



# Beckham Digital Tutorials



## How to Win Competitions

This disk is a different concept for us and it comes as a result of our experience with Photography and Camera Club Competitions over many years. The title I have chosen for this disk is likely to upset someone, hopefully not you. When you admit that you are trying to do well in Camera Club competitions and god forbid, if you actually admit you are trying to win

The great and the good tend to tut tut rather a lot and give you those funny sideways looks. You know the look, "shame on you for being over competitive", as if trying to do well in photography indicates there is something is wrong with you. Then you may be lectured on the fact that winning is not the be all and end all and photography is subjective blah blah blah.

Of course doing well in the competitions is important, practically everything in life is competitive, competition raises standards and its why Camera Clubs the world over have competitions in the first place. The club competitions tap into our natural competitive spirit. Whether we realise it at the time or not, these competitions are part of our apprenticeship in photography. If you don't enter competitions, then you are not setting yourself any goals at all. Of course, if you have nothing to achieve, then you cannot fail. The trouble is, you are unlikely to achieve much either. The only measurement we have that our photographic skills are improving is comparing ourselves with our peers. That is exactly what Club Competitions do.

So, to improve our chances in club competitions we need to know what the judge is looking for. Now, with my experience of Camera Clubs I can already hear some people jumping to their feet to say that you don't produce images to please a judge. They say photography is too subjective and that we should create images to please ourselves and I do not disagree with that.

But probably 80% of what the judge is looking for in our images is the same thing we are looking for too. We do need to know what makes a great image and yes, some of the judgement may be subjective, but probably a lot less than you would think. Why does one picture hardly merit a glance, while at the other end of the scale we are stopped in our tracks. **The truth is that what the judge is looking for in our images is the self same thing that we need to identify to become an accomplished photographer.**

Take a look at our introduction to this disk, which you can download from this page, which better explains what we are dealing with in this subject.

I have been involved in lots of competitions, as a contributor, a judge and a competition secretary for my own clubs. All the time I see silly and basic mistakes made over and over again, sometimes by skilled photographers who have missed the obvious. This disk covers all the areas that I believe could be put right relatively easily.

### Introduction and Setting the Scene - Running Time 5:00

We need to be competitive, that is a part of life itself, but we shouldn't lose track of why we run camera club competitions in the first place. Much of what I could say here, has already been said above and also in this Introduction. However, we can have a conflict if we are not careful.

Some do lose sight of the real reason we have competitions and allow the competition to dominate their thinking.

On the other hand of course, we need competitions to encourage and inspire members to greater heights.

From the judges comments we learn much about what makes a great photograph. Over a period of time we apply this knowledge to our own photography. Much of the knowledge needs to be thought about before we press the shutter button.

However, there is a significant amount that we can do after the picture has been taken. What we are offering in this disk is largely common sense when you think about it, but it covers all those skills we need, to prepare an image for competition, or viewing.



We have lost track of how many times we have seen something simple and then thought. Why on earth didn't I think of that?

## Thinking Like a Photographic Judge - Running time 6:19

In this short section we explore how to think like a judge, because what the judge is looking for in the competition images, we are also looking for in our general photography.

Judges often take a bit of flack over their comments and decisions, but they do give up their own time to assist us, so we should be grateful for that.

Here is a thought. The reason people complain about the judge is generally because he/she was critical of that photographers work. However, a judge is rarely critical without saying why.

So rather than looking for ways to justify what the judge says, why not take on board what the judge is saying in a more positive way. We don't learn from just one judge, we build up an experience of many judges and we take from each what we feel is right.

Having said all that, avoid the basic rules at your peril.



## Competition Subjects Running Time 7:16



Here we take a look at both Set Subjects and Open subject competitions, but also we deal with a number of other problems that we see quite a bit in any camera club competition. The most annoying this is that the vast majority of these problems are easy to deal with.

Here, we offer the benefits of our 35 years experience in camera club competitions, so you can avoid the pitfalls

## Using all of the Screen that is available to you - Running Time 5:15

It is said that a good big picture will beat a good small picture any day of the week. In some circumstances size is important and a large image, projected in a darkened room, can be impressive.

So why do we see some many authors not making the best use of the clubs projector and screen. In this section we demonstrate what the problem is and how to make sure your images are projected at their largest size possible.



