

Guide for APS Judges

Thank you very much for agreeing to judge an Atlanta Photographic Society (APS) competition. We look forward to hearing your commentary on our work.

The APS (originally the Alpine Camera Club), founded during 1970, has been around for nearly 50 years. Our regular competitions happen the first Thursday evening of each month, January through October.

Why we do competitions

Professionally judged competitions are a long-established way for camera club members to learn and improve their artistry and techniques. This happens by seeing how their efforts compare to others, and by hearing and learning from the judge's critiques of all images, not just their own. There are two goals: to recognize and encourage good photographic efforts, and to learn and grow as photographers as we get information from the judge on how we might improve our work.

Process for regular APS competitions

For each category of entries: monochrome prints, color prints and digital images, you will have a chance to see a quick run-through of all entries, viewing the images briefly to get an initial first impression. Digital images will be shown on a large screen TV and on a color calibrated computer monitor."

Critique of individual images + "Consider for a Ribbon" selection

Next, each image is displayed individually for your brief critique and constructive criticism. Your critiques should be less than one minute each. Each critique should first point out what you think are strengths of the image (or images aspects that the photographer might build on), then, if warranted, suggest things that the photographer might consider exploring to improve the image.

At this point (for each image) you select as "Consider for a Ribbon" those you want to see again for ribbon consideration. And for images you don't want to consider further, designate those as, "Don't want to consider for a ribbon."

About 40% of images entered can be selected by you as "Consider for a Ribbon," (sometimes referred to as Shortlisted or IN). Judges are encouraged to limit their "Consider for a Ribbon" selections to between ~30-50% of images entered.

Awarding of ribbons

Finally, all the images selected as "Consider for a Ribbon" are displayed side-by-side. At this point you will make your choices for first, second, and third place, and Honorable Mentions. The number of Awards/Honorable Mentions will be provided by our Competition Chair (ribbon will be awarded to ~20% of the images entered). This same process applies to each category: monochrome prints, color prints and digital images. As the winners are announced, members with ribbon-winning images are asked to comment briefly on their winners.

Important notes about constructive criticism:

Although many of our members are experienced photographers, we do have members who are fairly new to photography and competitions. Thus, feedback that is helpful and encouraging will help motivate less experienced photographers to improve.

We don't want to be a "mutual admiration society" where all comments are positive and inflated, but we do ask, that to avoid turning off new competitors, you NOT be too harsh in your criticisms.

Again, the goal is to learn from you, to be motivated to continue to improve our photography and to strive for outstanding results. Constructive is the key word. Nothing is learned from a bland, "That's a nice picture." comment, but again we don't want to turn off the new competitors with, "That stinks!" (Even if you think it does!)

Examples of constructive critique

"You picked a good subject to photograph, but your image is not quite sharp. We generally expect the photograph, or at least the center of interest, to be well focused, so focus more carefully, and using a tripod may help."

"Interesting subject and good composition, but I think the image is a bit too (dark or light), and/or the color seems to be off. The club has a ColorMunki that you can check out to calibrate your monitor and printer."

"Overall a good photo, but I think it would be improved by cropping off some of the less interesting parts of the image, like the left quarter of the frame."

"Good image, but you didn't quite capture the peak action. For this kind of subject, try putting your camera on continuous-high exposure mode, shoot a burst, then pick the best frame to work-up for the competition or to put on your wall."