

The SMART approach to image creation and evaluation - Handout

by Adrian Lowe

Or “How to go from Snap-shots to images that Crackle and Pop.”

A photograph is a combination of art (what) and science (how) and is used to record subjects and/or have an impact on the viewer, whether it is pleasant, stirring or emotive.

The difference between a snapshot containing perhaps a plethora of unrelated details, and an image making an impact on the viewer, depends on **what** the photographer perceives and interprets from the subject, and **how** techniques are used to successfully extract that unique essence of the subject.

Photography is the **art** of seeing and recognizing that crucial/special/unique element in the scene before you (**philosophical and psychological**) and having the **science/skill** to be able to isolate and capture that unique essence in a special way (**artistic**) that will move (**psychological**) the viewer. The SMART approach helps with this rationale.

4 types of photos.

1. A **snapshot** in time recording warts and all. A snapshot is not using any technique. It may be a faithful recording of the subject, but it is not what the mind actually sees, perceives and interprets. A mind selectively focuses, selectively exposes, admits and ignores light and shade, objects and details. A camera, if it is not used properly, will simply get it all, warts and all.
2. dramatic **opportune** moments,
3. strikingly **beautiful** scenes or subjects that impress all by themselves (still requires good technique)
4. the sign of a true artist is when you can turn the ordinary into the **extraordinary**. The art here is to observe and realize the uniqueness of the subject and the skill to present the subject in a way that one's subconscious mind has seen it. To consciously be aware of the unique essence of the subject in front of you requires careful observation and practice.

The SMART approach:

S. Subject - Story/Message/Appeal/Connection/Beauty - A picture should be worth a thousand words.

M. Mood - Emotion. How it affects the viewer. Elated, curious, sad, angry, pleasant etc.

A. Aesthetics - Artistic. Composition, lighting, motion, point of view etc. Is there a certain style or panache? What complements the idea? What detracts from the idea?

R. Rarity/Essence - Difficulty/Wow factor/Curiosity - How often do you see this or in this way? Does it capture the essence of the subject? The difficulty factor. This is what makes photos impressive.

T. Technique - the essential technical factors to bring out the above characteristics of the image to best effect. Appropriate: exposure, focus, depth of field, focal length, lighting.

If you don't take care of the points above, you're left with a **Snap-shot** with little meaning or impression.

The only exemption being a **Grab** shot by being at the right place at the right time.

Ask yourself “What or how many of these aspects can I employ?”

How best can I make the extraordinary from the ordinary? Some ideas are:

- What's the main point of the subject? What makes it different, rare? What impresses me about it?
- What story if any do I want to convey?
- What is the mood I want to portray?
- What props or elements of the scene can I use to emphasise the story/point.
- Lens (wa, tele, normal) to emphasise, compress or otherwise.
- Positioning – where is the best place to shoot from? Leading lines, angle, distance and point of view.
- Composition – where should my main element be and where should others be?
- Shapes, lines and textures.
- Exposure – what exposure, shutter and aperture, can provide the best feel and record?
- Lighting – help the mood.
- Colour – helps the mood – can use polariser, coloured or graduated filters, white balance, grain.
- What elements in the frame complement the idea and what detracts from the idea?

Aspects in this approach aren't new, but it is a combination of accepted ideas. It is only one way of looking at the creation and evaluation of images but has been used with great success. Practising this approach becomes natural and easy after time, and you will gain more pleasure from your experiences and more impact from your images, as will your viewing audience.