Southern Counties Photographic Federation
Competency Definitions – Guidance for Judges and Clubs

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This list of definitions is designed to support the checklist at the back of the document. The competencies listed form the core of the training provided to judges and are built on both many years' experience and on evidence-based principles for personal development and giving feedback.

We – both the Federation and judges – welcome feedback from clubs about judging. Competition still forms the backbone of the club programme.

Judges are encouraged to use these competencies to evaluate their own performance. Clubs are encouraged to understand these competencies in order to provide specific feedback about what judges do well and about where we might need to improve.

Section 1 – Core Qualities

Core Qualities are the personal qualities that determine an ability to give feedback in a competent way. They are loosely based on Carl Rogers' 'Person-centred' approach to counselling and promoting-growth[1].

If we get these right then photographers should always feel valued and recognised, even if they don't get the competition result they might have hoped for.

Empathy: Empathy is an ability to understand how the photographer was (and is) feeling - appreciating why the photographer might have made the image, even if it doesn't excite you. Seek to understand the intent.

Respect: Negative criticism is always destructive. Respect the photographer totally, no matter the quality of the image.

Congruence: Own your opinion. Be authentic and genuine. Say how you feel and give your own response (using 'I' language). It is OK to like or not like an image, provided you say why and you maintain empathy and respect. Be clear with your own opinions; don't hide behind what you think the photographer intended. Objectivity is impossible.

Motivation: Club photographers generally have two motivations:
a) to learn how to improve, and b) to gain recognition
Our job is to help the photographer to feel valued and recognised and to want to do better next time. Be enthusiastic, positive and constructive.

Section 2 – Appraisal Skills

Appraisal skills are about how we structure an appraisal in photography.

Expressive Quality: The balance of an appraisal should be weighted – 50-60% according to Dr. Eddy Sethna[2] – towards the photograph's success in communicating something - its 'expressive quality'. Expressive quality can come from emotional engagement, meaning, information, symbolism, storytelling, beauty (or otherwise), mood and atmosphere, individuality and photographer authenticity. **Note**: This is a subjective appraisal.

Craft and Technical: Craft enables and supports expressive quality – appropriate choice of lighting, focus, composition, exposure, presentation. Technical perfection alone does not make an image, neither do faults necessarily destroy an expressive image. Appraise craft and technicalities in relation to expressive quality – but the purpose is not technical fault-finding. **Note**: This can be objective when assessing raw technical elements but is subjective when considering appropriateness to expressive quality.

Avoid Bias: Avoid subject bias or prejudice, favouritism or personal preference. Instead show equal appreciation for all genres and styles, understanding their differing demands and characteristics.

The whole image: See the picture as a whole, as presented and how well it says what it says. A picture is not a collection of parts, nor is it how it compares to any possible alternative.

Positive Feedback: There is something good in every picture. It is your job to find as many positives as you can. Evidence suggests 3:1 is ideal – three positives for every one criticism. **Repeat**: Negative criticism – giving criticism in a negative way – is always destructive.

Be Constructive: If you feel an image could be improved, provide constructive suggestions as possibilities to open up new ideas. Beware making suggestions that would make a different picture. Give consideration to in-camera technique before post-production remedies such as cropping or cloning but also look at where post-production craft could be enhanced. Make sure suggested solutions are accurate and appropriate.

Beginners: Beginners appreciate any help we can give and faults that you see are probably mistakes. Convey knowledge and support, and recognise new ideas – beginners are often not conditioned by what they 'know' and bring fresh ideas and direction.

Advanced: Advanced photographers probably know what they are doing, so respect that and reflect it in your commentary, both in praise and criticism. Bring out points that might help the audience, but talk with advanced workers on their level. There is no excuse for raw technical faults.

Section 3 - Photographic Understanding

This should be self-explanatory. In order to appraise successfully, even though there is much more to an appraisal then the technical elements of photography, appraisers must be fluent in recognising and describing craft elements, insofar as they contribute to the success of a photograph and developing photographers' understanding.

Camera Principles: Understand and be able to describe the relationships between aperture and depth of field, shutter speed and movement, focal length and perspective, exposure and contrast, focus and camera shake to name but a few … AND <u>their effects on the image's expressive quality.</u>

Composition: Understand the principles of visual design: contrast, line, shape and form, colour, depth and perspective, space, balance and dominance, pattern and texture, rhythm. <u>Understand the effects of composition on expressive quality</u> – do not be a slave to "rules" or ticking boxes.

Lighting: Understand how natural light works in terms of colour temperature, tone, contrast. Show an appreciation of studio lighting principles for portraits, still life and commercial shoots, even if they are not your expertise.

