

A Guide for PSQ Judges Becoming Mentors 2023

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1. The Role of a Mentor

From time-to-time PSQ Accredited Judges may be invited to be the mentor of a PSQ Understudy Judge. The mentor's role is to support and guide an understudy judge to ensure that they are aware of the requirements to be an effective judge and to ensure that the necessary judging sessions, reports and presentations are completed. The relevant reports must be sent to the PSQ Judges Executive for assessment.

You should regard the invitation to be a mentor as a sign that somebody in the camera club movement regards you as a respected and competent judge. Consequently, you should feel an obligation, while working as a mentor, to act in a way which totally matches that level of respect.

Judges come with a wide range of photographic experience. It could be years of professional photography in the industry, many years of experience as an amateur photographer, long term success in international exhibitions, years of service on Camera Club committees, being a serving member of the PSQ committees, or an academic background in photography or art. No one type of experience is necessarily superior to any other. Neither is photographic experience the only factor that determines whether a person is an effective judge and mentor. Work, education, professional and personal experience like hobbies can help someone develop appropriate skills for a photographic judge.

For understudy judges, the range of background experience can be just as wide. What the mentor needs to do is get to know their understudy judge (referred as "understudy" hereafter) and use this knowledge to help them determine the level and range of support that's needed. You may find your understudy has more background experience than yourself in some areas, about the same in others and considerably less in some areas that are important in the role of a photographic judge. Obviously, the mentor needs to provide much more support and advice in some areas than in others. Occasionally, you'll find an understudy who needs surprisingly little help.

Make sure you have enough time in your life to dedicate to helping your understudy in terms of phone calls, answering emails, attending judgings with them, providing support and filling in reports afterwards.

Mentors should initially have a meeting with the Understudy to outline the requirements to become a judge, coach them in effective judging practice and provide general tips and guidance. Mentors should attend the Understudy's required judging sessions in person where possible. If this is not possible due to distance, then a video connection should be arranged (e.g., Zoom or Teams).

Mentors could mention the potential workload involved in judging for clubs and the need to start judging the entries as early as possible. This could depend on the type of judging,

whether written comments are required and the number of entries. Entry numbers can vary from anything between 30 and 180 entries, depending on the club's size although the recommendation is between 90 and 100 to keep things manageable.

2. Qualities of an Effective Judge

2.1. Communication skills

The foremost quality is communication skills. It doesn't matter how qualified, or skilful, a judge is in all the other components of the judging process, poor communication can undo everything else. First off, it's necessary to establish some kind of rapport or connection with the audience. Unless you're well known you may need to give the audience an outline of your background. Your speech needs to be clear and somewhat slower than normal, in many cases, so that the audience hears each word. Over complicated sentence structures and obscure technical jargon should be minimized. Silent pauses are very useful, especially in place of "Um" and "Ah", to allow time to think of the exact words to say next. The understudy needs to have enough confidence to face the audience and not have their back to the audience while appraising images. If possible, have the laptop/desktop monitor in front of them and the projection screen/monitor behind them.

The mentor needs to **carefully appraise at least one practice run** by the understudy prior to a judging performance. Obviously, perceived problems should be pointed out and the understudy given an opportunity to rehearse their suggested improvements - as many times as necessary. Needless to say, this process needs to be extended to other aspects of the judging process. This level of support needs to be provided for the first club judging assignment, at least, and a gradually diminishing level of support for subsequent judging commissions. If you are confident in the ability of your understudy, one presentation should be made with no or minimal assistance beforehand. While three club judging presentations and one presentation, lecture or demonstration on a photographic topic is the standard understudy training, this could be extended if either the mentor or understudy or the Judges' Executive feels the need.

2.2. Answering questions

Answering questions confidently is an important skill for judges. However, the mentor needs to provide some practice experience just in case, and alert the understudy on how to handle questions that they may lack the knowledge or experience to answer confidently.

