

## **Commentary in Camera Clubs**

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Commenting in the Northwest is soft commentary: no hard critiquing here! Traditionally commentators are very soft, in fact, but very helpful when traveling to area clubs to share experiences.

Those who join a camera club do so for any one or a combination of reasons: fellowship (perhaps most of all), being a part of the photography “community”, having a place to show one’s work, but, hopefully, to educate oneself and to improve one’s photography. Sure, we have demonstrations, set-ups, slide shows from others’ work, educational taped shows field trips, etc., but most of all the education in a camera club is centered around the judging of members’ work and the commentary of that work - with the commentary, of course, as the most valuable.

Judging in clubs around the world varies tremendously: in many clubs there is a visiting photographer who is both judge and commentator at the same time. A good judging session will never do a ‘run through’ first nor will it read titles before the scoring. Some will know of an English club’s Invitational Slide Competition where the club brought in an out of town judge especially for the competition, where he “scored out of ten”. In some clubs, an in-house panel of judges scores while a visiting artist/teacher/photographer critiques the work of the members. Either of these methods is preferable to in-house judges with an in-house commentator! Likewise there are different styles of judging and often different scoring systems are used. In short, never assume that what one club does is anything even close to another, particularly compared to a club in another part of the country.

If a club must use its own members for both judging and commenting the result becomes less valuable, that is, less educational. Obviously the judges and/or the commentator might recognize the work: a good judge/commentator will not allow this recognition to sneak into the night’s work. It is totally inappropriate to verbalize the obvious recognition of any one’s work and worse yet, to do so if the commentator has guessed incorrectly. Likewise a good commentator can critique his own work well, never letting the listeners know it is his work until it is announced afterward!

The commentator must be his/her own person: must be true to himself. This becomes especially true when invited to another club where the work is mediocre or worse: the photographer must be honest about critiquing the work in front of him. If it is poor work, the slide or print should still have a positive statement made about it and then one or two suggestions for improvement. It is inappropriate to pretend that the work is valuable when it is mediocre. It is not fair to pretend and no fun to pretend,

Each commentator brings to the job (just as each judge does) all of his/her background: education, life experiences, training, etc., as well as photographic ability. For this reason, the training of judges and commentators is about teaching photographers to recognize techniques, learning photographic basics, being proficient, and, on the other hand, it is not about cloning scores nor about terminology learned by rote. If a panel of judges all score identically once or twice an evening, that is fine, but judges have not learned anything if they all come up with the same (or close) scores all evening. Clearly, each person in any camera club has different education, photographic ability, life experiences, etc., and thus cannot possibly give scores like someone sitting next to him. A commentator is at a meeting to help others learn, utilizing all his life experiences, etc. He must not be a clone of any teacher; he is not at a meeting to give expected remarks but rather to honestly and fairly give comments which will help those exhibiting. The advantage of having outside commentators becomes obvious; the advantage of having commentators whose backgrounds vary widely is likewise obvious. Many clubs simply refuse to have in-house commentators or in-house judge/commentator combination.

So what can we expect at a camera club? We will hear comments (and different styles) from different parts of North America and hopeful some day even from a foreign country. We don't want to hear the same old thing each month. If there is a visiting international judge in town for a salon, we should hope that we will have the opportunity to hear that experienced individual. We should expect to hear different comments each month; we can likewise expect to learn, but we may not always like what we hear. We should expect to learn one or maybe two points per competition night but perhaps only one great bit of information per month. That helpful bit of information might be on someone else's work, not necessarily on one's own image. Listen carefully: Learn from the commentator of the evening something you can use.