

DALLAS CAMERA CLUB

2026



WHAT CONTEST JUDGES LOOK FOR

*Suggestions For Better Outcomes
in Club Competitions (Updated For 2026)*

LARRY PETTERBORG

THERE ARE MANY REASONS WE TAKE PICTURES

1. TO DOCUMENT SOMETHING.
2. TRAVEL.
3. TO MAKE MONEY.
4. TO TELL STORIES/COMMUNICATE.
5. CREATIVE EXPRESSION.
6. ENTER CONTESTS.



A close-up photograph of a person's hand in a blue shirt moving a black chess piece on a chessboard. The chessboard has alternating light and dark squares. The background is blurred, showing the person's torso and other chess pieces.

WHY COMPETE?

*PRACTICE SKILLS, LEARN NEW THINGS,
SHARE IMAGES, & HAVE FUN!*

WHY SHOULD YOU LISTEN TO ME?

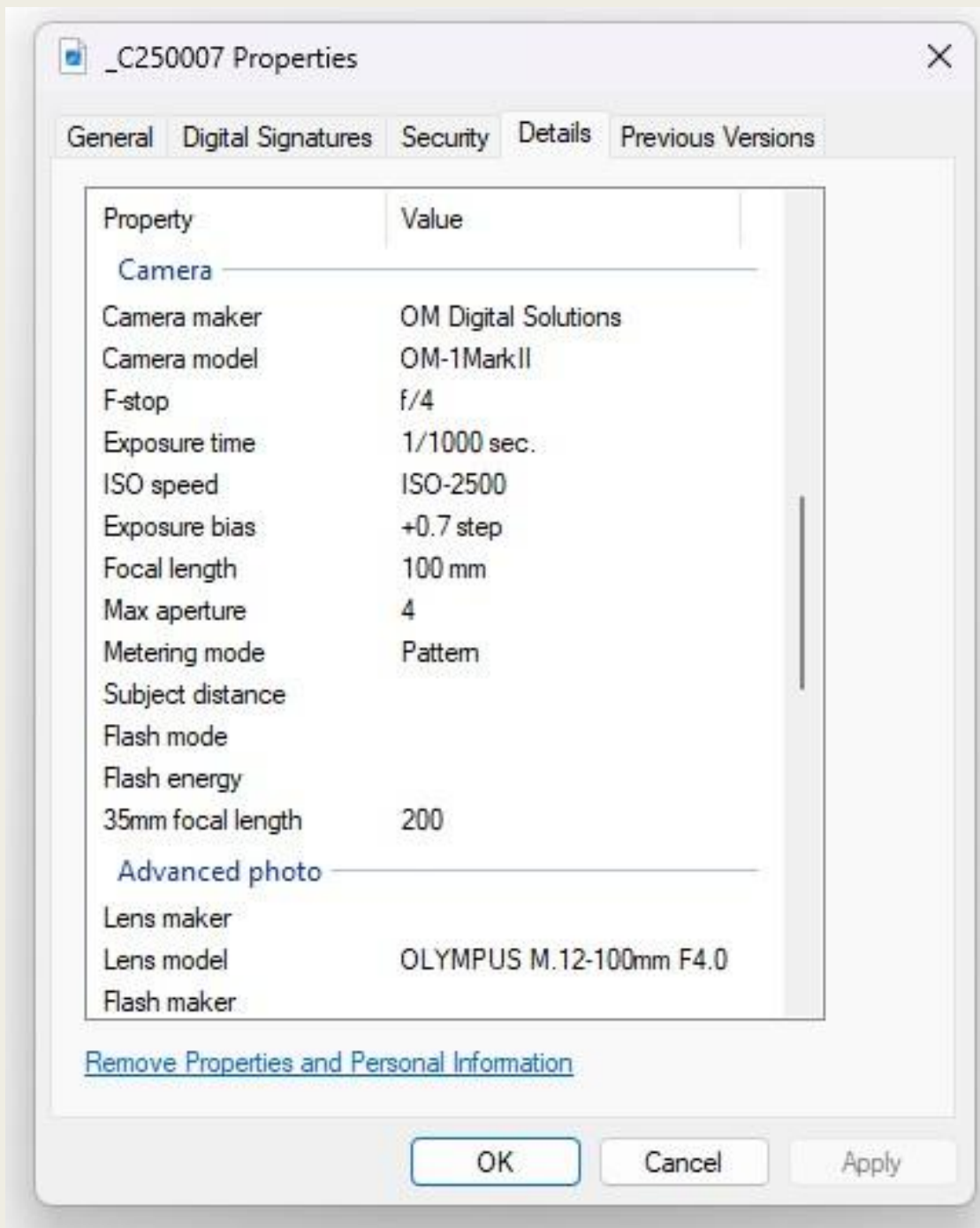
WHY DON'T I WIN ALL THE TIME?

