Evaluating Your Photographs

How to evaluate a photograph to help you become a better photographer

Photographic Evaluation

- We evaluate or appraise photographs to determine whether or not an image is achieving its objective of showing an idea, communicating a message, mood or feeling, or if it is sufficiently creative.

- Photographic evaluation is the process of analyzing an image so we can understand the visual communication

- We must establish the purpose of the photograph, its message or communication and then determine how well this purpose has been met

Photographic Evaluation

- We all look at photographs every day, either consciously or subconsciously

- Whenever we see a photograph we react in some way

- If, as members of a camera club, we take photographs, we do so for some purpose (sharing, challenge, competition).

- We may wish to inform, influence, entertain, or simply record when we are moved to pick up our cameras

- If we are to create a successful photograph we need to establish how well we have achieved our purpose with the images we make. That is where photographic evaluation becomes important – either peer or self evaluation

Photographic Evaluation

- SO ---

- What is a good photograph
- How do I create a good photograph
- How do I make a Self Evaluation

How do I make a good photograph??

How to make a good photograph

- The pillars of good photography are

1. Concept (Idea)
2. Capture
3. Process and Enhancement
4. Final Evaluation
5. Output

How to make a good photograph

New York Institute of Photography
Three Guidelines for Great Photos

1. Know your subject, the theme
2. Draw attention to / focus on your subject (emphasis)
3. Simplify

About New York Institute of Photography:
Established in 1910 as a School of Photography and is an accredited photography school
2 year home study course in professional photography taught by professional photographers

How to make a good photograph

Three Guidelines for Great Photos

1. Know your subject / theme
   - A good photograph is about something
     - It tells a story or creates a feeling/mood
     - It has a clearly identifiable subject/theme (and only one)

   - Ask yourself:
     - What is the theme – the universal message – of my image?
       - What am I taking a photo of, what am I trying to show/say
       - What caught my eye
       - Does the photo clearly show what my subject is or what the feeling I want to share is.

Three Guidelines for Great Photos
Know your subject

Ask yourself:
What caught my eye?
How can I show that?

- Know your subject
- Draw attention
- Simplify

Three Guidelines for Great Photos
Know your subject

- **The subject**
  - The stairs and shadows
- Draw attention
- Simplify

What caught my eye?

The light, the stairs, the lines and geometric shapes

However:
Too busy – competing areas of interest
Distracting elements

Three Guidelines for Great Photos
Know your subject

- Know your subject
- Draw attention
  - Angles, lines
- Simplify

What caught my eye?
The light, the stairs

Better – focus on stairs – but still distracting elements drawing your eye away, making you wonder what it is

Three Guidelines for Great Photos
Know your subject

- Know your subject
- Draw attention
  - Lines, angles, geometries
- Simplify

What caught my eye?

Stairs, light and shadow
This is what caught my eye.

Having said all that – someone else's story could have been the contrast between the simplicity of the stairs and the ornamental building etc. You must identify what YOUR story is.

Three Guidelines for Great Photos
Know your subject

What caught my eye?

The colours and swirling skirts

- Know your subject
- Draw attention
- Simplify

Three Guidelines for Great Photos
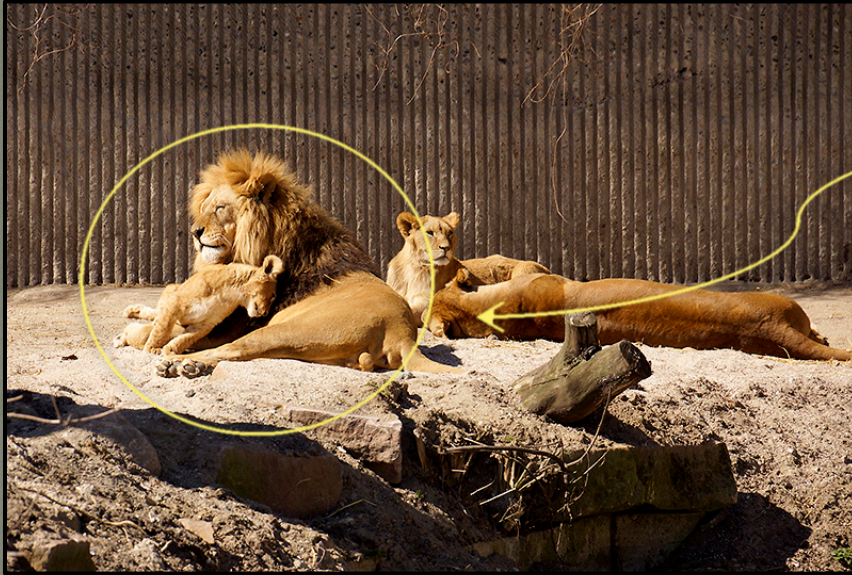## Know your subject

What caught my eye?

