(TC I) **T**echnique – **C**omposition – **Impact**

All three categories often overlap definitions and methods

For instance – “lighting” - it can be as a Technique when used to create a mood in an image, and for the category of composition it can be defined by source or direction, and for Impact it can be the subject itself, like a sunset or sunrise.

By practicing TCI - then critiquing images through competition for both your own photographic work as well as others, one can improve one’s self- creativity, expand their artistic vision, and learn how to improve one’s technical photographic skills.

First we will highlight photographic techniques then discuss how to judge them

**Photographic Techniques**

When entering a photo into competition or to present for sale or museum display one generally wants their image to be seen artistically.

You also want it to be a high quality presentation.

One primary and widely accepted criteria since early creative photography which is used to define art in photography is an image that evokes **emotion.** This can range from its beauty, mystique, humor, intrigue, pity, happiness or any of the many human feelings aroused.

*Technique or technical aspects of photography like its counterpart Composition can be used to allow your pictures to send a specific message or emotion as previously mentioned.*

*Light*

*Exposure\Filters*

*Focus*

*Color\Contrast*

*POV\perspective*

*Special Effects*

*Accuracy*

*Neatness*

**Light**

Light is probably the most powerful techniques or tools in your photographic arsenal. It can be used to highlight or subdue a subject, create a mood, add warmth to a scene, direct the eye or even be the subject itself. It helps create reflections, reflective glows and tones

* Artificial - strobe, fixed, flash, incandescent, florescent,
* Outdoor - sun and moon natural lighting, Golden hour, Blue hour, twilight, night
* Intensity - sun, shade, incandescent, fluorescent, direct or refracted, infrared
* Direction – from above, behind, frontal or even from the sides to cast shadows
* Temperature - Low temps will get you blues cool tones and highs will get you warm and earthy tones.

**Exposure\Filters**

Exposure can control many things in an image but it is primarily associated with lighting. The longer the exposure the greater the light allowed.

You can overexpose, underexpose an image, or with most modern digital cameras, the auto mode will handle the white balance or exposure automatically.

A good understanding of aperture and shutter speed will get you started.

Exposure can be used to create:

- mood lighting, accent or downplay highlights or shadow areas

- control motion or blur

- proper exposure affects contrast and can enhance or reduce color saturation

- allow increased or decreased details in the shadows.

Your lens’s aperture choice and length make a big difference related to shutter speed, as well as ISO, and white balance selections.

Filters can be added: (ND) Neutral Density, (CP) circular polarizing, (UV) Skylight or haze, color filters like warm and cool filters to change lighting conditions filtering out certain bands or reflective light.

**Focus**-

There are several types of focusing, the most common one being sharp focus throughout an image, especially the main subject.

Other types include selective focus such as “bokeh” <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bokeh>.

Special focal approach: like tilt-shift, zooming, are also focal techniques, short or long Depth Of Field (DOF).

No matter what focusing technique used it is important to apply it correctly which is usually controlled by aperture or the length of the lens.

Shutter speed often associated with exposure can also control focus like the blur on a waterfall, basically allowing the subject to move through the exposure length.

Focus can define a third dimension in your photo – most images are two dimensional but using focus such as blurring out the distant clutter– provides more depth to your image (DOF). Similarly, telephoto can block out distance – or compress distance.

HDR – To simplify, HDR (High Dynamic Range) is a digital photography technique whereby multiple exposures of the same scene are layered and merged using image editing software to create a more realistic image, or a dramatic effect. The combined exposures can display a wider range of tonal values than what the digital camera is capable of recording in a single image. HDR is sometimes considered a Special Effect as some software tool is involved.

Blurred areas - if applied correctly can also imply contrast. The point of focus is to be sharp and clear and the blur areas can enhance that further.

Cameras offer tools like single point of focus, multiple or weighted points of focus, as well as tools like continuous focus and focus locking.

In addition they even offer 100% manual focus giving one the ability to do almost anything like panning subjects, to create blur or stop motion.

**Color- Contrasts**

One of the most quoted marketing phases is “color sells!” and it does hold true.

It’s critical in fashion and packaging as it creates mood and evokes different emotions. So the colors in your image should be pleasing or dramatic as needed and where used should have proper contrast, tonal range and saturation.

The use of complimentary or contrasting colors can have varying effects, as do: bright or subdued, earthy or metallic tones. They are all a very important part of the image for eye flow, continuity or expression.

Stray or distracting colors can be used to guide an eye (a pop of color like a red canoe on a blue river) and equally they can distract if not careful.

Improper contrast colors can merge subjects to background or distract so when composing watch for these elements.

Choose a saturation level to match realism unless you specifically want or need to exaggerate or lessen a subject of element in the image.

