

North Haven Camera Club Competition Handbook

Effective 8/2018

by the Executive Board

Revision Date 11/07/2026



North Haven Connecticut
www.northhavencameraclub.com
Revision Date November 7, 2026

Table of Contents

Chapter **Page**

I. Eligibility to enter images in competition 3

II. Scheduled Competition Events 3

III. Photography Competition Group Classifications 3

IV. Submission of Images 3

V. The Five Competition Categories: definitions & rules 4
   a. A Note on Artificial Intelligence (AI) 7
   b. Special Annual Print-Only Competition 8

VI. Scoring 8

VII. Judging Criteria 9

VIII. Judging Guidelines 10

IX. Submitting for Competition using Club website 10

I. ELIGIBILITY TO ENTER IMAGES IN COMPETITION

Membership dues must be fully paid by October 1st of the current club season before images can be submitted to any competition during the upcoming club season. New members joining at any point during the club season must pay their membership dues before entering any competitions.

II. SCHEDULED COMPETITION EVENTS

The purpose of competitions is to provide a motivational, educational and fun experience for members. A Club Season consists of eight monthly competitions in September, October, November, January, February, March, April and May.
Note: There is no competition in December, June, July, or August.

III. PHOTOGRAPHY COMPETITION GROUP CLASSIFICATIONS

In order to keep competitions fair and balanced, by the start of each club Season members will be assigned to one of three Groups. Each Group can consist of any number of members.

1. **Group B**: for beginner and intermediate members. All new members will be placed in group B unless they are known to be or state they are more advanced.
2. **Group A:** for members with advanced photography and/or editing skills.
3. **Group M:** Masters Group is for those members who are advanced or professional shooters or those members who are very highly skilled at photo editing.

Advancement of members to Group A or Masters Group
At the beginning of each club season, members will have an opportunity to move from Group B to Group A, or from Group A to Group M based upon the member's cumulative scores earned in all categories in competitions during the previous club season's competitions See Section VI (p. 8 below) for details on the year-end scoring procedure. Members will be moved at the discretion the North Haven Camera Club Board to promote fair competition.

Requesting a Transfer into a different Classification Group
Any member may request to be moved up or down from one Classification Group into another. Requests should be submitted to the executive board for review, and all decisions are at the discretion of the Board.

If a member feels that he or she has been placed in a Group unfairly, the member should notify any member of the executive board so that we can discuss the matter and find a remedy.

IV. SUBMISSION OF IMAGES

Each member can submit up to a total of **three** digital images per competition in any of the categories (see Chapter V) for a total of **twenty-four images for the year**.

GENERAL CRITERIA (applies to images submitted to any of the categories):

1. A photographic image is a pictorial representation of the world around us, which can encompass many different subjects and perspectives. When entering images for competition and/or special projects, we ask our members to refrain from submitting images of the human form that contain nudity, which is defined as exposed skin or body parts that would be considered unlawful in a public area. Images deemed tasteless, violent or otherwise generally inappropriate can be rejected at the sole discretion of the Competition Chair.
2. Any image submitted to any category must be an original work of the photographer submitting the image. In addition, all allowable post-processing or editing undertaken to create the submitted image must also be solely the work of the photographer entering that image. NO CLIP ART OR ONLINE IMAGE LIBRARIES ARE ACCEPTABLE SOURCES FOR MATERIAL TO BE INCLUDED IN IMAGES SUBMITTED TO ANY CATEGORY.
3. Members can enter any number of categories they wish. Monthly scores and year-end awards are based solely on a member's performance within each category and not the number of categories entered. Each category is open to all three photography competition groups. The maximum numbers of images allowed is three per competition month.

