

Briefing for Street Photography competition

What is Street Photography?

The definition of Street Photography is a much debated subject on many an enthusiast web page, but as I am the judge I believe it would be indicative for you to understand my view. Generally speaking I lean towards the 'documentary' style of using the camera to capture those 'decisive moments' in life that reflects the people we are.

The images should have narrative about us as human beings in a genuine, authentic and candid moment.

Does it have to be on a street?

I prefer the broader definition of people in a public space. These include:

- Streets and public thoroughfare (note the law states as long as you are not causing an obstruction).
- Beaches; promenades & piers
- Train stations (note that the use of tripods are not allowed on platforms; Network Rail's official line is that enthusiasts are very welcome and can be beneficial to security by providing extra 'eyes and ears'. All they ask is that people notify station staff of their intentions)
- Airports (except where there are signs around security areas)
- Village fetes; county shows; summer public events
- Art Galleries
- Sporting events

Note the exception to this list is shopping centres which are privately owned (e.g. Bluewater), and photography is not permitted.

Also worth noting that 'Public' baths are actually privately owned by councils and so are considered as not a public place.

Subjects to avoid for this competition

- Homeless people: Poverty Porn has its place in documentary photography but ethically I don't think it should be included in club competitions
- Buskers: These are people who are paid to perform and not considered as representative of normal life. The exception to this is if the image is of a person's genuine and candid reaction to the busker on the street. (Tip if you see a good busker, check out the crowd for opportunities.)
- People leaning against a wall looking at their mobile phone and / or smoking. This has become a very common image as people who are distracted are easy targets. Unless it is part of a bigger image / concept – I would consider the lone texting smoker image too ubiquitous for normal consideration.

NOTE: I have not put children on this list as there is no legal restriction on taking photos of children in a public place. If the context is appropriate and you feel comfortable that it won't cause any 'angst', then I will judge on its merits.

What should I look for in a good 'street image'?

- Juxtaposition of subjects: new & antique; young & old; person and signage
- Use of strong light and shadows (normally early or late in the day to get the long shadows – Tip: look for shafts of light where people may be highlighted as if by a spotlight)
- Grey skies diffuse the light so good for monochrome style
- Rain for people running for cover – look for opportunities with people with umbrellas (note in the rain nobody cares if you have a camera). Try shooting inside cafes though the wet window to get street scenes
- Night street images: look for light sources on the street and how they work on setting an atmosphere.
- Human emotions: frustration; boredom; joy; love; excitement
- Reflections (that include people) store windows; mirrors; puddles

Technical considerations

Good Street photography is about the 'moment'; the impact of the image; the narrative. Technical is important, but less so than other forms of photography. It is common to read advice that suggests that with modern DSLR that you should consider a higher ISO rating and that a "little noise" should not get in the way of a good street photo. Note that as you move around a street (or public space) that you will move in and out of shadows constantly so shooting manually is a real skill. So to start with set a minimum 400 / 800 ISO and set the aperture to suit the situation from 5.6 to 16. Have the speed on automatic. (Conversely – you may want to set you speed from 125th sec upwards and go for automatic aperture setting. Experiment)

Street photography can be sharp or blurry – colour or black & white.

Tips on working the 'street'

There is a lot of advice out there and some of it is contradictory, but here is how I approach it.

- 1) Don't look like a photographer. NO back pack. NO Telephoto lens
- 2) Smaller the camera the better, stick with one primary lens – preferably between 28mm to 50mm. (Note this will help develop an understanding of a specific focal length)
- 3) Wear comfortable shoes, be prepared to walk lots
- 4) If you think you see an image, imagine it in your head first so you know you have the right framing. It's like hunting – only shoot when you have the right shot even if you have to move around a bit – you will only get one chance once you have raised that camera to your eye. If you can – take 2 or 3 photos in quick succession. Then move away in an opposite direction from the other person.
- 5) Stay on the edges of the street in the shadows; keep moving slowly and observe
- 6) Shoot out of eye level such as sitting low or from above on an over pass or restaurant veranda
- 7) Don't give up