

1. INTRODUCTION.

The purpose of the Judging Handbook is to provide potential judges with guidance and suggestions on how to become effective PFLI competition judges. If judging were a pure science then every image would receive the same score regardless of who was the judge. That is an impossible ideal due to the fact that of the 4 main elements that make up a photograph (Technical Considerations, Subject Matter, Composition and Lighting) only the technical considerations can be measured against defined standards. (is it out of focus, overexposed, etc.) Evaluating subject matter, composition and lighting are somewhat subjective and can be influenced to a certain extent by a judges' built in biases and personal preferences. The challenge of being an effective judge is to strive to minimize those biases and personal preferences and then to be as consistent and objective as possible.

2. BACKGROUND

Last year 3,587 images were submitted to the PFLI Competition.

In terms of media:

COLOR PRINTS.....	1,242
B&W PRINTS.....	860
DIGITAL.....	1,485

TOTAL.....	3,587

By category:

SCENICS/STILL LIFE.....	36%
WILDLIFE.....	30%
FLOWERS.....	14%
PORTRAITS.....	12%
CREATIVE.....	6%
ACTION/SPORTS/PJ.....	2%

	100%

3. SCORING

The PFLI uses a 5 point scoring system as follows:

5poor
6fair

- 7good
- 8very good
- 9outstanding

When 3 judges are used this translates as follows:

- 15, 16.....poor
- 17, 18, 19fair
- 20, 21, 22good
- 23, 24, 25very good
- 26, 27..... outstanding

The scoring breakdown for the 2010 - 2011 season was as follows;

15, 16.....poor.....	0
17, 18, 19.....fair.....	75
20, 21, 22.....good.....	2,119
23, 24, 25.....very good.....	1,501
26, 27.....outstanding.....	92

TOTAL	3,587

Since the clubs are sending what they consider their better images to the PFLI competition the low distribution of poor and fair images is exactly what you would expect. The overall average was 22.1 points.

4. WHY DO WE HAVE JUDGING IN THE FIRST PLACE?

1. To provide meaningful feedback for improvement. To simply announce a score without a comment on why you selected that score would be useless. To simply say "I don't like the background" without making suggestions on how to improve the background would be equally lacking.
2. To assign scores in order to reward outstanding work.

5. SCORING METHODS

There are basically 2 scoring methods. The technical approach and the holistic approach.

1. The technical approach.

Every image is assigned a 7 to start. The judge then looks at the following

elements one by one and decides if points (or fractions of points) should be added or subtracted.

Focus and Exposure
Composition
Lighting
Subject Matter

Variations of this approach include starting with a 5 and deciding how much should be added or, similar to some athletic events, starting with a 9 and looking for deductions.

2. The holistic approach.

Here the entire image is viewed as a whole. Is there ANYTHING I like about this image? If the answer is NO then it gets a 5. If the answer is YES then how much do I like it? Not so much gets a 6, it's OK gets a 7, I like it a lot gets an 8 and I really, really like it a lot gets a 9. The holistic approach is particularly useful in evaluating images that have a strong emotional appeal such as laughter, sadness, etc. or in photojournalism or action images where the power of the story more than compensates for any minor technical faults. It generally is the only way to evaluate pure abstracts.

There are problems with either approach. With the technical evaluation it is easy to get bogged down in minute details and forget about the entire image and what it is trying to say.

It also takes more time. With the holistic approach it is easy to let personal biases or the impact of merely brilliant colors rather than content creep into the evaluation.

DO's and DON'TS WHEN EVALUATING AN IMAGE

1. DO NOT say "I don't like cats (or whatever.)" While you are judging you have to eliminate your personal preferences regarding the subject and score the image appropriately. If you announce you don't like cats and then give a cat an 8 the maker will assume that were it not for you comment the image would have gotten a 9. The converse is also true. If you are primarily a bird photographer, you cannot give special consideration to a bird image, even if it is a rare species you have been trying unsuccessfully to capture for years.

