



EASTERN SUBURBS PHOTOGRAPHIC SOCIETY Inc.

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A New Member's Guide to Competitions

Including

Tips on How to Take a Competitive Photograph.

And a short glossary of Photographic Terms

When you walk in the door to a monthly meeting of ESPS, the room is generally a hive of activity with photographs being placed on display around the front of the hall. Members and visitors bustle around either chatting or examining the pictures on display until eventually the meeting is called to order and the evening's activities commence.

This can all be quite intimidating to the newcomer, particularly given the ensuing judging process, the commentary and the awarding of certificates. What does it all mean? Is this all there is? This article is designed to fill in the blanks and explain what our competitions are all about and how they can make you a better photographer.

Why the emphasis on competitions?

There is only so much one can learn in the abstract. Photography is a skill which requires both technical knowledge and artistic ability. There are thousands of articles and internet sites which will teach you the theories of photography, but putting those theories into practice and producing quality images is often something else entirely.

As with any skill, practice is the key to success – but a major part of practice is having both knowledge and incentive. Competitions provide the necessary incentive to produce not merely good images, but excellent images. They also provide the knowledge of what factors go into creating a good photograph. Once you start to enter competitions, you will be able to see how well your own talents compare to others, and to learn just what it is that needs to be improved in your own photography.

You will also be able to assess what others perceive as a “good” photograph and how that fits with your own perceptions. Competitions provide that extra impetus to try just a little harder, to push you past the point of simply competing with yourself to competing with others. This analysis of competition images will generally broaden your perspectives when you are taking subsequent images of your own.

ESPS follows the commonly adopted practice of conducting alternating competitions throughout the year. Some competitions are restricted to a set subject or “theme” and others will be “open” competitions where you may submit photos of any subject you wish. There is a certain latitude surrounding a set subject, as topics are open to interpretation. Nevertheless, care should be taken to ensure that any photograph you submit is clearly within the constraints of the set subject. If the competition steward considers an image to fall outside the scope of the set subject he has the power to reject an image before it is sent to the judge. There are also a couple of very specific topics during the year, one of which is a “Nature” topic and the other is for photographs related to handcrafts. Full details of the competitions are provided in the formal set of competition rules provided to each member.

Images are judged without identifying the photographer and only the winners' names are announced. As judging progresses, you need not feel vulnerable or exposed as the judges are not themselves aware of who has taken which image. Judges usually try to balance any negative comments with some positive observations, and their comments will generally provide you with some expert, unbiased and constructive comments which you can use to improve your work generally. Images are not scored in internal competitions although they may be in external, inter-club competitions. As we do not have a points system it means that there is no ranking for those who are unsuccessful. Winning images are awarded a certificate ranging from First to Third place plus "Highly Commended" in some circumstances.

Of course competing is neither compulsory nor expected. It may well be that you are not inclined towards competitions. Perhaps you are not yet confident enough of your own work, or perhaps you simply do not like competing with others. In that case, competitions simply enable you to observe the works of others and to learn by listening to what judges have to say about individual images. Whatever your level of participation, you should always remember that "one man's meat is another's poison". The fact that one judge doesn't consider a picture to be a winner doesn't mean that the next judge will view it the same way. An unplaced image can always be re-submitted in another later competition.

Keep your eye on the ball not the prize.

Competitions at this level are aimed at developing your skills rather than achieving fame and fortune. There are few real prizes involved – except at the end of the year when trophies are awarded to a select few. The real prize is learning just what makes a good photograph, discovering what elements go into a successful competition image, and learning to replicate those elements in your own images. The term "image" is used deliberately here because in the strict sense of the word "photographs" do not always win photographic competitions. Today's winning images are often a combination of good photographic skills and subsequent (usually computer-based) manipulation (post processing) of those photographs. This "post processing" can be achieved using either traditional darkroom techniques or via a computer. It should be remembered that the competition rules state that your final image must show evidence of an underlying photographic image.

A well worn debate about the validity of computer manipulation continues to pervade the photographic world, but the reality is that photographic images have always been manipulated to some extent. This used to be a talent available only to those with dark rooms with vats full of chemicals and expensive enlargers. Today, however, an average computer running free software can allow everyone the opportunity to achieve the same thing, except much more easily. Photography has evolved and is cheaper, more accessible and possibly a lot more fun!

Once you have decided to become a participant in our competitions there are a few key points that need to be understood before you take that first step into the competitive arena.

The Judges.

Firstly, remember that the judge's decision is never final in deciding which image is the "best". All a judge can decide is which image best satisfies his or her personal requirements at a given point in time. All they can do is to make what can sometimes seem a fairly arbitrary decision. Sure, that might make someone the "winner" at that point in time, and by default this means that most other entrants will be the "losers". Judges apply some basic "rules" and principles in their assessment of images and these are discussed later. Aspects such as composition, technical quality and visual appeal are central to their thinking.

However, in the overall scheme of things most judges agree that their decisions are ultimately subjective ones, and that another judge may well form entirely different opinions. Unlike other forms of competition, “winners” and “losers” are not necessarily those who have created the definitive “best” image. Art (and photography is a form of art) is not something which can be judged empirically and definitively – art is very much a subjective pastime and both photography and art are perhaps best summed up by the saying “Beauty is in the eye of the beholder”.