Printing: Show understanding of how to make printing improvements in a variety of media, using 'photographic' language appropriate to both digital and traditional printing. Avoid the 'digital assumption'. Reference both digital and traditional print processes, or neither if you don't know,

Digital Processing: Understand digital processes. Learn to recognise common layering and 'filter effects', particularly those that are entirely software generated, and tools for making simple corrections in post-production. Again, avoid making assumptions about 'how'.

Technical Faults: If there are raw technical faults, diagnose them accurately. Say what effect it has on the image first and foremost. Understand noise, jpeg artefacts, print banding, colour bias and cast, sharpening.

Differentiate between sharpness of technique (focus and stability) and sharpness in camera (sensor and lens quality). <u>Not everyone shoots with a pro DSLR</u> – you are not there to judge the camera.

Section 4 - Language and Presentation

Much existing guidance about judging touches on presentation skills but gives little guidance on how to do it successfully, as opposed to simply avoiding the pitfalls.

Confident public speaking comes with practice, practice and more practice. And since it is difficult to be aware of ourselves fully when doing it, feedback is essential. Do seek feedback.

Body Language: 93% of communication is non-verbal.
Stand tall and breathe: it WILL make you more confident.
Smile: it IS the most infectious expression of emotion.
Be aware of hand gestures and any habits that might irritate others.

Speak confidently: Do speak clearly, audibly and slowly. Speak to the audience, making friendly eye contact with people for a short time to help you to connect. Look at the print to give you your next cue and to illustrate your points.

Vary your tone of voice – a monotone delivery will bore the audience. Be as natural as you can and avoid too many errs and umms.

If you stumble, make light of it and move on; we are all human. The audience knows that, and most would never stand in your shoes.

Stay Concise: Keep comments concise and avoid repeating a point you have already made. If making interpretations, avoid over-analysis and irrelevant anecdotes.

'I' and 'You': 'I' language - If you say categorically that something is or is not, then you invite disagreement. If you say "I feel that …", nobody can argue. People may see it differently, but cannot argue with how you feel. You have owned what you have said, and the audience will respect that.

'You' language - Instead of saying "the photographer has done a great job here", say "you have …" You might not be looking at the photographer, but he or she will feel directly praised.

Language variety: Avoid repetition. Develop your repertoire of vocabulary and phrases. Become articulate. Use humour carefully …

Viewing distance: The closer you get to the print, the more you will talk to it and see just parts of the image. Stepping away allows you to see the whole picture and to connect with the audience. Always see a print on the light easel before making any final assessment.

Preview projections from the back of the room but talk from the front where possible. Don't be afraid to move in order to see the screen from a different angle.

Section 5 - Organisation and General Approach

These simple principles will create a good impression with your hosts and help you to relax and minimise stress.

Be Professional: Goes without saying, but you will not give your best if rushed and stressed. Manage your engagement professionally. Arrive on time, dress appropriately, respect your hosts.

Friendliness: Make friendly conversation with a smile as soon as you arrive. Show your hosts that you are really looking forward to the evening.

Know the Rules: Understand the classes, rules, expectations of the competition and respect them. Ask questions about expectations, numbers, timings, marking etc. If you have issues or queries, deal with them beforehand or offline.

Preview Images: Ensure to arrange suitable previews for both prints and PDI before you comment. Insist on this if the club is not prepared for it. View prints in the best light available and ask for a test projected image to verify the projector fidelity.

Manage Time: Know how many images there are in total and by class. Explain if you wish to give more time to the beginners. Know the break and finish times. Keep a regular watch on the time and don't overrun.

Section 6 - Marking

No aspect of judging causes discussion and controversy like marking. In this guidance and in training, we can only speak generally since there are so many contradictory beliefs about marking schemes, marking ranges and even about whether marks should be given at all.

We believe that a spread of marks covering 50-100% is probably fair and most helpful if marks are required.

However, there is no consensus among judges or clubs and, since clubs adopt different schemas, we advise judges to ascertain the club's expectations for the range of marks, to respect that and to use your experience and judgement in applying it – See Spread of Marks below.

Mark relatively: Images should be appraised relative to what you see in this club, in this competition, on this night, not to any absolutes or standards you have seen elsewhere. You might draw comparison with the very best to suggest improvement, of course.

Be careful not to judge one genre as being more valued than another – see Section 2 – Avoid Bias. A good consideration to hold in mind when marking is "Is this photograph excellent of its type?" One style might be more 'expressive' than another in the final reckoning but it is important to appraise the image, not the style or the subject matter.

Mark coherently: A common complaint is when judges praise highly and give a low mark, or vice-versa. Listen to your comments – make your mark coherent with what you say.

