

Hints for Print Competition Submissions

- Impact** of the subject matter is crucial: Emotional? Believable? Exciting? Creative? Unusual?
- Usually the print or image is **mounted** onto a larger sized mount board with an excess blank space around the image, rather than an "edge-to-edge" print as we deliver to a client. That blank space can be black, white or any other background color to compliment or as a contrast to your image. Whichever color you choose, the density of this background color is important so it doesn't garner more attention than the image itself, wither being too dark or too bright.
 - that being said, a long & skinny, rectangle, square, round or a geometric shaped image is permissible and it could be mounted onto a mount board with the same configuration as the image or onto a standard "rectangle" mount board.
 - with digital capabilities, pin stripe borders can be added around the image to enhance the presentation or it can detrimental if they are of the wrong color, size or placement.
 - PPA rules states a particular mounting thickness, 1/8" to 3/8", which can be a double to a triple weight art-mount board or the Sinatra board which is the correct thickness.
 - How much space around an image? I usually use the 1/3-2/3 rule: left or right edge-to-edge and top to bottom such as:
 - example #1:** your image is 11x14, add 3 inches of blank space to the left, add 2" inches to the right, at the top 3" and the bottom 2", add this and the mount board is a 16x19. This will present an "off centered" image onto your mount board. This suggestion has its variables too. Maybe it's 1.5" left or right and equal to the bottom and "lots" of space for the rest of the presentation onto a traditional 16x20 board. Add your pin stripe border around the image, to what looks/feels comfortable. Width of the pixel border is again, what feels/looks good, usually smaller or thinner is better than thicker.
 - example #2:** "centered" is 2 to 3 inches all the way around the image placed on your mount board, add your pin stripe borders for an emphasis or highlighting of the image presentation.
 - example #3:** Your panorama image is 14 x 30, this is too long for the official PPA rules, since the longest is 24", so one needs to re-size the print smaller. Suggested mounting would be "edge-to-edge" for this particular panorama image to fit the established rules.
 - example #4:** A single or double mat may be used on top of the print, then add a backing board, which all combined cannot exceed the recommended thickness rule.
- Cropping** can make or break the overall appearance. Do not crop an individual at a joint, but above or below; let there be space around the "center point" of your image, off center or dead center depends on the impact and the storytelling of your print. Is there space below the feet or above their heads and or left to right? Do you want the image within the print tilted or tipped rather than square to the edges? Same goes for mounting the print to the mount board. The point of interest in a scenic image should be below or above the central horizontal line of the print and it's mounting also applies. Crop out, dodge, print in or duplicate: trees, bushes, leaves, junk, buildings, remove window or eyeglass glares and light spots that will pull your eye away from the impact of the image.
- Some **guidelines** to consider for composition: the point-of-interest, rule of thirds, leading lines, reading from left to right, small or extreme sized subject matter to direct your view into the main subject, scene or item. It's that impact which can be the wow factor for yourself and the judge.
- Finishing** is critical. An overall high gloss spray or lamination is more appealing than without, which is the paper surface or a matte spray finish applied. Another option is metallic paper and possibly its glossy surface is enough to omit the additional glossy spray coating.
- A great **title** will catch the judge's ear over a bad one. Keep the title short, sweet, to the point. One to three words is better than a lengthy one that can get lost in the judges mind. Write a list of possibilities, recite your choice over and over, if it fits keep it, if not, find another one. Ask others for their suggestion for a title, also check out book, music or show titles for one which will fit the image.

7. Print competition is the **fairest** of all judging. When a print is first viewed on the turn table and its title announced, the judge has no idea of the maker's name nor skill level of a rookie to a Master. Yet, if it is poorly printed, mounted and finished, they may wonder if this is an individual who hasn't been taught the ins and outs of print submission or something being tested and will score it accordingly. The judge is taught to study the image, place it in a category, then press the buttons for a score. There is an opportunity for a judge to challenge the resulting score, present his thoughts, listen to the others judges viewpoints, gives his rebuttal and then the print is re-scored. Another judge may challenge the same print and present another viewpoint and fight for a higher category and score and the process can be repeated until all of the judges are satisfied with the entries total score.
8. Print judging is for your **benefit!** It is a method of learning how you are growing as a photographer. Your clients may love your image(s), the judges could love it or determine some faults. Learn from this critique to improve yourself in your next portrait session. One must have a thick skin and the willingness to listen and accept the comments from the Master of Photography degree judge. Their input is beneficial as they too have had prints scored from every point range possible from their peers and each knows they are there to help you improve your work through print judging.
9. Realize the **12 elements** to print judging were established to direct and educate the judges and as a guide for your photographic endeavors. Read, study, and learn from them as they will help in your continued learning process. An old saying is, "Know the rules, then you can break the rules". One must have a basic understanding about this phrase for your photography and print competitions.
10. Other **tidbits**:
 - a. **image choice**: confused as how to chose the images for print competition? Pick out 4,5,6,8 images from your repertoire of sessions, have 5x7's printed; study them thoroughly, dwell on the beauty or are their flaws? Pick 4 or 5 to be completed as convention prints from your lab.
 - b. **no two identical subjects**, people or pets, can be entered in the same print competition. This PPA rule also applies in albums. An image within an album cannot be entered as a print in the same competition in the same year.
 - c. **albums** or **storybooks** can be entered instead of individual prints. PPA official rules dictate the standards of their submissions, please check PPA's web site for this critical information.
 - d. **print density**: is the image correctly exposed, details in the highlights and the shadows? If you are the color manager, then make the overall print 25-50% darker than you can believe. Under the judging lights, your prints may be washed out while under "normal room" lighting they look great. Print it deep and watch out for extreme contrast and the shadows going too black. If your lab is going to print your "convention prints", they know exactly how to print, mount and finish them for you. Remember, these procedures takes extra time, plan carefully.
 - e. **vignetting**: is the process of printing in (darkening) around the print edges to draw your eye to the point of interest of the subject manner you have carefully designated.
 - f. **remove** any white spots that "jump out" like the holes in a tree, blades of grass, junk or glares.
 - g. **final four**: only four entries are accepted between prints and albums in your print case.
 - h. **place** your prints in between sheets of brown Kraft paper or bubble wrap, then into a print case; SMNPPA will accept your prints in a cardboard box, while other competitions will not.

These thoughts, ideas and techniques are from the author and are not to be "set-in-stone" rules, but to be used as suggestions for your advantages in print competition submissions.

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