

# National and International Photographic Competitions

Some Guidelines for Success



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"Paper wasp on guard"

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# Why enter competitions?

At club level, competitions give you an opportunity to get feedback from judges and compare the quality of your images with those of other club members. If you take notice of the constructive feedback that you receive, you can set yourself targets for improvement. However, there is a limit to how much you can learn and improve if you never exposure your images to audiences beyond your local photography club.

By participating in regional, State, National or International competitions you expose your images to a wider audience of judges and you get an opportunity to compare your images with a much greater variety and quality of images. This provides greater opportunities for you to reflect on the quality of your images and challenge yourself to achieve higher standards.

National and International competitions (usually referred to as exhibitions or salons) can also provide a pathway for you to work towards achieving photographic distinctions, as explained later in this paper.

## National Competitions

In Australia, photographic exhibitions can claim to be “Nationals” if they have approval from the Australian Photographic Society (APS).

The exhibitions approved by APS are listed at [www.a-p-s.org.au](http://www.a-p-s.org.au) under the “Exhibition Services>Competitions>Exhibitions” menu item. Approved exhibitions will display the APS logo and an approval number on their website and entry forms.



Entries in Australian national exhibitions are restricted to residents of Australia and members of APS who live elsewhere.

Many other countries also have national photographic exhibitions.

## International Competitions

There are hundreds of photographic competitions held throughout the world each year. To be considered an “International” exhibition for the purpose of entrants gaining credit towards photographic distinctions the exhibition must have approval from the photographic organisation that will be granting the distinctions (honours). The two main international organisations that approve exhibitions are the International Federation of Photographic Arts (FIAP) and the Photographic Society of America (PSA). In recent years other organisations such as the Global Photographic Union (GPU) have also been granting approval to international competitions.

These approvals are intended as a form of quality control as the exhibition organisers have to satisfy numerous conditions relating to the conduct of an exhibition before approval is given. Entries in these competitions are open to anyone.

Exhibitions approved by FIAP are listed at <http://patronages.fiap.net/salons.html> and exhibitions recognised by the PSA are listed at [www.psa-photo.org](http://www.psa-photo.org) under the “Competitions” menu item.

Approved exhibitions will display the FIAP and/or PSA (or other organisation) logo and an approval number on their website.



## Salons or Circuits?

Most exhibitions (sometimes called salons) are single competitions - the entries are judged once by a panel of judges - usually three different judges for each section of the competition.

Some salons are multiple competitions - the entries are judged several times by different panels of judges. These competitions are known as *circuits*. Circuits have several advantages for entrants,. You only have to go through the entry procedure once and the average entry fee per judging is usually much less than the fee for entry to a single competition. Most importantly, you get the opinions of several different panels of judges.

## Entry Procedures

Virtually all National and International exhibitions now use some form of on-line entry process. Digital images are uploaded to a website and in some cases an entry form is completed for prints. There are many different versions of on-line entry system.

Most exhibitions require the entry fee to be paid via PayPal (which does not necessarily require the entrant to have a PayPal account). My advice regarding exhibitions that do not offer PayPal is simple - don't enter.

## Competition Categories and Sections

There are two broad categories of competition - print and digital. This refers to the way in which the images are presented for judging (obviously prints can originate as digital files). A few competitions accept only print entries, some accept both print and digital entries, and the vast majority accept only digital entries.

An exhibition may have only one section (but this is rare). Frequently there will be four sections and sometimes there are many more. Exhibitions approved by FIAP or PSA must allow entry of up to four images *per section*.

Most print exhibitions will have a colour section and frequently a monochrome and nature section.

The most common sections in digital exhibitions are colour, monochrome, nature, photojournalism and photo travel. There may also be special sections (such as birds, landscapes, portraits, etc).

It is worth noting that when FIAP approves an exhibition it automatically approves all sections of the exhibition. However, PSA recognises individual sections of exhibitions so it is possible for an exhibition to have PSA recognition for some sections but not all sections. This has to be made clear in the Conditions of Entry for the exhibition and it is important for people who are working towards photographic honours.

In all exhibitions that are recognised by PSA each section will indicate the Division of PSA that gave approval. A landscape section, for example, may have been given approval by the Nature Division of PSA or by the Projected Image Division or by the Pictorial Print Division. This is important when you come to apply for PSA distinctions.

## Competition Rules

Each competition will have its own set of rules (usually referred to as the “Conditions of Entry”). It is absolutely essential to read these rules carefully before you start preparing your entries. If you enter a lot of competitions it is easy to fall into the trap of thinking that you don't need to read the rules, but this is very unwise as you will be running the risk that your entries will be rejected or disqualified because you overlooked something critical that could be unique to a particular competition. For example, some competitions do not allow certain subject matter (such as nudity).

## Common Rules

Although each set of rules will be unique, there are some common rules that have to be met as a condition of the exhibition getting approval from FIAP or PSA. These rules include the following:

- The entrant must hold copyright of the images entered.
- A maximum of four entries are permitted in each section of an exhibition.
- Entries must originate as photographs made by the entrant.
- The same image may not be submitted in more than one section of a competition.
- An image (or a nearly identical image) previously accepted in an exhibition may not be re-entered in *that* exhibition (but it can be entered in other exhibitions).
- The maker's name and/or image title shall not be in the image area or in any other area visible to the judges.
- Each image must have a unique title. (See further details below.)
- Images will not be judged unless the entry fee is paid.
- All entries must be received before the advertised closing date of the exhibition.
- The judge's decisions are final.

