



HOW TO WIN PHOTO COMPETITIONS

25 PROVEN TIPS TO HELP YOU
STAND OUT FROM THE CROWD

TOM PUTT



I've judged many photo competitions in my time and I've entered plenty as well. Here's what I've learnt from both sides of the coin in entering photo competitions and what to look out for.

1. YOU WON'T KNOW UNLESS YOU ENTER

Do you how many times I've thought the same thing then said at the last minute, "Fuck it! Just do it!"

Can you imagine if we lived our lives the same way?

We tend to overthinking most things and miss out on a lot in life because of it. If I self-destructed each time I thought "my photography isn't good enough" I wouldn't have over [200 awards](#) to my name.

Most of you reading this are thinking, "My photos aren't good enough". Perhaps that's true. Perhaps it's not. But you'll never know unless you give it a go.

Guess what? Most pros think the same - my work isn't good enough to enter competitions.

2. YOU PROBABLY WON'T WIN ANYTHING

This seems to contradict my first point, however it's reality. Competitions are that - competitive, and therefore you really have to be fortunate to win an award.

I enter thinking nothing more will come of it - when it does it's a nice surprise. But there's so much good photography out there, you really do have to have the stars align to do well.

3. MOST OF MY AWARDS HAVE COME FROM PHOTOS I DIDN'T EXPECT TO WIN

This relates to my first point about overthinking things, however I believe it also has to do with my poor judgement. Most of us are 'too close' to our photos and find it hard to see the good ones or choose what's best for competitions.

The best way around this it to shortlist a group of photos you're considering and then email them to a few trusted people in your group.



This image titled 'Ancient Snow Gum' featured in the 2005 BBC Wildlife Photographer of the Year Competition and was a breakthrough image for me.

4. KEEP ENTERING

I've been entering photo competitions for over 20 years. The first few years I was all enthusiastic and thought I was going to smash it. Of course this didn't happen and I got despondent.

But I believed my photography got better so I started again and got a few awards. The key is to keep entering - it's a numbers game.

"The more you enter, hopefully the more chances you'll have of getting something."

5. SUBJECT MATTER

Ok let's get down to a few HARD CORE basics on photo choices. Subject matter is HUGE! Just because it's a nice sunset doesn't make it a good photo. If there's a whole lot of junk in the foreground distracting your eye, the judges will mark the photo down for sure.

Choose your subjects wisely. Shoot what you're passionate about and hopefully you'll create good photos. Go to exotic locations and shoot amazing pictures. That's what the judges want to see!

Don't shoot the same old - it's been done to death!

6. LIGHT

Amazing light in a photo shows the judges that you're a good judge - of light!

Light makes all the difference - use it wisely and hunt it down. Set your benchmark high and search for best light with the best subject matter and you're half way there.



7. COMPOSITION

Good compositions rock - we all know that.

But what is a good composition? To me it's where all the elements fit nicely in with each other. It all makes sense. It might have a lot going on, it may be very little. But what's included is there because it helps tell the story. It helps convey the message. No more, no less. If you struggle with your compositions, look at other photos you admire and ask yourself what composition they've used to make it look so good. Copy that!

8. SIMILAR ENTRIES

Culling your photos to include unique entries will mean your case will be stronger. There's no point entering two or more images that are similar. Decide on one and be happy with your choice. Two the same can be picked up by the judges and possibly impact on one or both of your photos negatively. Don't just choose similar photos to say you've entered more. It's about quality not quantity. And if you're paying per entry, save your dollars for another trip away rather than spending it on your extra entry.

9. COLOUR

Good colour can make all the difference. I see many photos where the colour is off - more often it's where there's too many colours competing against one another. A bright blue competing with a dusty brown in the sky with a luminous green in the foreground.

Tone it down, be more realistic with the colour and know that sometimes a more subtle colour can work well. Black & whites work tremendously if the contrast is strong between the blacks and the whites.



10. FUNKY COLOURS

I'm a landscape photographer. More specifically I'm a chocolate box photographer - I like pretty pictures. Whenever I come to process my photos, I look to replicate what my eye saw and the beauty of nature.

Therefore I stay away from the funky colours that look unrealistic and ridiculous. The unnatural reds, blues and greens are not my style.

11. CONTRAST

There's been an overuse of HDR of late and it sux. Contrast is great in photographs and can add impact.

So don't be tempted to slide the highlights slider to the left and the shadows slider to the right. Keep some contrast to mimic our eye. Use light and dark to direct the eye and create a sense of mystery and magic.

12. OVEREXPOSED HIGHLIGHTS

If you don't know how to control your highlights, please watch any YouTube videos on histograms. Learn that the histogram should be as far to the right without blowing out the highlights (in most cases).

