Are You Progressing?

A Photographic Standard
A Checklist For Self Assessment

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The Assessment

- A most *difficult* thing to do is to judge your own creative work ---   <u>objectively</u>

- Can you tell when your work seems to be missing something?

- More importantly -- do you know <u>what</u> it is that's missing?

- An assist of some sort is needed –

  - What to look for

  - What standard to use

- *Only if you set a high photo standard to compare yourself against will you find areas to improve*

Your Critique – The Most Important Step

- "being your own worse critic?"
  - You may think that a negative phrase
  - Nothing could be further from the truth

- By identifying what does and does not work in your photos -- that is when GROWTH happens!

- Where to start?
  - Great photographers?
  - Technique?
  - A good checklist?

- *How to determine what is strong and what is weak?*

3 Characteristics of a Great Photographer - 1

- *Time-Life* wanted to select 250 photos for the *Great Photographers* volume of their *Time-Life Photography series*

- They chose 68 photographers out of thousands

- Those editors defined "great" photographers based on three main factors

3 Characteristics of a Great Photographer - 2

- **INTENT**
  - What did the photographer have in mind when the photo was taken -- and was it achieved?
    - E.g. empathy, peace, wonder, calm, curiosity

- **TECHNICAL SKILL**
  - Was there displayed a thorough understanding of composition, light, exposure, and design?

- **CONSISTENCY**
  - Did the photographer have just one or two great shots, or did they produce success time and time again?
    - One great photo . . . or even several . . . does not a great photographer make.

- *These same three factors may help you determine your own progress.*

Your Critique – The Most Important Step

- How can you progress from where you are now to a higher level?

- How to determine what is strong and what is weak?

- *Here is a checklist to help the process*

Based on an article by award winning writer / photographer Tedric Garrison. He shares his wealth of knowledge with the world through his website better-phototips.blogspot.com.

Photo Critique Checklist

- 1. Intent
- 2. Emotional Impact
- 3. Point of interest
- 4. Illusion of depth
- 5. Subject/background contrast
- 6. Selective focus
- 7. Composition
- 8. Exposure
- 9. Story telling
- 10. Personal style

- These are points to consider when making your critique

- Not every point will apply to each photo

- But each may be considered to elevate your skill

Intent

- Could any viewer look at your photo and KNOW what you had in mind?

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Intent

- Could any viewer look at this photo and KNOW what you had in mind?

- Strength, power, intimidation

Intent

- Interesting color and shapes

- Not as clear what my intent is

- Not strong as to intent

Intent

- Could any viewer look at this photo and KNOW what you had in mind?

- Emotion is the intent – puppy and parent!

- Not real strong otherwise – but may not need to be

Emotional Impact

- Can the photo be described with words of emotion, like peace, calmness, anger, rage, joy, or sadness?

- Does your photo make an emotional statement?

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Emotional Impact

- Can the photo be described with words of emotion, like peace, calmness, anger, rage, joy, or sadness?

- Does your photo make an emotional statement?

- Calmness and peacefulness

Emotional Impact

- Can the photo be described with words of emotion, like peace, calmness, anger, rage, joy, or sadness?

- Does your photo make an emotional statement?

- Contrast in wealth, well being, curiosity as to what is going on

Emotional Impact

- Can the photo be described with words of emotion, like peace, calmness, anger, rage, joy, or sadness?

- Does your photo make an emotional statement?

- What IS he doing? Danger?

- Not strong as to composition or selective focus.

- But does lead you to question --

Point Of Interest

- When composing -- do you successfully direct your viewer's attention to a specific point?

- Would the viewer know where your "center" of interest is?

- **A Clear Subject –** Great photographs generally have a very clear idea of what the core subject of the photograph is

- When you frame an image, if the subject is unclear -- try taking out any unnecessary elements or distractions

  - Sometimes simplifying the image is the best way to improve it

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Point Of Interest

- When composing -- do you successfully direct your viewer's attention to a specific point?

- Would the viewer know where your "center" of interest is?

- The lone pine on the cliff face

- Highlighted by the mist

- Also near one of the thirds composition point

Point Of Interest

- When composing -- do you successfully direct your viewer's attention to a specific point?

- Would the viewer know where your "center" of interest is?

- I was trying to show the geese all pointed in the same direction

- Particularly those still on the water

- But – no point of interest to bring you in – so needs improvement

Point Of Interest

- When composing-- do you successfully direct your viewer's attention to a specific point?

- Would the viewer know where your "center" of interest is?

- Interesting abstract reflection

- BUT – not strong – missing a point of interest

  - The line of reflection may be a subtle point of interest

Point Of Interest

- When composing -- do you successfully direct your viewer's attention to a specific point?

- Would the viewer know where your "center" of interest is?

- Similar to previous photo – but this has a point of interest that brings you in

- Also strong rule of thirds

Illusion Of Depth

- Have you used framing, balance, contrast, and other art concepts to make your image jump off the page, or does it just sit there?

- Is the viewer pulled into your image?