## Special Rules for Prints

There is no 'standard' size for prints. PSA recognised exhibitions distinguish between 'large' prints with a maximum size of 16x20 inches (40x50 cm) and 'small' prints with a maximum size of 8.5x12 inches (21.3x30 cm). However, some exhibitions will accept prints of other sizes so it is necessary to check the Conditions of Entry.

Some exhibitions require prints to be mounted and others prefer (or require) them to be unmounted - again, check the Conditions of Entry.

All prints should have the following information on the back (and some exhibitions provide a label format for this purpose): owner's name, address and email address; the title of the print and the section in which it is entered.

## Special Rules for Digital Images

There are always four critical things specified for digital images: pixel size, file size, colour space and file type.

**File type** - is almost always specified as JPG (although some exhibitions accept TIFF files).

**Colour space** - is almost always specified as sRGB.

**Maximum file size** - varies considerably but is rarely less than 500KB and rarely more than 3MB.

**Image size** - this is usually specified as the *maximum pixel dimensions of the image when it is viewed in its correct orientation*; for example, 1920 x 1200 pixels. However, sometimes it is specified as the maximum number of pixels on the longer side of the image, regardless of its orientation.

The following examples indicate what would be acceptable if the image size was specified as a maximum of 1920 x 1200 pixels - that is, a maximum of 1920 pixels on the horizontal dimension and a maximum of 1200 pixels on the vertical dimension.

1200 pixels  
(or less)



1920 pixels (or less)



Note: The maximum pixel dimensions specified by each exhibition are chosen to match the resolution of the projection or display equipment that will be used during judging. These dimensions are often not the same aspect ratio as the images captured by your camera. Your image does not have to be exactly 1920 x 1200 pixels. One (or both) of these dimensions can be less than the specified maximum. However, it is unwise to have both dimensions less than the specified maximum as your image will appear smaller than it could be when displayed for judging. This could put you at a disadvantage.

Continuing the above example, images that fit within the 1920 x 1200 pixel bounds could be square:

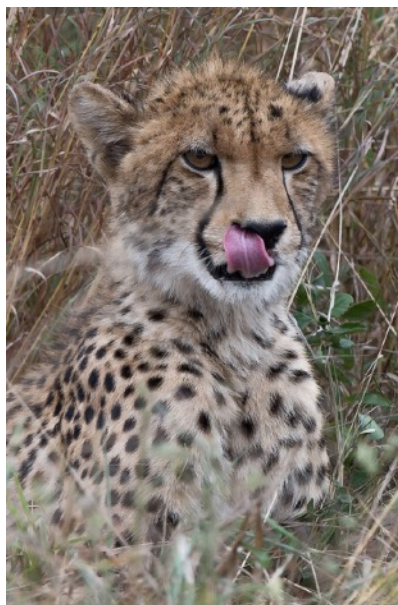
1200 pixels



1200 pixels

It is important to understand that a size specification of 1920 x 1200 pixels is NOT the same as 1200 x 1920 pixels - so the following image would *not* be acceptable:

1920 pixels



1200 pixels



## Subject Matter

For Colour and Monochrome sections there are generally no restrictions on subject matter - although some countries will not permit images that show nudity.

For **Nature**, **Photojournalism** and **Photo Travel** sections there are restrictions on the subject matter (refer to the definitions given later). There will also be restrictions when an exhibition has specialist sections for topics such as portraits or landscapes.

## Image Titles

The first time you enter a particular image in a National or International exhibition you should give it a unique title and that same title must be used every time that you enter that image. You cannot change the title of an image after it has been accepted under its first title.

Words such as "untitled" or "no title" are not acceptable as part or all of an image's title; nor are camera capture filenames or titles consisting of only numbers.

Most exhibitions require titles to use the English alphabet and to contain no more than 30 characters (including spaces), although some allow longer titles. Image titles may be in a foreign language, but the English alphabet must be used regardless of the country in which the exhibition is being held.

It is a good idea to use descriptive titles rather than 'clever' titles, particularly for images entered in nature, photojournalism and photo travel competitions.

If you enter a particular image in a print competition and later in a digital competition (or vice versa) the print and digital versions must have the *same* title.

If you produce both a colour and a monochrome version of an image from the same image capture you must use the *same* title for the two versions of the image.

## Definitions

FIAP and PSA have detailed definitions for some categories of images. The only categories in which FIAP and PSA use the same definitions are Nature and Wildlife.

### Nature

*Nature photography is restricted to the use of the photographic process to depict all branches of natural history, except anthropology and archaeology, in such a fashion that a well-informed person will be able to identify the subject material and certify its honest presentation.*

- *The story telling value of a photograph must be weighed more than the pictorial quality while maintaining high technical quality.*
- *Human elements shall not be present, except where those human elements are integral parts of the nature story such as nature subjects, like barn owls or storks, adapted to an environment modified by humans, or where those human elements are in situations depicting natural forces, like hurricanes or tidal waves.*

- *Scientific bands, scientific tags or radio collars on wild animals are permissible. Photographs of human created hybrid plants, cultivated plants, feral animals, domestic animals, or mounted specimens are ineligible, as is any form of manipulation that alters the truth of the photographic statement.*
- *No techniques that add, relocate, replace, or remove pictorial elements except by cropping are permitted.*
- *Techniques that enhance the presentation of the photograph without changing the nature story or the pictorial content, or without altering the content of the original scene, are permitted including HDR, focus stacking and dodging/burning.*
- *Techniques that remove elements added by the camera, such as dust spots, digital noise, and film scratches, are allowed.*
- *Stitched images are not permitted.*
- *All allowed adjustments must appear natural.*
- *Colour images can be converted to grey-scale monochrome.*
- *Infrared images, either direct-captures or derivations, are not allowed.*

## Wildlife

*Images entered in Wildlife sections meeting the Nature Photography Definition above are further defined as one or more extant zoological or botanical organisms free and unrestrained in a natural or adopted habitat.*

- *Landscapes, geologic formations, photographs of zoo or game farm animals, or of any extant zoological or botanical species taken under controlled conditions are not eligible in Wildlife sections.*
- *Wildlife is not limited to animals, birds and insects. Marine subjects and botanical subjects (including fungi and algae) taken in the wild are suitable wildlife subjects, as are carcasses of extant species.*

The following images illustrate some of the principles in the Nature and Wildlife definitions.



