



Hunterdon County Camera Club

Group Discussion and Critique Guidelines

The purpose for discussing and critiquing photographs is to help photographers improve. These guidelines are intended for use in sessions when the group discusses an individual's photo. This format is different than judging a competition because the photographer is involved in the process. It is not a one-way conversation where only a judge throws out his or her thoughts.

Ask the Photographer

Before the group begins to comment on a photograph, ask the photographer "Why did you take this photograph and what was it that you wanted the viewers to see?"

Give the Photographer Feedback

1. Give informative comments that explain what you like or what could be improved in the image. Avoid non-specific statements such as, "I like it." That may make the photographer feel good, but it does not help him or her understand why you made the comment. Be specific and say something like, "This photo is good because it tells a story about a family having fun together." Similarly, for negative comments, do not say, "That is an awful photo!" If you think something can be improved, explain what and how. For example, "The tree branches coming in from the side are distracting. If you were to remove them in post processing, the branches would not pull the viewer's eye away from the main subject."
2. Avoid suggesting changes that alter what the photographer intended. If, for example, you were to say, "You should crop this photograph much tighter so that the viewer can see the details in the bird's feathers", it could completely ruin the image if the photographer wanted the viewer to see the natural environment in which the bird was feeding.
3. Balance negative comments with positive comments, but be honest. Do not make up something just to make the photographer feel good.
4. If you notice an image that is particularly bad, try not to pick on every single fault in the image. Limit your comments to a few of the more important areas that the photographer can investigate or experiment with to make a better image next time. It is easier for people to grapple with a few things at a time, than having to deal with an overwhelming list of negatives. After all, if the photo is that bad, the photographer is unlikely to improve in every area during their next photoshoot.
5. Do not make comments to illustrate how knowledgeable you are. We are trying to help the maker, not boost the ego of the person giving the critique.
6. Constrain your comments to the photographer's experience level. For example, do not tell a novice to mask off an object and apply an overlay in post processing. It is likely they will not have a clue what you said.
7. Give the photographer a chance to talk during the critique. The person should have a chance to clarify what his or her intentions were and why they did what they did. By the same token, the photographer should not become defensive about negative comments.

One Last Thing

Remember, the person critiquing is giving the photographer an opinion based on their experience. Much of photography is subjective and there are few absolutes. People should take away from the session what they believe is meaningful.