PETER EASTWAY & BETTER PHOTOGRAPHY MAGAZINE'S

HOW TO WIN PHOTO COMPETITIONS

2ND EDITION

APPROACH

Better Photography

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PETER EASTWAY & BETTER PHOTOGRAPHY MAGAZINE'S

HOW TO WIN PHOTO COMPETITIONS

APPROACH

There are hundreds of photo competitions around the world and they can be a lot of fun to enter – but what do you want to achieve? While winning first prize would be nice, by setting your own goals for each competition, you can not only earn some success, but greatly improve your photography as well – and that's the main aim!
So, whether you want to win photographic competitions or just take better photographs, this book will provide you with hundreds of tips, ideas and strategies you can use to produce award-winning images.

By Peter Eastway FAIPP HonFAIPP HonFNZIPP APPL GMPhotogII MNZIPP

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Why Do You Want To Enter Photography Competitions?

The obvious answer to this question is because you want to win! Who doesn't want to win a photography competition, along with the fame and fortune it brings?

However, winning – or scoring highly – in a competition is also important on a personal level because it confirms that what we are doing is 'good'.

The most important competition I 'won' was not actually first place, but coming second in the 1995 AIPP Australian Professional Photography Awards. I was runner-up to Tim Griffith, the overall Professional Photographer of the Year.

Castelnuovo. One of the photographs that earned the author second place in the 1995 AIPP photography awards.
Gold Award 1995 AIPP Australian Professional Photography Awards

Admittedly, I also won the 1995 AIPP Australian Professional *Landscape* Photographer of the Year category, but far more important to me was that my portfolio of four prints was alongside the portfolios of other more established and more successful photographers. My work was sitting next to that of my heroes and my mentors. Yes, the prize was great, but it was the personal achievement that mattered the most. Suddenly, I knew that the quality of some of my photographs was of a high standard!

I think this is the main reason people enter photography competitions. Photography can be an individual pursuit, so it's good to have other photographers look at and acknowledge your work. And the fact that the competition is entered anonymously, means that you know people aren't just 'being nice' because they know it is you.

On the other hand, if you're entering a competition because you really want to win, you could be in for some disappointing times! While you have full control over what you enter, you have no control over what other photographers submit. The photograph you enter might be absolutely sensational, but it only takes one other photographer to enter an image that's slightly better (in the judges' opinion) and your dreams of winning are dashed!

Competitions should be entered as something you do for fun and personal advancement. And if you happen to win a prize, that's a bonus.

Who Is Peter Eastway? And What Would He Know?

There are a lot of award winning photographers out there. And a lot of people providing expert tuition, so why should you take advice from me?

My dad always told me not to boast, but I need to give you some confidence in what you are about to read. So, my name is Peter Eastway. I am a professional photographer and I have worked commercially for over 40 years. My work includes landscape, portraiture and advertising photography. I have worked for international clients and my images have been published in magazines, on billboards, books, calendars, posters and, naturally, the internet.

I am also a photography magazine editor and publisher. I have been involved with several dozen photo titles over the years, but I am best known for my own magazine, ***Better Photography*** which I have been publishing for more than 25 years with my wife Kathie. My time with the magazines has allowed me to meet and interview many of the world's most famous photographers and this has given me a very wide appreciation of all genres of photography.

I was the Chairman of the AIPP Australian Professional Photography Awards for six years. I am the head judge of the International Landscape Photographer of the Year. I have been lucky enough to win many photography awards and competitions, both in Australia and internationally. I have been the AIPP Australian Professional Photographer of the Year twice and I'm an AIPP Grand Master of Photography and a Fellow of the AIPP.

Tatev Monastery, Armenia. Some inclement weather created a wonderful atmosphere around the church.

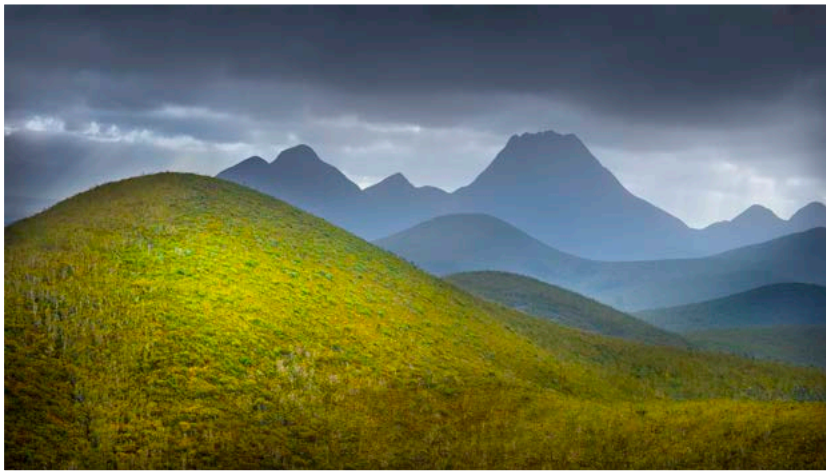
Silver With Distinction 2018 AIPP Australian Professional Photography Awards

Of course, since we're talking about photography, the views in this book are not shared by everyone and others have found success following different paths. However, I can guarantee that the information that follows will not only greatly improve your photography, but enhance your chances of winning awards in photography competitions as well.