The first principle to understand therefore is that judges are only human. Their views are not the only valid views and there will always be more losers than winners. Many excellent images do not win awards. These are the facts of competitive photography.

Our camera club, in common with other camera clubs, draws its judges from a pool of judges who are members of the Victorian Association of Photographic Societies (VAPS). These members are all experienced and sometimes professional photographers who have a wealth of experience in the field. Often they will conclude their judging with a display of their work or a few comments of interest about photography generally. Each will have their own idiosyncrasies and photographic biases which will contribute to their overall judgment of entries.

So you’d still like to be a winner.

Competing against others produces far better photographs than competing against yourself, and the competitive process tends to bring out a more disciplined and efficient result than working in a vacuum. Despite the unavoidable fact that there are more “losers” than “winners” it is equally true that you can increase your chances of winning if you understand the basic characteristics of award-winning images. This is the true value of competitive photography, an understanding of what common elements those winning photographs are likely to share. There are few photographers whose images do not improve once they have entered a few competitions and come to terms with the core elements of winning photographs.

This article attempts to explain some of those elements, and how to include some of them in your quest to produce better images. At the end of the day the goal is the creation of better images, more often, more easily. If you win a few awards along the way then that’s a bonus. If you make consistently better images than you did before then you are a winner irrespective of how many actual competitions you win.

Whoa! I’ve only just bought my camera ~ how do I learn to use it?

As mentioned in the opening paragraph, your first night at a club meeting can be intimidating, particularly if you are a novice photographer. The thought of entering competitions might be the furthest thing from your mind. Perhaps you think you’re way out of your depth, and to an extent you may be ~ but we are happy to throw you a life-line and get you up swimming along with the crowd. Photography is like that, and if you are keen you can learn to take photos as well as the next person.

Let’s assume that you know nothing about photography, and you’re looking for a starting point. Ask someone on the Committee to point you in the right direction and they’ll sit you down with someone who knows a bit more than you do to run through the basics. It may not be on that particular night because competition nights are generally too frenetic to allow time for much one-to-one conversation. However, once you get to meet a contact or two you can begin to understand more and to learn from them and from the comments of the judges. Make sure that you get hold of a good book or borrow one from our library and start familiarising yourself with the terminology. (At the end of this article there’s also a selection

of photographic terms explained for your convenience.) Once you understand the language then you can start to put it all together.

The first step is to get to know your camera and its controls. The fact that you might not know what to do with them doesn't matter at this stage. Familiarise yourself with the camera generally so that you are comfortable turning it on and off, loading its image card, changing batteries and pressing the shutter. Read the manual, play with the controls; experiment and ask questions. There will be questions, but someone is bound to know the answers or point you towards someone else who knows.

The best thing about the "digital camera age" is the fact that taking photographs is free, and you only need to print those that you are happy with. The most important tip anyone can give you is to take hundreds of photos, and to work your way through the examples in the camera's manual so that you understand the theory at least. Digital photography is one hobby where practice is cheap and mistakes cost nothing. Keep taking pictures until you are familiar enough with the controls that you know where they are and what they're supposed to do even if you don't fully understand those purposes. If you've transferred from film to digital you will need to adopt a whole new mindset when it comes to pressing the shutter. No longer need you worry about the cost of each photograph; you can take hundreds at no cost whatsoever and delete the lot if you feel like it! The key to learning how to use a digital camera is practice, practice, practice and to learn what works and what doesn't.

Once you have graduated to the point where you can press the shutter, see an image on the LCD screen and take a basic picture without cutting off the subject's legs or head, then you'll be ready to learn from our judges the elements which could turn your basic shots into masterpieces. Applying the information and advice contained in the following paragraphs will go a long way to improving your picture taking, and placing you firmly on the road to better photography.

One of the useful aids to learning digital photography is the fact that each time you press the shutter release your camera records not only the picture but also all sorts of information about that picture. You don't have to remember what settings you used for any given photo – the camera remembers it for you. The camera records what is known as EXIF data and this includes such things as the time and date you took the picture, as well as the camera settings, shutter speed etc. This means that as you become more familiar with your camera, and you start to understand the various settings, you can go back and see just which settings produced the results you were after.

WHAT ARE THE KEY ELEMENTS AND CHARACTERISTICS OF A GOOD PHOTOGRAPH ?

There are many elements to a good photograph, but these are some of the main ones and reflect the comments made by judges at our meetings. Before we explore these elements there is one overriding principle you should bear in mind

Image making is not about taking the photograph!! It's about creating an image that creates a strong emotive response in the viewer. There is no point in creating a technically sound image unless the final image generates a strong reaction in the mind of your audience. As with all hobbies and crafts you will not become a “master craftsman” overnight and you are unlikely to ever stop learning. Think of photography as an endless road with places of great interest to look at all along the way. There is always room for growth, learning and enjoyment in photography! Let us now examine those aspects of an image which combine to produce a quality image.

Appeal.

When you walk around looking at images on display, think about what it is that draws you to a particular image. Is it the colours? Is it the subject? Is it the manner in which it is presented? Looking at rows of images you will inevitably find that some of them will leap out at you demanding more individual attention, and it is this individuality that you must firstly try to analyse and resolve. There is often no single facet of an image which draws you to it, because images are frequently multi-faceted. There are however certain fundamental elements which combine to create this drawing power in the eyes of the observer.

Colour.