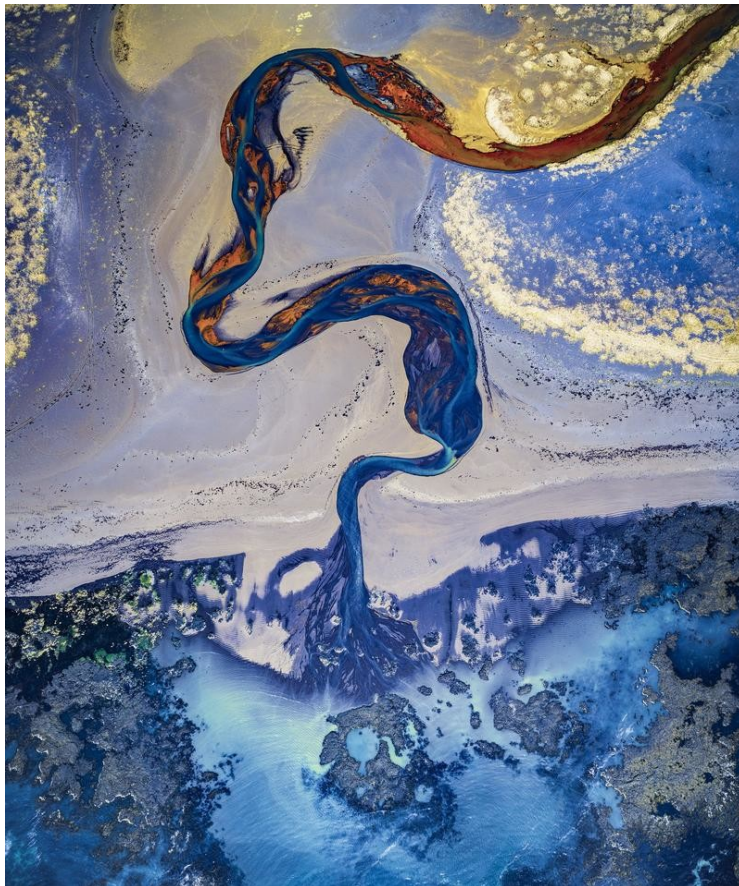
Nothing puts a judge off more than overexposed highlights where there shouldn't be!

13. MUDDY SKIES

Dragging down your Highlights slider unnecessarily to make your skies darker will only result in muddy skies. And muddy skies suck! I'm not sure I've ever seen one so why would you think it's ok to enter this is a competition? The sky is either blue, has white clouds in it, or storm clouds that are dark. But not muddy. Stay away from mud. It's dirty.

14. AESTHETIC APPEAL

Is your subject interesting? Unusual even? Not often seen? All these factors can help your photo stand out amongst the thousands of entries in a photo competitions. Online competitions attract thousands of entries each year. The judges want to see something different. They don't need to see another sunset, a pier or a dog on the beach. They want to see that you've gone outside the box and seen something that other people don't often see. Show off your originality.



"The judges want to see something different. They don't need to see another sunset, a pier or a dog on the beach."

15. GO FOR THE DIFFERENT CROP

We don't need to see another 3:2 ratio photo. A square or panoramic crop stands out from the crowd and works well for certain subjects. Try it!



16. IGNORE HOW LONG IT TOOK TO TAKE, HOW LONG YOU WAITED etc

The judges judge based on what they see. Unfortunately they don't know the backstory to your photo. They don't know how much you spent to get that photo, how long you waited, how many people you asked to move to get a clean shot etc.

It's tricky because if they did they many appreciate it more and score your photo higher. But they don't so you have to look at your photos at face value and ask yourself, "If this was someone else's photo, what would I score this?" That can help in removing you from the emotion of it all.

17. CLARITY

Don't underestimate sharpness - seeing a clean, sharp image is important. All RAW digital files need sharpening so make sure you do it.

18. SOFT FOCUS

There's a trend for some landscape photographers to add a soft focus look to their photos, perhaps for that dreamy look. I'm not a fan.

It looks cheap and often doesn't work in creating emotion. To me it screams of not knowing how to process a photo correctly.

19. ATMOSPHERE + DRAMA

We all love a bit of atmosphere and drama in our photos. An approaching storm, some menacing clouds, rain falling from a distant cloud, etc all work well to create a sense of atmosphere and emotion.



20. LEVEL HORIZONS

Sounds obvious right. But it's amazing how often I see horizons that aren't level.

21. POOR POST PRODUCTION

Less is more and more often than not, I see post production that is way over the top or unnecessary. Taking the time to learn how to process your photos from an expert is invaluable when polishing your images. You would be astounded with how little time I spend processing my photos. **One to two minutes per photo.** I get it right when I'm shooting the image, not after...