Peter Eastway - Major Awards

In addition to over 350 professional photography competition awards, in Australia, New Zealand, USA, Japan, UK and Europe, I have also earned the following majorl accolades and distinctions:

2019 AIPP Australian Nature Photographer of the Year
2019 AIPP NSW Professional Photographer of the Year
2019 AIPP NSW Nature Photographer of the Year
2018 AIPP Australian Photo Book of the Year
2013 AIPP NSW Landscape Photographer of the Year
2010 AIPP NSW Professional Photographer of the Year
2010 AIPP NSW Landscape Photographer of the Year
2010 AIPP NSW Commercial Photographer of the Year
2009 1st, 2nd, 3rd WPPI [USA], Landscape Award
2009 WPPI Kodak Award - Highest Overall Aggregate of 16x20" Print Competition
2009 Platinum Awards, PPA [USA]
2008 NSW Landscape Photographer of the Year
2008 Platinum Awards, PPA [USA]
2008 Grand Award, WPPI [USA], Commercial Category
2008 Fine Art Award, WPPI [USA]
2007 Fine Art Award, WPPI [USA]
2007 New Zealand Overseas Photographer of the Year [NZIPP]
2007 Platinum Awards, PPA [USA]
2006 First Place, Natural World category, UK SWPP & BPPA
2006 AIPP Grand Master of Photography
2005 Grand Award, WPPI [USA], Commercial Category
2004 AIPP Australian Illustrative Photographer of the Year



Sterling Ranges, Western Australia, using a considerable amount of post-production.

Silver With Distinction 2012 AIPP Australian Professional Photography Awards

2004 AIPP NSW Professional Photographer of the Year
1998 AIPP Australian Professional Photographer of the Year
1998 AIPP Australian Landscape Photographer of the Year
1996 AIPP Australian Professional Photographer of the Year
1996 AIPP Australian Landscape Photographer of the Year
1996 NSW Professional Photographers of the Year
1995 AIPP Australian Landscape Photographer of the Year
1995 NSW Professional Photographer of the Year
1995 AIPP Master of Photography
1986 Kodak Achievement Award
1986 Associateship of the AIPP

Where Have I Judged?

I have spent over twenty years judging and organising photography competitions in Australia and around the world.

I was the Chairman of the AIPP Australian Professional Photography Awards (from 2006 to 2011). This is an annual competition that has been running for over forty years and involves three days of judging with some 70 judges and 100 helpers. Entrants' work is individually assessed by a panel of five judges, scores are given and awards presented at a gala black tie dinner. It is a huge logisitcal process which requires a highly experienced committee to organise.

I have been invited to judge and panel chair in the USA and New Zealand, and I regularly visit the various states in Australia to assist with their local professional awards.

I am also the head judge of the International Landscape Photographer of the Year, an online photography competition that has entrants and judges from around the world. The entire competition is done online. The International Landscape Photographer of the Year awards is a relatively young competition, entering its eighth year in 2021. Its principles are similar to the print awards mentioned earlier, but it deals only with landscape photography and the objective is to enter one of the top 101 photographs which are published in a paper-based photo book. At the other end of the spectrum, I have judged amateur and camera club competitions in the Sydney area where I live. Often my role is to just pick out the three best photographs for a monthly competition night.

Cloud study, Under Coronet Peak, Queenstown, New Zealand

Silver 2019 AIPP NSW Professional Photography Awards

There is one theme that remains constant for all of these competitions and that's the passion exhibited by both the entrants and the judges. There may be a difference in quality, skill or subject matter, but the passion is always there.

My Competition Philosophy

I love entering photography competitions and it is a real thrill to win. However, winning a photography competition isn't like winning a running race. It's not an absolute measurement, rather it's an opinion.

I remember entering a monthly photo competition at my local Mosman Camera Club (of which I am currently the proud patron). My entry was a tonal dropout (a black and white rendition without any mid-tones) of a Barbary Sheep. The judge discounted the print, saying neither the photo nor I as a photographer, had any future and that I should look at doing something else.

By chance, I had already entered the same print into a district Top Shot competition and, to my surprise, I won first place!

This was a valuable lesson. It showed me that photography competitions can be very subjective and that what wins one day, might not win the next. Judges are human and no matter how hard they attempt to be objective, and no matter how carefully the judging criteria are framed, at the end of the day, all you have is a matter of opinion.

As a photographer, this opinion can be invaluable in helping you learn to be a better photographer. A rejection may suggest that you have more to learn. Entering competitions lets you develop your photography, but it's important to put your results into perspective.

Being rejected in a photography competition could also simply mean your photograph is not a good competition entry. I have many invaluable photos of my family and holidays that will never win photography awards, but they are more precious than any of my winning entries.

Valle de la Luna, St Pedro de Atacama, Chile

Silver With Distinction 2015 NSW AIPP Australian Professional Photography Awards

When entering photography competitions, I try my best to keep the results in perspective, both the wins and the failures. Any disappointment is short lived and you can dine out on the wins for years to come.

HOW TO APPROACH A PHOTO COMPETITION

Will You Impress The Judges?

The trick to winning a photography competition is to impress the judges.

How you do that is a little more complicated, but start by imagining you are one of the judges.

Think about it. You're presented with hundreds or maybe thousands of photographs. Each image is precious and important to its photographer, but unlike the photographer, you as the judge don't have the same emotional attachment.