“METADATA” AND LAZINESS!

THERE ARE TWO KINDS OF “METADATA”

“OBJECTIVE”

“SUBJECTIVE”



OBJECTIVE METADATA



SUBJECTIVE METADATA



The camera records a two-dimensional representation of a multidimensional experience. Our memory contains many orders of magnitude more information than does our camera's card.

HOW DO YOU WIN A PHOTO CONTEST?

1. IDENTIFY A CONTEST AND UNDERSTAND WHAT IS EXPECTED.
2. MAKE A TECHNICALLY PERFECT PHOTOGRAPH OF AN INTERESTING SUBJECT IN GREAT LIGHT THAT MEETS THE CONTEST CRITERIA.
3. ENTER THE CONTEST
4. HOPE THAT YOUR MOTHER IS THE JUDGE!

AN IMPORTANT POINT!

(FOR DEVELOPING A POSTIVE ATTITUDE TOWARD CONTESTS)

THE OPINION OF A CONTEST JUDGE (OR SOCIAL MEDIA, FOR THAT MATTER)

DOES NOT

DEFINE WHO YOU ARE AS A

PERSON, A PHOTOGRAPHER,

OR AN ARTIST!!!

IT'S JUST A SINGLE OPINION

REMEMBER, YOU CAN ALWAYS LEARN SOMETHING

THE LEAST IMPORTANT THING YOU WILL EVER GET OUT OF A CONTEST IS

A SCORE.

ITS JUST A NUMBER!

EXAMPLES



1. DCC: 82 pts.
2. Thin Line Festival: \$400
3. Flickr: Appx 69K views

DCC print: 65 pts. Tied for last
DCC projected: 95 pts. First
GSCCC nature: HM
GSCCC EOY 2024-25 nature: First





PPC: 9 pts
Hospital: \$200
Heard Contest: HM.



DCC 2018-2019 EOY PJ: 0 2024 ALPINE TX PHOTO CONTEST: FRIST PLACE \$500



DCC Print-70 pts. Last Place Masters



IT IS IMPORTANT TO CREATE REASONABLE GOALS!

I HAVE FIVE SIMPLE AIMS FOR CLUB CONTESTS:

1. ENTER EVERY CONTEST
2. ACTIVELY SEARCH OUT CONTEST IMAGEGS
3. SUBMIT INTERESTING IMAGES
4. DON'T BE THE FIRST NAMED IN RESULTS
5. FINISH YEAR IN THE TOP HALF OF MY GROUP

JUDGING: WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

- IT'S A ***BIG JOB.***
- *THERE ARE OFTEN TIME CONSTRAINTS.*
- *THE POOL OF JUDGES IS LIMITED AND EXTREMELY HETEROGENEOUS.*
- *A GIVEN JUDGE MAY LACK EXPERTISE.*
- ***JUDGES ARE REQUIRED TO RANK ORDER.***
IN MY OPINION, THIS CAUSES JUDGES TO LOOK FOR PROBLEMS.



