

## **To help people appreciate your work, and to get good feedback, you need to:**

- include all relevant technical info about the image: film, shutter speed , aperture, lens, filters, tripod, etc,
- tell everyone the kind of critique you want so you are neither told what you already know, nor blinded with jargon. (E.g. beginner, knowledgeable, professional, technical comments only, artistic comments only.)
- explain if there is anything particular you want help with,
- and it can sometimes be helpful if you share some of your feelings when you took it, or give details of an effect you wanted to achieve.

This facility can also be a great learning tool, if people would like to provide demonstrations: selected examples of their best work with a detailed technical and creative description of the way they set it up, and any special techniques in post- processing.

Comments on the impact, the look, the feel, the design/composition, etc. of an image are very subjective. Not everyone is going to like everything you shoot and vice versa. As a result, for non-technical issues, remember to take them in the manner intended, which is most likely trying to be helpful, and don't let it get under your skin or discourage you. On the other hand, you may find that someone suggests a fresh viewpoint or technique that has never occurred to you, and will be invaluable in developing your style.

## **Notes for Critiquers**

First of all, remember that a critique is (or should be) a thoughtful, reasoned response to a photograph - and it can be positive, as well as pointing out any defects. Critique does not mean criticism! That being said, a well articulated negative comment can sometimes be an illuminating moment for the photographer; conversely, being told that there is nothing wrong can be a good confidence builder.

(Honest feedback is a useful aid for the photographer to learn and progress: if no-one points out possible problems, we all carry on doing the same thing forever, instead of working out ways to improve. Some varying ideas will allow the photographer to pick and choose those that will help develop his/her own style.)

Second, remember that you are trying to help people improve their skills - not to puff up their egos or destroy their self-confidence. Try to balance any perceived problems with an appreciation of the good points of the image. That way, you will get a better reaction from the photographer, and perhaps encourage more useful discussion from other members.

If you point out a problem, see if you can offer some constructive help on how to fix it for next time, by choosing a different viewpoint, aperture or shutter speed for example. Do not assume everyone knows as much as you do, so explain in simple terms how to fix what you may see as obvious: not everyone understands the relationship between aperture and depth of field. (Even if the photographer is knowledgeable, other people hoping to learn from the critiques may not be.)

On the other hand, do not be put off making a critique just because you are not a technical expert: anyone who can see can form an opinion of an image and tell the photographer what they like and dislike about it. Since it is very hard to be objective about your own work, the reactions of fresh eyes can be really invaluable.

You will probably find that critiquing helps you to improve your own photography too: by analyzing what works and what doesn't, you will learn new techniques and approaches you can use.

While you are free to respond to other people's critiques, and it is perfectly valid to disagree, you should of course exercise courtesy and restraint in doing so: remember the primary purpose of the forum is to help photographers improve. Sometimes, a simple apology for unintentional offence may be diplomatic, however unreasonable you may feel the response to be.

## **Checklist for Critiquing**

Here are just some things to think about: if you don't understand or care about the technical aspects, then just concentrate on the others, which are equally valuable.

### **Technical Aspects:**

- Is it in focus where it needs to be (including appropriate use of depth of field)? For example, although landscapes are traditionally expected to be sharp, soft focus and a narrow depth of field are quite appropriate for certain subjects. And for macro shots, the part of the subject in focus is really critical.
- Is camera shake evident? (You cannot always tell the difference between shake and mis-focusing, but overall blur in a twilight shot is often subject to it.)
- Is the color balance right? (Unnatural color casts may indicate the wrong film or digital white balance was used.)
- Is the exposure right: can you see details from shadows to highlights, or are bright parts washed out for example? Is the overall impression very gloomy or too bright (taking the subject into account)?
- Was a good choice of lens used for the subject? (focal length: wide angle to telephoto; fisheye, macro...)
- Was a good choice of film / digital technique made: grainy monochrome, supersaturated color, infra-red...) - or has the photographer used an inappropriate filter or special effect to beef up what would otherwise be a really boring shot?
- For JPEG images, are there any obvious artifacts, typically caused by oversharpening or excessive compression?

### **Artistic Aspects:**

- Is the composition visually satisfying, or static, or just plain inept?
- Is your eye led around the frame in an interesting way by use of layers, curving or intersecting shapes, diagonals, repeating themes, symmetry/asymmetry etc?
- Is there a discernible subject? (Does there need to be one for this shot - not always necessary for a "tone poem" type landscape for example?)
- Is there a good balance between the subject and the background? Beginners often chose a safe, middling approach by getting the subject more or less to fill the frame, where a more distant shot including context, or a close-up of a detail, would be more compelling.
- Have any important parts of the subject been lopped off at the edge for no reason?
- Conversely, would a better crop have eliminated unnecessary areas and improved the image? Beginners often present full frames regardless, and rarely think to turn the camera 90 degrees for a better result.
- Has the photographer missed some obvious problems with the subject: litter in a tree, a fence post

sprouting out of a figure's head, unwanted object in the foreground etc?

- Is the horizon level, for sea-, river-, and lake-scapes? And for architecture shots, is any perspective distortion considered, or accidental?
- Does the photo tell a story, show a scene, record an event, or in some way evoke a memory or feeling? Or does it make you imagine the photographer saying 'Whoops, I just pressed the shutter button'?

Don't get too hung up on the rules of good composition - part of having a good eye is in knowing when to break the rules. Not every shot of a tree by a lake needs to conform to the rule of thirds, nor does every bird portrait need to be inclusive of the whole creature, or a head and shoulders looking at the camera.

Just because you may be bored with seeing (for example) sunsets with palm trees, boats with reflections, or macros of bugs on yellow flowers, that doesn't necessarily mean that the person who took this photo is. We all have to start somewhere, and what is common to you is fresh and exciting for someone else. Instead of pointing out that it is formulaic, suggest a way to lift it above the ordinary. If you can't, then concentrate on the photo technique, not the subject, in such cases.

### **Emotional Aspects:**

Does the subject speak to you, and evoke some reaction other than a yawn?

Sometimes, the impact of a powerful piece of photojournalism or a stunning scene can outweigh minor technical problems, and conversely, a beautifully executed shot can leave you quite cold.

Tell the photographer how you felt about the photo: it is impossible to be really objective about one's own work, so third party opinions are invaluable, as we have already said.

And finally, enjoy! Everyone here enjoys their photography, and we hope you will enjoy critiquing too.