

Summary of Judging and Scoring Guidelines for 4Cs Competitions

July 2001

Judging Guidelines

The 4Cs asks that judges of 4Cs competitions observe the following eight guidelines.

- 1) Use the 9-point scoring system described below.
- 2) Be consistent: do not change your scoring in the middle of a session.
- 3) Set aside your personal biases on subject and style.
- 4) Do not indiscriminately apply the "Rules of Composition."
- 5) Do not give a disproportionate number of high and low scores.
- 6) Take lint, dirt, and fungus into account if significant.
- 7) Take scratches into account.
- 8) If you see an image that looks like it was computer generated or manipulated, score it normally: this is okay in 4Cs competitions.

Scoring Guidelines

All 4Cs competitions should be judged on a 1-9 scale. Please use the following guidelines for giving each score:

1. Slide should be disqualified.
2. Serious technical defects.
3. Either significant technical defects or serious content problems.
4. Minor technical defects or content not well handled.
5. Acceptable but not interesting.
6. Reasonably solid and interesting. Generally the average score.
7. Very strong. Rewards contemplation.
8. Exceptional. Unique and worthy of special recognition.
9. A medal winner, among the best you have seen. Rarely awarded.

A Guide to Critiquing Photographs

July 2001

Judging is one skill, critiquing or commenting on pictures is another. To critique successfully requires a thorough knowledge of the basics of what makes a photograph pleasing, in addition to having an ability to communicate this knowledge and opinion.

Although there is generally no critique for 4Cs slide competitions, print competition judges may be requested to supply comments in addition to scores. Also, many clubs invite comments during internal competitions.

For competitions that combine judging and commenting, it usually works best to appoint one experienced person to critique while others do the scoring. The commentator should, in all cases, make remarks after the judges have scored so as not to influence the judges. However, scores may be actually announced before or after the commentator has made his or her remarks.

Some clubs have open critique sessions in which anyone present may make comments. For this to be constructive, the group should be trained or be familiar with the basics of a good picture before commenting.

The 4Cs suggests that judges observe the following guidelines when offering either verbal or written comments on images.

1) Don't be unkind.

Ill placed comments and individual words that degrade or insult the image or the photographer have no place in this process. They are effective only at reducing membership.

2) Identify positive attributes for each image, and be constructive about any image problems.

It's important to be encouraging, especially for photographers who are just getting started. When there are problems, identify ways in which the photographer might improve the image or similar images in the future. Never simply state that an image isn't appealing or doesn't work; always identify the cause of the problem. If all you say is that you don't like the image, you aren't helping anyone.

3) Brevity is the soul of wit.

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A Guide to Evaluating Photographs

July 2001

This document is a brief summary of considerations for evaluating image quality. It is not intended to be comprehensive; if you seek a thorough guide, there are many other sources available to you, i.e., in bookstores, libraries, or members of your club. However, much of the evaluation of images, especially in a camera club context, can be distilled into a relatively small number of concepts. All photographers benefit from at least considering the following points, and judges in particular should be used to thinking about them.

When you are judging prints, you have the actual print quality to evaluate as well as the image content.

Basic Technique

- Is focus appropriate for the subject? Is depth of field appropriate?
- Is it exposed in a way that works for the image?

Special Techniques

- Are special techniques like multiple exposure, sandwiching, panning, or cross processing used effectively?
- If the image is digitally manipulated, is the manipulation done well?

Composition

- Is the image balanced or unbalanced? Is the balance level appropriate? If there is a main center of interest, is it well placed in the frame?
- Are there distracting elements in the picture that could be eliminated?
- Are there too many unrelated elements? Too few elements?
- Does the composition make effective use of leading lines?
- Is depth used (or not used) to good advantage?
- Does the composition make use of repeating forms?
- Does the framing work? Mergers?

Lighting

- Does it show off the subject well?
- Is the contrast level appropriate?
- Is there lighting that would work better for the subject?
- If the lighting is controlled, is it well controlled?

Subject/Interest

- Does the subject have interesting connotations or associations?
- Color interest?
- Interesting textures?
- Interesting juxtapositions?

Originality

Does the image show an original subject or an original approach to a standard subject? Is it anonymous, or does it show a visual signature or convey a personal vision?

Story/Mood

Does the image effectively tell a story or convey a mood?

Printing Technique

- Is the contrast level appropriate for the image?
- Are there artifacts that make any dodging and burning too noticeable?
- Is toning well handled?

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A Guide to Judging and Scoring Photographs in 4Cs Competitions

July 2001

Most of the clubs in the Columbia Council of Camera Clubs participate in interclub judging of images. This guide has been developed with the objective of assisting individuals and clubs in the 4Cs with their judging responsibilities. It presents a set of guidelines for judging and the reasons behind them, an overview of the scoring system, and scoring guidelines. It also includes a single page summary of judging info for clubs to copy and share with members.