4. No make-up images will be accepted
5. There will be no manual entries into the competition software. If your image does not show up in the competition for whatever reason, you will have to enter it in a subsequent competition. Please enter your images carefully.
6. Entering a specific photo more than once:
    a. If an image has been awarded 1st, 2nd, or 3rd place in any monthly competition, it cannot be entered again in any category in any future club competition. If an awarded image is submitted in a later competition, intentionally or otherwise, it will be disqualified with a score of zero.
    b. Once a photo has been entered in a competition, the same photo may not be entered in another category in future competitions for the remainder of the club season year.
    c. For club seasons after the season in which it was first entered, a photo which did not place 1st, 2nd, or 3rd may be entered in any category other than the one in which it was originally entered. After the photo has been submitted twice it can no longer be entered into any future NoHCC competition in any category.
7. If you want to enter an image but you are not sure your image meets the criteria for a given category, email your questions to the Competition Chair no later than the Wednesday before the final submission date.
8. The Competition will close the Saturday prior to a scheduled monthly competition at 11:59 pm.
9. Within the 3-day window prior to the submission deadline for any scheduled competition, any image which the Competition Chair finds at his/her sole discretion does not conform to the rules for the category in which it was submitted will be removed from the competition without any opportunity to resubmit. It may be resubmitted in future competitions as long as it conforms to the rules for the category in which it is submitted.
10. Set ups (photographic opportunities set up by a third party such as for a workshop, which are then photographed by a member) are only allowed as submissions for club competitions by members in Group B.
11. When displayed for the judges, all photos must be anonymous, meaning **no use of watermarks, graphic signatures or logos that are made part of the printed image. Any prints that display the photographer's name in a way so the judges can see it will be disqualified.**
12. To submit your images into the monthly competition using the club website, see Chapter IX (p. 10 below).

V. THE FIVE COMPETITION CATEGORIES: Definitions & Rules

Club categories for entering images in competition consist of three "general" categories (*Traditional*, *Open Reality* and *Creative*) and two "special case" categories (*Assigned Subject* and *PSA Nature*). Of the three "general" categories, the rules for Traditional are the most restrictive, they loosen up some for *Open Reality*, and they are extremely loose for Creative. For the two "Special Case" categories, see details below.

Traditional Category

The final image should be a realistic representation of the subject matter and should demonstrate the photographer's ability to capture a compelling image through the viewfinder. Members may use an imaging editing program to apply basic image manipulation to the image, but the viewer should not suspect that any adjustments have been made in post-processing.

a. Permitted post-processing adjustments are limited to BASIC EDITING TECHNIQUES to enhance the presentation of the photograph without changing the story or any of the pictorial elements. Acceptable basic editing tools include:
    a. Adjustments to color, saturation, brightness, contrast, levels, exposure, toning, sharpening, clarity, red eye reduction, perspective correction, noise reduction, white balance, highlight and shadow detail adjustments, resizing, dodging, dehaze and burning.
    b. Adjustments made using Levels or Curves tools.
    c. Removing dust spots.
    d. Cropping and flipping images.
    e. Straightening and leveling.
    f. Monochrome conversions or images are allowed if they are pure black & white or if the whole image is rendered with a single hue (for example, sepia toned).
    g. Vignette that does not alter the basic image.
    h. Border or frame that does not alter the basic image.
    i. Use of editing software pre-sets or styles (as long as they conform to the requirements of each category).

b. The following post-processing adjustments are **NOT** allowed in the *Traditional* Category:
    a. Inserting pictorial elements not actually present when the photo was taken. *Examples include:* Adding a moon, replacing the sky, adding reflections, etc.
    b. Removing, moving or deleting any pictorial element (except by cropping).
    c. Adding any computer-generated effects, graphic elements, text, textures or patterns not part of the original capture.
    d. Processing of multiple exposures (HDR), multiple focal points (focus stacking) or multiple captures of a single scene (panoramic stitching).
    e. B&W conversions with a colored pictorial element.
    f. Infrared images.
    g. Blurring all or part of the image.

