

What the CPP Judges Look For

Who are the CPP Judges?

The judges who review your 20 images are Certified Professional Photographers (CPP) who are appointed by the Professional Photographic Certification Commission. Most are PPA Masters of Photography, or close to obtaining this degree. They won't be judging your images as merit prints, but as a representation of your finest work. The print review is their opportunity to assess your skills, knowledge, and ability to create images in a pleasing, high-level print. There are at least 5 judges on a panel.

What the CPP Judges Look For

The following information will hopefully be helpful in preparation of your image submissions for your certification. This information may change as the certification commission updates the policy. We will then keep this updated to be in alignment with those policy changes.

Selection of images: Oddly enough, the judges are not looking for "*PPA merit images*". One of the most *frustrating* things for a candidate is to have a Master Photographer advise a candidate on some of the images and then have their images rejected. The main concept that the certification judges are looking for is whether *the photographer knows what they are doing*. That is, does the candidate demonstrate good technique in quality of light (direction and exposure), the surroundings around the subject (is the background too bright?) and composition (are the subjects too crowded at the top? Are they too centered?)

Weddings: Make sure that there is a good mixture of formals and candid. But to play it safe, formals are a better choice. If you have candid images that have control over mid-day "hot-spots" and you have good awareness of the surroundings around the subjects, by all means submit them. But, formals with controlled lighting situations are safer.

Portraits: Portraits are all about photographer control. Are you taking specific orders from the client, or are your clients hiring you for your expertise? We hope the later, because if you start doing works based on what your client saw elsewhere, you have to ask yourself "why did they hire you in the first place?". So, with this in mind, light direction and proper light ratio is a must. The judges want to know if you understand the fundamentals of lighting. Think in terms of what you studied for in the written exam. There is a reason why the test is designed to see if you know what "light ratios" and "inverse square law" are all about. Styles change about every 8 years, good lighting knowledge has not changed in the last, well can you say early 1800's? The purpose of certification is that you have a good knowledge of the various techniques to survive long term in this profession.

Team/Sport/events: Diversity is the key here. If they are action images, it is vitally important that your image tell a story. It has to be illustrative. What is the story behind two kids going after the ball? What is the coach telling the player in the

dugout? How is the action composed with the on looking players in the background? For team photos, how well did you select the location to take the images? Are the backgrounds too bright or distracting? Do the individual portraits look significantly different than the "high volume" team/school photographers?

Commercial/advertising: View camera knowledge is a must, even if you don't use one. When doing interiors or exterior architectural work, make sure your perspectives, lens distortions, and camera angles are correct (perpendicularity, etc.). Also, make sure your quality of light, color density and proper contrast is good. Commercial is such a technical area that failure in any of these aforementioned will cause rejections. For products, make sure the product is not "Floating in space". It should look like it is "grounded" to where the product is sitting. Light direction is also very important.

Illustrative/scenics: OK, this is a real "toughy". Probably the biggest rejections actually happen here. Very often the judges will see these absolutely beautiful scenic images, some look like PPA merit images, mixed in with portrait work. The scenics look so perfect that, many times the portrait work looks like two entirely different photographers did the work. Bottom line is to put as much, even more effort in perfecting your portrait, wedding, etc. images to where they merit at PPA as well. In other words, make sure your other work is "up to snuff" with your scenic work. Many candidates think the judges rejected their submissions even though some of the submissions were PPA loan images. Just know that the criteria is vastly different. The judges want to know if what you can deliver is the best possible product for your clients on any given day.

If 100% of your images are in this class (I'm still not sure why you would need certification for this), then for goodness sakes, don't purger yourself. If the judges see the purpose statement "Client hired me to photograph the "Eiffel tower" where you are actually sent, on the client's dime, to take the images, then you're good to go. But if the commission catches wind that you took a bunch of travel images and sold it to the client by a stroke of luck, well, not a good thing as this gets into all sorts of ethics violations if you are caught.

More Tips: Questions have come up regarding color and density variations from the judge's comments of rejected submissions. The judges look first at a thumbnail set of the 20 images. Here, they can see images side by side, and can immediately spot images that are too blue, too dark, too bright, too, well, anything. Looking at all 20 images gives the judges that first impact about the images. "Am I looking forward to looking at the images individually", or, "Uh oh, I think there might be some problems with these". *It is recommended that you look at all 20 of your images in either light room, or bridge. Also, pay attention to the order that you place the images. Leading, or ending with weak images are not a good idea.*

Make your statement of purpose as concise as possible. Not a good idea to say "I had no choice, the client made me do it that way", or, "I purposefully wanted the trees to blast out the bridal couple in the foreground" (I'm not making this one up).

Special effects. Don't go crazy with them such as monotone images with the color of the roses painted back in, for example. The judges are all extremely experienced and they can tell if obvious flaws are being masked. You cannot save bad camera techniques in a majority of cases, so whatever you do, don't insult the judge's intelligence. Which sequel's into this:

Black and whites. Some of the judges are known for their black and white work, and some have earned their Masters with this work. Black and white may seem easy to most photographers, but those who know, know that this is actually the hardest thing to master technically. If you don't know what you are doing with respect to details in the highlights and detail in the shadows, as well as understanding of d-max and density curves, it might be a good idea to not go there.

Finally... **Painter images.** Make sure your non-painter images are up to snuff with your painter images. Like previously mentioned, if you have weak photography, all painter does is tell the judges that you need painter to salvage every thing that you do! Think like a painting master and learn to see the light from the get-go! The judges need to know what you can do with the camera first!