Many people enter photographs of their children or loved ones, thinking they are the best images in the world. And they are. They are the best images for that person because there is a three way association between the subject, the photographer and the photograph.

However, for a judge who doesn't know either the subject or the photographer, that association is lost. All the judge can deal with is the image, not the personal associations.

Successful photographs will create a direct association with the viewer. That association is created by choosing interesting or appealing subject matter, by capturing that subject matter with beautiful light or in an exotic location, by choosing an unusual camera angle, etc. Successful photographs are usually different from what we are used to seeing.

Santa Maria dei Miracoli. This image has won awards around the world.

Gold Award 2004 Canon AIPP Australian Professional Photography Awards,

Grand Award Winner 2005 WPPI, Las Vegas

And what was a successful subject or approach one year, may not be nearly so successful in future years because now the judges 'will have seen it before'. While entering something new isn't essential (or even possible), some novelty factor can certainly be helpful to your cause.

Common or Uncommon?

Q: What type of photographs impress the judges?

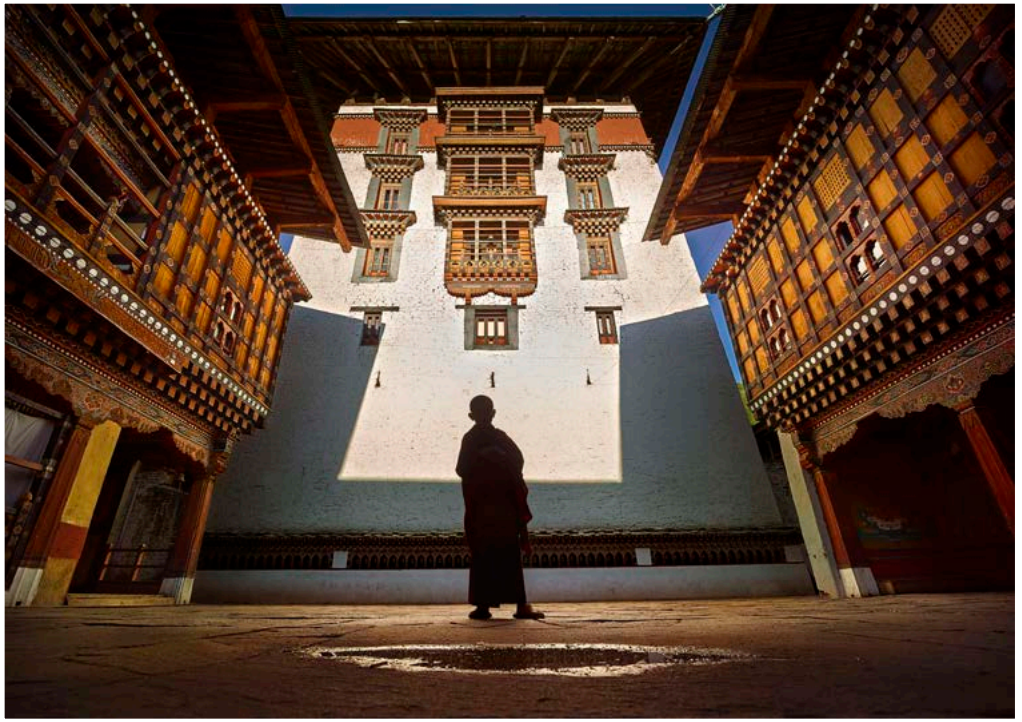
A: That depends on who the judges are, what the judges do, and where they live and travel. And what other photos they have seen, what they are interested in, what happened to them as children...

Many years ago, I was showing two audio visual presentations. One depicted the hill towns of Italy and France; the other concentrated on the deserts in outback Australia.

When I showed the presentations to Australian audiences, they loved the Italian hill towns. In comparison, when I showed the presentations to an audience in Italy, they loved the Australian outback best. Two groups of people had quite different responses, yet in many ways these responses were exactly the same.

Photographs of unusual or special subjects which are not generally seen will have more appeal than the commonplace. This is human nature. Judges are (normally) human.

Of course, something that is unusual for you may be common for the judge – you simply can't know everything about the judge. And similarly, a photograph of the commonplace presented in a different or special way can astound the judge, simply because it is so common!



Bhutan is an exotic country and the combination of a monk and a dzong create a subject that is new and interesting to many Western judges. Of course, Bhutanese photography judges would probably think this is rather commonplace!

Silver Award 2014 AIPP Australian Professional Photography Awards

How To Measure Your Success

Are there are any real tricks to winning a photography competition?

Well, I think your approach or attidue should be to have your photograph in the top 20 percent of entries. Why? Because most judges will agree about the bottom 80 percent, but the top 20 percent is up for grabs.

The top 20 percent always has the winning images, but which individual image wins can vary on the day.

I have had entries of mine score first place in one competition and not even be accepted in another, but that is the exception. I usually find that if an image is in the top 20 percent of one competition, it will be in the top twenty percent in most. And once you're into the top 20 percent, then you have a chance of taking out a prize.

Photography competitions aren't like a running race because there is an element of subjectivity about the result. If your photos are special, you have a chance and, to an extent, that's exactly what entering a photography competition is – a chance.

You have no control over what the judges like, their opinion about certain subjects or techniques, or what other photographers are entering. All you can do is produce your best work, work that you're personally proud of. You have to be in it to win it.

Then, sit back and hope the judges take a fancy to your imagery.

