

# 12 Elements of a Merit Print

1. **IMPACT** – Impact is the first reaction when a print is observed. It is the most important of the 12 elements. Does the print grab your attention? Does it make you want to look at it further? Does the title complement the image?
2. **CREATIVITY** - How novel is the image? The most creative images are totally unique. Use your imagination in creating images, and to share your ideas with others. You want your imagination to spark the imagination of others.
3. **STYLE** - Style separates one's images from others. You can borrow elements from established styles to help develop your own unique style. Examples of well-known broad styles include realist, cubist, impressionistic, scenic, documentary, glamour, and renaissance.
4. **COMPOSITION** - Composition, how the image is framed and its elements arranged, is often a matter of how well you follow (or break) the "rules." Create rhythm in your images through repetition and symmetry. Use the rule of thirds to place subjects. Use lines to create design and interest. Don't allow horizon lines to cut through subject heads, and watch for objects "growing" out of subject heads.
5. **PRESENTATION** - This is the style with which you present your images. Cropping, mounting, and under-lays (or color "stroke"). Dare to be different. But don't do anything that doesn't enhance your image. Use a color from the main subject as the border to help direct viewer attention. Don't use borders that are too bold. 1/16 to 1/8 inch border is a good rule of thumb. Refer to print competition rules for thickness and print sizes.
6. **COLOR BALANCE** - This element is the use of color harmony in an image. Light against dark, strong against weak. Do the colors of your subject harmonize with the background? Does the background de-emphasize or compete with your subject?
7. **CENTER OF INTEREST** - Use design and leading lines to draw the viewer's eye directly to your subject. Your design should hold viewer attention, leaving them free to explore the entire image, but always returning to the center of interest. The fewer distractions, the better.
8. **LIGHTING** - This means the correct quantity of light to convey the mood of the image, You should always have direction of light, otherwise the image will appear flat and lifeless. Proper lighting of the five views of the human face are essential to a great image.
9. **SUBJECT MATTER** - A correct and clear interpretation of your subject should be conveyed to the viewer. Your subject should correlate to its surroundings.
10. **PRINT QUALITY** - Color negatives should be of proper density for prints to hold detail in both highlight and shadow areas. Camera angle, lighting, contrast, and color will also effect overall print quality. Avoid matte sprays and any spray that lessens the brilliance of the photographic print. High gloss prints score best.
11. **TECHNIQUE** - This is the foundation of photography, but art principles are necessary and should be studied.
12. **STATEMENT** - Every image should tell a story. Make sure that the story is easy to read. Again, your title can make or break your story.