It would be acceptable to crop this image to produce the image on the following page.

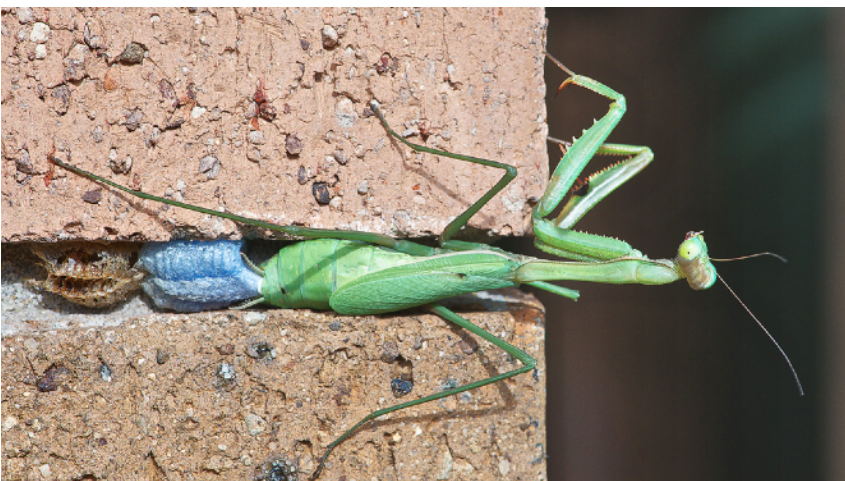




The images most likely to cause controversy are those containing 'human elements'.



This image does not meet the Nature definition because the human elements are not integral to the Nature story even though they are part of the story of how the macaque was interacting with humans.



This image would be permitted because the human elements are an integral part of the nature story (of how the mantis has adapted its behaviour to take advantage of the human structure).

It would not be acceptable to clone out the unwanted part of this image.



When considering how well your images tell a nature story you can use this framework as a guide:

**A single nature image can convey factual information about:**

- *the appearance of an animal* - it's size, shape, colours, characteristics, etc.
- *aspects of its life cycle and behaviour* - how it feeds, moves, reproduces, etc.
- *how it interacts with others of its kind* - mates, parents, offspring, group members, etc
- *how it interacts with other species* - predators, prey, competitors, those with a symbiotic relationship, etc.

The image can also place the animal in a context or habitat.

As you move down this list of dot points the nature story becomes stronger. For example:



The basic 'nature story' in this image is the description of the eagle and the fact that it is perched on a block of ice.



The next image provides the same level of descriptive information about the eagle but the nature story is much stronger.



The nature story becomes stronger still when the image shows the interaction between two different species:



For more information about Nature images, refer to [www.roykillen.photography](http://www.roykillen.photography).

## Monochrome

**PSA definition:** An image is considered to be Monochrome only if it gives the impression of having no color (i.e. contains only shades of gray which can include pure black and pure white) OR it gives the impression of being a grayscale image that has been toned in one color across the entire image. (For example by Sepia, red, gold, etc.)

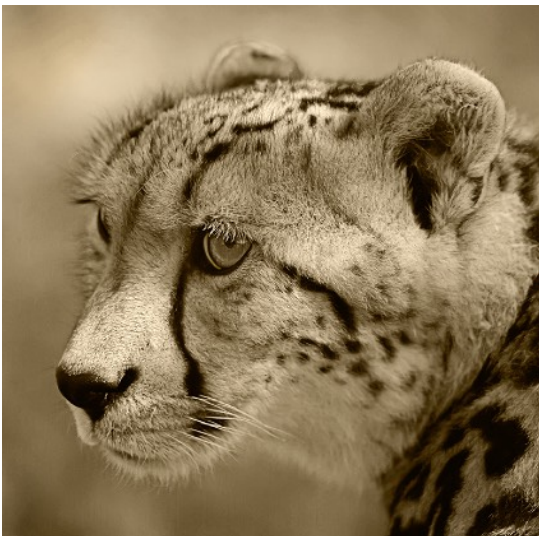
A grayscale or multi-colored image modified or giving the impression of having been modified by partial toning, multi toning or by the inclusion of spot coloring does not meet the definition of monochrome and shall be classified as a Color Work.

