

PHOTO JUDGING CRITERIA LIST

Criteria and standards for judging exhibitor photos are quite consistent across the state.

1. Photo Composition

A photo with good composition has only the elements necessary to tell the story. These elements – main subject and supporting elements – are arranged in a pleasing, logical, and balanced way to tell the story. Distracting or unnecessary elements should not be present. In photos with good composition, the subject will dominate an appropriate foreground and/or background. Remind youth of traditional compositional “rules,” such as, rule of thirds, framing and leading line. Encourage them to fill the frame, get close to the subject, keep the background simple, and change the angle – all the things that make for more interesting photos.

Standards:

- Photo shows a simple arrangement of a few elements. The key element serves as the main center of interest or the subject.
- Photographer got close enough to the subject to fill the picture area.
- Background is simple and uncluttered.
- Either a horizontal or vertical format was used appropriately for the subject.
- Photo follows one or more traditional rules of good composition: rule of thirds, leading line and framing.
- Photo is taken from an interesting angle or point of view.
- Horizon is placed level in the upper or lower third of the photo.
- Subject looks natural, not posed.
- Subject looks into the picture, not off (more space in front of subject than behind).

- Photo has no mergers (awkward touching of subjects, such as a pole growing out of subject’s head).
- Scenic photos have adequate foreground to show depth. The foreground has a distinct reference point for perspective.

2. Storytelling Ability

A photo with this quality has an interesting, clear message – a central idea, given simply, that you can grasp quickly and easily. It keeps your attention when you look at it a second or third time.

Standards:

- Photo has one central idea or theme shown simply and clearly.
- The photographer’s viewpoint is new, interesting or unusual.
- Photo shows only the things that help tell a story.
- Story is obvious without words (caption or title).
- Subject is *doing* something.
- Photos used as a group tell a story. The story has a beginning, middle and ending arranged in logical order.

3. Technical Quality

Print quality depends on camera technique, exposure, processing and printing. A quality print shows detail in all areas important to the message. Overexposure or underexposure results in lost detail. (Note: If a commercial photo finisher processes a print, the exhibitor may have little control over the quality of processing.)

Standards:

- Photo is properly exposed. No details are lost due to under or overexposure.
- Photo shows satisfactory detail in all areas important to the message.

- Photo is clear and sharply focused. Subject is in sharp focus, unless deliberately blurred to show action.
- Subject is separated in tonal value from its background.
- Lighting is appropriate for the subject and the theme of the photo.
- If it is a flash photo, the flash was used correctly.
- If it is a color print, the colors look natural and support the message.
- If it is a trick photo, the trick is effective.
- If the exhibitor experimented with a photographic technique, it was used successfully.
- Prints processed by *exhibitors* are free of faults, such as stains, creases, white or black marks, irregular edges or poor color balance.

4. *Mounting Technique*

A quality photo exhibit is well designed, clean, simple, structurally sound and pleasing to the eye.

Standards:

- Design of photo layout is well balanced, with an adequate border.
- Photos are mounted and matted neatly according to requirements of the county's fair book.
- Photos are mounted parallel to the sides of the mounting board. There is no additional artwork or decoration on the exhibit that detracts from the photos.
- Title attracts your attention and effectively tells you what the exhibit is about.
- Captions say something extra, not just repeat what is obvious in the photos.
- Lettering is neat, limited to a few words and not too large for the exhibit. Ink colors are limited to one or two that do not detract.

- Photo stories are arranged so that your eyes move from left to right, top to bottom.
- Scrapbooks have solid photo composition, creativity, visual appeal and appropriate use of scrapbooking techniques.

Summary

How much weight does each of these criteria carry when you evaluate a photo at a county fair? The main goal of the Wisconsin 4-H photography program is to help youth take, make and use photos for recording and communicating. So, 4-H recommends that you give more weight to the communication quality of a photo (photo composition and storytelling ability) than technical quality and mounting technique. How much weight? As a rule of thumb, score them like this: Composition, 35%; Story Telling Ability, 35%; Technical Quality, 20%; and Mounting, 10% – unless, of course, the county fair book or superintendent gives you different directions. (See “Photo Exhibit Judging Card.”)