CLEVELAND PHOTOGRAPHIC SOCIETY

COMPETITION RULES FOR 2026-2027

Introduction

At the Cleveland Photographic Society, competition is more than earning top honors. It's a path to growth, creativity, and evolving as an artist. Each entry is a chance to refine skills, gain new perspectives, and embrace the ever-changing artistry of photography.

Through constructive feedback and shared passion, photographers challenge themselves to improve, inspiring one another to push boundaries. Whether you're a seasoned professional or a newcomer, every competition is an opportunity to learn, create, and elevate the craft.

Welcome to a community where competition fuels inspiration, learning shapes growth, and every image tells a story.

Use of AI

AI is the next leap forward in photography. As a photo club we need to acknowledge that and establish boundaries that maintain the integrity of our craft without stifling creativity. Recognizing the potential impact, the CPS Competition Committee has implemented the following new rules to allow the creative exploration of AI. In the B&W, People and Nature categories, the use of AI is approved to remove unwanted elements, similar to cloning and the use of Content-Aware Fill which are currently allowed. In the Creative and Pictorial categories AI also may be used to remove elements from a photograph. In addition, Generative Fill may be used to ADD elements to a photograph. IN ALL PHOTOS ENTERED IN A CPS COMPETITION, THE MAJOR ELEMENTS IN THE IMAGE MUST BE PRODUCED BY THE ENTRANT using a photographic process. In this document, AI specifically refers to programs such as Photoshop, Midjourney and DALL-E. We hope these new rules, entered below, allow members to explore the creative use of AI while maintaining CPS as a photography club. As a club, we rely on your personal integrity to adhere to both the spirit and letter of these rules.

GENERAL RULES

CPS holds regular competitions throughout the Club year to afford its members an opportunity to display their work and to receive constructive and objective evaluations to help them learn and grow as photographers. There are two types of competitions – Regular and Year-End. Regular competitions are discussed in this document. Year-End competition is discussed separately.

RULES FOR REGULAR COMPETITION

A. Only CPS members and new students currently enrolled in the School of Photography can enter images in CPS competitions.

B. Members and new students must be in good standing. Visitors are welcome but cannot compete.

C. Each image must have a title. Titles should be unique and specific to the photo and should not be duplicated by the same entrant during the competition year. Titles are NOT read until the judging is complete.

D. The titles for photographs should not exceed 30 characters.

E. Watermarks nor any maker identification are not permitted on the print or the mat.

F. Number of entries for each competition is limited to 3 images per competition.

G. Image content – including nudity – is not restricted. However, the entrant is urged to exercise good taste in all images presented for competition.

H. Acceptability for entry and applicability to category is at the sole discretion of the Category Chair. Images that do not meet the requirements of a category may be moved to Pictorial at the discretion of the Category Chair.

I. ALL regular competitions consist of a dedicated category for the evening (as explained below) AND a Pictorial category.

RULES FOR PRINT COMPETITION

A. MINIMUM Print Size of 80 sq. inches, i.e., 8x10 or 9x9 or 4x20

B. MAXIMUM Print Size: 11” X 17” or equivalent (187 square inches).

C. Entrants may print their pictures themselves or have them printed commercially.

D. Entries must be mounted and/or matted – plain black or white mats are strongly recommended. Mat size is not restricted but should be proportional to the image and not excessive in size.

E. Entries must be mounted and/or matted in such a way that no damage will be caused to other prints. Loose tape, sticky residue or any foreign substance that may cause damage to other prints may cause the image to be disqualified at the sole discretion of the Competition Chair.

F. Entries must have a completed CPS entry label affixed to the back upper left corner of the print. See the Competition page on the CPS website for labels. A limited number of entry labels may be available on the night of the competition.

G. All entries MUST be submitted and ready to be logged no later than 7:30 pm. (NOTE: Entries may be left at any time in advance in a box provided for that purpose in the clubroom).

RULES FOR PROJECTION COMPETITION

A. Digital images sized to 1920 pixels wide x 1080 pixels high will look the best when projected. Larger images, in the case of wide panoramas, may show up as unnaturally small. Smaller images will not adequately fill the space available.

B. Digital images MUST be submitted via upload to the CPS website no later than 9:00 pm on the Sunday of the week prior to the competition date (12 days prior to the competition). Complete upload instructions will be furnished in a separate document.

C. Images CANNOT be entered after the deadline.

COMPETITION RULES

COMPETITION CATEGORIES:

A. Black & White

B. Creative

C. Nature

D. People

E. Pictorial

F. 'B' Competition (for students and newer members)

SCOPE OF COMPETITION CATEGORIES:

A. BLACK & WHITE

1. Images must be in true black & white or one solid color tone (Such as sepia). Any spot color will disqualify an image from this category.