This can be either the striking presence of colour or the absence of colour. A stark image can be as mesmerising as one filled with colour. What is essential is something within the total structure which gives the images substance, presence and allure. One mechanism for predicting the likely impact of colour in your image is to try squinting at a scene so that the objects are blurred or indistinct and then observe what colours, including light and dark spots are most apparent. This assists in determining where the image is brightest and what attracts your eyesight. Generally the eye responds initially to the brightest spot in an image, so if this is not where you intend the eye to be drawn, then eliminate that spot if possible. Camera settings can then be made to capture the light in the most effective way. Another approach is to turn the printed image upside down so that the subject is less recognisable. You are then left with the colour impression rather than being distracted by the actual subject. Conversely, try not to let an unimportant aspect of an image become prominent because of its bright colour. Remove it from the image by shifting your position or concealing it in some way. Similarly, white space can be as distracting as bright colour so ensure that white highlights are removed or concealed unless necessary to the image.

Consider the sky when taking a photograph and if the sky is featureless and does not contribute positively to the image, then minimise its impact by reducing the amount of sky which appears in the completed image.

Patterns and Lines

When we look at images our eyes naturally tend to look for patterns and lines which draw us into exploring the image. This can be a road, a fence or any number of different angles and lines leading the eye toward a main point of interest. Conversely, a poor image might contain lines which distract and lead the eye away from the intended focal point. The structure of the photograph is important to how we perceive it, and that structure should assist the naked eye rather than confuse it – it should focus the eye rather than cause it to wander aimlessly.

Most people read from left to right so “leading” lines that do this are more likely to make the image appear natural to the viewer. An image that forces our eyes to scan downwards tends not to be as attractive as one that leads our eyes into the image and upwards. An image showing a subject (person, animal) looking out of the picture to the right (or left) should be placed far enough to the left (or right) to allow space for this to “feel” natural. Similarly, a moving object should have a margin of space into which it can be expected to “travel”, rather than having nowhere to go within the image.

Above all, make sure that the horizon is straight because it is one of the elements of a photograph that any judge will condemn if it is not truly horizontal.

Clutter.

There is a limit to how much the eye will take in at first glance. A cluttered image can confuse and distract, burying the main focal point beneath too much unrelated or confusing imagery. Don’t allow too many elements within the image to confuse the viewer by competing for attention. A good image avoids too much conflicting information, allowing the eye to hone in on whatever it is the photographer is trying to capture or convey. In many situations “simplicity” remains the key to success. However, where multiple objects are contained in an image, studies have shown that an odd number is more pleasing to the eye than an even number of objects.

The easiest way to remove clutter is to create the composition using a different viewpoint so as to exclude unwanted objects. Move around your subject to seek the aspect which best highlights your subject and excludes other distractions.

Positioning.

Most images have a central focus, but this isn’t necessarily located in the center of the image. Studies have shown that images which have the most appeal actually have the focal point somewhere other than in the centre.

Consider the foreground and background and ask yourself if they compete with one another. Try not to place the horizon so that it divides the picture equally. Generally either sky or land should dominate.

Make sure that the surroundings don’t swamp the focal point. There are various “rules” such as the “Rule of Thirds” which suggests that the subject should be placed on the intersection of imaginary lines dividing the image into thirds on both the horizontal and vertical axis. Another “rule” suggests that a single subject should be placed off centre by one eighth of the image width. In most cases these “rules” will assist you to take a better photograph by placing your subjects where they are visually pleasing.

Notwithstanding these rules, a good photographer must also know when to break these rules, and that knowledge itself is important. Breaking the rules can shake the viewer out of their expectations and create a surprise response. However, breaking the rules also carries inherent risk given that most judges have seen many images over the years. Choosing when and how to break the rules is more successful once you have become more competent working within them!

Consider also the position from which a photograph was taken. Is that vantage point the best vantage point? Could another angle provide a new perspective and give a less conventional view? Would it be better to take the photo in portrait (vertical) mode rather than landscape mode (horizontal) ? What is it about the displayed image that capitalises on the positioning of the subject and camera?

Finally, one of the secrets to compelling photography is to “get in close”. This can be achieved either physically, or via a telephoto lens, or even by cropping the image on a computer. Either way, bringing the viewer closer to your subject is often a way of making an image significantly more appealing to the observer.

One useful technique when setting up a photo shoot is to “frame” the scene using the crossed fore and middle fingers of each hand to create a squarish “view-finder”. You can use this anytime; without needing a camera, and apart from attracting a few odd looks, it allows you become more familiar with “seeing” a composition more as the camera sees it. Look at how each photo in a competition uses positioning to achieve the best outcome.

Impact

What exactly is the photographer trying to achieve? Is it obvious? Is it successful? How was it achieved? Every good photograph has a story to tell, and none of the above aspects will be successful if the fundamental purpose and objective of the photograph is not also achieved.

Technical excellence is insufficient by itself. A photograph needs the artistic and emotional input from the photographer in conjunction with the technical elements to achieve the ultimate production of the finished image. All of these aspects combine to produce the overall impact upon the observer, which is what every photographer seeks to achieve. A photograph which is clinically efficient yet emotionally barren is unlikely to win. A good photograph is not a success unless it also produces an emotional response in the viewer.

