

Critique for SIGs

The opportunity to receive critique is one of the principle reasons people join photographic/camera clubs. Yet in those organisations it is usually inextricably linked to judging – a word that causes some prospective members to shy away.

Whilst the two do have some overlap, Critique can be—and some would argue, should be—a standalone process.

In larger clubs, exhibition/competition night has considerable time constraints. These points-centric evenings encourage judges to “get to the point” – see the fault, name the fault, tell how to avoid or get rid of it... then move on. Often, the image becomes the sum of its faults. This approach usually produces *criticism* rather than considered feedback. Critique on the other hand, is a more deliberate process and in its traditional form doesn't offer any unsolicited suggestions for improvement. Instead, the judge *reads* the image, and the author listens to that and determines the changes they need to make to (re)direct a future reading in their intended direction. The author is an active partner in critique, unlike judging where they are the passive recipient.

The Critique

The first stage of the process is the reflective silence. The critiquer quite literally just lets the image say what it wants. They are receptive to any message, and don't start to analyse until they feel the image has had a chance to speak for itself. The image may: invoke an emotion or mood; express a feeling (sensation e.g. cold); convey a statement, imply a narrative (story); or suggest an idea. These (hopefully) demonstrate the *intention of interpretation* of the author.

The next stages are more correctly made holistically, but can be delivered linearly if the critiquer is still learning the forms.

Describe

The Description is factual. It describes the Subject Matter including its Form and Style. It describes the principal elements that contributed to the visual communication (message) of the image.

Interpret

The Interpretation directly references the facts of the Description. The Description has little pertinence without an interpretation.

Evaluate

The Evaluation determines the effectiveness of the image. The Message component will be half to two-thirds of the make up. Content and Medium will comprise the balance. In Critique, skill/technique is seldom commented on per se, as it is assumed to be underpinning the message, content and medium. A deficiency of skill/technique will be reflected in a less-than-effective image.

Special Interest Groups

Special Interest Groups (SIGs) usually exist as sub-groups within clubs, though in some cases they can be stand-alone clubs in their own right. The most common ones in Western Australia are Birds, Flowers/Wildflowers and Underwater.

SIGs often develop slightly different dynamics than would appear in an “open” club.

Cons

- ♦ A tendency towards Trumpmanship – where one image trumps another.
 - Degree of Difficulty often becomes a deciding factor.
 - Species rarity, or inaccessibility, is a determining aspect.
 - A viewer shouldn’t need to be able to identify a species to be able to interpret the image. A better response would be “Whoa, that’s amazing! What is it?”
 - Focussing on Of shots rather than About
 - Less likely to explore categories as a way of broadening horizons – due to emphasis being placed on Of shots
 - degree of difficulty and inaccessibility can be applied to a Location as well

Outside of the SIG environment, images that rely upon any of these are often canned. They have no bearing upon the effectiveness of the image.

Pros

- ♦ Nature based SIGs reward a museum-standard natural history shot. They don’t feel the need for belaboured textures, overlays and borders to ‘enhance’ an image that already communicates the essence of the subject.
 - ♦ Members often have a cohesive body of work. Whilst it often evolves accidentally initially, this consistency of style begins to influence the capturing and post-production process, resulting in a need to understand better how it came about in the first place. It encourages responsive and reflective thinking.
 - ♦ Members frequently cull for The One – their very best-of-its-kind. This weighing up process is invaluable for practitioners to sort the wheat from the chaff and replicates in-kind the Evaluation process of Critiquing.
-
-