

A CHEAT SHEET: One Way to Talk About Photos¹

What Jumps Out?

START WITH INTENTIONS

Why shoot this? What makes it interesting? What makes it compelling to look at?

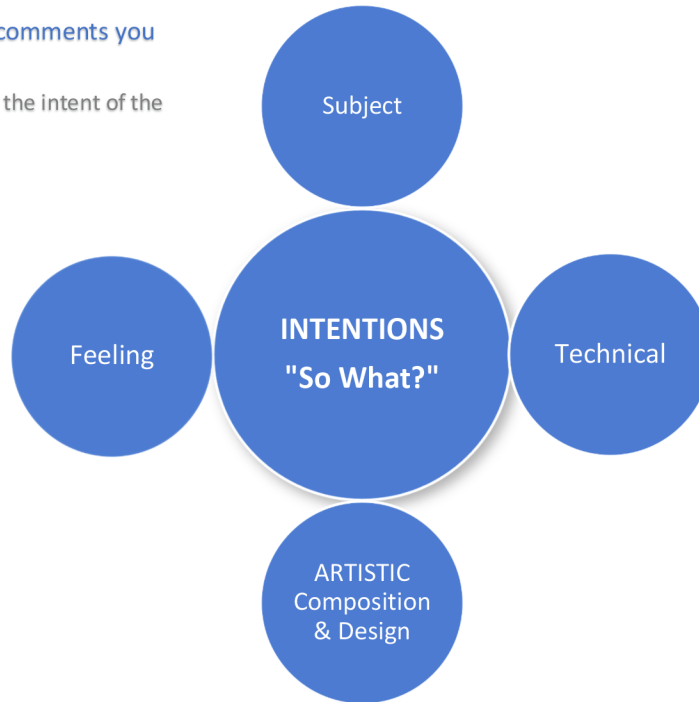
Do technical and artistic decisions strengthen the work?

Do imperfections add or take away from the photo?

How does the photo fit into a bigger set of photographs?

Remember, one of the BEST comments you might make is a QUESTION!

Be curious and open about both the intent of the photo and your own response.



SUBJECT	FEELING
Is there a clear subject, a focus point? Clear figure-to-ground separation? Leading lines? Does this appear to be candid or posed? Are there distractions? Is there juxtaposition? A Punctum?	Does it evoke an emotional reaction? Does it tell a story? Is the point direct or suggestive? Does it engage the heart or the mind? Does it arouse questions? Do you feel "in" the scene, or like an observer?
ARTISTIC COMPOSITION & DESIGN	TECHNICAL
How is the eye led through the image? What is the point of view or perspective? Light/contrast: Backlight, shadows; quality and direction of the light Lines: Horizontal, vertical, diagonal, organic Shapes: Rectangles, circles, triangles (real/implied) Texture, Pattern, Balance, Negative space Layers (foreground, midground, background) Filling frame v Minimalism or Simplicity Rule of Thirds	In Camera: Lens choice, Focus, Depth of Field, Exposure, Aperture, Shutter speed, ISO, Portrait/Landscape; Aspect Ratio Post Processing: Brightness/Contrast, Saturation, Grain, Noise, Sharpening, White Balance, Creative Edits Framing/ Cropping: Are all edges considered? Color: Harmony, contrast, dominance Black & White: Tonal range

¹ The framework for this document grew primarily out of conversations within the [Close to Home Photo Salon](http://homephotosalon.com) (homephotosalon.com).

MORE ON COMPOSITIONAL DESIGN ELEMENTS (alphabetical order)

Do the design choices such as those below add to or detract from the success of the photo (the intent, the story being told)?

Balance

Visual weight – complementary placement of photo components such as size, texture, color, tone, depth of field, light; with the weight of the various elements reinforcing the feel

Black & White

Range of tones and contrast
True blacks, true whites, shades of gray in between
Prominence of light, texture, shape

Color/Tone

Temperature, hues, saturation, luminosity
Harmony / complementary, clashing
Dominance of color as the “story” (single or multiple colors)
Strong, muted
Midtones, darks, lights

Contrast

Increased: with clearer distinctions and separation
Decreased: with softened tonal differences

Directional Gaze Lines

Lead the viewer to areas of interest

Focus

Placement of the sharpest area
Depth of field; Blur; Bokeh

Framing

Horizontal, vertical, or diagonal lines to define edges / boundaries
Space at the edges
Negative space
Perspective / point of view

Grain / Noise

Authenticity, filmlike
Smoothness

Light

Blue hour / Golden hour
Backlighting
Shadows, highlights
Brightness / darkness
Quality – softness/harshness

Lines

Horizontal, vertical, diagonal or organic lines, to lead the eye, or emphasize mood (serenity, strength, energy, etc.)

Shapes

Prominence of certain shapes
Juxtaposition or integration of a variety of shapes

Subject

Focus point, interest
Separation from distracting elements
Soul, gesture
Juxtaposition

Texture, Pattern

Details of an object’s surface
Repetitive elements of line, shape, color, texture

Triangles

Some implied, some extending outside the frame
Critical in guiding the eye around the scene
Can contribute to the feeling of balance