The dew on the apple
The luscious and refreshing feel

- Know your subject
  - Dew on apple
- Draw attention
  - Zoom in, isolate
- Simplify

Three Guidelines for Great Photos
Know your subject

What caught my eye?

This
The light

- Know your subject
  - The interaction between parent and child
- Draw attention
  - Zoom in
  - Triangular lines
- Simplify

Three Guidelines for Great Photos

Telling a story

- What:
  - Old/new
  - Historic/modern
  - Poor/rich

- How:
  - Eliminating the rest of the city
  - Including only the elements to tell the story

Three Guidelines for Great Photos

Telling a story

- What:
  - Remote wilderness
  - Float planes / kayaks only modes of transport
  - Beauty, serenity, solitude, quiet, majestic

- How:
  - Including only the elements to tell the story
  - Plane and kayak up close

Three Guidelines for Great Photos

Creating a mood

- What:
  - Peaceful nature
  - Sunsets/sunrises
  - Fog/rain/mist

- How:
  - Be there ☺
  - Simplify

Three Guidelines for Great Photos

Evoking a Feeling

Humour

Nostalgia

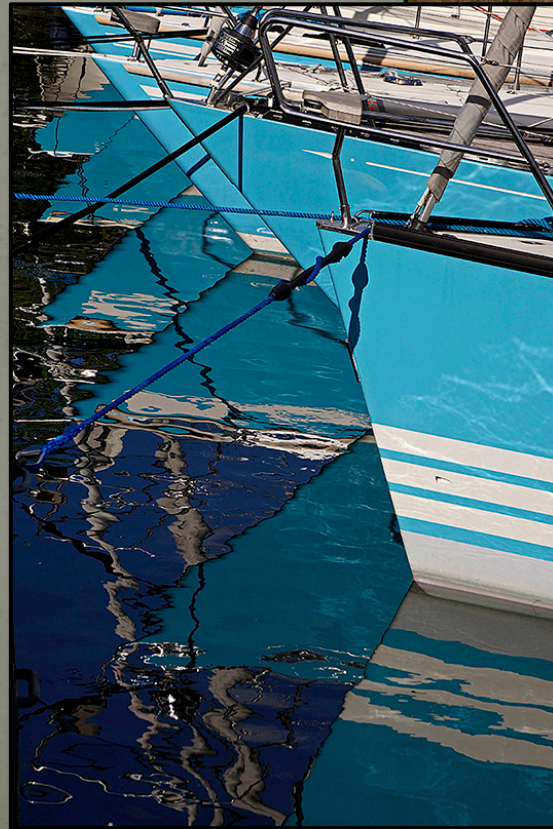Joy

Three Guidelines for Great Photos

Evoking a Feeling

Awhhh

Tenderness

Anger/disgust

2. Draw attention to your subject
- A good photograph focuses attention on the most important elements that express the theme

- How do you do that? By (some examples):
  - Filling the frame
  - Placement in the frame ("rule of thirds")
  - Leading lines
  - Framing