HOW DO JUDGES JUDGE?

WITH INFORMED SUBJECTIVITY!!!

WHAT IS INFORMED SUBJECTIVITY?

EXPERIENCE! & BIAS

MASTER PHOTOGRAPHERS

EDUCATORS

PROFESSIONALS

WHAT YOU SHOULD KNOW ABOUT JUDGES

- THEY HAVE SEEN A LOT OF PHOTOGRAPHS.
- THEY HAVE TAKEN A LOT OF PHOTOGRAPHS.
- THEY HAVE THEIR OWN WAY OF DOING THINGS.
- **SO, WHAT CAN YOU DO?**
 - *MAKE ORIGINAL PHOTOS.*
 - *BE DIFFERENT.*
 - *ENTER ONLY YOUR BEST WORK.*
 - *DON'T WORRY ABOUT IT!!!*

WHAT WE ASK JUDGES TO DO: FOR EXAMPLE

- PLANO PHOTOGRAPHY CLUB

- *“The judge considers **impact, composition, and the technical aspects** of the image in determining the point value.”*

- DALLAS CAMERA CLUB

- *“The judges are asked to evaluate images based on **impact, composition and technical merit**. Competition scores may range from 65 – 100 based on the general criteria below. A score of 75 is considered to be a good image.”*

QUESTIONS?



**FIVE TIPS
FOR BETTER
CLUB CONTEST
OUTCOMES**

TIP # 1

MAKE MORE IMAGES:

THOUGHTSHOTS vs *SNAPSHOTS*

CRATE PHOTOS THAT ARE ABOUT, RATHER
THAN OF THE SUBJECT

PRACTICE!!!



EVEN A GENIUS LIKE YOUNG MOZART HAD TO PRACTICE:

1. PHOTOGRAPH SOMETHING EVERY WEEK.
2. WORK ON PROJECTS.
3. THINK ABOUT WHAT YOU WANT YOUR IMAGES TO. LOOK LIKE BEFORE YOU PRESS THE BUTTON.
4. REVIEW AND ANALYZE YOUR WORK.
5. PARTICIPATE IN CLUB ACTIVITIES.
6. GET A **FOTO FRIEND** AND SHOOT TOGETHER.

7. PLAY AND HAVE FUN!!!

PHOTOGRAPH WITH “**INTENTION**”

IN GENERAL, WHEN A JUDGE LOOKS AT YOUR IMAGE, THEY SHOULD BE ABLE TO IDENTIFY WHAT YOU PHOTOGRAPHED AND WHY YOU DID SO. IN OTHER WORDS, THE PHOTO SHOULD CLEARLY COMMUNICATE YOUR **INTENTIONS.**

TIP # 2

LOOK FOR
CONTEST SHOTS!!!

CONTEST SHOTS

1. KEEP A COPY OF CONTEST THEMES/SUBJECTS WITH YOU.
2. AVOID “*ONE AND DONE*” CAPTURES.
3. *BE AWARE OF SPECIAL OPPORTUNITIES AND TAKE ADVANTAGE OF THEM.*



TIP #3

**SAVE YOUR BEST IN
A CONTEST FOLDER
OR COLLECTION!**

TIP #4

STUDY WINNING IMAGES:

YOUR CLUB CONTESTS

PSA INTERCLUB CONTEST [Competition Results](#)

[Gulf States Camera Club Council - Competition Results](#)

9 STEP IMAGE ANALYSIS*

(PRACTICE THINKING LIKE A CONTEST JUDGE)

1. WHAT IS THE MAIN SUBJECT? HOW DO YOU KNOW?
2. WHAT DO YOU THINK THE MAKER INTENDED?
3. IS IT AN IMPACTFUL IMAGE AND WHY?
4. HOW WAS LIGHT USED?
5. HOW HAS COLOR CONTRIBUTED TO THE STRENGTH OF THE PHOTO?
6. DO YOU FEEL THE CHOSEN CAMERA SETTINGS WERE OPTIMAL?
7. HOW DO YOU FEEL ABOUT THE POST-PREPROCESSING OF THE IMAGE?
8. WHAT DO YOU THINK OF THE COMPOSITION?
9. WHAT MIGHT YOU HAVE DONE DIFFERENTLY IN MAKING AND PROCESSING THIS PHOTO?

