- Titles
- Some examples

# Why enter competitions?

- To find our level
- Recognition
- Credibility
- Our moment in the spotlight
- Awards

# Background

- Is photography art?
- Subjective
- All judges are different
- Seminar:
  - Don't choose an image just because you like it
  - It has to be good of its type
- Sometimes they like or dislike it
- Some comp standards are so good, the deciding factor can be personal taste

# So, what does “good” look like to a judge?

## The Basics

- **Technical:**
  - Sharp
  - Exposure
  - Composition
  - Appropriate use of:
    - Aperture / DoF
    - Shutter speed
  - Timing
- If you break any of these “rules”, make sure it doesn’t look like a mistake

# So, what does “good” look like to a judge?

## The Not-So-Basic



- Viewpoint
- Lighting
- Space to breathe - watch the edges
- Centre of interest
- Impact
- Appropriate use of colour
- Sensible conversion to mono
- Catchlights are good in portraits
- Attention to small details
- Originality/creativity: unique perspective, creative techniques, imagination, style
- In a print, appropriate choice of paper

# So, what does “good” look like to a judge?



## The Not-So-Basic

- Blown highlights
- Blocked shadows
- Distracting backgrounds esp in natural history images
- Colour casts especially in mono images
- Halos around edges of objects in the image
- Clutter round the edges
- Over-sharpening
- Cropping too tight
- Areas of little or no interest in your image
- Sloping horizons
- Converging verticals
- Overuse of HDR
- Dust spots

# So, what does “good” look like to a judge?

## A Few Pointers

- Achieve the best possible quality
- Composition - rule of thirds, leading lines, framing, balance
- Processing that looks natural but with a personal touch - don't overdo processing eg garish techniques (HDR!)
- An outstanding image of something commonplace is better than an average image of something rare
- Personal interpretation and originality
- Be careful about producing images of someone else's work
- Story telling = emotion, interesting narrative, captures a moment
- Nothing wrong in posing a challenge for the judge
- Don't take photographs specifically for a judge. Take the photograph for you



# As a judge, what do I look for

(beyond the standard stuff)?

- Why have I been presented with this image?
  - Illustrative, pictorial, documentary, educational?
- Do I understand the purpose of the image?
- Is there a clear expression of an idea?
- Am I visually excited? Or the opposite?
- How do I feel?
  - Emotion, sadness, humour?
- Has the image been edited appropriately?

# The Aftermath

- Judges can come over as very critical and at times quite personal = you might come out of a competition feeling hurt
- It's very easy to slag off the judge, but remember they do this in their own time, voluntarily and, for the most part, they try their very best
- Don't be put off by a judge's negative comments
- Learn from them or ignore them
- If your image doesn't do well, don't give up, don't take it to heart, keep trying
- There will plenty of ups and downs. You'll get used to it and eventually enjoy competitions

# So, what makes the ideal judge?

- Knowledge of the photographic craft/art
- Not over critical
- Not over simplistic
- Diplomatic
- Gives a balanced assessment (good/bad/good sandwich)
- Understands the emotional content of an image: why has it been produced and presented as it has
- Marks awarded will be broadly in line with the judge's comments
- Finds something good to say about every image

# How to approach competitions

## Open

- Open is just that:
  - Anything goes
- Problem for the judge:
  - How do you assess a portrait vs a landscape?
  - Or a sports image vs a creative?
- Enter your best

# How to approach competitions

## Set subject / themed

- Remember, judges are simple people so:
  - Think very carefully
  - Stick to the theme
  - Read the rules!!
- Make sure the theme comes over loud and clear
- Don't try to be too clever
- There's nothing wrong with making a judge think but don't make the thinking too difficult
- With prints, most judges will consider the quality of the print but not the presentation. I do, but not to the extent of docking marks for it.

# How to approach competitions

## Nature / Natural History

Check natural history rules!!

Nature Eligibility (PAGB May 2020)

- Nature means images where living organisms are the primary subject matter. The story telling value of an image will normally be weighed more than the pictorial quality.

# How to approach competitions

## Nature / Natural History

### Nature includes:

- Images taken with subjects in controlled conditions such as zoos, game parks, botanic gardens, aquariums and enclosures where the subjects are dependent on man for food. Scientific bands, tags or collars are permissible.

# How to approach competitions

## Nature / Natural History

### Nature excludes:

- Images where the subjects are obviously domestic animals or plants.
- Images where an obviously artistic treatment has been applied.