Three Guidelines for Great Photos
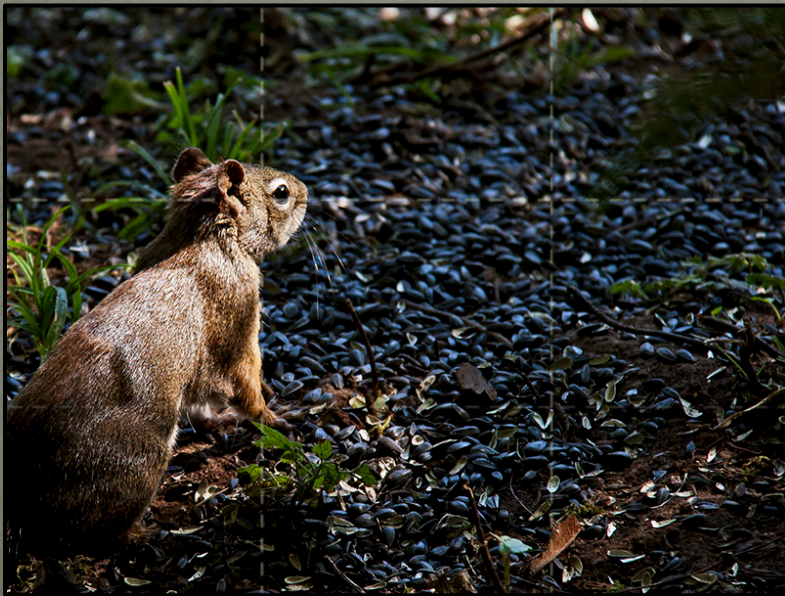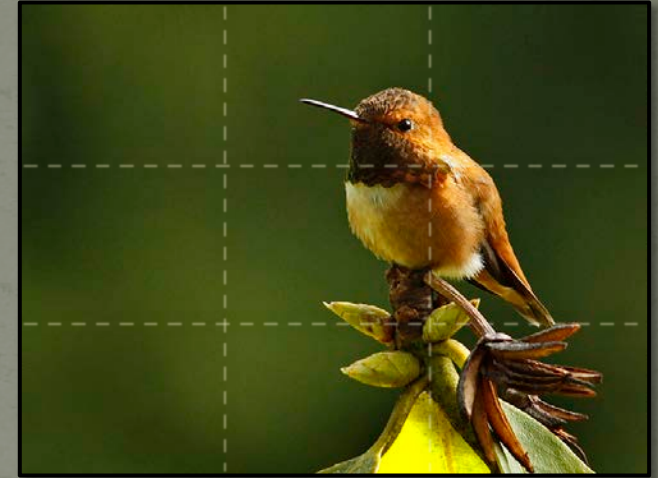
- Draw attention to your subject
    - Filling the frame
    - Placement in the frame ("rule of thirds")
    - Leading lines
    - Framing

New York Institute of Photography
Three Guidelines for Great Photos

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3. Simplify
   - A good photograph simplifies
   - A good photograph includes only those elements that are important to the theme
   - A good photograph excludes or diminishes all other elements that distract from the theme

   - How do you do that?
     - Isolating the subject
     - Selective focus and/or colour
     - In camera, cropping, processing

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Three Guidelines for Great Photos

In camera

processing

cropping

Evaluating your photograph

A technical "failure" which shows some attempt at aesthetic expression is of infinitely more value than uninspired "success".

Cecil Beaton, British Photographer

Objective analysis vs. Subjective analysis

Objective evaluations are easy
    Technical factors

Subjective evaluations are difficult
    The message (communication) of the image
    The reason the photographer created the image

A technically perfect image with no message has no real reason to exist. Technical excellence alone does not make a meaningful photograph!!!

Performing an Evaluation
Questions to ask yourself

1. How well does the photograph fulfill its purpose?
2. Has creativity been applied in making the image?
3. Does the image make a statement, a message, or create a feeling?
4. How effectively have available tools and techniques been used in the making of the image?
5. Has care and skill been applied to the presentation of the photograph?
6. Does the photograph force the viewer to notice and engage with it?

Steps to evaluate your photograph

1. First impressions
2. How and what does it make you feel
3. Address the technical components
   1. Focus
   2. Dust and other technical distractions
   3. Color
   4. Lighting
   5. Exposure
4. Assess the artistic elements of the photo

Steps to evaluate your photograph

1. First impressions - Examine your photograph
   1. What is your First impression?
   2. Study the details
      1. How does all the components work by themselves and in relation to the overall composition of the image
   3. What works and what doesn't work
   4. What is the purpose of the image?

Steps to evaluate your photograph

2. How and what does it make you feel

- Does the photograph fulfill it's purpose, it's intent???
- Is it meant to convey a message or record a scene??

