

FAQ regarding Certification Image Submissions

A few of the questions most candidates ask are:

Who are the judges?

What are the judges looking for?

What should I submit?

There is a lot of anxiety when our work is looked at by our peers. If you have been involved in print competitions and critiques at the state level, you may be a little more confident when you send your images for certification review. If you're new at this, you may want to ask your state liaison for some help—after all, they had go through this, too. If distance prevents you from a face-to-face meeting, you could e-mail them or send them some examples on a CD or DVD. If none of that is possible, reading this may help.

Who are the judges?

The judges who review your 20 images are Certified Professional Photographers (CPPs) who are members of the Certification Committee or Certification Commission. Most are masters, or close to it. They won't be judging your images as merit prints, but as a representation of your finest work. The print review is their opportunity to assess your skills, knowledge, and ability to create images in a pleasing, high-level print. There are at least 3 judges on a panel, with an overseer. Sometimes a second group looks at a body of work if questions arise.

What are the judges looking for?

The judges are looking for consistency in: lighting, exposure, variety, composition, color control, detail and finishing.

Why? Well, posing and lighting are good indications of a photographer's ability to produce saleable prints to clients. Are poses awkward? Do the subjects look relaxed? Does the photograph look like the subject walked into a photo booth, faced the camera, and pushed the button; or do they look comfortable, thoughtfully posed in relation to their shape, size, clothing and age? In portraits of multiple subjects is the inter-relationship meaningful? How are the hands treated when subjects are touching? Is the background suitable to the subject, their clothing, and the purpose of the image? Somehow, ball gowns and tuxedos look a little out of place with hay bales and split rail fences.

Is the lighting appropriate? High key (flat) lighting is rarely flattering to low key backgrounds and subjects. Is the high key background lit properly—not dingy grey or flaring back into the subject? Does the low key lighting enhance the subject? Are the shadows too extreme to show detail in the hair or attire? Did the photographer use more than one setting or lighting pattern, studio, (high key/low key), location, etc. Is the use of additional location lighting obvious (flash kill vs flash fill)? Is the lighting complimentary to a thin person? To a heavy person? To a child?

Is the skin tone normal? Are African-Americans, Asian, and Caucasians a believable color? Are white clothes white, is the sky blue (sunsets excepted) or any other control color out of balance?

Is the hair neat? The clothing smooth? The jewelry straight? Is retouching or any photo manipulation obvious? Does the photographer successfully treat facial imperfections? Is the expression forced? Is it soft focus or out of focus? Does the delivered image look finished? Is dust spotting done by the lab or photographer? Is the choice of lens appropriate? Is there room around the subject, or is the crop too tight? Does the image look too much like a snapshot?

The judges understand that a lot of knowledge goes instinctively into an image through your training and experience. They have more time to peruse Certification Image Submissions than a print judge has to look at a competition print, so they can pick up on all the items mentioned above and more.

A judge also tries to imagine how the image affects your client. Your client is the ultimate “judge.” They may not have a list of quality guidelines they are looking for in their image, but, subconsciously, they are seeking some of the same essentials as a print judge. Number one is probably expression. Is it too happy or too somber for the subject? Does the print convey what they asked for? Does it say something about the subject? Is there a reasonable degree of creativity? Does it reflect the style they hired you for?

What should I submit?

You should submit images that are your best work, proportionate to your business: portrait, wedding, commercial, sports, press, etc. The images should be recent examples, and they should not be self-assignments. There should not be two subjects the same, even if treatment of them is totally different. In addition, your images shouldn't have the density of a competition print. Submitted print images are viewed in normal room light, (as you would deliver them to a client) and those submitted electronically should have the same viewability.

All images should be prepared for the judging according to the rules in the application form. No studio name or photographer's name should appear on the front. Images should be numbered with the submission sheets filled out. These can be important, for they give a judging panel keener insight into a photographer's intent if it is not readily apparent.

Hopefully you read all of this and it is some help. If you have further questions, contact your liaison or PPA.