# How to approach competitions

## Nature / Natural History

- Processing of the captured image, by cropping, exposure adjustment, colour correction, noise minimisation, dodging/burning, HDR, focus stacking and sharpening, is permitted, as is cloning of image defects and minor distractions including overlapping elements.
- An image appearing to meet these criteria will be accepted as Nature. The judges will normally assume that any image presented to them is eligible.
- Access to some biological subjects may be restricted. Where that is relevant, then photographers warrant that they have followed relevant codes of practices and hold any necessary licences.

# How to approach competitions

## Creative

- In the case of creative images, the idea/author input/inspiration is probably more important than the image itself.
- The author must be the originator of every part of a creative image
- Try to make the judge think:
  - Why have I produced this image?
  - What am I trying to say?

# How to approach competitions

## Titles

- Can be important in clarifying the story/intent behind an image
  - But:
    - Some judges will look at them, some won't
    - Most external competitions ignore them

# How to approach competitions

- Difference between internal and external competition judging
- For every competition: **READ THE RULES**

A few  
examples





Before

After

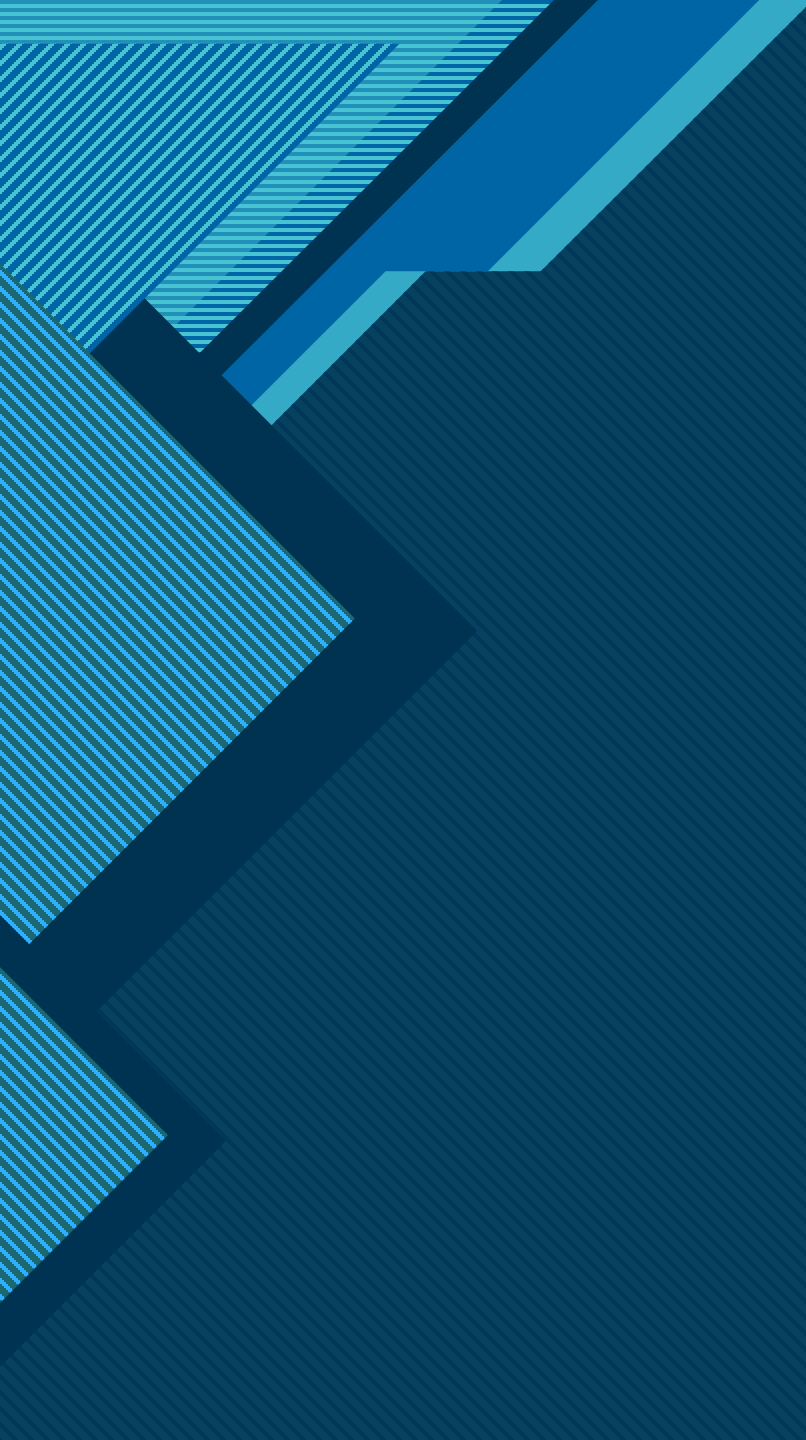




Before

After





Thank you  
and  
good luck