



Enriching Our World through Photography

Competition Manual

Section I

Members

Revised July 2025

By The 2025 Competition Committee

Michael Sassano, Jerry Kozel, Dee Williams

CLUB COMPETITIONS

1.1 Statement of Purpose

Competition events provide our club members with an opportunity to display their photographs as well as to have them impartially judged and critiqued. Constructive critique provides an opportunity for improving the skills of not only the individual photographer, but of all attending club members.

1.2 Competition Participants

All current club members are encouraged to participate in club competitions. Members at large will enter their images during the period specified by the Competition Committee for each competition. However, to prevent any unfair advantage being gained by viewing other entries, Competition Committee members and the club's Webmaster must enter before the opening date and time prior to the period specified for the general membership.

1.3 Responsibilities of Club Members

The objective of the Sandhills Photography Club Competitions is to promote creative activity, and participation. It should broaden a member's field of interest and aid in perfecting their photographic skills. Although the club fosters growth in the art of photography through various club activities, it is not a photography school. If club members experience difficulty with the first two items listed below, he/she should contact the competition committee for support. The committee may ask another club member to assist the individual and to keep the committee apprised to their progress.

Member's Responsibilities:

1. To ensure date and time are correct in camera settings.
2. To abide by the rules set by the competition committee.
3. To be courteous to judges, speakers, and the competition committee.
4. To be ethical.
5. To volunteer.
6. When taking photos of someone else's artwork, the photographer should be aware of the laws of copyright infringement and "fair use."
Please refer to [Is Taking Photos of Artwork a Copyright Infringement?](#) on the Sandhills Photography Club website.

1.4 Competition Tiers

There are three competition levels: Tiers 1, 2 & 3

Tier 1: Members with little or no experience in photography and/or who are new to competitions. Tier 1 members will be moved into Tier 2 when they have accumulated **10 award points** in competitions.

Tier 2: Members who have advanced through Tier 1 or new members who have already had prior photography experience and elect to be in Tier 2. Tier 2 members will advance to Tier 3 when they have accumulated 40 award points in competitions.

Tier 3: Members who have accumulated 40 points in competitions.

1.5 Award Points

Awards will be presented to the winners in each Tier. These may include First Place, Second Place, Third Place and Honorable Mention.

The number of awards will be based on the number of entries in each Tier.

- 0 to 4 entries: Zero awards will be given.
- 5 to 15 entries: Three awards will be given (1st, 2nd and 3rd Place)
- 16 or more entries: The number of awards given will be equal to the number of entries divided by 5 and rounded up. For example, if there are 23 entries, then 5 awards will be given ($23/5 = 4.6$ which rounds up to 5). The awards would be 1st, 2nd, 3rd Place plus two Honorable Mentions.

Award Summary

Entries	Awards
0-4	0
5-15	3
16-20	4
21-25	5
26-30	6
etc.	

When a member receives an Award, they earn the following Award Points

1 st Place	5
2 nd Place	3
3 rd Place	2
Honorable Mention	1

1.6 Annual Awards

Three Annual Stoffel awards will be presented at the end of the year to the three members who have accumulated the highest number of award points in each Tier. Normally, all points for an award must have been scored in the same Tier as the award. However, in the event that a member who graduated from Tier 1 to Tier 2 or from Tier 2 to Tier 3 receives more combined Tier points than the highest Tier 1 or 2 member respectively, both will be given a Tier award in the Tier from which they were promoted. In the event of a points tie in any Tier, two awards will be given.

1.7 Entering Photographs in Competition

Only SPC members who have paid dues for the current year are eligible to enter photographs in Club Competitions. The image must meet the published specifications of the competition and, regardless of the topic of competition, must never depict explicit human sexual acts or scenes.

The members will enter images using the link supplied by the Competition Committee. Currently, our management software (Airtable) is designed to automatically assign the appropriate Tier for each entry.

Competitions are held throughout the year. A schedule is published by the Competition Committee that shows the dates and topics for the competitions for one calendar year and a list of just the topics for the following year. The schedule for one calendar year will also identify the definitions of the topics and any additional restrictions or modifications that might impact the content of the images for that specific competition. The competition chairperson(s) or committee member(s) will review all images entered into the competition and reserve the right to reject any images that do not meet the competition guidelines and rules for entries or are not in good taste.

1.8 Guidelines and Rules for Entry

The following standard guidelines will apply to all competition Tiers and topic categories, unless specifically modified and published on the competition schedule by the Competition Committee.