2. Textures etc. are permitted if they are lesser elements of the photograph.

3. AI may be used to REMOVE distracting elements from an image, similar to Content-Aware Fill and cloning which are allowed.

B. CREATIVE

1. This category is designed to stretch the creativity of entrants. Images must depict an obvious creative element – either due to subject matter, in-camera effects or through extensive digital manipulation

2. Textures, stock images etc. are permitted if they are lesser elements of the photograph.

3. AI, such as Generative Fill, is permitted as long as the major elements are derived from photographs taken by the entrant.

C. NATURE

1. Images must be subjects of flora or fauna (flowers (wild or cultivated), plants, animals, rocks, water, landscapes, etc.). Domesticated flowers, plants, or animals ARE permitted.

2. Both classifications will be held to the order of "strict" in capture. NO evidence of the hand of man may be present in the image except for scientific bands on wild animals.

Manipulations that alter the truth of the photographic statement are prohibited.

3. Photoshop / digital manipulations may be performed in a minimal sense, not to change the truth of the original "Nature" story. AI may be used to REMOVE distracting elements from an image, similar to LIGHT Content-Aware Fill and cloning (e.g., removing a pop can), which are historically allowed. Cropping, Levels adjustments, slight color enhancements, contrast, slight dodging and burning, sharpening, etc. are all allowed. Heavy cloning and layer masking, though hard to identify, would violate the truth of the image and are not permitted.

4. Obvious HDR images will not be accepted. HDR can be used for exposure corrections, but the presentation cannot have a heavy, obvious HDR look.

5. Black or darkened backgrounds are permitted, but images that appear to be artificially lit or tabletop posed will not be accepted. Images appearing to be digitally cut and pasted onto a black background will not be accepted. Natural settings or surroundings of a subject are not always the most aesthetically pleasing but do bring truth to the capture.

6. Images may be either color or black and white.

7. We rely on your personal integrity to adhere to both the letter and spirit of these rules.

D. PEOPLE

1. Includes all aspects of the human form or evidence of the human presence.

2. Images may be either color or black & white.

3. Textures etc. are permitted if they are lesser elements of the photograph.

4. AI may be used to REMOVE distracting elements from an image, similar to Content-Aware Fill and cloning, which are allowed.

E. PICTORIAL

1. Pictorial is an open category.

2. Textures, stock images etc. are permitted if they are lesser elements of the photograph.AI, such as Generative Fill, is permitted as long as the major elements are derived from photographs taken by the entrant.

F. 'B' COMPETITION

1. 'B' Competitions were specifically designed for students and newer members who would like to compete but would prefer to do so amongst their peers rather than more seasoned members. There are no restrictions who can compete in this category, but we ask that you choose between EITHER the B Competition series or the regular competition series for the entire club year. You may change series ONCE during the year but must then remain in the chosen series.

2. 'B' Competitions always hold to the Pictorial category, although certain themes may be suggested.

3. Textures, stock images etc. are permitted if they are lesser elements of the photograph.

4. AI, such as Generative Fill, is permitted as long as the major elements are derived from photographs taken by the entrant.

5. Those competitors who receive a perfect '27' score in B Competition are automatically moved to the main competition series and those who place highest in Accumulated Points are automatically advanced to the main competition series the following year.

6. Members may compete in B competitions a maximum of two years.

NUMBER OF COMPETITIONS PER YEAR

A. There shall be three (3) competitions each in the main categories, Black & White, Creative, Nature and People, for a total of twelve (12) per year.

B. Every competition in the main series also offers the opportunity to compete in the Pictorial Category.

C. Eight competitions will be Projection and four will be Print.

NUMBER OF ENTRIES PER INDIVIDUAL IN A COMPETITION:

A. The entry limit per evening is three (3) total images, as follows:

1. Images may be entered in the evening's category (i.e., Nature) only, or split between the evening's category and Pictorial. Up to Two (2) images may be entered into the evening's category (i.e., Nature)

2. Any maximum combination of the following can be submitted on any given competition evening:

a. category and 1 Pictorial

b. 1 category and 2 Pictorial

c. 0 category and up to 3 Pictorial

d. Note that 3 images is the maximum and that fewer images can be entered if desired.

e. Participation in either the evening's category or the Pictorial component of any evening is optional.

ENTRY QUALIFICATIONS

A. ALL ENTRIES MUST BE THE ORIGINAL WORK OF THE ENTRANT, SUBJECT TO THE EXCEPTIONS NOTED IN THE RULES FOR EACH INDIVIDUAL CATEGORY.

B. If an image wins a Place (First, Second, Third or Honorable Mention) in a regular competition, it may not be submitted again - in any format - during regular competition – ever.