- Some ways to create depth –
  - Linear perspective (1, 2, or 3 point perspective)
  - Overlapping
  - Size (closer object larger than distant object)
  - Framing
  - Detail (objects with more detail appear closer than those with less detail)
  - Color and Intensity (or Value)
    - Objects that are closer to a viewer appear darker in *intensity* and warmer in color
    - Objects that are further away appear lighter in *intensity* and cooler in color

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Illusion Of Depth

- Is the viewer pulled into your image?

- Good example of depth by use of color and intensity

- The darker color appears closer and lighter appears farther away

- Also overlapping areas

Illusion Of Depth

- Is the viewer pulled into your image?

- Macros are tough to create depth

- Use of overlapping objects gives some depth to image.

- Also use of higher detail closer and less detail farther away

Illusion Of Depth

- Is the viewer pulled into your image?

- Perspective is used – 1 vanishing point to the upper right

- Also overlapping objects and more detail closer than farther away

Illusion Of Depth

- Is the viewer pulled into your image?

- Framing used to give depth

- Also overlapping objects and change in detail front to back

Subject/Background Contrast

- Shooting a portrait of someone with black hair against a black background in not usually a good idea.

- Does your subject stand out?
  - Or is it lost in your composition

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Subject/Background Contrast

- Does your subject stand out?

- Here some light behind or to the side of the subject was used to give some back lighting to separate the hair from the background

Subject/Background Contrast

- Does your subject stand out?

- The subject fruit and bowls separate from the background

- Composition could be better – the areas at the top of the photo draw you away from the subject
  - A better angle shot would have helped

Subject/Background Contrast

- Does your subject stand out?

- Contrast may be done by color, lights and darks, sharp and soft, any number of ways

- Here both the lighter subjects in the foreground and the sharper focus presents contrast

Subject/Background Contrast

- Does your subject stand out?

- Here it is hard to separate the subject "selfie girl" from the background

- A different angle or wider aperture might have helped

Selective Focus

- Do *you* choose where the viewer will look?

- If the background is just as sharp as the foreground, it can be very visually confusing

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Selective Focus

- Do you choose where the viewer will look?

- A very busy background.

- I tried to both soften the background with a wider f-stop and also create a little surprise back there.

Selective Focus

- Do you choose where the viewer will look?

- A long focal length lens helped to isolate the interesting tree from both foreground and background

Selective Focus

- Do you choose where the viewer will look?

- A low f-stop and a longer lens helps to soften the busy background and isolate the subject

- The color contrast also helps separate the foreground

Composition

- Do you think about composition "rules" when photographing
  - the rule of thirds
  - formal or informal balance
  - leading lines
  - light and dark
- Take *control* of where the viewer's eyes are most likely to fall in your image

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Composition

- Take *control* of where the viewer's eyes are most likely to fall in your image

- Do you think about composition "rules" when photographing

- Obvious leading line into the mountains

- The slopes of the mountains also lead you to the base

Composition

- Take *control* of where the viewer's eyes are most likely to fall in your image

- Do you think about composition "rules" when photographing

- The use of light and dark lead from across front, up side, to falls at back

- Also there is informal balance between the large green rock (L) and the bright falls on right side

Composition: Informal & Formal Balance

- An image is *balanced* when subject areas command a viewer's attention *equally*

  - Achieved by shifting the frame and viewpoint so objects, tones, and colors are of equal <u>visual</u> weight

- Formal Balance

  - Elements of size, shape, or texture are equal around a center or line

- Informal Balance

  - Informal or "asymmetrical" balance is uneven or unequal balance

  - Objects have nearly the same ***"visual weight"*** on either side of the vertical center

  - But are different in some element such as size, shape, texture

Composition

- Take *control* of where the viewer's eyes are most likely to fall in your image

- Do you think about composition "rules" when photographing

- Combination of informal balance and light and dark

- Also leading lines of lily pads take you to reflected water lily on right

Better Composition?

- Revisit your old photographs

- Mistakes to avoid

  - Background clutter or distraction

  - Cramped – lack of breathing room

  - Amputations

- What to look for

  - Leading lines

  - Negative-positive space

  - Subject

Exposure

- Do you always shoot at whatever the camera says, or do you take control of the light?

- Can you see details in your shadows?

- Have you ever used a reflector or bounced a flash as opposed to straight on?

- Backlight, hard light, diffuse or soft light

- Exposure triangle; histogram --- KNOW your camera

  - Practice practice practice to make it second nature

  - Do you always stay in "AUTO" -- Experiment

Tom's Tip: Use Manual Mode. Practicing in Manual Mode will teach you about light

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Exposure

- When composing a shot – consider the light

- Great photographers will consider the direction as well as the quality of light
  - Is the subject side lit, or back lit?
  - Is the light source hard or soft?
  - Will I set up the picture so that it is low-key or high key?

- Depending on the answers -- the overall emotional feel and aesthetic will change radically -- thereby changing its meaning
  - Your exposure skills will come into play

Exposure

- Do you take control of the light?

- Backlight, hard light, diffuse or soft light?

- Does the exposure match your intent?