**Adapted from PSA course on
creating images for competition*

TIP #5

SEEK FEEDBACK: ASK SOMEONE KNOWLEDGEABLE FOR ADVICE BEFORE YOU SUBMIT AN IMAGE.

1. DO NOT LET A CONTEST JUDGE
BE THE FRIST PERSON TO
COMMENT ON YOUR PHOTOS!

DO NOT GIVE A JUDGE ANYTHING TO DISLIKE!!!

- KNOW AND FOLLOW ALL CONTEST RULES.
 - NATURE AND PHOTOJOURNALISM ARE VERY STRICT!
- MAKE THE EFFORT TO CREATE CONTEST SPECIFIC IMAGES.
- ELIMINATE OBVIOUS FLAWS IN YOUR SUBMISSIONS. **JUDGES WILL EXPECT YOU TO BE AT LEAST PROFICIENT IN BASIC POST-PROCESSING TECHNEQUES!**
 - EG. NOISE, DUST SPOTS, HORIZIONS, BACKGROUND DISTRACTIONS, EDGES, FOCUS, SHARPNESS, PRINT QUALITY, MATTS & MATTING ([Best photo editing software in 2025 | Amateur Photographer](#))
- KEEP YOUR ENTRIES AS SIMPLE AS POSSIBLE. AN OBVIOUS MAIN SUBJECT THAT IS SUPPORTED BY THE OTHER ELEMENTS IN THE FRAME WORKS BEST.
- (*Remember that contest photography is only one of many reasons to use your camera.*)

PAINTING vs PHOTOGRAPHY



EXAMPLE: CONTEST SUBJECT WAS PORTAL(S)



ONE IS A DOCUMENT THE OTHER A STORY!

EXAMPLES

(Contest Topic: Shadows)



EXAMPLES

(Contest Topic: Minimalism)



EXAMPLES





EXAMPLES





**A PRETTY
PICTURE
IS NOT
ENOUGH!**

CREATING IMAGES WITH *IMPACT*

- WHAT IS **IMPACT**?
 - IT IS **SUBJECTIVE!**
 - CONTRIBUTES THE NARRATIVE.
 - WHAT MAKES A PHOTOGRAPH MEMORABLE.
 - **CONTRAST AND DEPTH.**
- WHY DOES IT MATTER IN A CONTEST ENTRY?
 - TIME TO LOOK
 - NUMBERS OF ENTRIES