2. DO NOT say "Oh, another Bluejay". A judge has to avoid thinking "I have seen this subject a hundred times before". In fact there will rarely, if ever, be a subject or a subject genre that you have not seen a hundred times before. Make believe it is the first time and evaluate it accordingly. Remember, for a B worker, it may well BE the first time he or she shot that subject.

3. DO NOT say "that image was obviously Photoshopped". First of all it does not matter in today's environment. Photoshop is here to stay. Second if you say so and the image was actually the result of an hour's worth of waiting and 50 or 60 tries you lose all credibility. Don't Guess. The final result should be evaluated only on what it is, not what you think it is or how it got there.

4. DO NOT say not bad for a "B" worker. A judge should be gentle to B workers when critiquing their work but not to the extent of awarding points they do not deserve. The images, whether they be A, B or Salon, must all be scored on their merits. Awarding points solely because the worker is a "B" is a sure way to make sure the worker stays a "B".

5. DO NOT automatically deduct if a maker broke a composition "rule". You must stay flexible.

The most common broken "rule" is centering the subject rather than a placement at a 1/3 point. The question you must first ask is "does the broken rule hurt or help the image?" and then score accordingly.

6. DO stay consistent. make sure images of equal value receive equal scores. In addition be aware that you may subconsciously be influenced by the sequence of images in a competition. After a series of poor images one after another a judge may tend to elevate a simply good image higher than it deserves. Conversely, after giving out 3 or 4 high scores in a row, a judge may tend to over penalize an image for a minor technical flaw. The stack is random. The next image has nothing to do with the previous one.

7. DO be receptive to new techniques. Camera and computer technology now allow us to do things we could never do with film and darkrooms. Extending depth of field beyond the limits of lens design. Extending the range of highlight and shadow detail beyond what film or even digital sensors can capture. Increasing the number of frames per second to capture peak action.

3. SPECIAL SITUATIONS

Some images generally do not lend themselves to a traditional analysis. Photojournalism and Sports photography are the best examples. The primary purpose of these images is to tell a story or invoke a reaction and the image should be judged on that basis. If the maker managed to control all of the other elements as well so much the better.

Theme competitions are a third case. The most common mistake for a judge to make here is trying to rationalize an image to fit the theme when it clearly does not. If it does not it should simply be

disqualified. To do otherwise would be unfair to all the makers that did.

The final, and most difficult special category are Abstracts. Some are carefully planned and some are a simple click of the Twirl command in Photoshop. There is no technical criteria on which to measure them and from an artistic standpoint as a judge you usually either love them or hate them. You have to score them according to your own taste, recognizing that the scores from other judges will be wildly different. The makers have to recognize this fact as well.

THE PROBLEM OF SCORE COMPRESSION

One of the biggest complaints regarding PFLI judging is that il got a high score at the club but a terrible score at the PFLI. judges at the club level. The nominal club scoring is technically 5 to 9 but human nature being what it is (people generally want to be loved or at least invited back to judge) some judges will never score a 5 and many will never score below a 7. If that is the case the scoring system becomes compressed into a 3 score system. (7, 8 or 9). This in turn means a 7, which we have already defined as a good image, would actually be given to the worst images of the night. Good images (true 7ís) would therefore have to be bumped up to 8ís and very good images (true 8ís) would have to be lumped together with the outstanding 9ís. The maker of an inflated 8, of course, now expects a 24 at PFLI, thereby setting up the future complaint il got an 8 at the club and only a lousy 21 (or worse) at PFLI. The surest way to alleviate this problem would be to use the full range (5, 6, 7, 8 and 9) of scores.

However, even with a full range scoring system sometimes a judge may be caught, say, between a 7 and an 8. Again the natural inclination to be loved would probably influence the judge into scoring an 8. Fractional point scoring, such as 5.0, 6.0, 6.5, 7.0, 7.5, 8.0, 8.5 and 9.0, would not only allow a more accurate score but would lower unwarranted expectations when the image is submitted to the PFLI. A few clubs have gone beyond a fractional point scoring system and have adopted the PFLI 18 to 27 point system giving the judge even more flexibility.