

## 12+ Elements of an Excellent Photo



1. **Impact** – The sense one gets upon viewing a photo for the first time
  - Impactful photos evoke: laughter, sadness, anger, pride, wonder or another intense emotion
  - There can be impact in any of these 12 elements
2. **Technical Excellence** – The quality of the photo itself as it is presented for viewing
  - Lighting, focus, exposure, printing, mounting, color, retouching, manipulation ...
  - The nuts and bolts of photography. Be wary of going too far with corrections.
3. **Creativity** – Fresh expression of imagination to convey an idea, message or thought
  - It's looking at an ordinary subject and finding an extraordinary way to portray it
  - In photographic competitions, you get bonus points for creativity and originality
4. **Style** – A specific genre or recognizable characteristic to showcase an artist
  - Has a positive impact when the subject matter and the style are appropriate for each other
  - Your work can be anything from traditional to surreal, candid to abstract, hard or soft light
5. **Composition** – Bringing all of the visual elements together to express photo's purpose
  - Holds the viewer in the photo and prompts the viewer to look where the creator intends
  - Do you follow the standard rules of composition? When you break them to enhance the photo?
6. **Presentation** – Affects a photo by giving it a finished look
  - The mats and borders used should support and enhance the photo, not distract from it
  - Applying digital borders, customized for each photo, can either make or break your photo
7. **Color Harmony** – Color tones working together enhance the emotional appeal
  - Color balance is not always harmonious and can be used to evoke diverse feelings for effect
  - Are your colors and corrections pleasing to the eye? Do they look like they belong together?
8. **Center of Interest** – The point or points where the viewer should stop as they view the photo
  - Can be subtle or strong, regardless, they allow the eyes to pause in preconceived areas
  - Occasionally there will be no specific center of interest
9. **Lighting** – How dimension, shape and roundness are defined in a photo
  - The strength of your subjects should be portrayed by of the strong lighting choices you utilize
  - Whether the light applied to a photo is artificial or natural, proper use enhances a photo
10. **Subject Matter** – Should always be appropriate to the story being told in a photo
  - Keeps it interesting and appropriate; just because it's pretty, doesn't mean it's right
  - Subject matter is often linked to the competition category or photo title
11. **Technique** – The approach used to create the photo
  - Printing, lighting, posing, capture, presentation, ... are part of the technique applied to a photo
  - Including camera angle, lens choice, a certain style such as forced perspective
12. **Story Telling** – The photo's ability to evoke imagination
  - Take a step back to see what kind of stories your photos can create
  - One beautiful thing about art is that each viewer might create their own message or story
13. **Title** – Use the title to provide the judges an emotional connection to the photo
  - At a minimum, use the title to tell the judges where to look
  - Don't waste the title to name the location (Niagara Falls) or obvious object (Gorilla)

## Tips for Judging Photography

- Does the Subject Matter/Content fall within the assignment/theme?
- Does the photo follow the rules of the category, if there are any?  
Wildlife, Nature, Photojournalism often have additional requirements.