## An Organised Approach - Running Time 5:15

- 01 Feb-Landscape-Seascape
- 02 Mar-Close Up
- 03 Apr-Curves
- 04 May-Animals
- 05 June-Shadows
- 06 Jul-Skies
- 07 Aug-B&W
- 08 Sept-Portraits
- 09 Oct-Speed-Action
- 10 Nov-Self Portrait

Many a photographer has been embarrassed when their images appeared on the big screen at their camera club competition. Often the reasons are so simple, You have left things to the last minute and in the rush to find three images, mistakes are made.

Its not an isolated issue, and we see this at least once a month in our own competitions. Here we offer some simple ideas that can avoid all that embarrassment..

## Preparing Images in Photoshop and Elements - Running Time 23:40

Here we take you through preparing an image ready for a competition, but as usual we broaden that message to deal with format too. Your camera club will advise you via the competition rules what resolution you need to use to prepare your image.

However, its a fair bet that they will say you can create images to a resolution of 1024 pixels by 768 pixels. It doesn't mean you have to match that size exactly and I doubt we would want to do that anyway. Its all to do with the format of the image and 1024\*768 is not the most attractive shape to present images from cameras that actually create a 3:2 format.

In this video we will take you through the entire process of converting a high resolution image into one perfectly sized for club projection. There are a couple of ways we can do this in both Photoshop and Elements and in this section we demonstrate both.

If we are going to remove millions of pixels from our image for digital projection (this is the right thing to do by the way) we will lose some image sharpness.

This means we need to add a little sharpness back into our image and this is where some authors overdo things. Its easy for the judge to spot and will almost certainly bring forth adverse comments.



## Presentation of our Images - Running Time 21:00

Apart from all the stages we have covered so far in this disk, there is another we need to consider.

We need to think ahead and visualise how the image we are preparing and viewing on our PC screen, will be seen in the camera club, in a darkened room via a digital projector.

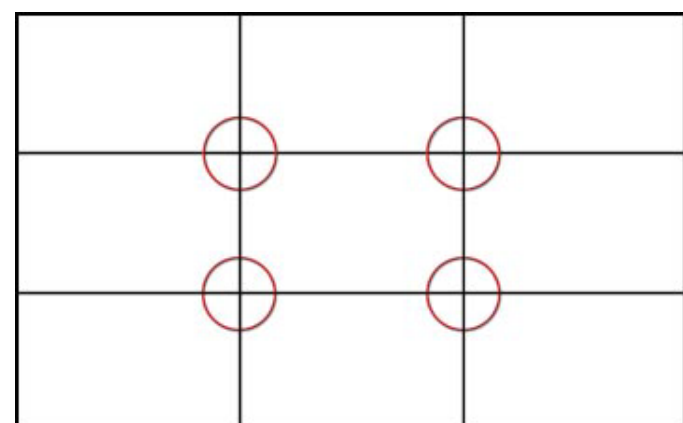
Some images with dark areas around the edge may need some presentation support, but the trick here is to achieve that without the border competing with the image. In this PDF document, we have had to make the line around the image bold so that you can see it clearly, but that is not what we want for a projected image.

Here we demonstrate how to place the line around the image, but also how we can use digital techniques to get some idea how it will be seen in a darkened room. Its best not to trust to luck and attention to detail pays off nearly every time.



## Composition and the Rule of Thirds - Running Time 12:20

There are many things that combine to make a great photograph, but probably the two most vital are Lighting and Composition. Composition can change an ordinary image into something far more interesting and dynamic. So, when I looked at a recent entry of 55 images for my own camera clubs competition, did I find 18 images that had no composition whatsoever. That's 32% of the images, an extremely high number when you consider how simple composition is.



Here we explain composition and show you a number of examples where composition is vital to the image. Now, some will say that the rule of thirds is just that, a rule, but not one you have to follow blindly. We can break this rule and still create a great image, when it is right to do so.

However, we looked through thousands of our images and found the vast majority had great composition. We then looked for some images where the rule was broken for all the right reasons. We could only find a few, a handful.

This demonstrates how vital composition is.



## Composition - Pitfalls - Tips and Tricks - Running Time 21:14

So far on this disk we have looked at composition and the different ways we can create the right size and format for our competition images.

In this section we take a look at them together and one of the pitfalls some authors fall into. We also look at how we can use our image editors to add a greater appeal to the images we are preparing.

For example, here we have cropped for the right size and format image, but also added an interesting slant to the eyes of the subject. That does leave an obvious problem to deal with, but its an easy one to fix.

We can use any version of Photoshop or Elements to do this seamlessly



## Dealing with Annoying Distractions - Running time 15:06



Distractions in an image, and here we mean something that draws the attention away from the main subject. Distractions will always affect the appeal and interest of the image and it will be something that the judge will almost certainly consider a negative part of your picture.