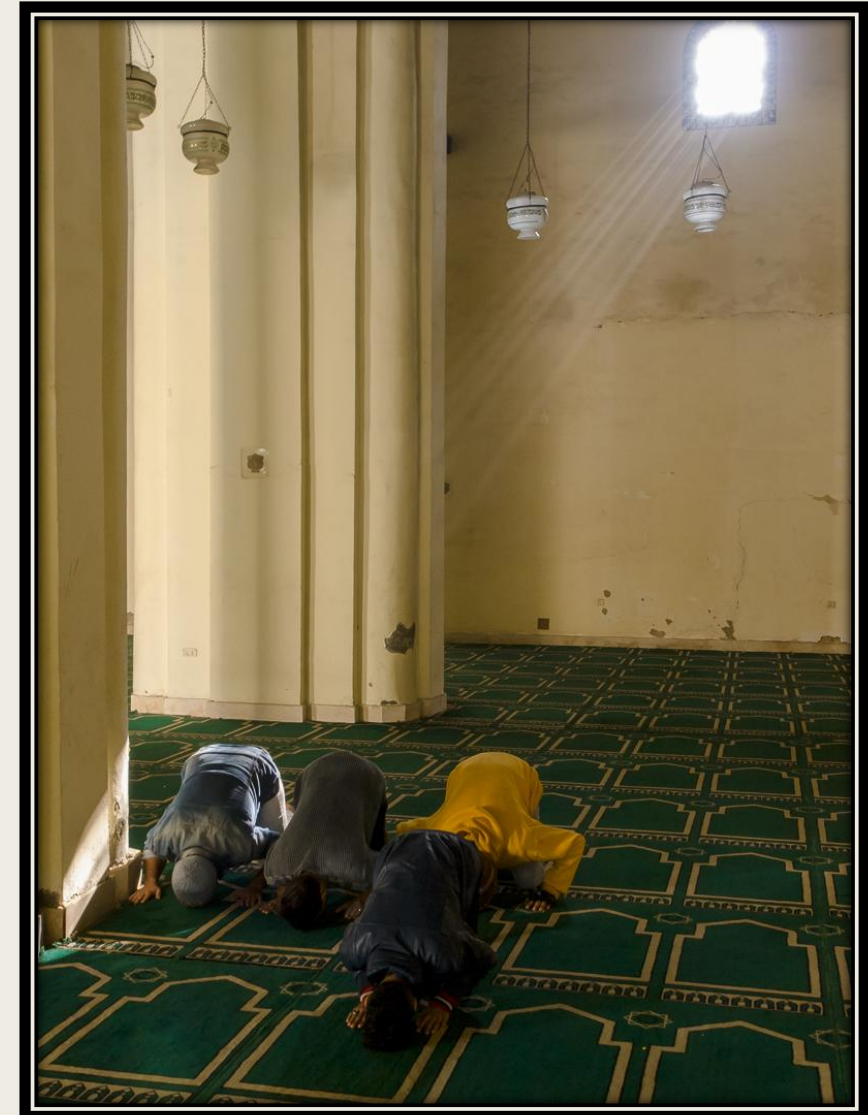
IMPACT

EMOTION



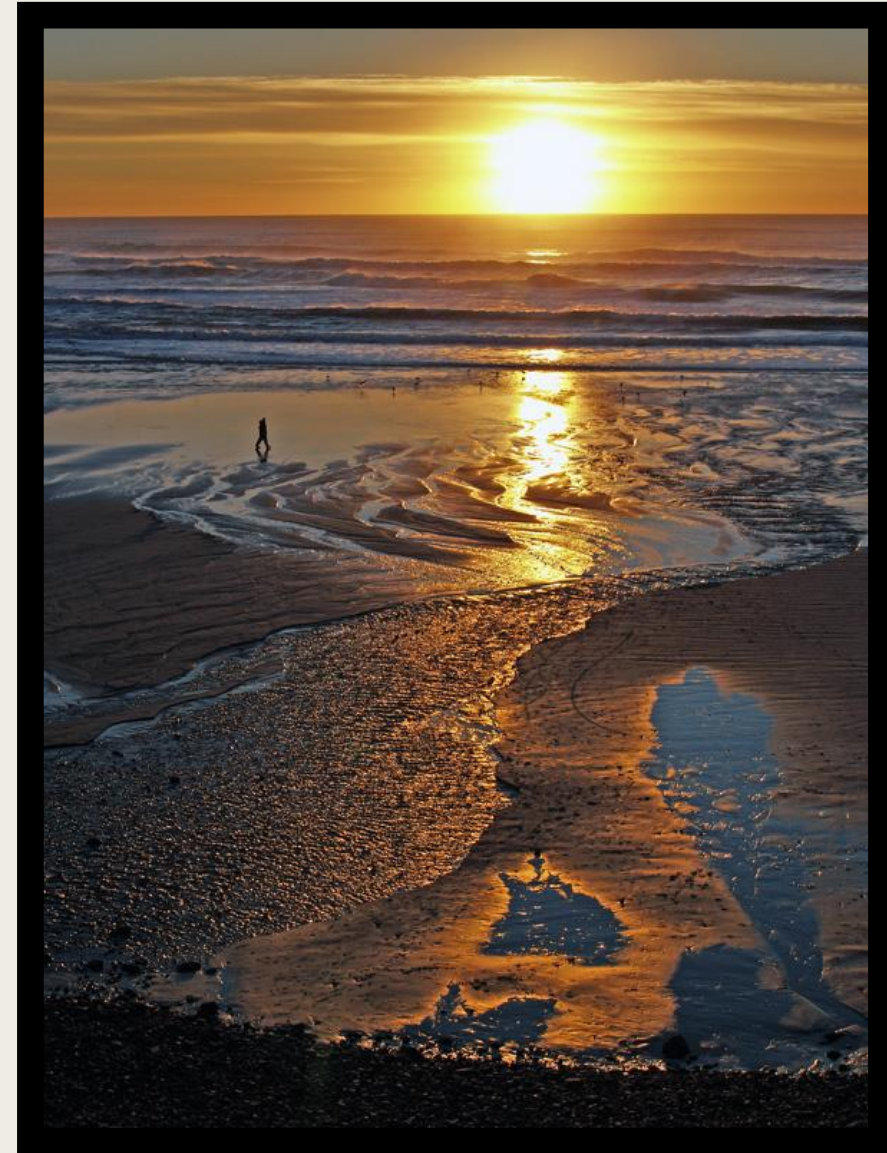
IMPACT