Experienced judges will often be familiar with the work of respected members of the club whose work is being judged and may defer the question to someone else in the club. For example: "One of your club's A-Grade members, Joe Bloggs, is very experienced in this area

and I'm sure he can give you a better answer than I can, particularly in the time available this evening." Sometimes it's safer to admit your limitations as long as you don't have to do it often. Honesty and sincerity are appreciated by camera club members.

2.3. Constructive Criticism

Providing constructive criticism {without putting down} is also an important skill. Criticism involves both positive and negative commentary on images. It should be either balanced or skewed towards the positive aspects of the work. Commentary should never be skewed towards negative aspects of an image. Judges should realize how tactless criticism can destroy the confidence of a new club member and that judges are meant to help club members to improve. Conversely, a favourable comment or a slightly generous award can be profoundly encouraging to a struggling beginner. Similarly, an experienced photographer who feels depressed about their photography or simply "in a rut" can have their enthusiasm restored by a favourable comment from a respected judge. Judges should encourage wherever possible and provide feedback for people to improve their photography where needed.

Judges could briefly describe the image and what it communicates to them, followed by positive comments about the image and any opportunities for improvement. It's good to encourage the use of the sandwich technique. Say something positive, followed by your critique, then finish up with something positive. Audiences usually respond well to this method. Remember that every image submitted to club competitions is a result of effort of the member and it is the judge's job to identify such efforts and praise it.

You should alert your Understudy to the possibility that someone could be offended by one of their statements that the Understudy thinks is inoffensive or even positive. For example, "This is quite a good image for a B grader." The sting in the tail, "...for a B grader", might not be noticed, or it could give serious offence. It's probably safer to make an unqualified statement like, "This is one of the better images in this section of the competition."

2.4. Aesthetic Quality in Images

Ability to recognize and discuss aesthetic quality in images can mean different things to different people. It can be closely related to the appeal of an image on an intellectual level rather than an emotional one. Under this heading a judge would be discussing things like the lighting and how it emphasizes subject texture or the value of high key tones in separating the subject from the background, or how the specular highlights add life to a monochrome image, etc.

Many images have a profound effect without necessarily, for most viewers, evoking an emotional reaction or telling a story. Much of Ansel Adams' photography, https://www.anseladams.com for example, would probably fall into this category. Other examples include Ruth Bernhardt https://independent-photo.com/news/ruth-bernhard/

Paul Caponigro https://www.artnet.com/artists/paul-caponigro/ and Michael Kenna (https://www.michaelkenna.com).

2.5. Emotional Content in Images

Ability to recognize and discuss emotional content in images depends to some extent on our understanding the meaning of emotion and to large degree on the judge's personal background and life experience. An engineer could be emotionally excited by a technically perfect image of an intricate piece of machinery while a teacher could be quite amused by Robert Doisneau's photo of a schoolboy gazing hopefully at a clock - reading 2:55, perhaps. Similarly, a judge who has travelled to India and experienced the sounds, tastes and aromas of a rural spice market in Gujarat could give a more meaningful commentary on an image depicting such a scene. Their experience can evoke an emotional response to the stimulus provided by the image. Someone lacking the necessary experience may respond differently to the same image or have no response at all.

When discussing emotional response with your understudy, you could show them how your experience triggers an emotional response and then ask them to relate their experiences that might be relevant to the image. Any discussion that is related to a commentator's personal experience, especially if members of the audience might have had similar experiences, will seem more meaningful and relevant. Experience does not have to be direct – it can be second hand. Books and films sometimes provide a vicarious experience just as powerful as the real thing. These references to personal experience should not be overdone, however. Your understudy needs to refrain from turning every comment into a story of their own life as it will make the evening way too long.

Another factor related to appreciation of images is **imagination**. Firstly, photographers, and indeed artists, need imagination to produce their images and, secondly, the viewer needs imagination to appreciate them. Once again, background and experience play a part in developing imagination. Their appreciation of an image could be profoundly different to that of someone whose imagination was limited. It's easy to see how two different judges could react differently to the same image.