When creating an image it is wise to consider other elements of the scene which cannot necessarily be captured and reproduced in print. We respond to a scene emotionally due to a combination of sensory inputs. A part of this is visual, but some of it lies in smells, sounds or other less tangible influences which cannot be present in a photograph. In reality we respond to a scene due to the totality of that experience. Nighttime images sometimes profit from including a moving object which introduces a greater sense of life and motion. In taking a photograph we must decide how well the experience can be reproduced in the absence of some or most of the sensory input, and how much of the total experience will remain for those who were not present at the time. It is important that each image can induce a sufficient emotional reaction in those whose total sensory input is derived from your image alone.

Sharpness

Probably the most important and most frequently commented characteristic of a good photograph is sharpness. Not every winning photograph is sharp, and there are situations where a good photograph has been deliberately blurred, but as a general principle a good image is a sharp one. At the very least the subject (or a key part such as the eyes) should be dead sharp. There are many steps you can take to maximise the sharpness of an image, and a limited degree of sharpness can be achieved via post-processing in your computer – however getting it right in the camera is the best way to ensure that your final image will be razor sharp. This sharpness need not be uniform, and in fact one of the skills to taking certain images is to control which parts of your image are sharp and which are blurred (see Depth of Field)

Depth of Field (DOF).

Depth of Field describes the extent to which different objects in your photograph are sharply defined. If you look at portraits or images of flowers, you will often notice that although the subject is clearly portrayed as a sharp image, the background is quite indistinct. This is a deliberate technique to keep the eye focussed on the main centre of interest. Depth of field is controlled by a combination of aperture, shutter speed and the type of lens being used. Creating a shallow depth of field (i.e. where one small part of the photo is sharp and the rest

is not) is more difficult when using a “Point and Shoot” (P&S) camera. P&S cameras generally retain the focus right through the picture and therefore it is harder to artificially manipulate this aspect. (An illusion of DOF can be created later on the computer, but this can require a reasonable level of computer expertise.) .

Generally speaking, the greater the lens aperture (eg f3.5) the shallower will be the “in focus” range (i.e.DoF). Conversely, a smaller aperture (eg f22) will result in a greater DoF, that is a greater part of the image will be in focus.

Purpose.

Finally, stop and consider what the whole purpose of the image is. You can create the most technically correct image which conforms to all of the above criteria and is crisp, clear and a fine representation of whatever it happens to represent ~ but does it have a purpose? Is it self-evident why it exists or is it simply a technically competent image which essentially has no real purpose? Every photo should have a purpose in life, and if there is no such purpose then you have probably failed in whatever it was you were trying to achieve. After a while you will start to see the world differently, and photographic potential will emerge at every turn. You will see images forming from previously invisible subjects and you will begin to mentally judge your surroundings and view them from an entirely different perspective. This is a part of the art of photography ~ the capacity to visualise your images before they exist. Creativity starts in the mind and the camera becomes a tool with which to bring that image to life.

What equipment do I need ?

Today’s cameras can be film based or digital – most will be the latter. However pretty well all modern cameras are capable of producing excellent images irrespective of how much they cost. It is often more important to the final image that the photographer has a good grasp of photographic principles rather than the equipment be expensive or sophisticated. The standard of “Point and Shoot” (P&S) cameras is so high that often they can be easier and more effective than more costly SLR cameras (i.e. cameras with interchangeable lenses). The SLRs produce better photographs in the right hands, but the automated nature of P&S cameras leaves the photographer free to concentrate on other things like positioning, composition etc. There are numerous cameras that are mid range between P&S and the SLR cameras. These offer a limited range of adjustment. Generally the photographer is able to set the type of scene being shot e.g. landscape, daytime/night time, flowers, people, etc and the camera makes the most appropriate setting including deciding when flash will be required. Increasingly cameras are offering anti-shake abilities and more recently the ability to recognise the type of scene being photographed !!

Your choice of camera has probably already been made, but if not then give yourself a little while to understand yourself and what you want to achieve before buying your camera. If you simply enjoy taking pictures but do not want to be bothered with interchangeable lenses and manual settings, then a P&S is probably the way to go. If you want to go further and to experiment with different lenses and the whole range of photographic experiences, then buy a Digital SLR. Make sure you do your homework first. A major consideration will be your budget because there is a vast difference between the middle range P&S cameras and the more expensive DSLRs which can cost a great deal once you venture into various lens combinations.

One of the most overlooked pieces of equipment is the tripod. Despite modern lenses, image stabilisation and sensitive digital sensors it remains true that tripods are essential. The ability to capture clean, sharp images in many situations relies on a tripod. In low light or for telephoto shots, a tripod can make the difference between a blurred reject or a crisp winner.

One of the “rules of thumb” in photography states that the shutter speed of a hand held camera should not be less than the inverse of the focal length of the lens, expressed in seconds. EG for a 50mm focal length the shutter speed should not be less than 1/50th of a second. It follows that especially with telephoto lenses and/or dark situations, a tripod can be indispensable.

There are various other accessories which can be included at little cost including a piece of polystyrene large enough to use as a reflector. Often this can be useful in portrait or still-life shots to reflect light onto a shaded portion of the subject.

Computers.

The mere mention of computers is enough to drive some to despair. Computers are sometimes regarded with some alarm by those unfamiliar with their use. If you are not “computer literate” then you do indeed have a greater learning curve than others, but it is not an insurmountable difficulty. Those with some basic familiarity with computers will find that the combination of computers and digital photography is a marriage made in heaven.