MOOD



IMPACT

CONTRAST



IMPACT

COLOR





IMPACT

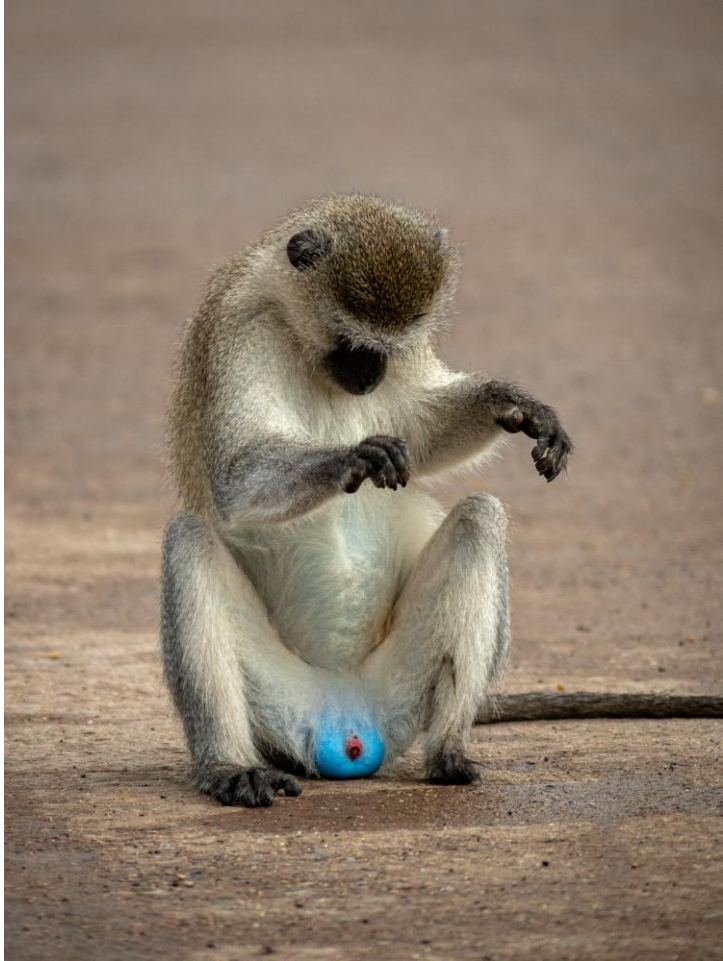
SUBJECT



