

The Art of Critique

The Authors Responsibility

When putting up an image for other members to make comments, the author is accepting that he or she would like something more than “that's nice”, or “well done” or even that ultimate put down “nice pic”.

The author should understand that a critique is that viewers personal opinion. You want opinion so you must accept that you will like some viewpoints and not others. After all some will like the image, while others will object to certain technical or aesthetic qualities of the image.

The author should not debate the critique. *The viewer offering the critique has taken the time and trouble to share their thoughts with you. After all you want something more than just “nice pic” or no critique at all. You must want constructive comment or why post the image in the first place.*

The nature of the process almost guarantees that there will be comments made about the image that the author (or even other viewers) will whole-heartedly disagree with. However, it is appropriate to ask a viewer to clarify his or her comments if those comments are not entirely clear, providing the viewer is asked for their additional time and effort in a congenial, non-argumentative manner. In all cases, critique should not be taken personally, but rather at face value, nor should the critique of a photographic image be misconstrued as an indictment of one's lack of ability.

When an image is posted for critique, the author who posts it should be prepared to take all comments, both good and bad, and to do so in a respectful and appreciative manner.

To help the viewer, state what your intended goal or purpose was for taking the image (portrait, landscape, artistic/digital rendering of subject, record, etc.). It's also helpful if you briefly describe what it is that *you* like and/or dislike about the image. By providing this information up front, it gives those who are writing the critiques some indication of any specific feedback you're looking for. In essence, writing your own "mini-critique" (just a few lines) as part of the original post hopefully gets the thread off on the right foot.

Writing an Effective Critique

While the person who posts the image bears the brunt of the responsibility for extracting the "pearls of photographic wisdom" from what should be a learning opportunity, the person writing the critique should do so in a manner that is not offensive or dismissive and to “help” the author in as polite and concise a manner as possible.

Writing an effective critique is truly an art unto itself.

- Start off by taking some time to *study* the image and form an opinion of what appeals to you about the image, both technically and aesthetically.
- After forming an overall impression of the image, what are the *technical qualities* of the image (lighting, colour, contrast, composition, depth-of-field, background, etc.) that appeal or don't appeal to you. Do the same with the *aesthetic qualities* of the image by describing any emotional response the image imparts. It's not uncommon to find images that are technically deficient, but yet impart a strong emotional response from the viewer, and *visa versa*. Feedback to the photographer on both the technical and aesthetic aspects of an image is useful.
- Try and find the words and phrases that most effectively convey your thoughts about these specific qualities.

- Begin the written critique with what you *like* about the image. It is a mistaken belief that a photo critique should only point out what is wrong. In fact, much can be gained by pointing out what it is that appeals to the viewer.
- Out of the image qualities that you feel need improvement, pick those qualities that you can most effectively communicate *why* you think they need improvement, and *how* an improvement of those qualities would help improve the image.
- Whenever possible, offer suggestions based on first-hand experience on how to improve those image qualities that you found lacking.
- We know through competitions and exhibitions that the technical qualities of a lot of our members work is very high. In this case, simply commenting on the aesthetic qualities and/or the image's emotional impact makes for a worthy response.
- As a viewer offering your own critique, *do not* argue with the opinion of another viewer's comments. Instead, offer your own point-of-view on the issue in an objective manner.
- While much has been made of the "wow" responses that offer nothing more than superlatives, there is no reason not to post such comments! Sometimes "wow" is all that comes to mind! A little "ego stroking" is not such a bad thing either.
- Learning to write an effective critique is a good way to learn as well. Study those critiques that you feel are most effective, and use them as an example to follow when writing your own. Additionally, in a community-like atmosphere such as our forum, those who post critiques are more likely to receive them on their own images.
- Simply studying the images on display, and reading the comments posted can be a learning experience in itself.

Hopefully by following these simple guidelines, image critique can be an effective learning tool for all involved. If conducted with care, objectivity and sensibility, hopefully it can allow us to improve and become better photographers. A common misconception is that we need to offer some "expert" advice to justify our comments, but nothing could be further from the truth. Even if we do not feel qualified to offer advice on how to technically improve a photo, simply stating why we like or dislike a photo is reason enough to post a critique.

Don't forget, we post our photos in this forum to get opinions on them! The more we comment on the work of others, the more they will begin to comment on yours.