**FIAP definition:** *A black and white work fitting from the very dark grey (black) to the very clear grey (white) is a monochrome work with the various shades of grey.*

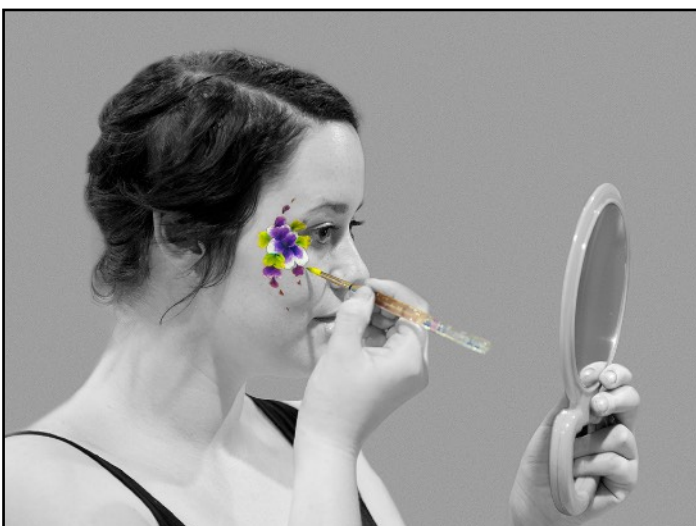
*A black and white work toned entirely in a single colour will remain a monochrome work able to stand in the black and white category; such a work can be reproduced in black and white in the catalogue of a salon under FIAP Patronage.*

*On the other hand a black and white work modified by a partial toning or by the addition of one colour becomes a colour work (polychrome) to stand in the colour category; such a work requires colour reproduction in the catalogue of a salon under FIAP Patronage.*

The basic requirement of each of these definitions is that a monochrome image can contain shades of only one colour, but that colour does not have to be grey.



This is acceptable as a monochrome image because it has the same tone across the whole image.



This is not acceptable as a monochrome image because it has some 'spot' colour.

## Photojournalism

**PSA definition:** Photojournalism entries shall consist of images with informative content and emotional impact, reflecting the human presence in our world. The journalistic (story-telling) value of the image shall receive priority over pictorial quality.

*In the interest of credibility, images that misrepresent the truth, such as those from events or activities specifically arranged for photography or of subjects directed or hired for photography, are not eligible.*

*Techniques that add, relocate, replace or remove any element of the original image, except by cropping, are not permitted. The only allowable modifications are removal of dust, scratches or digital noise, restoration of the existing appearance of the original scene, sharpening that is not obvious, and conversion to greyscale monochrome. Derivations, including infrared, are not eligible.*

Photojournalism has a sub-category called **Human Interest** which is defined as *images that depict a person or persons in an interactive, emotional, or unusual situation, excluding recreational or sports action.*

## Photo Travel

**PSA definition:** A Photo Travel image expresses the characteristic features or culture of a land as they are found naturally. There are no geographic limitations.

*Images from events or activities arranged specifically for photography, or of subjects directed or hired for photography are not permitted.*

*Close up pictures of people or objects must include features that provide information about the location.*

*Techniques that add, relocate, replace or remove any element of the original image, except by cropping, are not permitted. The only allowable adjustments are removal of dust or digital noise, restoration of the appearance of the original scene, and complete conversion to greyscale monochrome. Other derivations, including infrared, are not permitted. All allowed adjustments must appear natural.*

## Creative or Altered Reality

*FIAP and PSA do not define "Creative".*

**APS definition:** Creative or experimental photographs display a novel effect because of an unusual combination of objects and /or unusual viewpoint.

*Photographs in which the images have been modified during or after exposure by using an experimental technique are also eligible in Creative/Experimental sections.*

*The photograph must always have a basic photographic image.*

*Digital manipulation processes may be employed provided the original photograph was exposed by the entrant.*



# Selecting and Preparing Images for Competitions

The images you decide to enter in competitions are obviously a personal choice. However, to maximise your chances of success you need to consider at least the following principles.

## Shoot with a purpose

Sometimes you get lucky and opportunities to capture good images present themselves unexpectedly. However, you will have much more success if you plan ahead - think about the types of images you want to capture, put yourself in situations where there is suitable subject matter, and persist until you achieve your goal.

As a general rule, when people look at your images they should be able to identify what you photographed and why you photographed it. In other words, the image should communicate your intentions. Those intentions may be as simple as trying to capture the beauty of a flower, or as complex as trying to tell a subtle nature story. Try to get into the habit of thinking of each of your images as a tool for visual communication. Before taking each photograph, consider what you want the final image to communicate to viewers and use the capture techniques that will best enable you to make that communication clear.

## Get the technical stuff right in camera

It is pointless entering images in competitions if they have obvious technical faults that could easily have been avoided at the time of capture or when the image was edited. Judges will recognise these faults and probably give your image a low score.

It is easy to produce a poor image from a good camera, either because you made a mistake (such as selecting the wrong shutter speed) or because you did not understand how to use your camera in a way that would produce the technically best image that the camera was capable of under the circumstances.

You must understand the basics of photography and be able to control your camera to convert those basic principles into quality images. To do this you must know your camera well enough to be able to make most settings intuitively without needing to stop and think about what dial to rotate, what button to press, how to access the right part of the menu, and so on.

An essential step in producing the best quality images is to record RAW files rather than JPG files. There are three main reasons for this:

- RAW files contain the maximum amount of information that your camera is capable of recording. Important information is not discarded in the camera.
- RAW files allow you (rather than the camera) to control the way in which the RAW data is converted into an image for display or printing.
- RAW files give you have a better chance of minimising the effects of problems such as areas of over-exposure.



## Develop your image editing skills

There are many alternative programs for image editing and I am not going to try to convince you that any one is better than all the others. My basic advice is this:

- After considering several options (perhaps by downloading trial versions) select one that you think will satisfy your needs. The most useful programs are likely to be those that allow you to use non-destructive editing and 'layers'.
- Learn as much as you can about whatever software you are using so that you can edit your images without using 'automatic' adjustments. You will generally get better results if you are in control.
- Do not rely too heavily on presents and filters.
- In most cases, use subtle rather than drastic adjustments.

