

Photo Tips Collected over the Past Few Years from Photography Judge Lin Craft at the Palomar District Photography Contest Judging

There are always exceptions to the rules, but basically here are some points to consider:

1. You need something in your photo to engage the viewer.
2. Does your photo tell a story?
3. Simplicity of composition is often good.
4. Correct exposure is important. Try for detail in both light and dark areas. Better too dark than too light.
5. Leave some space in front of a moving subject.
6. Pay attention to your backgrounds and get rid of distractions. Busy backgrounds or very bright areas are distracting. Is there a tree or pole that looks like it is growing out of someone's head? Move them!
7. People included in the image should be engaged with the subject or story.
8. Make sure horizons are straight and not right through the middle of your image.
9. Is the photo cropped to its best advantage? Eliminate negative space.
10. Don't cut off heads, feet or other appendages. If parts of a subject are cut off, it should look intentional.
11. Is your photo sharp enough? Animals, flowers, people, generally need to be sharp. Backgrounds can be soft. Landscapes should be sharp from foreground to background, meaning lots of depth of field.
12. Don't go over the top in processing. For instance, over sharpening can be a negative.
13. Usually your subject should not be in the exact center.
14. Are there any distracting elements, e.g., white or dark spaces or objects that draws your eyes away from the central subject?
15. Move in closer to your subject to eliminate background distractions. Avoid placing important elements near the edges of the frame? Mergers of subject matter with the edge of the image are almost always a negative.
16. 3-dimensionality (perspective)—something in the foreground can help to anchor your composition, e.g. a tree limb which helps to frame your subject. Leading lines can create this also.
17. Color can be an effective element adding impact and providing a focal point for composition.
18. A polarizer filter helps improve contrast and accentuate clouds and blue sky and helps reduce reflection (e.g., shiny water) and cuts glare.
19. Is more color needed? Is there enough contrast and saturation?
20. Is there too much contrast or saturation? Be careful not to oversaturate digital images. Color needs to be believable.
21. Is the lighting flat? Does it need more dimension? Photograph when light is at a lower angle to give your subject more 3-dimensionality.
22. Watch out for white balance. Whites need to be white
23. Watch out for color casts. Colors need to be true.
24. An overcast day is usually good for photography.
25. Placing important elements in the crash points (rule of thirds) can make your compositions stronger.
26. Use a shallow depth of field (selective focus) to help eliminate background distractions.
27. The date should not be in your picture. If you have not turned off that feature in your camera, it can be removed using an editing program, such as Photo Shop Elements.