We are not saying the image to the left is a strong competition image, but it is an image that shows many distractions and that allows us to demonstrate how easy it is to put those right. These are distractions we could do little about at the time we took the shot.

We could almost argue that after a little work in Photoshop or Elements we can take a non competitive image and give it the appeal necessary, to become competitive.

## Still thinking like a Judge - Running Time 5:25

This section is just a brief round-up of the topics discussed on this disk. The object of the exercise via club competitions is to drive improvement in our photography.

In this section we have also given you the benefit of a small survey we carried out recently on a typical batch of images entered into a camera club competition.

I looked at the 55 images entered using some of the issues raised on this disk and the results were not that surprising. For example, from 55 images, 18 demonstrated little or no composition at all. That is 32% of the entry. This is surprising, because we know how important composition is.



## Sloping and Curved Horizons - Running Time 5:25



If you are going to present an image that has the horizon line showing, that horizon line must be level. In the survey I mentioned above, 8 of the 55 images had a serious problem with sloping horizons, some from experienced photographers too.

We all suffer from this problem from time to time, either a sloping horizon or a curved one caused by wide angle lense. Its actually easy to fix in almost any image editor and in the more modern software like Photoshop CS5 and Elements 9, it's being made even easier.

It doesn't matter whether the image is for a competition or not, if you leave those horizons sloping it sends out a "I can't be bothered" message. Because it is so easy to put right.

## Exposure - Running Time 15:00



Alongside Composition, Lighting and/or Exposure remains the holy grail of photographers. Unfortunately this is too big a subject to cover on this disk.

However, we do have a dedicated disk on this subject called Photographic Technique and Manipulation. In this section, we have included one of the tutorials from that disk here. It does give a lot of information on this subject that may be useful.

## 5 Minute Fix 001 - Running Time 7:53

Please don't take me too literally with the times of these 5 minute fixes. In some of these videos I cover more than one option and I also have to explain as I go. The idea is that these are quick and very useful techniques that you will use over and over again with many different images and subjects. The techniques are suitable for Elements and Photoshop except where stated.



We start by completely replacing the sky in this image in just a few minutes. We use no selections and the result is flawless. Simple techniques, but techniques that work and will stand the scrutiny of a

photographic judge.

You have complete control over the colour and gradation of the sky and while in this case we have made a blue sky more attractive, the sky could have been a lot worse and these techniques can give you a way to put matters right.



## 5 Minute Fix 002 - Running Time 13:34 ( Includes two separate fixes)



Simple techniques used here to create a letter box format and to ensure good composition, then some painting out of distracting areas.



Here we completely replace the white distracting background in a few minutes. There is nothing difficult or complex about this technique and once again it is one of those you can use again and again.

As you can see above, both of these fixes only took 13 minutes and that included the time taken to explain what we are doing and why.



## 5 Minute Fix 003 - Running Time 4:27



With this technique we come in under the 5 minutes. However, this small thumbnail will not show what we did here, but we made more of the narrow depth of field, to focus attention right on the stamen of the flower.

Composition was enhanced and areas that were a bit too sharp softened, but in a very short time and with a pretty good result. Certainly one that would pass the scrutiny of a judge.

## 5 Minute Fix 004 - Running Time 4:58 - Photoshop CS-5 Only

You can see here that the author took their eye off the ball and the main subject is right in the middle of the image. There is little or no composition and the bird needs more space in front of it.



To fix the problem, we turned to the content aware tools in Photoshop CS-5 and as you can see from the time taken, we got a pretty good result in a very short time.

The Content Aware tools in CS-5 are pretty powerful tools and you need to see what they can do before you believe it.



## 5 Minute Fix 005 - Running Time 10:28



There are a couple of fixes in this section, but one way to deal with distractions in an image, is to create a vignette and not all of those have to be white or black.

## 5 Minute Fix 006 - Running Time 8:12



In this fix we needed to create more canvas size because the original shot is far too tightly framed. Not only can we do this in just a few minutes, but we get the advantage of improving the composition too.



## 5 Minute Fix 007 - Running Time 9:15 ( Photoshop CS-5 Only)

Here we explore the power of Content Aware in CS-5 to help us prepare an image for competition/presentation. The original has many distraction with leaves that do little for the appeal of the flower.



Without any cloning we can remove them simply by making a quick selection of the offending leaf and deleting it with content aware.