Steps to evaluate your photograph

3. Address the technical components
    1. Focus
        1. Is it sharp where intended
        2. Is blur intended – shallow DOF, motion blur
    2. Dust and other technical distractions
        - Should always be removed
    3. Colour, shades
        - Faded, dull, ruddy colours may be product of technical error
    4. Lighting
        - Too much, too little – resulting in sub-par image
    5. Exposure
        - Over-exposed / under-exposed

Steps to evaluate your photograph

4. Assess the artistic elements of the photo
    1. Subject matter
        1. Is the subject clear in the image
        2. Are there distractions from the subject
    2. Colour
        1. Artistic use of colour/monochrome
        2. Does the colours add to or detract from the subject/feeling
    3. Composition
        1. Subject position, symmetry, clutter, cropping
        2. Does the composition aid or detract from the subject

- What works, what are the strong points, why
- Strong elements both technical and artistic
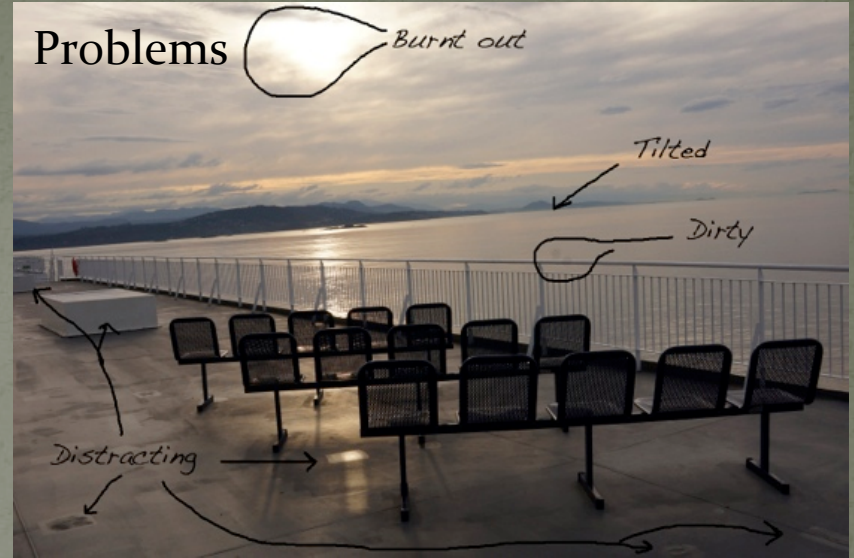- What elements of the photo can be improved upon

Examples

Original

Problems

Burnt out

Tilted

Dirty

Distracting

Fixed

- First impression: Beautiful morning
- Subject: the benches on the early morning ferry
- Problems:
  - Tilted horizon (straighten it)
  - Dirt on the lens (clone it out)
  - Distracting elements
    - Crop or clone out
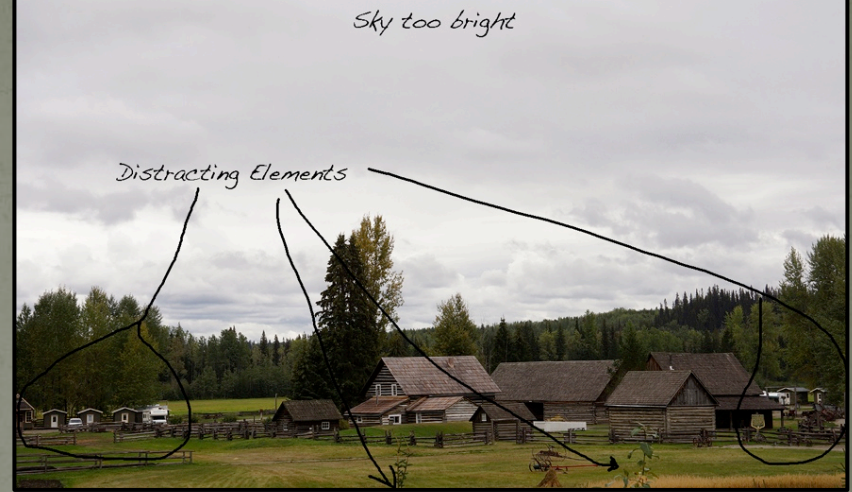 - Exposure
    - Sun burnt out – crop out

Original

Problems

Sky too bright

Distracting Elements

Fixed

- First impression:
  - Interesting farm buildings
  - Dull, un-interesting sky
- Subject: The farm buildings
- What works:
  - good detail and exposure in buildings
- Problems:
  - Distracting elements
    - Crop or clone out
  - Exposure
    - Sky too bright (the clouds were amazing, the photo doesn't show)
    - Crop sky and adjust exposure

First impression: cluttered, dull, has potential☺

The overgrown motorcycle is clearly the subject and story but clutter detracts.