There are a number of free programs available for processing digital images, and most digital cameras are in fact sold with software packages included. Those with more computer awareness will possibly already have software which will allow them to process their own digital images quite satisfactorily. There are programs which will suit you no matter your level of computer awareness. If your computer skills are really lacking it would be well worthwhile obtaining separate tuition concurrently with your photographic learning.

Whilst it is true to say that many photographic failings can be corrected using a computer, it should not be seen as the sign of a good photographer. Computers should be used to enhance and correct problems which cannot be avoided at the creation stage, and a computer is the darkroom of today. However, use of computers to cover up poor photographic technique should become less and less the more experienced you become. There are many legitimate photographic skills which do properly lie within the realm of the computer including photo stitching, cropping and basic adjustment of contrast, colour, sharpness etc. ***However good photography forms the basis for good photographs.***

Understanding Light

More important than your camera is a basic understanding of light itself, and how the camera uses light to capture that winning image. There are many good books which explain the processes in detail, but broadly the following principle applies to your photography –“The better the quality of the light the more options are available to the photographer.” Maximising this “quality of light” is one of the first things you need to do. This can mean anything from moving your subject to a better lit location, to providing additional light in the form of flash or providing additional light sources.

“Quality” does not necessarily equate to brightness. In fact direct or overhead sunlight can be very harsh for photography creating bright or “burnt out” glare spots and harsh sharp edged shadowed images. The “best” light is often in the morning or evening, when the sun is lower on the horizon and creates more interesting hues and shades.

You also need to understand how your camera uses and controls the light which passes through its lens. Light is often compared to water in the way it behaves. Just as a bucket can be filled slowly or quickly, so can an image be created slowly or quickly. We can compare the filled bucket to the completed photographic image – each requires a specific amount of water/light to achieve the desired result.

The light which produces your photograph is reflected from the subject you are photographing. Your camera captures that light very quickly, provided that there is enough

light available. However, if there is less light available, then the camera needs to wait longer to collect the same amount of light.

Your camera, whether it be film or digital uses two main methods to control the light which it captures. It can change the size of the aperture (the lens opening) and it can control the length of time that aperture is left open to the light. The bigger the hole (aperture), the more light can enter at once, and the smaller the hole the less light can enter. The longer that hole is left open, the more light can stream through. Conversely, the shorter the time that the hole is left open the less light is captured. By balancing these two controls – time and hole size (aperture) – the camera determines just how much light is available to make the picture.

A camera's aperture is the hole through which light enters the camera, and the size of this hole is described by what are known as "f stops". Oddly, the smaller the number, the larger the hole. Therefore an f-stop of f-8 is a smaller number but a larger hole than f-22. Conversely, f-2.8 is a smaller number, or f-stop, than f-11 but it represents a larger hole or aperture. A typical range of f-stops would be f2.8; f4; f5.6; f8; f11; f22 with the largest (f-22) having the smallest aperture.

On a clear, sunny day your camera might only use a small aperture (eg f11) and it might leave it open for only 1/250th of a second. This will allow enough light to enter your camera to take the picture. Even if your subject is moving during this time, it is such a brief instant of time that your average subject is unlikely to move fast enough to alter the light reflected into the camera. The image you take will be nice and sharp (provided you have focussed the camera properly in the first place).

However, on a dull day with far less light, it might take the camera 1/30th of a second to capture the same amount of light through the same sized aperture. A moving object may well change position within that time and the light reflected from it will change during the time that the lens is left open. This will result in a blurry image. Therefore, if you wanted to retain the benefit of a fast shutter speed, then you would need to open the aperture much wider to collect the same amount of light in the time available. (i.e. open to f stops such as f2.8, f3.5, f4, f5.6 rather than f8, f11 or f22)

You will see from this that in order for an image to remain sharp, the light captured by the camera must be ideally be reflected from a subject which does not change position during the taking of the photograph. However, if the subject does move, then you will have to compensate by adjusting the aperture and time so that the same amount of light can be captured within a very short time span – otherwise the image will be blurred. Generally speaking, a shutter speed of less than 1/60th of a second requires you to use a tripod or at least stabilise the camera on something solid.

Moreover it is equally true that even if the subject remains stationary but the camera moves, then the result is the same, so it is equally important to make sure that your camera remains still during the taking of the photograph. Even the downward press of the shutter release can cause an image to blur if you are not careful. One method of minimising camera movement, (and this is essential in low light), is the use of a tripod. This allows the lens to remain open for longer period without the camera moving. It does not, of course, help when the subject itself is in motion.

This behaviour of light, and the means of controlling it, is a topic which is complicated and requires more space than we can spare here. There are many articles on the topic, and those who are interested should pursue it more deeply. Most modern cameras will allow the setting of both the aperture and shutter speeds automatically and many will have a setting to automatically adjust these to suit the type of photograph you are taking. Understanding why the camera chooses these various settings will make you a far better photographer, and could make the difference between a good photograph and an excellent one. Once you understand why a camera chooses to use particular settings you can move on to the next step in

photography which is to override the camera's automatic settings and to make those choices for yourself.