It is extremely important to avoid the following editing pitfalls:

- Do not use filters or textures that change your image without really improving it - different is not necessarily better!
- It is only in exceptional circumstances that obvious vignettes improve images. If your image needs an obvious vignette to focus attention on the main subject then it was probably not a great image to start with.
- Do not over-saturate colours.
- Do not use excessive contrast, either with a contrast adjustment of a 'clarity' adjustment.
- Do not over-sharpen, particularly to the point where the sharpening creates obvious halos.
- It is not advisable to put borders on your images, particularly decorative borders, as these can be distracting. In exceptional cases, you may wish to use a very thin white border to separate dark areas of an image from the dark background on which the images will be projected.

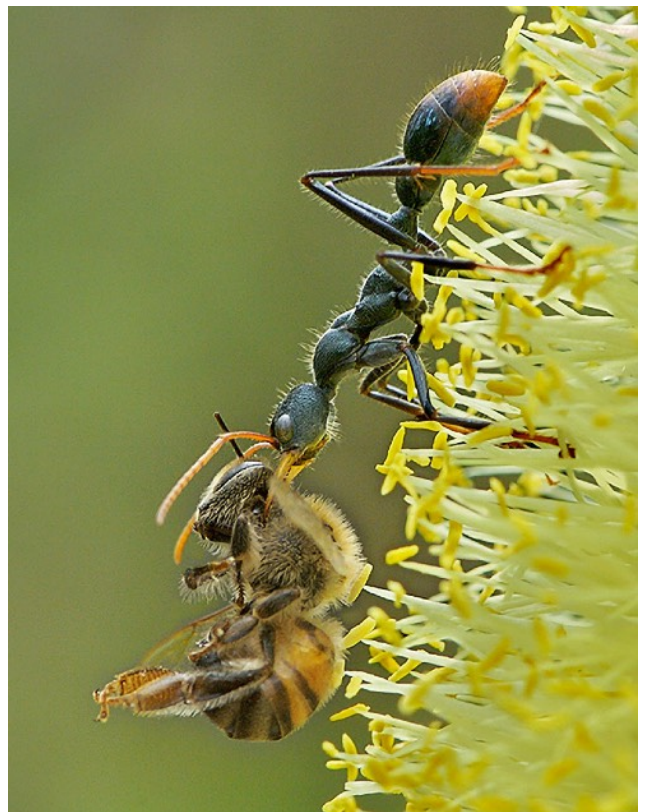
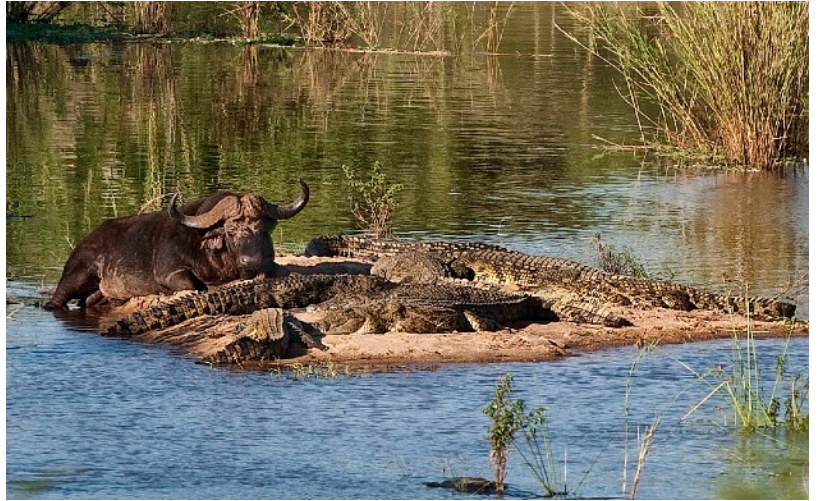
## Try to make your images unique

No matter what subject you are photographing, there is not much point in simply capturing an image that is essentially the same as that captured by thousands of other photographers. You might as well just buy a postcard!

Your aim should be to put your personal touch into every image. You can do this by capturing images of unique subjects or by photographing common subjects in unique ways. The difference might be as simple as photographing a common scene under unusual lighting conditions or from an unusual vantage point.

If you are a wildlife photographer you should aim to capture unique moments and these come about most often when your subject is behaving in an unusual way or interacting with other creatures in an unusual way. This is obviously a serious challenge but some of the possibilities are illustrated in the following examples.







## Evaluate your own images objectively

It is often easier to see the good and bad aspects of images that are not your own. When looking at your own images, two things can get in the way of objective evaluations. First, you may have some emotional attachment or special interest in the subject, especially if it is a grandchild or a pet, or you took the image in an unusual situation. Second, when you look at one of your own images you can probably remember the circumstances in which you took it - where you were, how you were feeling, why you took the photograph, how difficult the image was to capture, and so on. It is almost as though a video is replayed in your mind. But remember, judges see only the single image.

Your emotional attachment to the subject matter, or your recollections of the circumstances in which you took the image can easily cloud your judgement and lead you to focus on the good aspects of the image and ignore its faults.

Part of your objective evaluation should be to ask yourself what audience the image is likely to appeal to. If your image is likely to appeal only to dog lovers or train spotters or ruby league fans or some other rather narrow audience then maybe it will not do well in competitions.

If you are entering images of people, particularly children, keep in mind that 'family snapshot' style images tend not to do well. Images need to appeal to a wider audience than just the family members who know the subject.