**POV\Perspective**

This involves selecting a POV (Point of View) or perspective for the image to give the most impact. It requires knowledge of lens choice and composition and allows the photographer to express a subject from their own view. It can be from the angle or distance at which you shoot the subject, or involve composition rules for example, raising or lowering a horizon, shoot the image portrait or landscape or even at a sharp 45 degree angle for maximized effect. The Lens choice can use wide angle or fisheye versus your standard lenses, or to shoot a subject at macro level.

**Special Effects**

This could include almost anything creative –either applied at camera level, applying a technique, or (darkroom) computer software computer enhancing an image.

Example: at camera level, apply to deliberate blurring or panning to accentuate motion.

Post processing effects - Most often this category includes use of software like Phostoshop, LightRoom etc. used to correct or enhance an image.

These powerful tools allow you to clean up and resize image, apply filters for sharpening, or impart art effects and other darkroom techniques.

The final evaluation should be, as always, a response to how well the effect achieved the desired result: did it work, and is the result pleasing or evocative enough to have made the effort worthwhile?

**Accuracy**

When we build skyscrapers they are built level, so when photographed they too should be level.

Elements like horizons, animals\humans or any geometric shape all have attributes that should be normal to the viewer or they can become distracting.

Accuracy especially comes into play when positioning and balancing subjects in your image. Thus accuracy becomes entwined as a sort of composition tool.

Accurate color is important - calibrate your computer screen, and be sure to use good printing sources

Accurate details - for instance you photograph a Civil War reenactment – be sure the people aren’t wearing sunglasses or modern watches.

**Neatness**

As well as being accurate, your presentation should be neatly trimmed or matted to appear its best.

Proper matting or framing can bring out highlights of lighting or colors or both, or can have the opposite effect and subdue the highlights. It creates boundaries for focus and adds further depth.

Image size is important – it should be large enough to be viewed especially detailed images and not pixelate when enlarged.

Proper papers can also enhance your image – be sure to use good printing sources which understand your quality concerns.

**Judging Technique**

Judging of the technique used in a given photograph is simpler than we might think. It should follow these three key guidelines:

1. Leave “bias” at the door you are not judging the photographer’s subject or style, nor their particular compositional style
2. The “application of chosen techniques” must be viewed as appropriate to the outcome or success of the image.
3. MIND &HEART

Use your MIND to assess the technical elements that are essential – Exposure, Focus, Lens selection, Color, Print surface, Mounting & Presentation

**and**

Use your HEART to ‘feel’ the image, see the stories, take in the light or technique.

If it inspires you, regardless of any so called ‘rules’ or MIND technical elements to which we have been indoctrinated over the years, it is good! Score high and celebrate a fantastic image.

**Technical excellence**

*Proper use of Space – is it used wisely and balanced within the scene?*

Consider vacant space, if a sizable part of the photograph is empty and has no meaningful content, or consider too tight of a ‘crop’, or things like too much forefront or not enough. Also if the subject is animals or movement is depicted, is there room for the subject to look like it has somewhere to go (especially on subject like flying birds).

*Distractions – are elements balanced?*

Are any objects cut off that need to help define subject or out of synch – for example in a picture with people or portrait, the limbs should not be cut off, and if cropped are they cropped appropriately?

Check for even slight distractions such as an odd elements jutting into scene, bright color or shadow appearing in front of or behind a main subject.

Viewer focus may also be interrupted when a significant element or parts of the image are cut off by the borders of the photograph. Objects like buildings, poles and bridges that are crooked and not expected to be.

*Color*

Over-saturation when colors appear too strong or exaggerated for effect.

In the past few years, HDR images have been guilty of over emphasized effect. Poor HDR (high dynamic range) as indicated by “unnatural” skies or other odd-looking hues.

*Lighting considerations*

Over- or Underexposure when not intended. This problem is not as common today with automatic exposure control with digital imaging.

Off-putting reflections, glare, unintended blurs of motion and other unplanned consequences of capturing an image under challenging conditions can distract.

Check for excessive contrast, or colors appear too bright or dark.

Unless an image is obviously abstract or includes an intended area of dark shadow, all significant areas of a photo should be lit adequately to show some texture or other detail.

We want uniform lighting so distractions are such things as hot spots, or bright areas that detract from the image. Improper lighting can affect color, tones and detail especially on distant objects like mountains. So look for faded color, or absence of tone where strong color saturation would normally be expected. (like blown out sky).

*Accuracy*

Image not level: Applies particularly to water views and landscapes with a horizon, and to architectural photography. Usually images taken with wide-angle lenses are particularly susceptible creating leaning buildings. Again it may be intended – you need to understand.

*Presentation faults*

Judges may reject entries because the incorrect size, wrong subject for category, or style of image. If a print or digital image is too small to effectively illustrate the content.

Not usually a critical issue but could make a difference is poorly presented matting, like a person might decide to use a color that detracts, or frames the image crooked in the matting. (neatness counts).