Ducks in Arnhemland, Australia. This pattern shot was a little cynical because I know that judges are suckers for this type of photo. It's not my favourite shot, but it proves a point that some photos are more likely to win than others, so if you want to win an award, go with what the judges like and keep your personal favourites at home!

Gold Award 2018 AIPP NSW Professional Photography Awards

What Are The Judges Judging?

When judging photographs, I have some basic expectations. The photograph should be sharp (focused) in the right places (although blurred images can be wonderful in context); it should be correctly exposed (not too light or too dark); and it should be appropriately framed. There's nothing worse than a fantastic subject being overcrowded by unnecessary information or a busy background. Deciding what to leave out of your photographs is just as important as what to leave in.

This doesn't mean that I won't award a prize to a blurred image with poor print quality – there could be emotional or pictorial aspects about the image that either justify the blurred image, or override it.

This is a subjective process, for both the photographer and the judge, and because photographs can be so varied, you can never be assured of impressing the judges.

However, you can expect to achieve a high standard. You can aim for an 'Acceptance' or a 'Silver Award' (each competition has different names and levels of achievement). If you are regularly achieving high scores or acceptances, such as Silver Awards, perhaps you should now aim for Gold Awards. Don't expect to win a competition the first time you enter, rather look at entering as a process of learning so that at some stage in the not-too-distant future, your work will be good enough to be up there with the winners.

And it is nice if you do happen to win!

Walrus and pup, Svalbard. The mother/child relationship gives the judges a lot to be happy about - often judges are just as easily swayed by the subject matter as the technical skills and acumen.

Gold with Distinction Award 2019 AIPP Australian Professional Photography Awards,

Gold with Distinction Award 2019 NSW Professional Photography Awards.

Personal Favourites

This is the most amazing photograph you will ever see!

Not convinced? Let me tell you about it. We're off the shore of Deception Island, on our way to Antarctica, with a small swell washing up against the black volcanic beach. Thousands of Chinstrap penguins march in lines for as far as the eye can see, a leopard seal swims between the zodiacs, and it is cold. The water is icy, there are small icebergs all around and it starts to snow.

The snow is so heavy you can barely see the other zodiacs only 20 metres away. I sit back and marvel at the experience. It's something I will remember for the rest of my life, so I take a photograph.

Everytime I look at this image, it brings back fond memories. So is it a good photograph? Yes! Is it an award winning image? No.

There are some good points about the composition, exposure, contrast, colour and so on, but when all is said and done, it's really just a memory of a great time. It deserves a place in my photo album and audio visual presentation, but it is unlikely to impress a judge who doesn't have the same personal baggage as I do. Judges will just see some gaudy red jackets against a grey, grainy background. Many might not realise it's snow, so when you select your images for competitions, remember that the judges were not with you when the photo was taken. The image needs to stand on its own.

Snow storm, Deception Island. No, it's not a poor quality image, it's snow, but would a judge realise this, or just assume the photographer used a second-rate camera?

DETACH YOURSELF LIKE THE JUDGES

A friend of mine backed up her husband's Rolls Royce to a portable trailer toilet and took a wonderful photo. In the camera club competition, the judge looked at the photo, but all he saw was a car towing an oddly shaped trailer. He didn't connect with either the Rolls Royce or the toilet, so don't assume judges have the same background or understanding that you do!

Artistry vs Record Shots

The overview in Antarctica is amazing if you have never been there, but commonplace if you have. It's an interesting photo, but the judges have probably seen lots of Antarctica photos and so it is nothing remarkable.

In comparison, a black and white interpretive rendition is quite unusual, the composition has been simplified and the subjects made very clear and obvious.
Gold Award 2017 AIPP Australian Professional Photography Awards

With modern cameras producing near perfect images at the press of a button, it is no longer good enough to find a great location with perfect light. People all around the world are doing exactly the same every day, so you need to do a little more to excite the judges.

The two photos above are from the same raw file. The overview is interesting and possibly has more meaning for someone who has visited Antarctica, but doesn't compare with some of the other amazing photos we see of the southern continent. The rendition on the right is much simpler with a stronger, cleaner composition. It impressed the judges.

This isn't to say that a record photograph can't be a winner, but it needs to be exceptional from a technical perspective, or of a very unusual subject that the judges will respond to.

Artistry Vs Record Shots

Water boat, Deception Island. The boat is seen in the context of the snow-swept volcanic island and the remains of human settlement. The photo tells a story and creates some atmosphere.

This is the same image, but cropped. The subject is now centred, there's no breathing space and the image becomes more of a 'record' of what was seen, rather than an interpretation of what was experienced. Can you see the difference and how the judges might respond?

So what exactly is a record shot? Cameras can be used for both mundane and artistic pursuits. Photographs of a family member or an annual holiday are often 'records' of memories. For the photographer and the people in the photograph, they have a special significance. For a judge who doesn't know them, however, they are usually meaningless. All the judge can assess is the image in view.

To be more 'artistic', the photograph needs to be more than just a record of something. This is difficult to define in words, but examples include placing the subject in a context, such as an iceberg in a stormy sea; lighting or styling a family portrait in an exquisite way, so that it becomes extraordinary; photographing a landmark in unusual weather or from a different viewpoint.

Record shots tend to be taken from eye level, straight on, with little imagination. Award winning photos generally do more than this.