Open Reality Category

In this category, the final image should still look **realistic** and be recognizable as something we might encounter in the world around us. It may or may not appear to the viewer that the photo has been manipulated, but additional tools for editing are allowed here as compared to the *Traditional* category. Any elements introduced to the photograph through manipulation, as well as the base photograph itself, must all be from the maker's own images.

A. All of the post-processing editing tools and techniques allowed for the *Traditional* category are also allowed in *Open Reality*. In addition, the following techniques **ARE** acceptable in *Open Reality* as long as the final image looks **realistic**:
    a. Composite photos: The blending of several photos or parts of photos to achieve a realistic image. All blended elements must be the maker's own work. (e.g. sky/background replacements must not be taken from any source other than your own digital images).
    b. Removing or adding pictorial elements to the photo.
    c. Processing of multiple exposures (HDR), multiple focal points (focus stacking) or multiple captures of a single scene (panoramic stitching).
    d. B&W conversions with selective coloring of pictorial elements.
    e. Infrared images which look realistic.
    f. Blurring all or part of the image.
    g. Background textures **which you created on your own** (meaning not downloaded from the web or created by A.I.). "Background texture" refers to a representation of a physical surface quality (such as tiled geometric shapes, wood grain, linen, water, etc.) which are applied to one of the base layers of a digital photograph, rather than the top layer.

B. These Post-Processing Adjustments are **NOT** allowed in the *Open Reality* category:
    a. Computer generated graphics (including text) or other effects such as watercolor or oil paints.
    b. Any images or pictorial elements, including backgrounds and sky, taken from any source other than your own digital images.
    c. Any textures which are not your own work, downloaded from the web, nor created by A.I.

Creative Category

The *Creative* category is the most flexible and open-ended of the three general categories in terms of allowable editing techniques and manipulations. This category is for depicting an 'Altered Reality,' and as such the final image should noticeably depart from reality. It should be noticeably different from an image as viewed through the camera lens and should display an obvious departure from some combination of natural color, form, shape, or the juxtaposition of various pictorial elements that may not naturally occur together. There are really no prohibited techniques in this category EXCEPT the universal requirements for all categories, which is that all the pictorial elements or images used in the final image must be solely the work of the maker, and are NOT to be taken from external image libraries. A few general considerations for this category:

A. *Creative* images are often – but do not have to be – composites (a blending or composite of multiple images).

B. Some part of the original image must be visible.
C. Note that images with background textures and HDR merged images **without further changes** are NOT considered to belong in this category and should instead be entered in the *Open Reality* category.
D. Painterly effects are allowed in this category.
E. Artwork or computer graphics generated by the maker may be incorporated into an image, provided that the original photographic content predominates.
F. Artificial Intelligence, especially "Generative" and "Content-Aware" AI tools are permissible in the *Creative* category, with the understanding that any generative elements (meaning elements created by the computer and not taken from other photographic images) can only be used as PARTS of the final image. In general, images may not be constructed entirely by a computer.

Judges will not give comments in this category.

The two "Special Case" categories in club competition are "Assigned Subject" and "PSA Nature":

Assigned Subject Category

Different *Assigned Subjects* for each Club competition are assigned at the end of each Club Season such that each monthly competition has a different *Assigned Subject*, just for that one competition. These subjects are usually general in nature (e.g. "Black & White", "Leading Lines", or the color Yellow) to allow for the broadest possible interpretation by the photographer. In submitting a photo for this category, the *Assigned Subject's* theme should be the main focus of the image. The *Assigned Subject* category images are intended to be a fun way for members to stretch their photographic skills by trying new and different photographic techniques.

In producing an image for this category, the maker can utilize of any of the techniques allowed in any of the other categories (*Traditional*, *Open Reality* and Creative). The only overriding rule that still applies in this category is that all the elements used to make the final image must be the original work of the maker who submits the image. The judges are instructed to evaluate entries in this category based on how well they exemplify that month's *Assigned Subject*, and because the rules are so open for this category, they have a good bit of discretion about how they do that.