2.6. Ability to Make Suggestions

Judges need the ability to make suggestions for improvement to an image, discuss its story telling or its emotional content and describe or evaluate relevant techniques (such as composition and cropping, selective exposure and contrast controls, sharpness, blur etc.).

In this area it's particularly easy for a judge to get bogged down in technical discussion. Suggestions for improvement need to be precise and brief to insure a good time control for the overall judging night.

2.7 Work Smarter - not Harder

Working smarter may include analysing the technical faults that need discussion and discuss one or two only, in detail, along with recommended solutions for members to try. This could be done early in the judging presentation, and later images displaying the same fault could be covered with a comment like: "Here is another example of inadequate depth of field. Appropriate remedies have already been described."

Working smarter may also include putting the onus back on the club committee; e.g. "I noticed several examples of images that could be improved by selective exposure adjustment to various areas of the same image. Rather than boring you tonight with an in-depth description of how to address this problem, I'd advise the club committee to organize a workshop on the subject." If you could suggest somebody to run the workshop that would be a helpful bonus.

2.8 Consistency in Giving Awards

Being consistent in giving awards and adhering to the club's award system isn't always easy. Praising an image, highly, and only giving it an Acceptance isn't seen by the club as being consistent. Neither is awarding an Honour and describing several faults in the commentary for the image. This is not to say that minor "improvements" cannot be suggested for Merits or Honours. E.g., "If the maker intends to enter this image in an International competition, I would suggest"

Club award systems are different. Some clubs suggest that a judge only gives awards to certain percentage of the images. A flexible approach to such a club guideline is needed. When 5 images are entered in a section, it's difficult to allocate awards to 30% of 5 for example, so some common sense needs to be applied. Provided the judge makes an attempt to acknowledge or accommodate their wishes, clubs are usually happy. However, if the judge is perceived as too "stingy", or exceedingly "generous", complaints may follow. In practice, when strict compliance with such guidelines is impossible, erring slightly on the side of generosity is usually well received.

2.9 Stick to the Definition

Recognizing and adhering to the club's subject definition can be an area of contention if the judge is not careful. Occasionally clubs arrive at a definition that differs from the accepted subject definition provided by such authorities as PSA, APS or even FIAP. They may have perfectly sensible and valid reasons for this. Wherever possible, the club definition must always be followed. If there are any concerns over the definition provided, this should be discussed with the club's competitions officer.

It is important for mentors to help Understudies familiarise themselves with the specific entry and judging requirements for **general genres such as Nature**, **Photo Travel and**

Photojournalism. Further information can be found on the APS website. Attention should be drawn to the Photographic Society of America's international competition guidelines for reality-based divisions. https://psa-photo.org/page/division-definitions

2.10 Promptness and Timing

There are two parts to this. The first is in the Judging process. This needs to be completed, with the results **forwarded to the competitions officer**, **by the required date** – usually a few days before the judging presentation night. If you are having problems with the timeframe, contact the competitions officer. Clubs are usually understanding.

The second part relates to the judging night itself. Judges [including mentors and understudies] need to arrive at least 10 to 20 minutes before the meeting starts and adjust the presentation to the finishing time stipulated by the club. They may have no flexibility in this regard and face penalties from the building's owners for being late leaving the premises. Also, some members need to work the next day and need their sleep. They may also have to drive a considerable distance to get home. You could arrange with a prominent club member to keep an eye on the time and provide a signal if you need to speed up. Unfortunately, clubs sometimes don't help by having club business and announcements to be discussed before the judging commentary can start. If this happens, you will need to inform your understudy that they may need to speed up a little.

2.11 Preparation for Judging

Preparation for Judging can cover a surprising number of subtopics. It may include time spent studying images and discussion between the mentor and understudy. It may, however, extend to such apparently trivial matters as arranging the club's print entry in the same sequence as when they'll be presented at the club meeting. It's been patently obvious, over the years that even some experienced judges neglect to take this simple step, which may take minimal time for the judge. It can even be a virtually effortless part of the standard process adopted by an organized judge. On the meeting night, itself, it can save the Competitions Officer considerable time and an enormous amount of stress.