Fixing colour, contrast – but:

The overgrown motorcycle is still clearly the subject and story but clutter detracts.

Options / Solutions:

- Focus on subject
- Different point of view
- Simplify
- The image still tells the story but with fewer distractions

What are you trying to show (the story)

Does the photograph capture some aspect of the person's character or story?
Is there feeling in the image?
Can we make some assessment about the person photographed?
Does the photograph give some clue to the person's life experience?
Does the photograph show the person's interests?

A lady in her environment

A lady shopping/going to visit?

A portrait of a beautiful woman

What are you trying to show (the story)

This is what it looked like

Raindrops show – but busy image

The mood after the rain

My favorite☺

Creativity

- How well have we used available tools and techniques along with artistic tools to convey our idea?
    1. Format (landscape/portrait)
    2. Colour or Black and White
    3. Lighting (quality, intensity, direction)
    4. Selective focus
    5. Point of view

Creative and effective art does not require explanation

Jim Crew,2011

Creativity

An image that has technical quality as its only attribute will have a hard time communicating a message.

Within the camera club arena, a genre of photography has evolved that places technical quality above all else, such that it has become the only requirement. We see images pin sharp in focus, absolutely clear in tonal and colour purity and expertly presented but which has nothing to say, images that are instantly forgotten because they have no lasting message. The reality is that technical quality is the means by which the image communicates and it only needs to be sufficient to achieve this aim.

Jim Crew, 2011

--- And all that being said ☺

- The story
  - History
  - Old farming

Which image tells it better??

That is the subjective part of evaluating your image☺

Thank You

And have fun☺

Bonus

Other useful comments and ideas

New York Institute of Photography
Six Tips for Great Photos

- Six Tips
  1. Watch for interesting angles
  2. Experiment
  3. Consider Black and White photography
  4. Decide: Horizontal or Vertical
  5. Don't use flash when it hurts
  6. Rule of Thirds

New York Institute of Photography
Six Tips for Great Photos

- Six Tips
  1. Watch for interesting angles
     - Unexpected angles, use your imagination
  2. Experiment
  3. Consider Black and White photography
  4. Decide: Horizontal or Vertical
  5. Don't use flash when it hurts
  6. Rule of Thirds

New York Institute of Photography
Six Tips for Great Photos

- Six Tips
  1. Watch for interesting angles
  2. Experiment
     - Take a "safe" picture, then try something different
     - Angles, framing, cropping that might tell the story better
  3. Consider Black and White photography
  4. Decide: Horizontal or Vertical
  5. Don't use flash when it hurts
  6. Rule of Thirds

- Six Tips
  1. Watch for interesting angles
  2. Experiment
  3. Consider monochrome or selective colour
     - Use to emphasize mood, feeling, attention to subject
  4. Decide: Horizontal or Vertical
  5. Don't use flash when it hurts
  6. Rule of Thirds

New York Institute of Photography
Six Tips for Great Photos

- Six Tips
  1. Watch for interesting angles
  2. Experiment
  3. Consider Black and White photography
  4. Decide: Horizontal or Vertical
     - Try viewing both before taking your photo
     - Use the one that works best
     - When in doubt – take both and decide later
  5. Don't use flash when it hurts
  6. Rule of Thirds

New York Institute of Photography
Six Tips for Great Photos

- Six Tips
  1. Watch for interesting angles
  2. Experiment
  3. Consider Black and White photography
  4. Decide: Horizontal or Vertical
  5. Don't use flash when it hurts the image
     - Built-in flash can only reach 1-4 m away
     - Do not use on buildings, in arenas, through windows
     - The flash will hurt the image if you have two subjects where one is a meter from the camera and the other is 3 meters away. The flash will either turn the closer one into a bright, burned-out blob or fail to sufficiently light the subject farther away, or both. Solution? Either turn off the flash or move the subjects so they are an equal distance from your flash
  6. Rule of Thirds (composition)

New York Institute of Photography
Six Tips for Great Photos

- Six Tips
    1. Watch for interesting angles
    2. Experiment
    3. Consider Black and White photography
    4. Decide: Horizontal or Vertical
    5. Don't use flash when it hurts
    6. **Rule of Thirds**
        - If you place your subject dead-center, the photo may be boring
        - Right or left – both work
        - How far off center – Rule of Thirds
        - Have subject look into photo – leave space in front.