

The Process of Image Critiques

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One of the most pivotal experiences in my progression as a nature photographer was a critique of my images by a professional photographer at a workshop. Learning to see my photos objectively and evaluate them from another perspective was a gift. Upon returning from the workshop, I looked for other avenues for this kind of feedback and found it in online forums. Now, years later, I still post on forums and benefit from receiving comments, but surprisingly, I find viewing the images of others and providing feedback more instrumental in my continued growth.

Many photographers have discovered the value of objective critiques and participate in online communities such as the [NatureScapes.Net forums](#). There are plenty of posted photos to view and learn from, and many people willing to provide comments on posted photos, with experience ranges from novice to seasoned professional.

OFFERING IMAGE CRITIQUES

Each one of us is uniquely qualified to offer our thoughts on an image, as our perspectives differ from anyone else's. When you take the time to provide image critiques, the authors benefit by having objective input from your perspective, helping them to see the photo differently. By taking the time to study and comment on someone else's image, you are improving your ability to critique images, which extends to critiquing your own.

Many people new to photography feel uncomfortable offering comments, believing they lack the experience needed to provide an opinion. But visual art is subjective, and even a raw beginner who might feel uncomfortable discussing technical aspects can easily share thoughts and feelings about a photo. This process can also be a good opportunity for a less experienced photographer to ask the author about his or her thought process or their technique in making the image.

Our photos are our creations, and there is often a personal attachment to the image posted. Constructive, well thought out critiques delivered in a courteous manner are encouraged to contribute to the learning environment of the forums. Tonal and other inflections present in face to face conversation are not a part of online communications, so consider taking extra care to ensure your message comes across the right way.

When you first see an image, consider the visual impact and appeal. Study the technical aspects, such as exposure, use of depth of field, and artistic considerations such as composition and other elements included in the frame. Image critiques might include any of this, as well as a discussion of the subject matter, emotions that the photo evokes, and other pertinent considerations.

Reposts are edited versions of an image that have been posted in a response to the same thread. It is common courtesy and very important to ask a photographer if they mind a repost of their image. The repost is ineffective unless you also include the steps you took in image editing to achieve your results.

Remember that the thoughts you provide are your own, others may follow and voice their agreement or disagreement with what you've posted. It is important to bear in mind that this is all subjective and try not to take it personally.

RECEIVING IMAGE CRITIQUES

Considering that first image post can be intimidating, however, we work hard to maintain a positive atmosphere for learning at NatureScapes.Net and the value is well worth the effort. The image critique forums are specifically for an exchange of thoughts and ideas on the posted images. If you are not prepared to receive constructive criticism on your photos, there are other resources that allow you to share images besides image critique forums.

When preparing your image post, you can help the process by providing details that will be pertinent to the critique. The more information made available about a photo, the better the learning opportunity and more relevant the critique will be. Important data includes equipment used to obtain the image, settings, and your approach in capturing the photo. It is also helpful to disclose if a subject was captive or controlled, if filters have been used, and if any significant modifications have been made to the image in post processing. If you are looking for feedback on a specific aspect, be sure to mention it to get the most out of your critiques.

The majority of people providing critiques in the NatureScapes.Net forums are photographers themselves. They are more likely to notice minor technical imperfections and other aspects that others would not. The process may seem "nitpicky." However, evaluation of a photograph is based on the results evident in the image. You might have the absolute best image in a given situation, but that doesn't mean there aren't imperfections that can be addressed. If shooting from lower, or the left, or the right would have provided better results, people will say so even if this was not a possibility. While this type of evaluation may seem unrealistic, it is an excellent way to gauge your work against the work of others and understand what conditions can help improve your photography.

Rebuttals of critiques provided are not necessary and, in fact, can discourage honest input.

Both giving and receiving image critiques can be a highly effective tool for learning to evaluate your own work more objectively. With the availability and cost (free*) at websites like NatureScapes.Net, there's no reason not to avail yourself of such a resource!

*To use the NatureScapes.Net forums, registration is required but it's free. To post a photo, an image must first be hosted on the internet, such as on a personal website or online gallery that allows hotlinking. For users without these hosting options, [paid membership](#) at NatureScapes.Net has benefits such as the image upload service for the image critique forums.



Heather Forcier photographs nature subjects throughout North America. Her work has been published for various commercial uses and is sold in prints at several permanent displays. She is editor in chief at NatureScapes.Net and as one of the site operators she also manages membership and the online store. To see more of Heather's work, please visit her website at www.heatherforcier.com.

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