Straight Photography vs Photoshop/Lightroom

Does it matter if your photograph is 'straight out of the camera', or if it has been 'tweaked with Photoshop'?

For most photography competitions, it is no longer an issue, but do check the rules (especially for nature and documentary competitions). While most competitions allow Photoshop to be used, there can be restrictions.

As far as judges are concerned, most are very experienced and most use Photoshop or Lightroom. The question of film vs digital simply isn't relevant. In fact, if you don't use Photoshop or Lightroom to 'tweak' your file before submitting it into a competition, most judges will think that you simply haven't finished editing the photograph properly.

It's no longer good enough to submit a photograph straight out of the camera because in 99.9% of situations, a few tweaks in Photoshop will improve it.

There are some competition categories and some full competitions which limit the amount of editing you can do. For instance, in documentary and wildlife categories/competitions, multiple exposures and composites (dropping in or removing elements) are not allowed.

The photograph must be 'real', but in being real you are still allowed to adjust the exposure, colour and contrast, and darken the edges.

The image on the left is the straight capture, as output by the raw processing software. The image on the right has been edited with Photoshop. As the selective darkening of the rockfaces and the building of contrast are really just matters of exposure, this image would be acceptable in most nature categories and competitions. However, notice how much stronger the image on the right appears - judges expect you to optimise your images.

Gold Award 2019 AIPP Australian Professional Photography Awards. (As part of the judging process, the entered photo and raw file were vetted by the organisers before the a ward was made.)

Often you're told you can do what was possible in a film-based 'darkroom', but this advice isn't very helpful because so few entrants have actually been in a photographic darkroom!

Straight Photography vs Photoshop

In wildlife and documentary photography, it is not acceptable to clone out areas or move things around; the image must be presented as it was captured, but you can lighten and darken areas, and maybe change the colour. A correction of colour balance would be acceptable, but the introduction of false or overly saturated colours would not.

While most general photo competitions – open, landscape, portraiture etc – permit image editing, a lot of them require the editing work to be 'photographic'. Many competitions do not allow you to use 'non-photographic' elements. For instance, you can't draw shapes or add illustrations to the image because it's all about photography, not graphic design. The image must remain 'photographic' in nature.

Antarctica again! Notice the hint of a mountain range in the background of the image on the right – this was the little surprise that helped earn a few extra points from the judges and it was created with Photoshop.

Gold Award 2017 AIPP Australian Professional Photography Awards

In the image opposite of Antarctica, a hint of a mountain seen through the mist added an extra dimension to the scene. This would make it ineligible for a nature competition, but this is quite acceptable for an open or landscape competition. Some would argue the image is closer to a work of art than a photograph. This is a valid observation, but many photography judges like this style of work and reward it.

So, do you have to use Photoshop to win a photography competition? Yes, you probably do (or Lightroom, Luminar, Affinity Photo, Capture One etc).

And do you have to make your photos look like artworks to win awards? Definitely not. Judges really do appreciate a great shot that still 'looks like a photograph' and, in fact, can be very harsh on images that are over manipulated or over processed.

If you are going to edit your photos as we recommend, you should think of it as 'invisible editing'. We know you used it, but we shouldn't be able to point to exactly where.

THE JUDGING PROCESS

How Are Competitions Judged?

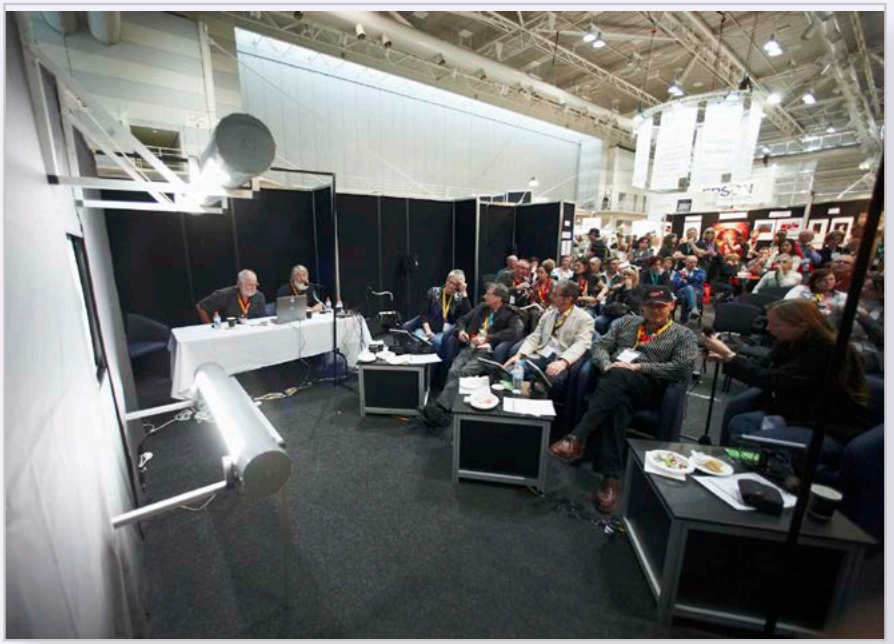
Photographic competitions are judged many ways. Some are public events, others are done behind closed doors. Some are judged by experts, some by personalities. Some have one judge, others have 17 judges! And most competitions today are judged online.

When you enter a photography competition, the rules may state who the judges are and how the competition is judged. This is important to understand as it can determine how you assess your own results.