Some clubs have their own personalized awards like "Most Apt Title" or "Image of the Night". Try not to forget such little details. Often, they are an important part of the club's competition calendar. Having to make an "off the cuff" decision on the night puts the judge in the unenviable position of making a decision apparently without due care and consideration.

One essential aspect for judges when judging digital image files is to **calibrate their monitor regularly** to ensure accurate colour rendition and brightness. This requires a calibration tool such as a Datacolor Spyder which can be purchased by the Understudy or sometimes loaned from their club or other members. Having an uncalibrated monitor may mean that you are judging images that look quite different to what the entrants believe they entered and different to how they will look when projected at a club.

3 Different Judging Experiences

3.1 Panel Judging

Panel judging is where a group of three or more judges (the panel) each evaluate images by scoring out of 5 or 9 followed by discussion of the relative merits and faults of a small selection of them to determine awards. Judges have not previously seen the images and are required to make a decision on the spot. Very little time is usually allowed for each image to be scored. Commonly, images with a high level of initial impact are chosen for further consideration and often, more subtle images miss out. For obvious reasons this is sometimes called **impact judging**.

Occasionally understudies are invited to be part of such a panel, and it can be a valuable learning experience for the understudy. However, the mentor needs to provide encouragement and prior advice so that their understudy is not overawed by the occasion. It would be wise for the mentor to chat with the other panel members and ask them to involve your understudy in the discussions. While this style of judging usually applies to serious competitions such as Interclub competitions plus national and international exhibitions, camera clubs occasionally have such judging events as a learning experience for members.

3.2 Stand up Impact Judging

A "Stand up Impact Judging" - for want of a better name, occurs when a single judge is invited to a meeting, without seeing any images beforehand and asked to comment and evaluate them on the spot. It's a rare practice amongst PSQ affiliated Queensland camera clubs but is very common, if not the norm, for camera clubs in NSW. One Brisbane club has this style of judging just for its first meeting of the year. Other clubs, incorporate it for part of their monthly competition only, e.g., for prints. It's quite possible an understudy could be invited to perform such a judging assignment, so you, as their mentor, need to give them some experience at impromptu image commentary.

4 Other Matters to Consider in the Internet Era

4.1 Online Image Reviewing Platforms

My Photo Club Website and other photo viewing websites have been a popular judging platform for remote clubs for some time. Recently Metropolitan and near Brisbane clubs have increasingly been using it as part of their competition process. The judge views images on the website and records awards with or without typed comments depending on the

club's requirements. Comments may well be condensed compared with a live oral commentary delivered at a meeting. Judges unused to typing may find this process extremely exhausting and time consuming. Often a small amount of time thinking about what to say, beforehand, can save considerable time typing.

These platforms can be very different and navigating within a platform might not be very intuitive and can be frustrating for new judges.

4.2 Online Meeting Facilities

The Covid 19 Pandemic forced some operational changes onto camera clubs. Holding interactive meetings using online meeting platforms, specifically ZOOM has enabled clubs to function almost normally, if more informally, while physical meetings were banned. This has now become the norm for some distant clubs. Also, some clubs now have normal physical meetings with the judge joining on Zoom. Presentations from guest speakers can also be delivered using Zoom. Various aspects of camera club operation could change, possibly forever. So far, the overall response from club members to the changes has been positive. Judges should familiarise themselves with the usage of ZOOM meeting interface.

Similarly, to attending physical meetings, judges judging over ZOOM need to dress smart casual with a good attitude and in addition, ensure a decent web cam is used with reasonable lighting. Make sure the judge is framed properly during the judging session. Make sure there is no noise around the judge, such as TV, baby crying, or dog barking. Make sure there is a dedicated space for the judge and no people walking behind. Without seeing the audience face to face, these things may have significant impact on the judging and the level of professionalism displayed.

5 What is a Photography Judge?

In reality, a photographic judge is not that different from a judge in a courtroom. One examines testimony and other evidence and provides a clear, balanced explanation for a jury to enable them to make a reasoned decision. The photography judge combines the functions of a courtroom judge and jury by providing a **balanced commentary and allocating an appropriate award to an image**. Ideally, one is respected by his or her photographic peers, the other is respected by the legal fraternity and relevant government officers.