IMPACT

ACTION

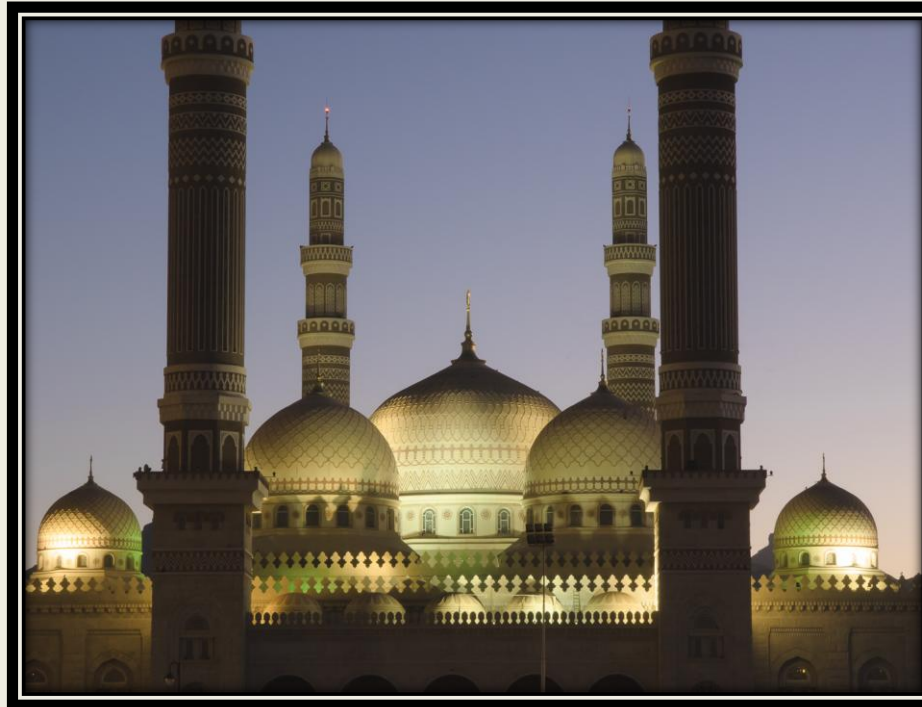
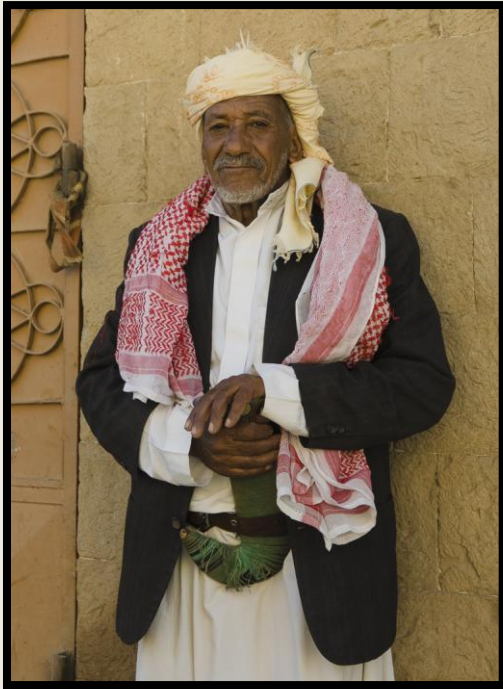