C. An image that does not win a place in a regular competition may be entered one more time in any regular competition. Category and/or Classification are not restricted. Re-entry does not need to occur in the same competition year.

THE JUDGING PROCESS:

A. THE JUDGES:

1. There will be three (3) judges for each competition, chosen from outside the Club membership whenever possible.

2. Judges are chosen for their knowledge and their ability to give constructive and sensitive critiques.

B. JUDGING STANDARDS

1. JUDGING POINTS: In all competitions, judges will evaluate each entry based on its own merit by the following categories.

Composition .....1-3 points

Impact… ..... ….1-3 points

Photographic technique…….1-3 points

Therefore, a perfect score is 27, with 9 points from each judge.

2. SCORING: Because the scoring process is dynamic and will vary from competition to competition, there is no set score which determines the place an image will receive. Simply, the image that receives the highest score in each Category/Classification will be designated First Place. Subsequent awards – 2nd, 3rd and Honorable Mention may also be given as described below. Ties are NOT broken – multiple images may receive the same award level and Honor Points.

3. HONOR POINTS are awarded for each PLACE in regular competition:

5 honor points ..... for “1st place.”

4 honor points ..... for “2nd place.”

3 honor points ..... for “3rd place.”

2 honor points ..... for “Honorable Mention”

For the scoring of the End of Year image in photojournalism, the following HONOR POINTS will be given and added to other honor points to determine Photographer of the Year:

7 honor points……for Image of the Year.

5 honor points……for "1 st place."

4 honor points……for "2 nd place."

3 honor points……for "3 rd place."

The number of honor points per Category awarded at any individual competition is based on the total number of entries that evening.

4. The total number of available places, including all ties, will not exceed 30% (rounded up) of the total number of entries in that Category. Note: Since ties are not broken during regular competitions, it is possible that not all potential places will be awarded each evening. If there are limited entries in a category that evening and tied mages take the total beyond 30%, all images in that point value will be awarded points but may not permit awards to be given at lower levels. Conversely, on nights when there are a large number of entries it is also possible for images with multiple scores to receive Honorable Mention awards in order to reach the 30% limit.

5. Honor points will be tracked for each entrant. Accumulated Points winners will be recognized at the Annual Banquet. In addition, a plaque will be presented to the photographer who earns the most Accumulated Points across at least three separate Categories. Results of each competition will be published on the Competitions page of the CPS website as soon as practical following the competition. See the link on the Competitions page for Results and Accumulated Points.

THE COMPETITION PROCESS:

A. Two rounds of viewing are used in competition.

1. FIRST is the judging round. The image is shown, and each judge scores the image. The totals are recorded by computer. In the case of projection competitions, images are scored online in advance by judges on their own computers.

2. SECOND is the critique round. The judges, taking turns, critique the images. Following each critique, an announcement is made of the image title, the maker, the score, and the place awarded, if any. The Category Chair determines the exact number of images to be commented-upon each evening, based on the total number of entries and/or any time constraints. Entrants may be asked at the time an image is submitted which image(s) they wish to designate for comment.

B. Prints will be displayed on an easel at a comfortable viewing distance from the judges.

C. Each print will be displayed on the wall immediately following the critique and announcement.

D. Winning prints will be displayed separately from non-winning images.

E. Digital Images will be projected at a comfortable viewing distance from the judges.

F. Special Rules for Judging:

1. In a case where a judge is previously familiar with a competitor's work, that judge shall exclude him/herself from judging that competitor's images in order to ensure fairness in the judging process.

2. The judge will identify the conflict to the Competition Chair prior to the judging round.

3. When the image is presented, the judge will provide the lowest score provided by the scoring equipment as a signal to the tabulators. Tabulators will then average the score of the other two judges and add that average to obtain the final score for the image. (ex.: scores of 8 and 6 would yield an average of 7 and the total score would be 21).

4. In the event that the average score yields other than a whole number (ex.: 8 + 7 = 15 / 2 = 7.5), for the first instance of occurrence for each affected competitor, the score will be rounded up to the next whole number. Should the situation recur on the competitor's second image as well, that score will be rounded down. (In the presented example, the first instance would yield an average score of 8 and a total score of 23, while a second instance would produce an average of 7 and a total score of 22).

COMPETITION CHAIRS FOR 2026-2027

Overall Competition Chairperson: Catherine Kenngott

Black & White Chair: Dave Ciborek

Creative Chair: John Paganini

Nature Chair: Denise Meekins

People Chair: Brad Nelson Ruebensaal

Pictorial Chair: Randy Beiter

Photojournalism Chair: Bill Keaton

'B' Competition Chair: Marge Brady

End of Year Chair: Catherine Kenngott