Don't confuse 'like' with 'appreciate'. You might 'dislike' the subject of an image or its effect on you, but if the image conveys its message powerfully, whatever that message is, appreciate it and reward it.

Mark Consistently: Treat images of a similar standard consistently.

Explain low marks: Remember, if the criticism is constructive and positive, the photographer will accept the mark and want to do better next time.

Spread of Marks: It is usual to give at least one top mark. Pin your lowest-marked image early and make it the lowest in your range. Make that mark low enough to give you room to manoeuvre – if you mark it too high you will create a pinch-point for other images at the low end and in the middle.

Generally use a wider spread of marks for advanced work than for beginners.

Southern Counties Photographic Federation
Judging Checklist for Judges and Clubs

Quick Checklist

This list of competencies details what is expected of a competent photography appraiser. Use it to identify specific areas you wish to highlight in your feedback. In each case ask yourself "Did the judge …?" There is no need to complete fully or return this checklist.

	Y	N	?
1. Core Qualities			
a. Show empathy with the photographer?	☐	☐	☐
b. Show respect for the photographer at all times?	☐	☐	☐
c. Display congruence in owning his or her opinions?	☐	☐	☐
d. Leave everyone feeling enthusiastic and motivated?	☐	☐	☐
2. Appraisal Skills			
a. Respond to and discuss the expressive qualities of each image?	☐	☐	☐
b. Appraise the craft and technical aspects of each image?	☐	☐	☐
c. Appreciate and understand all genres and styles without bias?	☐	☐	☐
d. Discuss each image as presented and as a whole?	☐	☐	☐
e. Give positive feedback about every image (3:1)?	☐	☐	☐
f. Provide constructive and appropriate suggestions for improvement?	☐	☐	☐
g. Encourage the beginning and intermediate photographers?	☐	☐	☐
h. Respect and recognise the intent of advanced photographers?	☐	☐	☐
3. Photographic Understanding (Demonstrate understanding of …)			
a. Camera principles – focus, exposure, depth of field etc?	☐	☐	☐
b. Composition / Visual Design and its effects?	☐	☐	☐
c. Use of lighting and its effects?	☐	☐	☐
d. Printing, both digital and traditional?	☐	☐	☐
e. Digital processing and editing?	☐	☐	☐
f. Accurate diagnosis and suggested remedy for technical faults?	☐	☐	☐
4. Language and Presentation skills			
a. Show positive body language (with minimal distracting habits)?	☐	☐	☐
b. Speak clearly and fluently to the audience (not to screen or print)?	☐	☐	☐
c. Keep comments concise and to the point?	☐	☐	☐
d. Use "I" language for opinions / "You" language 'to the photographer'?	☐	☐	☐
e. Use a variety of phrases and words, avoiding repetition and cliché?	☐	☐	☐
f. View prints and / or PDI at an appropriate distance and angle?	☐	☐	☐
5. Organisation and General Approach			
a. Behave in a professional manner: arrive on time, dress well, show respect?	☐	☐	☐
b. Appear friendly and confident?	☐	☐	☐
c. Understand and observe the classes and rules of the event?	☐	☐	☐
d. Preview the images beforehand?	☐	☐	☐
e. Manage time well for the number of images provided?	☐	☐	☐
6. Marking			
a. Mark relative to the competition?	☐	☐	☐
b. Mark coherently with the comments?	☐	☐	☐
c. Mark consistently across images of similar standard?	☐	☐	☐
d. Explain low marks adequately and constructively?	☐	☐	☐
e. Use an appropriate spread of marks in each class?	☐	☐	☐

Judging Sub-Committee

These competencies form the core of the training provided to SCPF judges. They are prepared and maintained by Ken Scott ARPS.

Please direct any queries, requests for change or addition to Ken at judging@southerncountiespf.org.uk

The judging sub-committee at January 2016 comprises:

- Ken Scott ARPS
- Roy Lambeth DPAGB AFIAP BPE2*
- Tony Oliver ARPS CPAGB
- Glyn Edmunds APSA EPSA EFIAP/s DPAGB
- Caroline Colegate ARPS

Footnotes

[1] Carl Rogers is recognised as one of the founders of a perspective in psychology known as 'humanistic' psychology. His approach to counselling is the 'person-centred' approach and is based around three core conditions: Empathy, Utmost Positive Regard and Congruence, which he saw as essential in any 'growth-promoting' relationship.
http://www.simplypsychology.org/carl-rogers.html

[2] Dr. Eddy Sethna's "Analysis of Judging" is important reading for all judges
http://www.monolandscapes.talktalk.net/judging.htm