Both types of judges need to be **good communicators**, and both, at times, assume the role of **teachers** in transmitting information to their respective audiences. A courtroom judge instructs a jury on points of law before they retire to consider a verdict. They may similarly

instruct barristers. To a photography club audience, a judge delivers technical advice and interprets the artistic and aesthetic qualities of an image. Clearly, in both cases, they play educational roles.

Another thing judges do is **set precedents**. An original or courageous decision by a courtroom judge often determines decisions in a type of case for hundreds of years into the future. Photography judges can influence the types of images that become popular or fall out of favour by giving awards or "rejects." How many experienced photography judges can say they've done this? How many have done it without realizing?

Impartiality, or at least **the appearance of being impartial**, is another expectation of both kinds of judge. Our courtroom judge needs to act impartially for obvious reasons - the survival of large corporations as well as peoples' livelihoods, rights and freedoms are affected. In extreme instances, actual lives depend upon it. This doesn't mean a camera club judge, or a courtroom judge for that matter, has to be totally unprejudiced. It is natural for human beings to have prejudices due to individual differences and life experiences. However, they must avoid making statements or judgements that are unduly or obviously influenced by them. "Another bl....... sunset! Seen one, seen 'em all. Reject!" is definitely not an example of judicial impartiality at a camera club. Judges must always strive to avoid personal bias.

Nevertheless, well-known photography judges can make humorous reference to their supposed prejudices, without giving offence. "Everyone probably knows I have a soft spot for late afternoon or early morning light reflected from wet sand, [Pause] but that's not the only reason this image received its award......" A statement like this will usually get a chuckle from the audience. The earlier example of a prejudicial statement might not be so well received. Other examples of preferences or prejudices judges may have other than subject matter, are camera brand, compositional choice, tight cropping, or generous negative space, toned or untoned monochrome prints, bright areas...... The list could go on and on.

Having prejudices is not necessarily an example of judicial fallibility but allowing them to unduly influence our awards, or direct our commentary, could be perceived that way.

Perhaps the final role of a judge that requires consideration is that of **Ambassador**. Who indeed are judges representing? For a start there's **PSQ**, Secondly, every time we stand before a Camera Club as a judge, we are ambassadors for all the **other PSQ judges** in general and the PSQ Judges' Executive in particular. Please make your understudy aware that a careless statement might, in extreme circumstances, bring disrepute onto judges generally.

Finally, **judges** are ambassadors for the club that's invited them to judge. If the judge's commentary or toughness discourages some beginning members from further participation, he or she is doing the club an extreme disservice. Being unnecessarily tough when handing

out awards or critical in commentary towards all but very experienced club members doesn't help anyone. It may discourage participation or even reduce club membership and, worst of all, stifle the enthusiasm of emerging photographers.

6 Common Judging Mistakes

6.1 Prejudices

Obviously the first judging mistake we need to mention is unconsciously allowing our prejudices to influence our awards and commentaries. A simple example might be if you aren't a cat person and you see a cat image and award it a low score because you are negatively prejudice towards cats. Referring to supposed prejudices and preferences is fine provided it's deliberate and the accompanying commentary fully justifies any award given.

6.2 Unqualified Dogmatic Statements

Next comes one of the potentially most harmful mistakes - **Making unqualified dogmatic statements,** e.g. "The colour of that rock is absolutely wrong!" Certainly, that's a courageous comment to make about Uluru whose colour changes throughout the course of a day. It's a risky comment about any other place depicted in an image unless we were there at the same time as the photographer [and have experienced a recent colour vision test that confirms our vision is colour correct - especially if we're male.]

What art or photography guru declared that colours must be correct? How does the judge know that the colour abnormality isn't part of a creative strategy by the photographer? Why can't trees be orange or purple or skies magenta? They are in children's imagination, before being "corrected" by misguided teachers with tunnel vision and an obsession for "correct" colour.

