

# **COMMON PHOTO EXHIBITING REQUIREMENTS**

**Entrance Requirements** – Exhibitors can enter a class only if they are enrolled in that unit of the project. If enrolled in more than one unit, exhibitors generally can enter only the more advanced level. All exhibits must be the work of the exhibitor since the last county fair.

**Photo Divisions** – County fairs divide their photo classes for exhibitors in many different ways: exhibitor’s age (e.g., 8-11, 12-14, 15-over); exhibitor’s grade (e.g., 3-5, 6-8, 9 and up); unit in photography project; number of years in photography project; number of years in a unit of the photography project; camera type (non-adjustable vs. adjustable, simple vs. 35mm); photo type (black-and-white vs. color); and lighting (flash vs. natural lighting).

**Print Requirements** – The county fair premium list should clearly point out any print requirements, such as size. Sometimes, the list will say prints are to be “untouched” when returned from the printer, which means no cropping allowed. If no cropping is allowed, prints tend to fall into these standard sizes: 3x5, 4x6, 5x7, 8x10 and 8x12. If cropping is allowed, some counties say that photos must be cropped or trimmed to a geometric shape (square or rectangle), but no smaller than 3x3. Usually mixing of horizontal and vertical photos on the same exhibit is okay, but mixing of color and black-and-white prints is not. (Hint: When judging photos, try not to be influenced by the size of the prints or by your personal preferences for a subject or photo technique.) Sometimes exhibitors are asked to show the “before” photo if a digital print has been manipulated. Sometimes county fairs say that the exhibitor may not be in the photo, which eliminates the possibility of self-portraits.

**Number of Entries** – Many counties are firm on the number of entries allowed by an

exhibitor, while some have no limits. If there is a limit, 3-6 entries are common. County fairs will not allow more than one entry per person per lot. In other words, “you cannot exhibit against yourself.” Sometimes premium books will spell out that prints from the same negative or digital file may not be used in more than one photo entry. In other words, the same photo should not appear twice in the same department of a county fair.

**Title and Captions** – Some county fairs require a title and/or captions for entries. The *title* is the headline or name of the entire entry. A *caption* is the word, phrase or sentence under, over or next to the photo that gives you a clue as to how an individual photo is to be interpreted. The caption should supply information not included in the photo. When used, a title or caption should be brief, specific and free of trite expressions. Words should be spelled properly. Letters should be legible. Encourage fair superintendents to consider *not* requiring titles or captions on future exhibits. Most judges prefer that photos be *numbered* from left to right, top to bottom, just as we read words on a page. This system gives judges a number to refer to when talking or writing about a photo.

**Mounting and Matting** – Because of limited exhibit space, many counties are specific about the size of mounting boards that youth can use for single and multiple photo entries. Standard board sizes are 11x14, 14x22 and 22x28. For enlargements, the recommended mounting board size (unless the fair book says differently) is one standard size larger than the print (e.g., a 5x7 print goes on an 8x10 board, an 8x10 on an 11x14 board). The fair may also control the color of mounting or matting materials. Many counties say all mounting boards must be white, for example, for consistency. If colored boards and mats are allowed, encourage youth to select colors that

do not detract or overpower, but complement the colors in the print. Safe colors are plain white, off white, black, gray and light tan. Photos mounted with wood, glass or plastic frames are seldom allowed at county fairs. If they are, it's only for entries with single photos (enlargements).

**Mounting Adhesives** – Some county fairs list the type(s) of adhesive that youth should use for their photo exhibits. If it's not listed, you might be asked to give advice to exhibitors. Judges generally recommend rubber cement as the best *temporary* mounting adhesive for a county fair. It's fast, it's clean and it works for the length of the fair. If youth want to try something else for temporary mounting, encourage them to experiment with mounting adhesives *before* using them for their county fair exhibits to make sure they hold for a week under humid conditions. For example, glue sticks are popular, but some work well under county fair conditions, and some don't. Double-stick tapes, spray glues and dry-mounting tissues are generally good for more permanent mounting. Corner mounts or art corners are forbidden at most county fairs because they tend to fall off and photos can catch on them as exhibits are handled.

**Exhibit Designs** – County fair books give little information or advise on photo exhibit design, other than "Be neat." As a judge, you can teach youth some things about layout. Most importantly, remind them to keep photos square on the board – sides of the photo should be parallel to the sides of the mounting board, not placed at distracting angles, diagonals or circles. If photos are cropped, the sides should be straight, not rounded or jagged. Tell them to aim for pleasing balance of elements and space between photos. People and animals should look *into* the exhibit, not out or off the board. For photo stories or series, direct them to place photos left to right, top to bottom — the same way we read a page of text. Tell exhibitors that planning photo layouts in advance and following carefully-placed pencil marks create neater exhibits.

They should remember to erase the pencil marks, clean up the excess rubber cement and avoid fingerprints. (Note: You need to model proper care of photos by keeping your hands clean and dry during judging so that you don't leave fingerprints either!)

**Technical Information** – Asking exhibitors for some technical information about their photos is an excellent learning opportunity. Some counties require this information be attached to the entry on a 3x5 card. As the judge, ask each youth for the type of camera used to make their photos. Ask advanced photographers additional information, such as, exposure details (aperture setting, shutter speed) and lighting conditions (flash, natural light, side lighting), and any special technique or equipment used.

**Merit Awards** – At the end of your photo judging, you'll probably be asked to select the "Best of Show," three entries for the state fair photography display, and other awards of excellence. Discuss the process of selecting merit awards with the photo superintendent before you start judging. Then throughout the day set aside merit award possibilities. At the end of the day, bring them all together and judge them as one class. It's nice if you can spread the awards around among the various age groups and individuals who entered photos. In other words, try not to give all the merit awards to the advanced photographers. Try to recognize the good work of the beginners and intermediates who entered this year.