For instance, if there is just one judge and you get a low score, it's easy to dismiss the result as a single person's opinion. On the other hand, if there is a panel of three or five judges (there is usually an uneven number), a low score might be considered more carefully.

Generally, each judge is asked to give a score. Some competitions score between one and five, others give a score from 1 to 20, or 1 to 100. The higher the score the better. When the score is from one to five, it is common for the judges to regularly give scores of five for good photos, but when the score is out of 100, few judges feel 100 can be justified and will defer to a lower 90 or 95. Most don't believe there is any such thing as a perfect photograph and so a score of 100 is either impossible or incredibly rare.

Some competitions don't give scores at all and it's a matter of in or out, whittling away the entries until there is a short list of a dozen or so which can be discussed until finally a winner is selected.



Judging the AIPP Australian Professional Photography Awards. On the left sits the panel chair and assistant panel chair who oversee the judging. Across the front are five judges, each with a microphone and computer input screen for entering their scores. Behind is the public gallery – the judging process is open to viewing for both entrants and other interested parties.

Many judging systems provide scores which are a useful indication for the entrant. While you mightn't get the top score, a high score indicates the judges liked your work and, usually, this is considered a good result!

How Do I Know The Results Are Fair?

There is an element of trust when entering a photography competition. You need to be able to trust the organisers, the judges and the system. A competition with a history of several years can be relied upon as being fair – there are so many people involved in the process that the opportunity for 'rigging the result' simply isn't there. On the other hand, small and one-off photo competitions, often run as a marketing exercise and without respected judges, may not be organised as fairly.

Of the competitions I have been involved with, all are judged fairly. Photographs are judged anonymously and no identifying marks are allowed on the front of the print or image. Of course, in professional competitions a judge might have seen an entry, for example, on a billboard before the competition, but generally judges don't know who took the photo. And while a judge cannot judge his or her own work, it is quite usual (and in fact encouraged) for judges in professional awards to enter as well. There's nothing like keeping judges attentive by having their own work judged by the same system.

The word 'fair' is sometimes used out of context. Some entrants who don't win an award look at the system or the judges as being an excuse for their failure. However, most systems are designed so a single judge can't override the opinion of the other judges – in other words, the result is a collaborative effort. And most competitions look for experienced judges, so while a judge might make an error in scoring an entrant's work, the process of getting to the final score is indeed 'fair'.

The issue of fair usually comes down to the process. For instance, some competitions give first place to the photo with the highest score. This might sound sensible, but

At the AIPP Australian Professional Photography Awards, the winning portfolios from each category are reassessed to determine the overall prize winner. The highest score is not considered to be the best way to determine an overall winner as different judges may give different ranges of scores. It's much better for the judges to select the strongest images at the end of the process.

if the competition has been judged in separate categories with different judges, it's not fair if one group of judges scores higher than another group. To make the system 'fairer', the highest scoring photo(s) from each category might be re-assessed with a combined panel of judges to ensure there is no discrepancy between the panels.

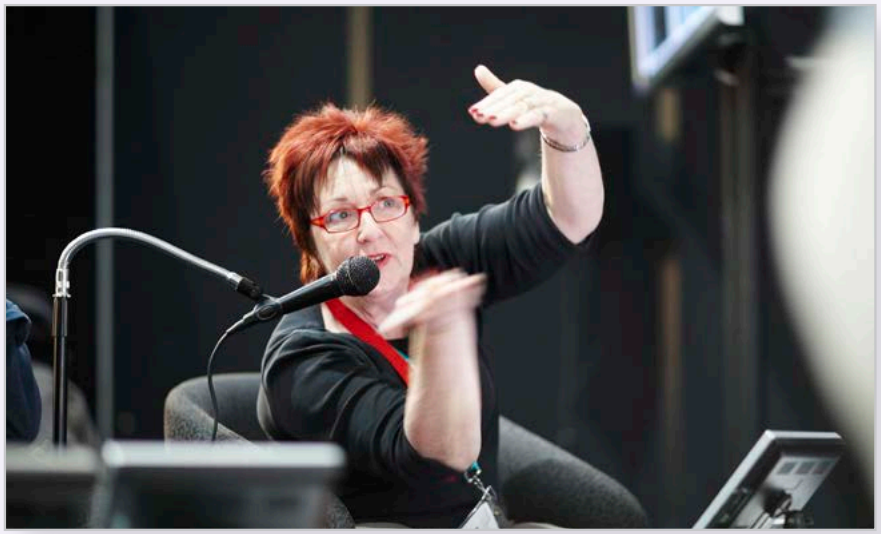
How Are The Judges Selected?

Depending on the type of photography competition, judges can come from all types of backgrounds. A competition open to the general public may indeed be judged by a television personality, but this would be known at the time you enter the competition and you can select your entry accordingly. As we all know, photos of cute pets and green eyed frogs seem to get the public's choice award because of the subject matter, rather than any particular photographic skill.

However, when it comes to proper photography competitions, most are judged by photographers who are either experienced or have won awards before. Generally speaking, photographers like to enter and win awards which are judged by other photographers because only a photographer understands what's involved. We can call this a peer review system.

Experienced and award-winning photographers don't necessarily make the best judges, but it's a good starting point. They are certainly well positioned to comment on an entry's technical attributes – whether the image is correctly focused, exposed and printed, or whether the post-production is skilled or sloppy. Sometimes these aspects of our art are not understood (or are indeed ignored) by non-photographers.