6.3 Unfounded Speculation

High on the list of judicial errors is **making assumptions based on inadequate study and thought** over an image. One judge provided advice to a camera club audience regarding the inadvisability of shooting in the middle of the day. He was probably slightly puzzled by the amused chuckles amongst the audience. Members looking at the projected image had noticed tiny star trails in the sky and lights low on the horizon. Why hadn't the judge? — presumably he'd spent two to three weeks studying the club's images. Please note that way back in the murky depths of the past some judges reputedly evaluated colour slides by holding them up to the light instead of projecting them — a fatal mistake!

6.4 Hasty Advice

Similarly, **giving advice** (about a changed viewpoint perhaps), **without fully considering its possible implications** could be a mistake. A suggested move, two metres to the right at Fingal Head, might indeed win the photographer an Honour award. Unfortunately, it could be posthumous, unless, of course, they own a drone. Similarly, if you say just get down at eye level to the animal, it could be an incorrect assumption - the photographer may be in a wheelchair and isn't capable of this. So, you could say, "If you are able to get down a bit lower...."

There are probably numerous other examples of judging mistakes. Perhaps you and your understudy could spend time recalling some.

7 Mentoring Mistakes and How to Avoid Them

7.1 Failing to Get Acquainted with Your Understudy

The first is failing to get properly acquainted with your understudy. If you know your understudy's skills and relevant experience it can save valuable time. Neither should it be assumed that the understudy will necessarily share your views on every image or type of photography. Neither should they. One of the great benefits of having judges with widely differing backgrounds is that it fosters diversity in judging styles. If your understudy doesn't share your view, on an aspect of photography, don't automatically suppress their opinion. Provided they can justify their view they should be encouraged to be different. Creating a "clone" of yourself may boost your own ego but it will limit diversity within the judging fraternity. Use of the Mentor's Checklist (below) will help avoid mistakes.

7.2 Failing to Spend Enough Time

Failing to spend as much time as is necessary working with your understudy is perhaps the biggest mistake to be made. In our busy lives it may not be possible to accompany your understudy to every judging presentation. Enlisting a fellow judge to sit in, is obviously necessary sometimes and can be beneficial for the understudy by exposing them to different ideas about the judging process.

7.3 Failure to Follow Up

Make sure to follow up with the Understudy and/or the relevant club to ensure that the appropriate judging reports are completed and submitted promptly to the Judges Executive for assessment of performance. Delays in completing paperwork can delay the finalisation of an understudy's recommendation for accreditation, sometimes by several months.

The foregoing comments are not meant to be totally exhaustive. Intending mentors and understudies hopefully will find them a helpful starting point for the understudy and judging process.

8 Mentor's Checklist

- 1. Have I made an effort to get to know my understudy?
- 2. Have I encouraged my understudy to formulate their own opinions about the value of each particular image?
- 3. Have I thought about my own preferences and prejudices relating to images and discussed this issue with my understudy?
- 4. Have I taken steps to minimize passing my own prejudices on to my understudy?
- 5. Have I discussed the set subject definition with my understudy and how it impacts the evaluation and commentary regarding relevant images?
- 6. Have we discussed ethical issues that may arise e.g., possible perceived plagiarism, the use of Artificial Intelligence or photography that may distress wildlife and how [(or even whether)] to raise them diplomatically with the club?
- 7. Have I discussed aesthetic quality of a number of images with my understudy?
- 8. Have we discussed the emotional impact of the subject matter in a variety of different images?
- 9. Have I asked questions about the understudy's commentary on a number of images?
- 10. Have I ensured that the understudy's commentary is positive?
- 11. Have I discussed the relevance, suitability and practicality of remedial advice with the understudy?
- 12. Have I ensured the understudy complies with the club's timing requirements? A. Before the judging night? and B. On the presentation night itself?
- 13. Have I ensured one or two copies of the appropriate judging report form are completed by club representatives and handed back on the night of the judging?
- 14. Have I completed and submitted my report on the understudy's performance?