

Background

There has been a lot of debate, discussion and questions within the Society recently on the topic of the judging, rating and scoring of images in, particularly monthly, competitions. This is a debate that has been going on for many years and is raised periodically.

In this Society we have long been of the opinion that the actual competitive element of the evenings is secondary to gaining positive, encouraging guidance. Ultimately what we want as photographers is to be guided and encouraged to enjoy our hobby and to improve. A judge's comments give a more detailed and accurate feedback on the various merits of and improvements to an image than any marking system can give.

There is however a sense that with the current system, at the end of the evening, and possibly at the end of the season, a lot of people are left with the same score which could make them feel in some way disenfranchised by the process.

Across the Southern Federation, and I'm sure elsewhere, there are lots of different systems in operation everything from marks out of 10, or out of 20, to hybrids right through to simple "critique evenings" where no marks, scores or awards are given at all. Most of the judges that come to us are pleased with our system which they prefer over most of the others in operation.

This paper proposes four options that try to strike a balance between positive feedback with recognition from a competitive stand point.

- Approach 1 – The current system
- Approach 2 – A variant of the current system
- Approach 3 – An extended variant of the current system with multiple rows
- Approach 4 – Marks out of 10

Principles

Before embarking on the options I noted some basic principles of what we want from a judging evening:

- Accurate reflection of an image's merit and encouragement and advice on how to improve as a photographer
- Consistent from month to month
- Equally applicable to prints and PDIs
- Straightforward and simple for a judge to understand and apply

Summary

The table below shows how points would be awarded under the four Approaches that are mapped out in this paper. You'll have to read the individual approaches to understand the table.

Finishing Position	1 – Current	2 – Current +	3 – Multiple	4 – Out of 10
1 st	5	6	7	10
2 nd	4	5	6	9.5
3 rd	3	4	5	9
Highly Commended	2	3	4	-
Held back (Gold)	-	2	3	-
Unplaced (Silver)	-	-	2	-
Unplaced (Bronze)	1	1	1	6-9

Approach 1 – Status Quo

Keep the current system. It works well, is simple to apply and judges generally like it. Note also that an opinion from several judges is that this approach actually gives a better, more accurate result as they have to take time re-considering all their held-back images before picking the overall winners.

A recent article in the PAGB newsletter about Pointless Scoring (i.e. just a critique evening) included this:

Newcomers and beginners may feel that so many people receiving 1 point doesn't tell them the relative merit of their picture. However, by not being awarded a Commended you have been told that your picture is not considered to be as good as others. Do you really need a score of 7, or less, to tell you it is really poor and surely this is much better conveyed by the judges' helpful comments than by a relatively

meaningless score. Judges mostly love the [critique] system because they don't have to find a reason to separate (say) a 14 from a 13 when really there is very little difference. Entrants mostly like it as the judge can concentrate on making helpful suggestions for improvement rather than being obliged to make negative comments to explain the very low score.

Approach 2 – Current plus a tweak

A slight modification to the current approach would be to move all the points up by one to allow two points to be awarded for being *held back*. Thus giving an extra differentiation and award over the images that were not quite up to that level. So the class winner would now get six points, second place would get five etc.

Approach 3 – Multiple held back rows

In this approach the judge uses all three rows on our print stands to rate the images within the class. Three "held back" rows if you will. A sort of bronze, silver and gold rating within the class.

At the end of the class the judge selects the 1st, 2nd, 3rd and HC from the gold row, as we do currently. The images on the silver and bronze rows get fewer points (as per the summary table)

This would perhaps give photographers more recognition of their overall standing within the evening but it would be a lot harder for a judge to think about and manage on the night. It could be achieved for prints and PDIs.

Approach 4 – Marks out of 10

Applying marks out of 10 is sometimes viewed as being a good system for understanding an image's value and relative merit to other images either from the same photographer over several weeks or against other images on the competition evening.

In practice this is not true. Having done some judging and talked to other judges what happens is that, during a run through of the images in a class, a judge will identify the one or two top images and the one or two bottom images. The top image(s) will get a 10, regardless of their overall merit, and the weakest image will receive a 6 or 7, depending how generous/mean the judge is feeling or just how "poor" the image is judged to be. Images will almost never get less than 5 out of 10. As a judge, trying to retain the relative merits of all the photographs across a class, outside the top and bottom, is impossible so these mid-range images will be given a somewhat arbitrary score between 7.5 and 8.5.

That same article PAGB article included this (when considering marks out of 20):

As a judge, it can be very difficult find a reason to separate (say) a 14 from a 13 when really there is very little difference. The need to award a full range of scores also encourages the judge to concentrate more on the negative attributes of a picture rather than the good points. How else can he/she justify low scores? A growing number of Clubs have stopped asking the judge to award points at all. They simply ask for a critique and advice to improve the image and may ask for a few of the best pictures to be recognised by (say) a Merit Award or a Top Position.

You can't compare marks from week to week because judging is highly subjective and even the same judge presented with the same images a week later will give different scores and possibly, probably, come to a different overall conclusion.

Only one judge I spoke to did profess to prefer marks out of 10. Quizzing him further it turned out that it was because having given a mark for an image and moved on that image was immediately forgotten. Our approach required him to revisit the images, consider them and come to a logical conclusion, which was harder work.

A mark out of 10 is not going to give you the richness of feedback that a judge's comments can give, even those that struggle to find something meaningful say will be better than a single number

Photographers do come away from the evening with a number in their head, it can apply equally to prints and PDIs and it's simple for judges to understand and apply.

Recommendation

Your committee has examined these options carefully and took a vote on them at the meeting on 20th April. The result was a recommendation that we adopt Approach 2, a slight modification to the current process. This was because it gives a better spread of values across a class, it's very simple for us to employ and it is simple for a judge.