1. Unless specified otherwise by the Competition Committee, photographs should be taken within 3 years prior to the year of the competition. (For example, a photo taken any time in 2022 forward

may be entered in 2025 competitions.) Metadata should be included with the photograph that shows the date taken as recorded by the camera. Members will be asked when the photo was taken and / or the metadata will be examined to determine the date taken. Regardless, it is the member's responsibility to make sure the photo was taken within the allowable period.

2. The photograph may not be entered if it has previously won an SPC competition award (1st, 2nd, 3rd. or HM).
3. The photograph of the main subject must be taken by the person submitting it.
4. Photographs of another person's artwork (photo, painting, or sculpture) which are presented as the photographer's own work will be rejected.
5. Editing to all photographs is unrestricted except for adding image content provided by artificial intelligence ("AI") as described below. However, the original image must be an image taken by the members and meet the time and topic criteria for each competition. Members can use specialized cameras. (Infrared, ultraviolet, microscope, telescope, x-ray, electron beam, or any electro-optical device.) To enhance the original image the use of the following is allowed but not required: textures, frames, and borders created by the member, part of editing software, purchased, or acquired with permission. All images (and portions thereof e.g., a sky) used in a composite must be the photographic work product of the club member. The committee has the authority to request additional information if they feel it to be necessary.
6. AI: Artificial Intelligence is a new and exciting way to create and edit photos. Because it is a rapidly developing technology the following general rules apply.
 - a. AI can be used to edit and enhance all or portions of a photo as long as all of the image content is provided by the member. For example, removing a person standing in front of a building.
 - b. Adding image content provided by AI is prohibited. Image content can include an image, portions thereof or text. For example, asking AI to "add a dog" or "add a dramatic sky" to an image.

As AI evolves and becomes more commonplace, additional rules may apply. At present it is at the Competition Committee and judge's discretion to accept images with AI content. The Competition Committee may request the member to provide the original unedited image(s).

7. By virtue of submitting an entry, the entrant certifies the work as his own and permits the SPC to reproduce the entered material free of charge for publication and/or display in media related to the competition or exhibition. This may include low resolution posting on a website. SPC assumes no liability for any misuse of copyright.

1.9 How to Submit an Image for Competition

COMPETITIONS ARE ONLY OPEN TO MEMBERS IN GOOD STANDING WHO HAVE PAID THEIR DUES.

1. Members may enter one photo in a competition
2. The Competition Committee will announce and open the competition website for entries. There is a limited amount of time for submissions, usually one week, and all entries must be made during this period.
3. The announcement will be sent to you in an email. It will contain a link to the club website to use for entering your photo. It will also remind you of the description of the topic, time frame for entering and any other relevant information or instructions.
4. You will be prompted for your name and the photo's title. It is no longer necessary to rename your photo, although a descriptive filename is helpful.
5. The link is also available on the Bulletin Board section of the club's website home page.
6. Each image entry should be given a title. The title may or may not be considered by the judge in scoring your photo. This is at the judge's discretion.
7. You will be asked when the photo was taken. The photo's metadata may also be examined to determine the date taken. Regardless, it is your responsibility to make sure the photo was taken within the allowable period.
8. Technical guidelines for your photo:
 - a. Photos submitted in formats other than JPG may get converted, if possible, to JPG. You will be contacted if there is a problem.
 - b. Really large photo files (> approximately 50MBs) may be scaled down.
 - c. Judges will be viewing full-size photos using SmugMug and will most likely zoom in. So don't make your photos too small. They should look sharp when viewed on a PC display.
9. You will receive confirmation that your photo was accepted (or is under review for acceptance) within 48 hours. If you have not received a notice **after 48 hours**, contact the committee via email to: competitions@sandhillsp Photoclub.org



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Competition Committee

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2.1 Judge Selection Process

The Competition Chairperson(s) will select judges. Every attempt should be made to select judges who are well known for their knowledge and experience in the art of photography, their reputation for objective evaluation, and their ability to effectively communicate constructive criticism.

1. An individual judge or a three-member panel may judge competitions. The three-member panel may include members of SPC or non-members. SPC panel members may not enter photos into the competition that he or she is judging.
2. Upon approval of the current board, the competition chairperson(s) will offer the judges, including remote judges, payment for their services. In addition, the competition chairperson(s) may offer the judge an option of a meal prior to the competition if applicable. SPC members will receive no honorarium or expense reimbursement for judging.
3. Prior to competition, the chairperson(s) shall provide the judge(s) with SPC guidelines for judging. This will include a copy of the topic and the rules for competition as written for the entrants and published in the newsletter and a guideline for assigning points to each image.