Presenting Your Work

Competition rules are provided to each member and detail the regulations governing mounting and presentation of images for competition purposes. Broadly speaking, images are displayed on photographic mounting boards examples of which will be seen at every monthly competition. These can be re-used but in practice most members will leave each image mounted as it makes for easier storage or re-entry in later competitions. In any event, each image you submit may well be of a different size, as you will start to create images with dimensions which suit the subject rather than conforming to a set standard image size. We get used to standard sizes because that is how normal developing and printing has evolved. However, if a better image is created by having a non-regulation size, then it is better to frame the print accordingly.

Mounting boards should be cut carefully, preferably with a bevelled edge similar to the mounting techniques used for framed pictures. Sometimes an unusually shaped mount (provided it fits within the regulations) can enhance an image. Similarly, although black is the common colour of choice, other coloured mat boards can also be effective. Mounting the image slightly higher than centre is recommended for best effect. It is important to frame the image in the direction of the subject's main interest. A tall tower is best presented in a vertical frame; a landscape in a horizontal one.

Many members print their own images at home using standard inkjet printers. Others rely on the commercial outlets at the major department stores or chemists. A problem with these types of outlet is the fact that they are geared to mass production. Their equipment has automatic settings which can result in poor colour rendition. Generally they are reliable for small prints.

A professional solution is to use a professional printing service (ie. a commercial photo lab) which can still be quite cost efficient and generally produces a better quality print. Whichever method you choose you should care for your prints by avoiding exposure to harsh sunlight (UV), moisture, touching other images or coming in contact with glass or acidic cheap papers. It is important to avoid finger marks and other aberrations which might detract from the presentation of your image. You can buy acid free, archival plastic sleeves quite cheaply in which to keep your images.

Where to from here ???

The local club level competitions are a stepping stone to better photography, but also to bigger and better competitions. ESPS also participates in inter-club competitions one of which is the "4 Club Competition" which pits members of ESPS against members of other local clubs. The competitions are conducted every 6 months and entries are chosen from our members' photographs. There is also a competition at the higher level which is held by the Victorian Association of Photographic Societies (VAPS) which also allows members of ESPS to compete at a higher level. Periodically there are also other competitions conducted by other photographic societies and clubs or other organisations. Members need to carefully peruse the rules and conditions for all such external competitions as they may contain rules which restrict, curtail or even remove the photographer's rights to future ownership of the images.

Wherever your photography leads you, never lose sight of the fact that enjoyment and personal satisfaction should be your aim. If we can help you towards realising that goal, then we shall have achieved our purpose. Good luck with your hobby, and may your photos bring you lasting pleasure as it has to thousands before you.

GLOSSARY

AE - Auto Exposure, a system for automatically setting the correct exposure (i.e. shutter speed and aperture)

Aperture Priority (AP or Av), the user chooses an aperture and the shutter speed is automatically determined by the camera

Shutter Priority (usually Tv), the user chooses a shutter speed and the aperture is automatically determined by the camera.

AE Lock – Allows you to freeze the current exposure settings but point the camera elsewhere before taking the photo. Generally accomplished by half-pressing the shutter button and keeping it at that position until the photo is taken.

AF - Auto Focus. The camera automatically focuses the camera lens.

AF Lock – see Focus Lock

Anti-aliasing - The process of smoothing edges of an image where individual pixels are visible.

Aperture - The lens opening formed by the iris diaphragm of the lens.

Artifact - Image faults in a compressed image that visibly degrades the image.

Aspect Ratio - The ratio of horizontal to vertical dimensions of an image. The most common aspect ratio is 4:3 which relates to how an image appears on a computer monitor. However many cameras now have a 3:2 mode which relates to the common 4x6-inch print size. Some have 16:9 also

AWB - Automatic White Balance. Sets the white balance (See "White Balance")

B&W - Black and White

Back Lit - The subject is lit from behind causing it to be underexposed if general scene light readings are adopted. To light the subject use a fill flash (see below) on the subject or place a reflective sheet/screen or light to throw light on the subject. Alternatively manually set the exposure for the dark subject and ignore the background which will become overexposed.

Backlight - The illumination for a colour LCD display

Barrel Distortion - A lens distortion causing an image to bend inwards from the edges toward the center and to be "rounded" along the outer edges.

Bit - The smallest unit of memory. Binary digits are 0 and 1, also known as on and off digits.

Bit Depth - This refers to the colour depth of an individual pixel. A colour pixel with 8 bits per colour gives a 24 bit image. (8 Bits X 3 colours (red, blue, green) = 24 bits.) 24 bit colour resolution = 16.7 million colours.

BMP - Bitmapped graphic file format. This is a file format like TIFF.

Bracketing - see "Exposure Bracketing".

Buffer - A temporary storage area for temporarily holding data or image information before transferring it to more permanent storage.

Bulb Setting - This is a time exposure setting where the shutter stays open for as long as you keep the shutter release button pressed.

Burst Mode - The ability to rapidly capture successive images in quick succession.

Byte - Eight bits of memory in a computer.

Calibration – Adjusting devices so that they provide consistent colour representation.

Card Reader - A device into which you place memory cards from cameras in order to transfer the data to a computer.

CCD - Charged Coupled Device- a light sensitive device used for image gathering. The digital equivalent of an unexposed piece of film, but in the case of digital exposures the same “film” is re-used for each photograph, with the preceding photograph transferred to a storage card or device.

CD - Compact Disc - read only storage media (generally commercially prepared) capable of holding 650MB of digital information.