Judging Overview

Anyone can decide whether a photograph is appealing, but skilled judging is about more than a personal reaction: it requires a good understanding of how photographs communicate. For a description of characteristics to look for in evaluating a photograph, see the 4Cs document "A Guide to Evaluating Photographs".

When you have been selected to be a judge, this means a group of your peers think enough of you as a photographer to ask you to judge their work. This is the ultimate honor your peers can confer on you as a photographer. Always treat the invitation accordingly.

Judging Guidelines

The 4Cs asks that judges of 4Cs competitions observe the following eight guidelines.

- 1) Use the 9-point scoring system described later in this document.
- 2) Be consistent: do not change your scoring in the middle of a session.

This most often occurs when a judge notices that his or her scores are generally higher or generally lower than the scores of the other judges. The goal for a judge is to score the images so that, in the judge's best opinion, all of the 9s are better than all of the 8s, all of the 8s are better than all of the 7s, and so on all the way down. If a judge changes scoring in the middle of a session, this will not be true. It may even become embarrassing if you find that your scores are much different than the other scores, but you must stay consistent throughout the entire judging session for complete fairness of the competition.

- 3) Set aside your personal biases on subject and style.

A judge has the simple but serious challenge of being as fair as possible to all photo entries regardless of personal biases or emotional response to a subject. Even though art is subjective, simply reacting to the image is not adequate; it is important for a judge to analyze his or her reaction to an image, screen out any personal bias, and using consistent reasoning in evaluating the image. This is not easy, but is critical for fair judging.

- 4) Do not indiscriminately apply the "Rules of Composition."

The "rules of composition" are one-size-fits-all guidelines that in many cases are completely inappropriate for a given image. Evaluate composition based on how it works in the image, not how it follows or fails to follow the rules.

5) Do not give a disproportionate number of high and low scores.

It is possible for one judge to single-handedly determine the winners in a competition by giving only scores that are either very high or very low. This is not an acceptable practice in 4Cs competitions. For almost any collection of images, the majority of the images will fall in the middle of the group, fairly close in quality to the average for that particular group. Every judge's scores should reflect this.

6) Take lint, dirt, and fungus into account if significant.

It is the responsibility of the slide and print chairmen for each club to make sure the images submitted for competition are clean and are shipped such that they will arrive clean. So if there is a lot of material on the image, score it down to the extent that the debris is distracting.

However, realize that even a clean slide may pick up a small amount of debris during projection. So if the amount of debris is limited, give the photographer the benefit of the doubt.

7) Take scratches into account.

It is the responsibility of the slide and print chairmen for each club to make sure the images submitted for competition are free of significant scratches. So if an image has a noticeable scratch, score it down to the extent that the scratch is distracting.

8) If you see an image that looks like it was computer generated or manipulated, score it normally: this is okay in 4Cs competitions.

Scoring Overview

A 4Cs competition should use a panel of 3 judges, each using the 9 point scale described below.

Ideally, a judge should not know how another judge has scored an image before presenting his or her own score. As a result, verbal scoring is discouraged. Where possible, use scoring machines, individual scoring sheets for each judge, or score cards. If verbal scoring is the only option, rotate the order in which judges call out their scores.

Most judges will find it helpful to preview all the images in a competition before starting to score; previewing makes it easier to maintain scoring consistency throughout a session. If time allows, you may opt to preview them multiple times.

Scoring Guidelines

All 4Cs competitions should be judged on a 1-9 scale. Please use the following guidelines in giving scores:

1. Use this score to disqualify an image. An image may be disqualified if it clearly infringes on another artist's copyright or if it is submitted for a category competition and you feel that it clearly does not fit.
2. The image shows serious technical defects: gross under or over exposure, very poor focus or significant (and clearly unintended) camera movement, or similar problems.
3. The image either has significant technical defects, serious shortcomings in image content, or some combination of these problems. Because most of the photographers who compete in 4Cs competitions have at least some photographic experience, this score and lower scores are rarely awarded in 4Cs competitions.
4. The image does not have significant technical defects or serious shortcomings in image content. However, it may have minor technical defects, and the content (composition, lighting, etc) is not well handled.
5. The image is acceptable in most respects but does not create any significant interest.
6. The image is reasonably solid, creating at least a little interest. Technical aspects and image content all competently handled. This is generally the average score for 4Cs competitions.
7. The image is very strong. Handling is a notch above competent, and the image rewards contemplation.
8. The image is exceptional: unique and worthy of special recognition. You should feel excited about the image.
9. The image is of the very highest quality, equal to the best you have seen. You feel that it should win a medal in salon competition or slide of the year in 4Cs competition. This score is awarded only rarely in 4Cs competitions.

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