One particular barrier to objective evaluations by older photographers is what I call the 'grandparent trap'. Most grandparents think that almost any photograph of one of their grandchildren is fantastic! The challenge for these photographers is to capture images of their beautiful/wonderful/clever grandchildren that will have general appeal to people who do not know the children. This usually requires more than a straightforward portrait, as illustrated in the following examples.



Definitely cute and beautiful, but this image has not gained any acceptances in competitions.

However, the following image shows the same wonderful grandchild in a different situation and it has gained five awards in international competitions.



## How are Competitions Judged?

For each section of the exhibition there are usually three judges. Each judge independently scores each image (often on a scale of 1 to 5) and a total score is allocated to the image.

In exhibitions approved by the Australian Photographic Society, the judges use the following guide when scoring each image:

- 5 – Entry of excellent quality and could be considered for an award.
- 4 – Good entry with minimum faults. Could be included in the exhibition.
- 3 – Reasonable entry of good average quality; a potential acceptance.
- 2 – Reasonable entry but inadequate for exhibition standards.
- 1 – Obviously faulty technique or entered in the wrong section.

A similar scale is generally used in other exhibitions.

After all entries in a section have been judged, the highest scoring images are reviewed by the judges. Either by re-scoring these images or through discussion, or both, the judges determine which images will receive the awards.

In each section an “Acceptance Score” is set to determine what percentage of images in that section will be accepted. For most exhibitions this score is set to give acceptances for between 20% and 35% of the images in each section. [FIAP requires the maximum acceptance rate to be 25% in salons with their patronage. PSA sets the maximum acceptant rate at 35%.] Images that are not accepted are said to be ‘rejected’ or ‘not accepted’.

Entrants in National and International exhibitions do not usually get any feedback to indicate why their images received particular scores or why they were not accepted. This would be an extremely time-consuming thing for an exhibition to do. However,



each exhibition must provide each entrant with a report card that shows which of the entrant's images were accepted or awarded and what scores they were given (if scores were allocated during judging). The Acceptance Score for the individual sections is shown on the report card.

## **Consider how your images will be judged**

For judging, prints are normally placed on a light stand and viewed for judging at a distance of 2-3 metres. The prints will be examined much more closely when the awards are being determined.

Digital images are usually projected onto a screen that is at least 2m square and they are viewed at a distance of 3-4 metres. However, sometimes they will be judged on computer monitors or TV screens at a closer viewing distance. You need to keep this in mind when deciding whether an image might be best entered as a print or as a digital image. Projected images can have more impact (because of their size) but they can also make it easier for judges to detect faults (such as over-sharpening).

## **Don't bore the judges**

All judges in National and International competitions will be experienced photographers and they are likely to have judged many previous competitions. They are certain to have seen many images of what could be called clichéd subjects - things that hundreds of people have photographed and entered in competitions. These subjects include: flowers (and bees on flowers), pets, sunsets, other people taking photos, old things, spiders, pretty birds sitting on a stick, and other people's artworks (such as statues and graffiti). If you are entering an image of a commonly seen subject (such as a sunset or the Sydney Harbour Bridge) keep in mind that it will need to be outstanding to score well.

I am not suggesting that you should never enter such images in competitions. But I strongly believe that such images need to be outstanding in order to score well.

You also need to be very wary about entering images that feature over-used or quirky capture techniques such as deliberately tilting the horizon, zooming during exposure, or using a slow shutter speed to produce blur.

For images to gain acceptances and awards they must demonstrate to the judges that you have the technical skills necessary to capture and process your images. Your image should also demonstrate that you can photograph things that are of interest to others and that you can create images that communicate your intentions clearly. If judges think your image is boring or they have difficulty working out what you want the image to communicate it may get a low score.

## **Enter a variety of images**

The same image cannot be entered in more than one section of an exhibition (e.g. in the Colour section and also the Nature section). You are permitted to enter similar images in a section, but this is *not* recommended. It is better to enter a variety of images. Although your entries in each section are not judged sequentially (they are spread across the four rounds of judging) it is very noticeable when similar entries appear. If judges do not particularly like



your first image they are unlikely to like a second or third one that is very similar. If you have a collection of similar images that are all worth entering it is better to enter them in different competitions. For example, both the following images have gained medals in International competitions but it would be pointless entering them in the same competition.



If you are a member of a photography club or other group and you intend to submit images from a group outing try to find out if other members of the group are planning to submit similar images. When several entrants submit images that are very similar in style and



content the first image judged may score highly but those that follow will probably be at a disadvantage.

## Catalogues

Each exhibition approved by FIAP or PSA is required to produce a catalogue that contains a list of all the accepted images, all the award winning images, the approval number of the exhibition, contact details for the exhibition organisers, and certain other information. Most catalogues will also include reproductions of the award winning images and some of the accepted images.

The catalogue may be available in print form, or on a CD or USB drive, or as a PDF file downloadable from the exhibition website. You may have to pay an additional fee to obtain a print version of the catalogue.

Make sure you keep a copy of the catalogue (in some form) for each exhibition that you enter - you will need it if you decide to apply for photographic distinctions.

It is always worth studying the catalogues of exhibitions that you enter so that you can get some idea of what the judges were looking for and why your images did or did not do well.

You can download an example of a catalogue by visiting the Maitland International Salon of Photography site at <http://maitlandsalon.myphotoclub.com.au>

## Photographic Distinctions

Photographic distinctions (sometimes called honours) are awarded by all the major photographic organisations such as FIAP, PSA and GPU. The majority of these distinctions are based on success in International competitions. Some national photographic organisations, such as the Australian Photographic Society, have distinction systems that take into account success in National as well as International exhibitions.