2.2 Rules, Guidelines, Procedures for Presentation

Providing images to the judge:

The photos will be provided to the judge in SmugMug galleries, one for each tier. The judge will receive links to the galleries and will view the images from his/her own computer.

Displaying Images for the Audience:

The room must be set up in such a manner that the audience can view the images on the competition night. To preserve shadow detail in the projected images, the room should be darkened sufficiently to reduce the ambient light to the lowest level.

Format of Meeting:

The goal of the Competition Committee is to keep the meeting lively, educational, engaging and not get bogged down. To achieve this, the committee may amend the flow of content. This could include showing technical details of the photo, asking members to talk about their winning image, asking the judge to discuss how they would enhance a photo, etc. The committee may also limit the numbers of entries in any competition. Any such limit will be announced to the members prior to the competition.

2.3 Responsibilities of the Competition Committee

The committee is headed by the Competition Chairperson(s), who is appointed by the board. The Competition Chairperson(s) serves on the Board and represents the committee. The committee is responsible for:

1. Securing appropriate judges for scheduled competitions.
2. Maintaining records of member's entries, scores, and points earned for each competition.
3. Coordinating each competition presentation.
4. Entering each digital image into competitions.
5. Presenting the competition winners and certificates/awards.
6. Maintaining the Competition Manual.
7. Check image prior to entry for competition to ensure the image complies with the specific rules for the event.
8. Upon request, opening the entry link to new members one week earlier to assist with their first competition.
9. By virtue of submitting an entry, the entrant certifies the work as his own and permits the SPC to reproduce the entered material free of charge for publication and/or display in media related to the competition or exhibition. This may include low resolution posting on a website. SPC assumes no liability for any misuse of copyright.
10. Competition Committee members and the club's Webmaster must submit images in club competitions a week before the opening date and time specified for all other club members. This prevents committee members and the club's Webmaster from gaining any advantage from seeing other entries before deciding on their entries.
11. The Competition Chairperson(s) will appoint members to form the Competition Committee to assist the Chairperson(s) in performing the above duties. It is recommended that a member on the committee be considered for the Chairperson position in the following year(s), and that one or two new committee members are brought on board in August each year to shadow the current committee.

2.4 Competition Topics and Schedules

Maintaining a two-year schedule for competitions, which includes: a one-year schedule of topics, dates, and any other special rules for conditions for specific competitions; and a one-year list of future competition topics along with a description of each topic. All topics are presented to the Board for final approval. The following guidelines should be used to establish the competition program.

1. Not later than each September, the Board shall have the topics for “competitions” scheduled on the month’s Board meeting agenda. At that time, the Competition Committee Chairperson(s) and the Board shall discuss a plan for the next two calendar year’s competitions. Items to be determined are the total number of competitions to be held. This may influence the selection of topics.
2. Not later than each October, the Competition Chairperson(s) should recommend to the Board for approval a list of topics, dates, and any special rules (see below) for the following year’s competitions, and the topics including descriptions for the second year. A final list should be approved at the October Board meeting and published in the club newsletter no later than November for the benefit of the members’ planning.
3. Special rules for any specific topic are at the discretion of the Competition Committee. The rules should be communicated to the membership by the Chairperson(s) with the schedule and list of topics. An example of special rules is the hand-of-man restrictions normally associated with topics such as Nature or Flowers. Special rules may include restricting the type of image and/or the method(s) used to acquire and produce them.
4. Notifications of any changes to the approved competition topics and schedule shall be made to the membership at least **60 days** prior to the earliest affected date.
5. Not later than each August, the Competition Chairperson(s) should provide the Board with the Competition Committee budget for the following fiscal year.
6. Additional notices should be provided as follows:
 - a. PDF file posted on the website with the information from the November newsletter on next year’s schedule and topics and the topics for the following year.
 - b. Two newsletter issues prior to competition, the following will be provided: Reminder of Competition Topic, Date, and Name(s) of Judge(s) if known.
 - c. Newsletter immediately prior to the competition, the following will be provided: Complete Details of the Competition.
 - d. In the rare case that an error or conflict is discovered in previously published rules, subject, topics and/or definitions after the 60-day restriction for making changes goes into effect, the Competition Committee may enact immediate resolution based upon its best judgment and, if appropriate, propose an update to the Competition Manual.