However, being an award-winning photographer doesn't make you a great judge. In addition, a judge also needs to have a background in art and photography. Without the history of photography behind you, you simply can't compare and assess the competition entries properly. A judge also needs a background in photographic history so he or she doesn't give awards to photographs that are direct copies of existing works. Of course, no judge can possibly know all the photos in the world, but a strong background makes a big difference.



A good photography judge will be an award winner herself, have an extensive knowledge of photography and its history, and importantly, be able to express herself clearly in public.

Finally, if someone is going to be judging in public, he or she needs to be a good speaker. It's important for a judge to clearly express his or her ideas and comments, and to do so in a way that is supportive and instructional.

No one likes a judge who big notes himself at the expense of an entrant.

What Do My Results Really Mean?

Some photography competitions only have a first place, so if you don't win, you have no idea how you fared. These competitions won't give you much feedback.

However, competitions which provide scores, or competitions where the best images entered are exhibited or published, allow you to assess your work. If you get a high score or your photo is exhibited, you can pat yourself on the back because you know you have done well.

But what if you haven't done so well? What if your score is below average or poor? How should you take the result?

Years ago when I was first entering the professional awards, I had a photograph I'd taken on Easter Island that I was particularly proud of. It was of a tree in late evening light and I thought it was delightful. However, the judges disagreed. One judge called it a 'very average travel snap' and I was insulted. Five years later I was clearing out my studio and I came across a pile of old print entries. I flipped through them quickly because none of them was very good, but as I picked up the Easter Island print, I stopped. I looked at the print and found myself agreeing with the judge who had insulted me so badly five years before. In fact, I decided that the judge had been very polite!

The point I am making is that on our path as photographers, there will be times when we receive criticism. In fact, the very reason many of us enter photography competitions is to seek out this criticism, but this doesn't make it any easier when we receive it!

My photo of Easter Island that I thought was absolutely fantastic when I entered it, but now look upon it as being 'nice, but not particularly wonderful'.

A low score from a panel of judges may mean one of three things:

- your photo is only worth a low score and you have more to learn;
- your photo is not suitable for a competition (it might be good, but it's not special in any way – others have taken photos just like it); or
- one judge might have loved it, but the others didn't and so you missed out. Better luck next time!

Competition Rules - Please Read!

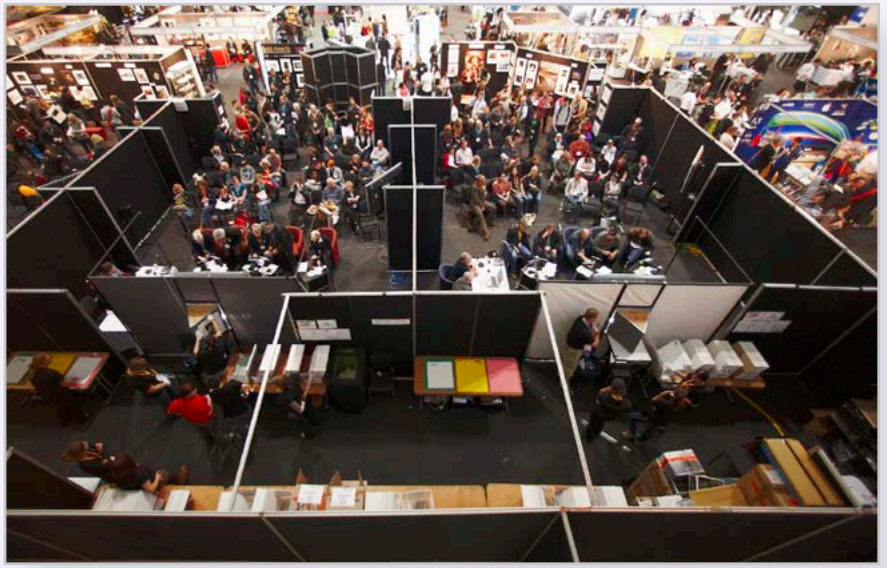
Most photography competitions are very honourable, but not all! It is important to read the terms and conditions of the photography competition because by submitting your photos, you are also entering into a legally binding contract with the competition organiser.

Most of the rules concern issues such as what you can enter, how it is to be entered, sizes, subject matter, judging and, importantly, prizes! However, the small print can include legals issues, such as who owns the copyright of the photograph after it is entered.

Most competitions run by photography groups (such as a camera club, photographic society or professional association) will state that the copyright remains with the entrant, but that they reserve the right to use the entries for pubicity and promotional purposes. In other words, if you win a prize or award in the competition, the organisers need permission to use and publish your work. By entering the competition, you give them the right to do this.

Other competitions, run by publishers, not-for-profit organisations, businesses and even government departments, can be more demanding. As a condition of entry, they may ask that you transfer the copyright of your photograph to them. This is unacceptable and you shouldn't enter the competition. Whether you win or lose the competition, you lose the right to use your photograph ever again. That sucks!

A mid-way point for some of these competitions is that if you win an award, then they have permission to use your photograph for their own advertising or marketing. An agreement like this could be a fair exchange if the prize or publicity is good value for you. However, to do this, the organiser doesn't need to own your copyright, it just needs your permission (a licence) to use the photo. And if you don't win a prize, then it can't use your photo without obtaining your permission.