When you achieve photographic distinctions you are permitted to put letters after your name to indicate the distinction (for example, GMPSA to indicate Grand Master of the Photographic Society of America).

If you are entering national and international exhibitions with a goal of achieving photographic distinctions it is important to make an early decision about the organisation to which you will apply for honours. This choice will influence which salons you enter, what records you need to keep, whether you enter digital or print salons, whether or not you must obtain some awards, how many acceptances you need to gain, and the processes that you must follow to apply for honours.

If you are a member of the Australian Photographic Society, the obvious first choice is to consider APS honours - LAPS, AAPS, FAPS, MAPS, GMAPS and APSEM. If you take this path, you can skip LAPS and make AAPS your first application, but you cannot skip any of the other awards – they have to be obtained sequentially. Details of the requirements for each award can be downloaded from the APS website and it is important to make sure that you are following the latest rules as some of the details

change from time to time. For LAPS, AAPS and APSEM you can count some acceptances in APS approved national exhibitions, for the other honours you can count only acceptances in international exhibitions approved by APS, FIAP, PSA, RPS, PSNZ or GPU.

In addition to the APS honours, many APS members choose to apply for distinctions from the International Federation of Photographic Arts (FIAP) - AFIAP, EFIAP, EFIAP levels and MFIAP. You can download the requirements for each award from the APS website or from the FIAP website. APS members do not need to be an individual member of FIAP to apply for FIAP distinctions. For FIAP distinctions you can count only acceptances obtained in FIAP approved international exhibitions. Distinctions from FIAP have to be obtained sequentially, except that you can apply for MFIAP without having obtained any of the EFIAP levels (bronze, silver or gold).

Some APS members choose to follow the Photographic Society of America (PSA) distinctions path in addition to, or as an alternative to, gaining APS honours or FIAP distinctions. The PSA photographic honours are called ROPA – Recognition of Photographic Achievement awards – QPSA, PPSA, EPSA, MPSA, MPSA2, GMPSA and GMPSA levels. You have to be a member of PSA to apply for PSA awards. For ROPA applications you can count only acceptances achieved in PSA approved International exhibitions but these days many international exhibitions have both FIAP and PSA recognition.

The PSA system is different from the APS and FIAP systems in a number of important ways and these differences are worth considering before you decide which honours path to take. I will briefly describe several of the differences that I consider to be the most significant.

A critical difference (that often confuses people who are applying for PSA distinctions after having obtained APS honours or FIAP distinctions) is the way in which the exhibition acceptances you are claiming are checked for legitimacy and accuracy. For both APS and FIAP honours the process of having your acceptances verified and your honours application processed are combined into a single application. You cannot submit this application until you have proof that you have obtained the required number of exhibition acceptances for the particular honour. This proof comes from entries in exhibition catalogues. You prepare an honours application (on the approved form) and submit it to an APS Verifying Officer (VO). The VO checks the details on the application against the relevant exhibition catalogues. If all the claimed acceptances can be verified and you meet other conditions (see later details) your application is passed on the relevant person on the APS Honours Subcommittee or to FIAP for final approval. A list of the Verifying Officers and their contact details is available on the APS website. All applications have to be submitted in specific formats and these are available on the APS website.

In the PSA system, the verification process and the application for distinctions are separated. Verification takes place through what PSA calls the Star Ratings system. Applications for Stars are checked by a Star Ratings Director using the PSA's electronic database of exhibition acceptances – you do not have to supply the catalogue evidence. You can apply for Star 1 with just 18 acceptances from 6 images. You then need a total of 36 acceptances from 12 images to qualify for Star 2, and so on up to 288 acceptances



for Star 5. Once you have accumulated sufficient verified acceptances you can apply online for the appropriate ROPA award.

The second important difference is that in the APS and FIAP systems there is no distinction between acceptances gained in different sections of an exhibition (for example, Colour and Nature sections or Print and Digital sections). However, in the PSA system the verification process through the Star Ratings is done through different Divisions of PSA (Colour Projected Images, Monochrome Projected Images, Nature, Photojournalism, Photo Travel, Pictorial Prints and 3D). You cannot mix acceptances across Divisions for Star applications. For example, when applying for Star 1 in the Nature Division all your acceptances must have been obtained in PSA recognised Nature sections of exhibitions. However, once acceptances are verified through Star Ratings they can be combined to give the required number of acceptances for ROPA applications. For example, Star 4 in Nature plus Star 4 in Photojournalism would give the required 288 acceptances for a PPSA application.

The third important difference is in the timing of distinction applications. Both APS honours and FIAP distinction applications have to be submitted by a specific date each year (advertised on the APS website). If your application (say for AAPS) is successful, you cannot submit your application for the next level of honours (FAPS in this case) until the following year. The same applies for FIAP distinction applications - you can apply for only one distinction each year and you have to achieve each distinction before applying for the next one - AFIAP, then EFIAP, then EFIAP/b, etc. For PSA, Star Ratings applications can be made at any time. When sufficient acceptances have been achieved the relevant ROPA application can be made online at any time. There is no mandated waiting period between achieving one ROPA distinction and the next. In fact, if you have sufficient acceptances you can 'skip' lower level distinctions and apply for higher level distinctions. You could, for example, apply for EPSA without having been granted QPSA or PPSA.