CDR - Compact Disc Recordable - a user writeable CD that can be written to once only. It holds 650 to 700MB of digital data.

CDRW - Compact Disc Rewriteable – A CD which can be erased and re-used many times.

Center-Weighted – The measurement of light in a scene that favours the light value at the center portion of the image.

CF - see Compact Flash

Colour Balance - The accuracy with which the colours captured in the image match the original scene.

Colour Cast - An unwanted colour tint in an image.

Colour Correction - The process of correcting the colour of an image to more accurately represent the colours contained in that image.

Compact Flash (CF) – see storage media.

Compression – A means of reducing the file size of an image so that it can more readily be stored, transmitted or processed. There are “lossless” forms of compression which result in images which are equal in quality to the original (e.g. TIF images) and “lossy” forms of compression which lose some quality when compressed (e.g. JPEG images)

Contrast - A measure of the rate of change of brightness in an image.

Cropping – The process of reducing an image by trimming the edges, thereby making the remaining part more prominent.

Decompression – (see compression). The process by which a compressed image is restored to its uncompressed state.

Depth of Field - depth of field (DOF) The range within which an image appears to be in sharp focus. Controlled by the focal length, aperture and duration of the opening of the lens. A large aperture (small f-stop) = shallow DOF. Smaller apertures (large f-stop) give deeper DOF, all else being equal.

Digital Film - Term used to describe flash memory cards which store images in digital cameras in lieu of film.

Digital Zoom – A digital rather than optical magnification of an image. The magnification is not of the same quality as the increased size is the result of a computer calculation rather than an optical increase.

Digitization - The process of converting information into a digital format for use by a computer.

Diopter Adjustment - Adjusts the camera’s viewfinder's to suit the eyesight of the user in a similar way to glasses. It enables photographers who normally wear glasses to take pictures without wearing glasses.

Download - Transfer image data from the camera or internet to the computer using a cable or internal connection.

DPI - Dots per Inch. A measurement value used to describe the resolution of a display screen or the output resolution of a printer.

DSLR - Digital SLR (Single Lens Reflex) camera. Interchangeable lens digital camera. See SLR

EXIF Data - (Exchangeable Image File) refers to the embedded information that a digital camera produces at the time it creates an image. It allows the photographer to later view the image and to know when the image was taken and with what settings.

Exposure - The amount of light that reaches the film or image sensor. This is determined by a combination of the lens aperture and shutter speed. There are several combinations which will produce the same image exposure but not necessarily equally satisfactory images.

Exposure Bracketing - the camera automatically takes a series of pictures with differing exposures. When in doubt, this gives the photographer a selection of different images taken of the same scene at the same time. The best result can then be selected and the other images rejected. The images can also be combined later on a computer if required.

Exposure Compensation – Automatic adjustment of exposure settings to either lighten or darken the image that would otherwise be produced with standard settings.

f-stop - A numerical designation that indicates the size of the aperture opening. It is inversely proportional – that is, the smaller the number the larger the opening of the shutter and vice versa. F-stops typically range through 1.4, 2.8, 3.5, and 4. 5.6, 8, 11, 16, and 22 with f22 being the smallest aperture.

File - A collection of information, such as text, data, or images saved on a disk or computer hard drive.

File Format - A way of identifying what type of file a particular file is. Some common image file formats include TIFF, JPEG, and BMP, while a Word document would be DOC.

Fill Flash - Using the flash other than in the dark to lighten shadow areas or just to provide more overall illumination in situations where flash would not normally be necessary.

Focal Length – The lens angle of view as in telephoto, wide angle or macro. Expressed in figures such as 28-135 (a moderate zoom lens) or 50mm (a portrait lens)

Focus Lock - Pre-focusing the camera and then moving it to re-compose the image before taking the picture. Achieved by half-pressing the shutter button and keeping it held at that position while moving the camera to another point before pressing it all the way to capture the image. Some cameras allow this to be set by pressing a button. The “lock” is held until the shutter is released and then is reset “off”.

GIF - A graphic (image) file format.

Gigabyte (GB) - A measure of computer memory or disk space consisting of about one thousand million bytes (a thousand megabytes). The actual value is 1,073,741,824 bytes (1024 megabytes).

Gray Scale - A term used to describe an image containing shades of gray rather than colour. More commonly known as a black and white photo.

Histogram - A bar graph produced by the camera or computer which analyses an image. When interpreted by an experienced user they offer valuable information about the photograph.

Image Resolution - The number of pixels per unit length of image. For example, pixels per inch, pixels per millimeter, or pixels wide. The greater the resolution the greater use which can be made of an image in terms of enlarging etc.

Image Sensor – See CCD

Image Stabilization (IS) - An optical system for removing or reducing camera movement in zoom lenses. Using gyroscopes an internal lens is moved around to counteract the movement of the camera. This can allow the photographer to shoot at 2 to 3 stops slower than a camera without IS.

Interpolated - Software programs can enlarge image resolution beyond the actual resolution by adding extra pixels using complex mathematic calculations. See "Resolution" below

Interval Recording - Capturing a series of images at preset intervals. Also called time-lapse.

ISO - The speed or specific light-sensitivity of a camera is rated by ISO numbers such as 100, 400, etc. The higher the number, the more sensitive it is to light. This term replaces ASA which was used prior to the adoption of ISO.

