

Six Keys to Competition Photography

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1) **INSTANT IMPACT:** There are many kinds of photography: advertising, magazine, show, subjective, etc. Competition photography calls for images that tell the whole story instantly. The judge has 3 or 4 seconds to evaluate each image. Impact is essential to get the viewer's attention instantly.

2) **TECHNICAL ACCURACY:** Technically poor images are automatically rejected. Competent judges are rarely fooled. The most common problems are:
Exposure. Overexposure is nearly always rejected. Underexposure, except for silhouettes, of 1 1/2 stops is usually too dense when projected. On the other hand, saturation of 1/2 stop under often enhances color.

Depth of Field should be sufficient for the subject. Avoid "hot spots" and other elements that detract from the main subject. Deliberate "soft focus" by use of selective depth-of-field can be very effective when properly handled.

Motion. Camera shake is unacceptable. Deliberate motion through "panning" or "zooming" can be effective if one element of the subject remains sharp.

3) **COMPOSITION:** Placement of the elements of a picture to enhance and support the impact. For competition, the more simple and straightforward the composition, the greater the impact. Generally, subtle or complex compositions are not viewed long enough to get their message across.

4) **COLOR BALANCE:** Color is an integral part of composition. Bright, warm colors are more obvious and striking adding to impact. Monochromatic (single color) images require a very strong center of interest or a strong feeling of mood to generate an emotional response from the viewer.

5) **VIEWER INTEREST:** The best subjects create viewer interest. The viewer should be able to relate to the subject immediately; either through their own past experience ("I remember that!") or by having a new experience ("I didn't know that!").

6) **LUCK OF THE DRAW:** Don't take it personally. Your image may come up in a bad position. Yours may be a bright image following a dark one or vice versa and the judge's eyes didn't have time to adjust. Yours may be a good portrait following an absolutely great one. Maybe the projectionist failed to properly focus your image in time. Great images often lose out due to external factors beyond the control of the maker. Don't take it personally!

AND ONE MORE:

With today's rapidly improving automation nearly anyone can make a good or possibly a great photograph, but only true photographer can make fifty or a hundred or more.