A fourth difference is that for APS honours above LAPS you must have received a specified number of awards (medals, merits, honourable mentions, etc.) in approved exhibitions in a specified number of countries. You must also have received a specified number of acceptances in Australia, and there are limits on how many acceptances can be claimed from countries other than Australia. FIAP requires acceptances to have been obtained from a specified number of exhibitions in a specified number of countries. For EFIAP and above a specified number of awards must be obtained. This aspect of the PSA ROPA system is much simpler. There are no special requirements on the number of countries in which acceptances must be obtained; there are no limits on the number of acceptances from any country or exhibition or circuit; and there are no requirements for achieving awards.

Some of the FIAP distinctions require a specified number of acceptances for prints to be included in the application. There is no special requirement for prints in the APS honours system or for PSA distinctions (unless you are applying for Stars in the Pictorial Print Division).

There is a significant difference in the number of acceptances required for distinctions in the APS, FIAP and PSA systems. These differences are summarised in the table at the end of this paper. You will note that in some cases acceptances used for one distinction can be included in the application for the next distinction. For example, the 200

acceptances required for FAPS can include the 100 acceptances used for AAPS. However, in other cases the acceptances required for an award have to be new (obtained after qualifying for the previous award). This is the case, for example, when applying for MAPS.

Each of the systems (APS, FIAP and PSA) has different rules about how many acceptances can be claimed for a particular image. In the APS system this does not become an issue until you are applying for APSEM. At that point you have to be using acceptances gained from images that were not used in any previous APS honours application – all the images you used for honours up to and including GMAPS are “retired”. In the PSA system, images have to be “retired” once they have been used in a Star 5 application and thereafter only three acceptances can be claimed for each new title until you get to the Diamond Ratings and then you must have six acceptances for each title. In the FIAP system images (or ‘works’ as FIAP calls them) do not have to be retired at any point. However, FIAP does have rules about needing new acceptances and new awards for various distinctions.

Despite the differences outlined above, there are some common grounds in the FIAP and PSA distinction systems. The most important one is that all the systems are based on acceptances in exhibitions approved or recognised by the organisation that will eventually issue the honours. Acceptances in other exhibitions are not considered. That is why it is important to make an early decision about the organisation from which you will eventually apply for distinctions.

There are other organisations that award photographic honours; for example, the Royal Photographic Society (RPS) has a system of distinctions based on the submission of a portfolio of images. The PSA has a similar portfolio distinction system. The Global Photographic Union (GPU) offers three different systems of awards, one of which is based on exhibition acceptances and awards. Details of these distinction systems are available on the relevant websites.

I welcome feedback on any aspect of this paper.

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## Basic Requirements for Honours

(Note: Additional requirements apply in some cases and the rules change from time to time – refer to the relevant websites for details.)

### AUSTRALIAN PHOTOGRAPHIC SOCIETY (APS)

LAPS (Licentiate)	50 acceptances	No awards needed
AAPS (Associate)	100 acceptances	5 titles with awards
FAPS (Fellow)	200 acceptances	10 titles with awards
MAPS (Master)	300 new acceptances	5 new awards from 5 titles
GMAPS (Grand Master)	300 new acceptances	5 new awards from 5 titles
APSEM (Exhibitor's Medal)	600 acceptances from new titles	15 titles with awards
APSEM/b (APSEM Bronze)	100 acceptances from new titles	40 titles with awards
APSEM/s (APSEM Silver)	100 acceptances from new titles	50 titles with awards
APSEM/g (APSEM Gold)	100 acceptances from new titles	60 titles with awards

You can skip the LAPS and apply for AAPS as your first distinction. Thereafter, you must achieve each distinction before progressing to the next distinction.

### INTERNATIONAL FEDERATION OF PHOTOGRAPHIC ARTS (FIAP)

AFIAP (Artist)	40 acceptances	4 prints - No awards needed
EFIAP (Excellence)	250 acceptances	12 prints - 2 awards
EFIAP/b (Excellence Bronze)	200 new acceptances	4 new awards
EFIAP/s (Excellence Silver)	100 new acceptances	5 new awards
EFIAP/g (Excellence Gold)	200 new acceptances	6 new awards
EFIAP/p (Excellence Platinum)	200 new acceptances	7 new awards
EFIAP/d1 (Excellence Diamond 1)		50 awards after EFIAP/p
EFIAP/d2 (Excellence Diamond 2)		100 awards after EFIAP/p
EFIAP/d3 (Excellence Diamond 3)		200 awards after EFIAP/p
MFIAP (Master)	Print folio submission after achieving EFIAP.	

You must achieve each distinction before progressing to the next distinction. There is a one-year waiting period between each application.



## PHOTOGRAPHIC SOCIETY OF AMERICA (PSA) DISTINCTIONS

QPSA (Qualify)	54 acceptances	No awards needed
PPSA (Proficiency)	288 acceptances	No awards needed
EPSA (Excellence)	700 acceptances	No awards needed
MPSA (Master)	1500 acceptances	No awards needed
MPSA2 (Master 2)	2250 acceptances	No awards needed
GMPSA (Grand Master)	3000 acceptances	No awards needed
GMPSA (Grand Master Bronze)	5000 acceptances	No awards needed
GMPSA (Grand Master) Silver	7000 acceptances	No awards needed
GMPSA (Grand Master Gold)	9000 acceptances	No awards needed
GMPSA (Grand Master Platinum)	11000 acceptances	No awards needed

Providing you have sufficient acceptances verified through the Star Ratings system you can apply directly for any distinction without having been granted the lower level distinctions. There is no waiting period between distinction applications.