IMPACT
HUMOR

IMPACT

EXOTIC



IMPACT SCALE





IMPACT CONNECTION



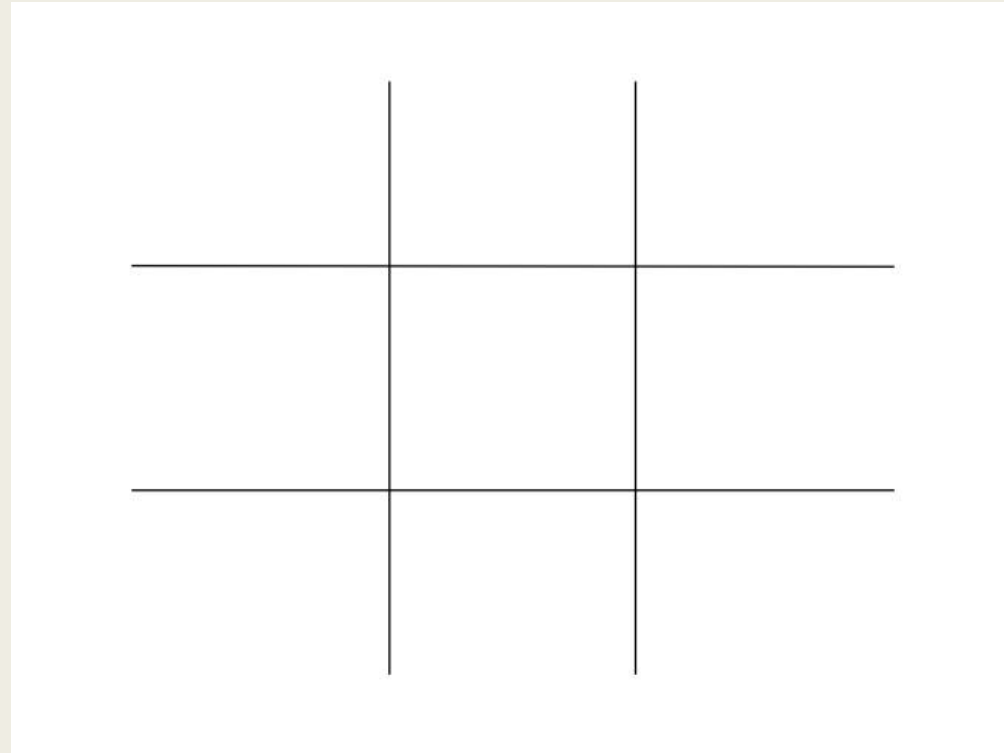
TOOLS NOT RULES!

*(USE COMPOSITION
TO YOUR
ADVANTAGE)*

- **WHAT ARE THE SO-CALLED COMPOSITIONAL RULES OF PHOTOGRAPHY?**
 - The Rule (Tool) of Thirds
 - Leading Lines
 - Fill the Frame
 - Read Left to Right
 - Use Odd Numbers of Things
 - Leave Space for Subject
 - Create Depth
 - Triangles and Diagonals
 - Frames
 - Differential Focus and Depth of Focus

EXAMPLES

THE TOOL OF THIRDS



EXAMPLES

THE TOOL OF THIRDS



Background

Mid

Foreground

EXAMPLES

LEADING LINES





**EXAMPLES
FILL THE FRAME**

EXAMPLES

READ RIGHT TO LEFT



EXAMPLES

USE ODD NUMBERS OF THINGS



EXAMPLES

LEAVE A SPACE FOR SUBJECT



EXAMPLES

CREATE DEPTH



EXAMPLES

FOCUS





FINAL TAKE HOME MESSAGE IF YOU WANT TO COMPETE MORE SUCCESSFULLY

1. PHOTOGRAPH INTERESTING SUBJECTS WITH **INTENTION**
2. TAKE FULL ADVANTAGE OF THE **BEST LIGHT** FOR YOUR SUBJECT
3. **USE COMPOSITIONAL TOOLS** TO ENHANCE THE IMPACT YOUR SUBJECTS
4. **AVOID/ELIMINATE DISTRACTIONS**
5. TAKE FULL ADVANTAGE OF THE **POST-PROCESSING** TOOLS AVAILABLE TO YOU
6. **FOLLOW ALL CONTEST RULES/GUIDELINES**
7. **TURN IT IN AND LET IT GO!!!!!!**

***HAVE
FUN!***