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Section III

Judge's Guidelines

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GUIDELINES FOR COMPETITION JUDGES

Information for all judges:

We have a club site on SmugMug that will contain three galleries, one for each of the Tiers 1, 2 or 3. Each participant can enter one image. The number of awards is based on the number of entries and is included in the email containing the Judge's Packet.

The Competition Committee is responsible (and does their best) to ensure each image meets the rules of entry. We accept photos that generally fit the topic description. However, the judge(s) has final determination how well the image fits the spirit of the description.

All metadata has been intentionally hidden from the Judges view. All images should be judged strictly on how they appear in the gallery.

Our members go on field trips and day trips together so sometimes the judges may see images of similar or the exact same subjects. It may appear that they were taken by the same person, but in fact they are not.

Judging Entries

There are three competition Classes: Tiers 1, 2 & 3

Tier 1: Members with little or no experience in photography and/or who are new to competitions. Tier 1 members will be moved into Tier 2 when they have accumulated 15 award points in competitions.

Tier 2: Members who have advanced through Tier 1 or new members who have already had prior photography experience and elect to be in Tier 2. Tier 2 members will advance to Tier 3 when they have accumulated 40 award points in competitions.

Tier 3: Members who have accumulated 40 points in competitions.

Editing to all photographs is **unrestricted** except for adding image content provided by artificial intelligence ("AI") as described below. However, the original image must be an image taken by the members and meet the time and topic criteria for each competition. Members can use specialized cameras. (Infrared, ultraviolet, microscope, telescope, x-ray, electron beam, or any electro-optical device.) To enhance the original image the use of the following is allowed but not required: textures, frames, and borders created by the member, part of editing software, purchased, or acquired with permission. **All images (and portions thereof e.g., a sky) used in a composite must be the photographic work product of the club member.** The committee has the authority to request additional information if they feel it to be necessary.

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As AI evolves and becomes more commonplace, additional rules may apply. At present it is at the Competition Committee and judge's discretion to accept images with AI content. The Competition Committee may request the member to provide the original unedited image(s).

It is the judge's responsibility to choose, in his/her opinion, the best image overall no matter how much or how little processing is done. The point's guideline will help to rank the images as to Impact, Composition, and Technical.

The judge(s) will be provided with the same written description of the competition topic as the club members received. To value the quality of material submitted, the judge(s) will have up to 10-14 days to review and score the images of material submitted. This enables the judge(s) to successfully tailor the range of scoring to the actual range of the quality.

The judge's packet:

The judge's packet includes score sheets- one for each Tier. Tiers 1, 2 & 3 will be judged separately. The judge(s) shall give each entry a total score from 3 to 10 (3 for weak and 10 for outstanding) using the outline defined below. The judge shall critique each image using the columns as follows:

POINTS GUIDELINE

IMPACT: 1 to 4 Points

Does the image elicit a **strong emotional response** as a first impression with feeling of mood? Does it hold your eye and interest? Does the title add to the image?

COMPOSITION: 1 to 3 Points

Is there design and balance in the image, bringing all of the visual elements together? Does it draw the viewer to look where the creator intended? Is the topic emphasized by placement, contrast and framing with no distracting elements? Does the image have a **strong point of interest**?

TECHNICAL: 1 to 3 Points:

Proper exposure, color balance, image focus, and good tonality should exist in the image as appropriate to the topic.

No image should be given a score of 0 in any category. Judge(s) will provide a quick critique of each image in the comment's column. The critique should be brief, friendly, and positive in tone, pertain to the image as a whole, and be impartial. Special emphasis is to be given to constructive suggestions for the improvement of images so that members can learn and advance their skills and techniques.

After completing the Score Sheets, use the Judge's Results Sheet to award images based on the score. The highest scoring image receives the 1st place award, and so forth. It is the judge's responsibility to break all ties. This could be based on how well the photo fits the spirit of the competition description or other factors at the judge's discretion. The judge can use ½ points if this helps. The Competition Committee will announce winners and award ribbons at the competition based on this document.

At the competition meeting, the images in each Tier shall be previewed once without comments, and then, on second viewing, critiques and scores will be given. Winners are announced at the end of the judging of each Tier. If the judge is unable to attend the competition night, the Competition Chairperson will read the judge's comments to the members, reporting the scores and winners as judged.