JPEG - Joint Photographic Experts Group. See JPG

JPG - The most common type of compressed image file format. Known as a "lossy" type of compression as it can lose some image quality in the process. Image degradation grows more noticeable after repeated compressions. (see compression)

KB - "KB" means a kilobyte of data or approximately. A kilobyte is about 1000 bytes, and a byte is approximately one digit of information.

Landscape Mode - Holding the camera in its normal horizontal orientation to capture the image. See Portrait Mode.

LCD - Liquid Crystal Display.

LED - Light Emitting Diode. The small lights seen on electronic devices.

Lossless - Storing the image in a non-compressed format, see TIFF and JPEG

Mac - Refers to the Macintosh type of computers

Macro - The ability of a lens to focus very closely.

MB - Megabyte, memory term meaning 1024 Kilobytes. (see KB)

Megapixel - CCD resolution of one million pixels.

Memory Stick - A flash memory card standard from Sony.

Modes - Many digital cameras have an exposure "mode" where by selecting a mode the camera will automatically adjust the settings to suit the type of photo being taken – e.g. landscape, close-ups etc.

Multi-Point Focusing – An auto focus system that uses several different portions of an image to determine the proper focus.

Multi-point light sensing- A system used by cameras (usually the more sophisticated the camera the more points are used and the more that can be adjusted by the user to override the in-built options) to determine the amount of light received by the CCD. Options are typically "evaluative" (using an in built program to obtain the best exposure setting), centre weighted, and point metering (or spot metering.see below).

Noise - Pixels in your digital image that were misinterpreted. The digital equivalent of film grain and occurs when you shoot a long exposure or when you use the higher ISO. Also, when using significant digital zooms, the natural light variations and/or ability of the CCD

sensors to capture the true colour will be compromised by the small voltage variations driving the CCD pixel elements thus creating noise. Some noise can be removed in the “computer” photo processing lab.

Noise Reduction - This is a camera or software solution to help eliminate random image noise.

Optical Zoom – Image magnification via optics rather than via computer calculation.

Orientation Sensor - A special sensor in some cameras that can automatically sense when a picture is taken in portrait or landscape orientation.

Overexposure - An image that appears too light, and detail is missing.

Panorama - Capturing a series of images to create a picture wider than a single image. Images are “stitched” together in some cameras or alternatively are stitched together on a computer.

Parallax - An effect seen in close-up photography where the viewfinder and lens do not see exactly the same part of the scene.

Pin-Cushioning - A common lens distortion causing an image to pucker toward the center.

Pixel - The individual imaging element of a CCD or electronic image.

Pixelation - The stair-stepped appearance of a line in digital images. The smaller the pixels, and the greater their number in an image the less apparent the "pixelation".

Point and Shoot (P&S) - A term used for a simple to medium complexity automatic camera.

PPI - Pixels Per Inch - A measurement to describe the size of a printed image. The higher the number the more detail.

Prosumer - Refers to the more expensive semi-professional digital cameras.

RAW - RAW files are the image files recorded by the camera prior to any manipulation of the image, and which have not been converted or processed into JPEG or other formats. RAW files cannot be viewed without processing by image processing software such as Photoshop. RAW files have the highest level of information about the captured light but also use up the most space on storage cards.

Resolution - The quality of any digital image, whether printed or displayed on a screen. More and smaller pixels add detail and sharpness to the image.

Rule of Thirds - The “rule” states that if you divide an image into nine equal parts by superimposing two equally-spaced horizontal lines and two equally-spaced vertical lines, then the four points formed by the intersections of these lines are the best places to place the main features in the image.

SD - Secure Digital card, a popular type of flash memory

Shutter - The physical device that opens and closes to let light from the scene strike the image sensor.

Shutter Lag - The time between pressing the shutter and actually capturing the image. This delay is caused by the camera having to calculate the exposure, set the white balance and focus the lens. There is also a recovery delay when the camera shutter cannot be pressed while the image is processed to the storage card. The more expensive the camera, the less likely that these delays will be a problem.

SLR - Single Lens Reflex - Means the camera has a viewfinder that sees “through the lens” (TTL). Other cameras do not, which means that the viewfinder image is not exactly what the camera “sees”.

Smart Media - (aka SSFDC), another flash memory card for storing information (images).

Spot Metering - The camera's auto exposure system focusses on a very small area in the center of the viewfinder.

Storage media – Digital cameras store information on flash storage cards rather than film, Types include Compact Flash cards and Secure Digital cards and others.

TIFF - Tagged Image File Format - An uncompressed image file format that is lossless (see Lossless) and produces larger but better images than “lossy” formats such as JPEG.

TTL - Through the Lens, used both in relation to an auto focus or auto exposure system that works through the camera's lens, and the fact that a viewfinder obtains its image directly through the lens.

USB - Universal Serial Bus – a data input/output socket on electronic devices for transferring data between them.

Vignetting - A term that describes the darkening of the outer edges of the image due to lens limitations at certain focal lengths.

White Balance - Refers to adjusting the relative brightness of red, green and blue so that the colours in the image (in particular white) are truly representative of the original scene. Different types of artificial lights (fluorescent, tungsten, sodium, etc) will degrade each of the RGB colours to different degrees and, if the camera allows, the white balance should be set for each type of environment

Wide angle - The focal length that gives you the widest angle of coverage. Also describes lenses designed to produce a wide angle of view.