- I wanted the soft reflectance of the aircraft skin

- The soft light was perfect

Exposure

- Do you take control of the light?

- Backlight, hard light, diffuse or soft light?

- Does the exposure match your intent?

- I wanted the colors – diffuse light or backlight would not work here

- High overhead hard light and a polarizer filter brought out the color

Exposure

- Do you take control of the light?

- Backlight, hard light, diffuse or soft light?

- Does the exposure match your intent?

- Swans wings with backlight is my intent

- Also catching them flying across the shadowed hillside separated them from the background

Storytelling

- Is there a feeling of *movement* within your image, or does it just sit there?

- Does it leave anything to the imagination, or is it just a statement of what is?

- If your image doesn't tell a story, there is no reason to give it a second glance.

- Have you used negative and positive space concepts?
  - Positive space is space that's filled up with your main subject
    - It's clear what you are trying to show and convey
  - Negative space refers to the areas where there is nothing of the subject but provides key context
  - The use of negative space can greatly influence the story you are trying to tell

- ***Great photos make you want to look again and again.***

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Storytelling

- Is there a feeling of *movement* within your image?

- Does it leave anything to the imagination?

- Have you used negative and positive space concepts?

- Do you want to look again or linger?

- I could have used more negative space on the left.

- I liked the energy in the photo

Storytelling

- Is there a feeling of *movement* within your image?

- Does it leave anything to the imagination?

- Have you used negative and positive space concepts?

- Do you want to look again or linger?

- The use of light and dark spaces, and negative space around the outside keep you centered

- Then you begin to look and question what is it – that keeps you there

Storytelling

- Is there a feeling of *movement* within your image?

- Does it leave anything to the imagination?

- Have you used negative and positive space concepts?

- Do you want to look again or linger?

- Calm inside, rough outside

Personal Style

- Great photographers each have an associated "style"

  - Ansel Adams -- extreme illusion of depth and all planes in very sharp focus

  - Jim Zuckerman -- vibrant colors and simplified subjects within their natural setting

  - Henri Cartier-Bresson once said, "There is nothing in this world that does not have a decisive moment."

- How will others describe your unique approach?

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Personal Style

- It takes some time to develop your style
  - Plus a critical view of your work – assess what makes you most satisfied with your photos

- For me – I am tending to capture 'The Decisive Moment'
  - Mostly in outdoors and/or nature photography – but not always

- I try to have something in the image that --
  - Shows a point in time when all of the elements of the image fall into place
  - When the emotion of the "story" of the image is at its peak

- Great timing is essential in photography
  - Preparation, study, patience, anticipation help define the best moment

Personal Style

- How will others describe your unique approach?

Personal Style

- How will others describe your unique approach?

- Not always an action shot – here it is time of day and the weather

- There is a mood

- Also negative space to right helps set the mood

Personal Style

- How will others describe your unique approach?

- Approaching the finish line

- Emotion on face

- Diagonal lines create energy

Personal Style

- How will others describe your unique approach?

- The light was the subject
  - Backlight grasses and late time of day

- The balance between positive and negative space may drive the tone of your story

Know Where You Are Going

- The best lessons are self taught!

- *The best lessons are self taught!*

- Assess your images and ask and evaluate critiques from others

- Use these items as a checklist to develop your next steps to improve your work

- Having a standard is like a roadmap
  - You may get from A to B
  - But it is a whole lot easier if you have map to get you there

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Photography Is A Passion – And Is Best When Shared

- Talk to and with others – each of us see things differently

- Share challenges and successes

- Selectively use online photography communities to gain wider feedback
  - Viewbug – gave me a new perspective on my work
  - Instagram – not so much
  - Flickr – has some good forums that are active
  - There are others ….

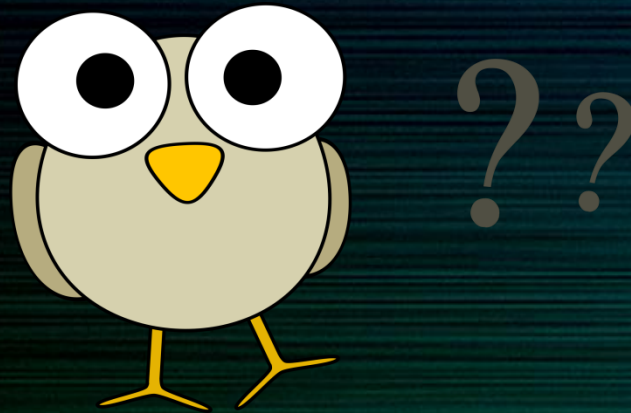- *Most importantly – SHARE with others!!*

Questions?

Photo Editing is No Substitute for Photography Technique

- The camera—not the computer—is still the best photographer

- Today it is important to know how to work a photo – maybe even essential

- But there are plenty of essential things editing cannot fix

  - Recover poor focus

  - Un-blur a moving subject

- Learn how to use your camera

  - how to appreciate light

  - how to compose a great image

- Software can achieve amazing things

- AND – it takes a whole lot less time to get it right the first time – and gives a lot of self satisfaction