



# Evaluating 4-H Photography Exhibits

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**Goal** - helps you decide how to get where you want to go. An ideal goal includes three parts that can be measured or checked (the *action*, the *result*, the *timetable*).

## Strong or weak goals?

- \_\_\_\_\_ To take a picture of my cat.
- \_\_\_\_\_ To use the aperture control on my camera to isolate the subject from the background.
- \_\_\_\_\_ To compare the effect of different mat colors on my photograph.
- \_\_\_\_\_ To photograph the same scene from the same location at sundown during each of the four seasons.
- \_\_\_\_\_ To take a picture of my cat without shaking the camera.
- \_\_\_\_\_ To take a better picture than last year.
- \_\_\_\_\_ To take better picture of my dog using the rule of thirds.
- \_\_\_\_\_ To show the effect of different shutter speeds by shooting a series of photos of running water at 1/125, 1/15, and 1/8 second.
- \_\_\_\_\_ To use the rule of thirds to improve composition by moving the point of interest away from dead center.

**Standard or expectation** - an accepted basis for measuring or comparing.

The following suggestions should help judges evaluate photos from 4-H exhibitors as they participate in county fairs or the Iowa State Fair. The points should also suggest questions or discussion areas for conference judging or for writing reasons. As 4-H'ers move on to other photography competition, new or different expectations/standards may apply.

This list of expectations/standards is based primarily on what 4-H'ers can control as they plan and prepare their exhibit.

## Composition expectations/standards

- Exhibitors can improve most photos by using the rule of thirds to compose the photo with the point of interest away from dead center.
- Cropping in the camera or on a finished photo (using the rule of thirds) can improve composition and help eliminate distracting elements in the photo.
- Photos with dominant vertical lines are usually stronger when shot in a vertical format (and horizontal subjects shot in the horizontal format).
- Horizon lines should be level.
- Camera position (point of view) can help eliminate background and foreground distractions.
- The camera position should be at an appropriate distance from subject (depends on exhibitor's goal).

## **Technical expectations/standards\*\***

- If image sharpness is desired, camera should be held steady with a tripod or other method.
- Fast shutter speeds are used to stop subject motion; slow speed to create blur that suggests motion.
- Photographer should choose appropriate aperture for the depth of field or depth of focus needed to achieve the desired effect. Small apertures yield greater depth of field; larger apertures yield shallow depth of field.
- In general, the exhibitor should be aware of and work within the capabilities of his/her equipment.
- Human subjects should be posed to look natural and comfortable.
- Lighting should enhance and strengthen the purpose and impact of the photograph. Lighting is influenced by such factors as artificial methods used, time of day, weather conditions.
- Photographs should be properly exposed; not grossly over or underexposed.

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\*\*Judges should be aware that exhibitors in Class 851-C (contemporary-creative) may experiment with many of the "standards." Thus, it's very important to know what he or she is trying to do or convey with their work and be flexible in how you evaluate.

## **Photo presentation expectations/standards**

- If photo is matted, mat color or mat size should not take attention away from the photograph.
- Mounting or matting need not be elaborate, but should be neat.

## **Photography terms**

The 4-H Photography manuals include extensive lists of terms and definitions that can help you identify discussion points to use in judging situations. The manuals also list photography resources and Web sites for additional information.

## Evaluate what the 4-H'er can control

A 4-H'er can never have complete control when he or she shoots a picture and prepares an exhibit, but the photographer can make decisions about many of the following factors.

Consider the photographer's goal... then evaluate based on:

- *Point of view – location on camera in relation to subject.* Did camera placement present a unique and interesting point of view? Did placement help eliminate distracting elements in the picture?
- *Distance from subject.* Did subject distance strengthen or weaken the picture?
- *Composition and cropping.* Did 4-H'er use the rule-of-thirds guideline to place the point of interest? Did cropping help strengthen the picture? Did 4-H'er recognize dominant lines and shoot or crop to strengthen the photo?
- *Camera movement.* If sharpness was desired, was camera held steady? If camera movement was intentional (panning with subject, for example), did the technique add to the impact of the picture?
- *Subject speed* (if adjustable). Was appropriate shutter speed used to stop movement, or to emphasize subject movement?
- *Aperture setting and resulting depth of field* (if adjustable). Did 4-H'er choose appropriate aperture setting to help achieve goal? A small aperture yields a greater range or depth of focus; a large aperture yields a shallower depth of focus. Also called depth of field.
- *Focus point* (if adjustable). Is the photo sharp where it is suppose to be sharp?
- *Posing a human subject.* Does the subject look natural and comfortable? Is the subject engaged in an activity or just staring at the camera?
- *Lighting* (flash vs. natural light). Did 4-H'er choose lighting to enhance the subject? Was bounce flash used to reduce harshness of flash?
- *Time of day photo was shot.* Lighting and atmospheric conditions vary greatly during the day. Did exhibitor choose a time of day that strengthens the photo's impact?
- *Digital manipulation.* Did 4-H'er choose appropriate manipulation to add interest and strength? Depending on the goal, was manipulation overdone?
- *Mat color, size, neatness.* Does the mat color or size enhance the photo? Or, does the mat draw attention away from the photo?

## **Suggested questions for conference judging**

1. What was your photography goal for this exhibit?
2. What were some of the things you did to work toward your goal?
3. What were some of the important things you learned?
4. Based on what you learned, do you have plans or ideas for what you'd like to do next in photography?
5. If you could prepare this exhibit again, would you change it in any way?
6. Why did you choose photography as a project?
7. Why did you choose this type of lighting for your picture?
8. What other people helped you as you prepared your exhibit?
9. Did you think of any other ways to compose your picture before you shot it?
10. Is your photograph as you saw it in your camera, or did you crop it later?
11. How did the rule of thirds help you as you shot or cropped your photograph?
12. What feeling or response would you like to get from people as they look at your exhibit?
13. Where do you get your ideas for your photography subjects?
14. Had you thought a long time about how to photograph this subject?
15. What differences do you see in using a digital camera as compared to a traditional camera?
16. Tell me how you decided on the special effects you chose for your photo as you worked with your digital computer program?
17. What are 2-3 key points of advice you'd give to a beginning photographer?
18. How will you continue to use what you've learned in the photography project?
19. How did you decide where to place yourself and your camera (point of view) when you shot this photograph?
20. What could you do to eliminate some of the background in your picture?
21. What could you do to help viewers pay more attention to the main subject in your picture?
22. How do you think your photo would be changed if you shot it at a different time of day? Or in different weather or lighting conditions?

## **Points to remember**

- Exhibit is only one part of the 4-H project. Project is on-going.
  - The exhibitor's goal should trigger certain expectation or standards for a judge. Meeting a goal doesn't always mean a blue rating.
  - Concentrate on what the 4-H'er could control as he/she shot the pictures and prepared the exhibit.
  - Know the county fair book where you judge.
  - What photography resources did the county provide?
  - Sit side-by-side with exhibitor if possible.
  - Add to the list from your own experiences.
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