An overview of the judging rooms for the AIPP Australian Professional Photography Awards. In the bottom is the back room with the support staff needed for print handling. The cost of doing print awards is very high and in part explains the trend towards online competitions.

Keep an eye on the small print. You can give away your copyright if you wish to, but don't lose it because you didn't read the rules.

Tips For Judging

If you're asked to judge a competition, keep in mind what it was like to be an entrant, especially if you are judging in public and are asked to comment on entries. And remember that the entrant could be in the room listening to you!

One thing you should avoid as a judge is describing what is quite obvious to everyone else looking at the photograph. Everyone can see it is a photo of a kangaroo or a portrait of a girl. What they want to know is whether it is a good photo of a kangaroo or a girl and why.

It can be helpful to break down the photograph into areas for discussion and improvement. Here are some areas that could be useful:

In-Camera

- Camera technique - exposure, focus, colour balance
- Lighting technique
- Composition and framing
- Posing, propping, styling
- Timing, anticipation

Post-Production

- Quality and amount of post-production (too much, too little)
- Appropriateness of post-production technique
- Print or image quality
- Presentation and matting

SUGGESTED DISCUSSION POINTS

Impact
Does the image have power and presence - does it stand out?

Creativity
Does the image exhibit imagination or a new outlook?

Story Telling
If the photo tells a story, is it clear, understandable, interesting?

Subject Matter
Is the subject new, interesting, or photographed differently?

Colour Balance
Is the colour either natural or appropriate for the subject?

Composition
Is the composition pleasing and appropriate for the subject?

Image Construction
Have the elements in the image been well positioned?

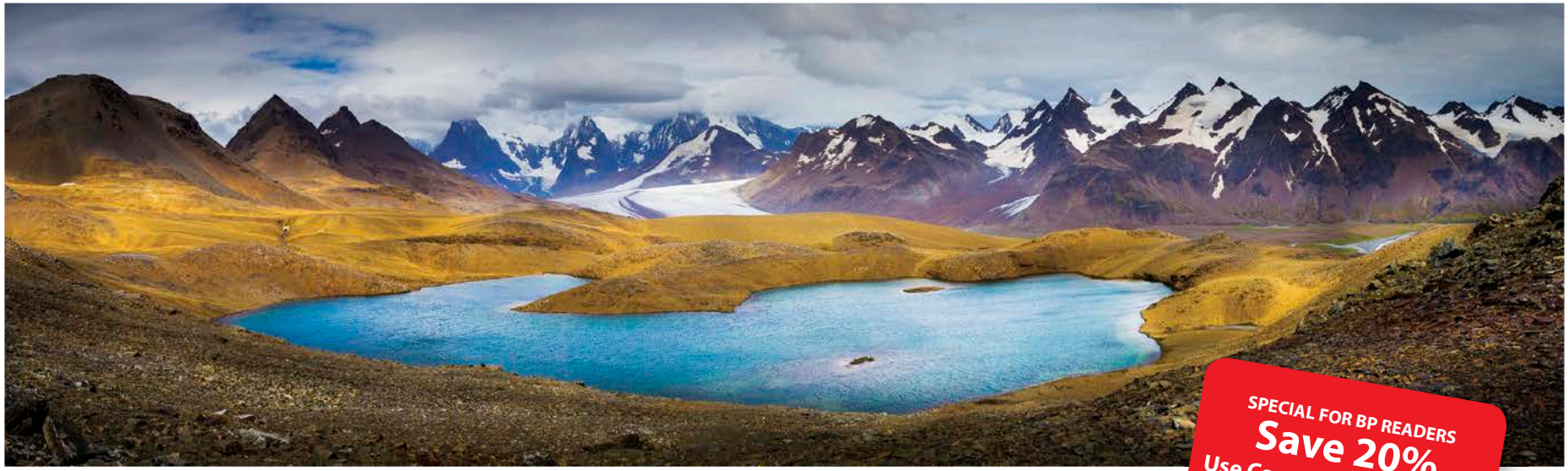
Centre of Interest
Does the eye go easily to the main subject?

Lighting
Has the photographer used or created appropriate lighting?

Print/Image Quality
Are camera and post-production techniques of high quality?

Style
Does the image exhibit an individual or original style?

Technique and Presentation
Are the techniques and approach appropriate to the subject?



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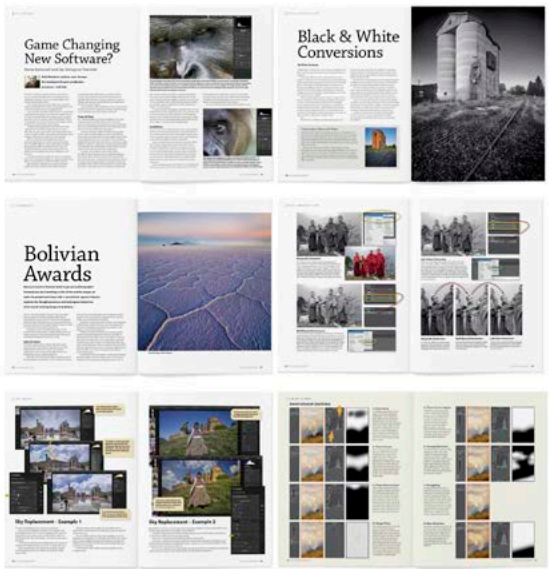

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