

CRITIQUING: THE WHY *and* HOW

The first question you have to consider is this: "Why are you doing a photo critique?" After all, by the time you're doing the critique, the photo has been taken. It might be hours, days, even months or years since the photo was taken. Perhaps it was taken abroad, or in a situation where the photographer will never be again. In other words, it is important to remember that a photo critique isn't about a single photo: it's about how a photographer can develop as a photographer, both technically and artistically.

If you are on the receiving end of a critique... remember a couple things:

1. you placed your photo out there, so be prepared for **anything** !!!
2. you need to be quiet and listen carefully; let the photograph speak for it self (remember! A picture is worth a thousand words!)
3. your critiquer may have the best of intentions, but may not be able to put it in the best of terms, but wait till the very end, after everyone is heard from, before asking for an explanation, as it may become apparent by what others are saying
4. asking a specific question, such as "How can I improve the lighting?" and explaining what lighting you used will get you the precise answers. If you can, have pertinent information: camera and lens used, camera settings, time of day, perhaps what you were trying to achieve.
3. take all critiques, good/bad/thorough/terse, and learn from them.

In conclusion, saying "I love this picture! What do you think?" will not get you the help you need to improve. Better to put those in the "Share Your Shots" area.

How to critique a photograph



How to critique a photograph

A critique is a written or verbal evaluation of a photograph based on careful observation. It does not do to just say "I like the photograph". The critique must mention what you like and why you like it. Having yourself or a second party evaluate your photographs is an important and constructive step in developing your craft. A proper critique for a photograph usually focuses on 5 main aspects of the photo: content, background, technical, craftsmanship, and finally your general feelings on the photo.

Step 1



First look at the composition or content in the photograph. What is the center of interest in the picture? How does your eye move through the photograph and where does it rest? What sense of order does the photograph have? Where did the photographer place the center of interest in the frame? Did they use the rule of thirds? If there is more than one focus point does that add to the photograph's interest or distract from it? What other eye control elements are in the photo (leading lines, contrast, diagonal lines, etc). Look at the angle. Did the photographer get close enough to the subject to include only what is important, or are there wasted parts of the picture with elements that do not add to the message of the photo?

Step 2



Next, observe the background in the photograph. Is there a good balance between the foreground and the background? Would the photo have worked better with a different prop / model? How did the photographer represent the background in regards to focus and depth of field? How does the background add or distract from the message of the photo?

Step 3



Now take a look at the technical camera work involved in the photograph. Is the subject sharp and clearly in focus or blurry? What is the effect of the clarity or blurriness? Are parts of the photo that need to be clearly focused out of focus? Study the lighting. Is the photo exposed properly? Are details missing because of over or under exposure? A properly exposed photo will have some texture in the shadows. Is there detail visible in the brightest parts of the print? If there are areas of the print that lack detail is that good or bad?

Step 4

Good points

This is where you **point out what you like** about the photograph, **and why**. The why bit is most important: If you can't tell why you like X, Y, or Z, there's no point in mentioning it. "I like the sky" is useless. "I like the colour of the sky" is better. "I like the deep blue colour of the sky because it contrasts nicely with the yellows and reds in the photo" is perfect. Put some thought into this. Finally, offer your own personal feelings on the photograph. What do you like about the selected subject? Is it an emotional shot, a story, a statement, a humorous photo? What would you do differently if you had the chance to take the same photograph?

Points worth improving

This point is saved for last, because you've made the photographer more confident about their photograph by now. It is still important to remember that the photo has been taken, and that this photo can't really be changed anymore. As such, there's no point in slating people for their photographs. **Tell them one or two specific points that could be improved on this particular photo** ('clean up dust' and 'turn into black and white' are useful suggestions, as they can be done in the darkroom/printing), **and perhaps one or two points that you would have done differently, if you were the one taking the photograph** (using specific filters to help with difficult situations or switching to a different lens because of distracting elements, etc.)

Step 5

When critiquing a "final" photograph or a matted / framed photo



Then look at the craftsmanship the photographer exhibits. Does the physical photo have spots, stains, or scratches? Does the photograph look like care was made in making it or is there evidence that the person just rushed it? Is it nicely displayed in the frame or is it just slapped in?