22. GRAD FILTERS

We all know that grad filters can help with balancing out our exposures - darkening the sky and keeping the foreground bright. But I see far too many grad filters added unnecessarily or added post and very heavy handed. I shouldn't be able to see that a grad has been added. That goes for most post production. Be subtle not obvious.



23. OVERUSE OF SELECTIVE LIGHT

99% of the adjustments I make to my photos are global adjustments - it happens across the whole image.

Where I see photos running into trouble is where selective light has been painted into certain areas - light or dark - and it look unrealistic and overdone.

Be very wary when doing this.

For example, you could paint light into the shadows. My preference would be to use the shadows slider instead.

24. HALOS

This comes sometimes with the point above and using selective adjustments - sometimes the adjustment spills over the line, creating halos in the sky for example. At other times it comes with dragging sliders all over the place, creating halos in areas of contrast. Halos tell me your post production techniques aren't up to scratch.

25. STUDY PAST WINNERS

I could go on, but let me finish with this last point.

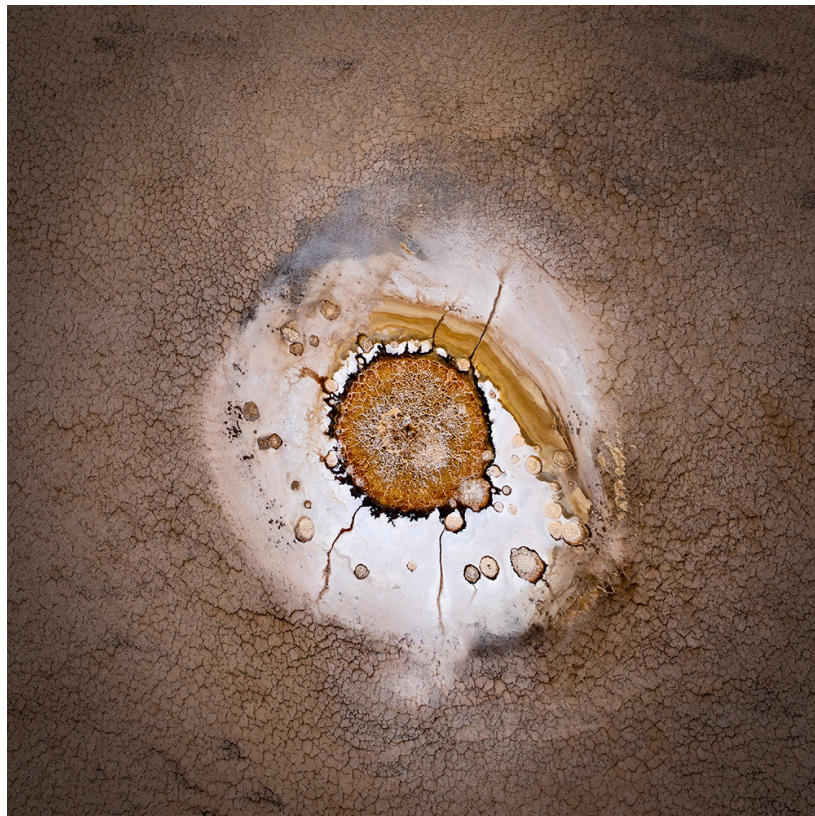
Nothing beats looking at the past winners from the competitions you're entering. It doesn't suggest that's what will win in the future, but it gives you a feel for what has been noticed and rewarded by the judges. It will indicate the standard they're looking for so aim for that and hopefully something will come of your efforts!

GOOD LUCK!

If you want more advice on entering competitions, I offer one-on-one critique sessions of your photos. Visit my [Critique Sessions](#) page on my website for more details. I look forward to hearing from you. Cheers,



Tom Putt



Who is this Tom Putt?

Hi thanks for reading this eBook. For the past 20 years I've been fortunate enough to follow my passion - fine art landscape photography. Driven by my desire to showcase the beauty of the landscape, I spend many months of every year creating new photographs for upcoming limited and open edition prints and book projects.

I first fell in love with photography at the age of 13. Following my love of ornithology, I photographed birds. Once leaving university, I pursued a career in sports photography where I covered over 300 events across Australia and the world, including the Sydney 2000 Olympic and Paralympic Games.

My passion has always been photographing the breathtaking Australian landscape. For the past 20 years, I have been privileged to call the Australian wilderness my office. For me, there's nothing more exhilarating than being surrounded by this serenity. Whether it be standing on top of a mountain, or wandering along a ancient dry creek bed, my heart and soul always feels at home amongst these landscapes.

My drive is to showcase the immense beauty and variety of Australia by bringing my art into every home and office. In doing so, I hope to highlight the importance of protecting what we are so lucky to call our home. And for my artwork to bring people together; to get them talking to one another, challenging their visual perceptions and levels of interpretation, on a deeper and more spiritual level.

If you're wanting to see more tips like the ones here, join my Facebook Group [HERE](#)

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