PSA Nature

This is a specialized category based on specific rules established by the Photographic Society of America (PSA) which they use in conducting their own competitions around the world. PSA is a global organization with members made up of both individuals (professionals and amateurs) and clubs like ours, and most clubs around the world use PSA rules, especially for the Nature category, when conducting their own club competitions.

PSA Rules for the Nature category are quite specific and strictly applied. A detailed description of the *PSA Nature* Category rules can be found here, on the PSA web site (25 page PDF, available for download):

https://psa-services.org/ES/NatureGuide.v2.01e.pdf

General Summary of basic PSA rules:

1. Restrictions on photographers in this category fall into one of two types: (1) Restrictions as to the subject, and (2) Restrictions as to how an image can be edited in post-processing.
    a. Restrictions as to Subject: The subject of any photograph has to be completely natural, and can be either living (birds, animals) or inanimate (landscapes, seascapes, astral photography). To this end,
        i. No photos of hybrid plants, formal floral arrangements, domestic and feral animals (including all horses) and mounted specimens are acceptable. Only naturally occurring species of plants or animals are acceptable.

ii. Setting: The accurate depiction of the subject in its natural environment is the primary factor for judges. No human-made elements are allowed in images in this category (examples not allowed: cages for animals or man-made structures in landscapes like fences, buildings, or power lines).
Exceptions to this rule:
- scientific bands on animals or birds in zoos or in the wild are acceptable.
- photos of zoo animals are acceptable as long as the zoo setting replicates a natural setting with no man-made objects such as cage wire or feeding dishes in the scene.
- integral story elements such as nests made with human-made materials

iii. Story: PSA rules encourage photographers and judges to emphasize the "Story" the photographer wants to convey in his/her photograph about the subject and its natural environment. PSA rules actually consider the "Story" element of a Nature Category image to be more important even than technical excellence, and for this reason judges tend to favor Nature images that show strong interaction between one or more subjects (or between a subject and its natural environment, which might include extreme elements like a flood or a volcano erupting), as opposed to simple portraits of a single bird or animal, no matter how nicely that is rendered.

b. Restrictions with regard to post-processing editing (meaning any edits or adjustments made after the image is initially captured using a computer, software, or some of the more sophisticated tools now being built into phones and cameras):

i. The *PSA Nature* editing rules are very similar to, perhaps slightly more restrictive than, the rules for our *Traditional* category described above. Some limited post-processing adjustments which are acceptable for *PSA Nature* images include cropping and straightening as well as very basic editing tools like adjustments to sharpness, contrast, brightness, color and saturation.

ii. Conversion to monochrome **IS** permitted, but only the complete conversion of a color image to grayscale. No colored elements or tints are allowed.

iii. Techniques such as HDR, focus stacking and panoramic stitching, whether done in-camera or with external software, are permitted. PSA considers such adjustments to be compensating for limitations in the camera (like limits to field of view or dynamic range) rather than direct manipulations of the image.

iv. More complex composite images are **NOT** permitted, such as any manipulation of an image that adds, removes or re-arranges photographic elements. This means manipulation such as cloning, use of generative fill Artificial Intelligence elements (meaning elements created by the computer and not taken from other photographic images), sky replacement, etc., are ***not allowed***. The resulting image must be a true representation of the actually observed scene.

v. Borders or strokes around an image are not encouraged, but can be used if they are 5 pixels wide or less. **Adding a vignette is NOT allowed**.

A Note on Artificial Intelligence (AI)

Artificial Intelligence capability is increasingly becoming embedded in photo editing software (i.e., Photoshop, Lightroom, Capture One, etc.) and also embedded software in newer cameras and phones. When the AI tools are designed to make various tasks easier (like masking, selecting subjects, auto adjustments, etc.) they are permissible in all competition categories unless specifically forbidden (example, limitations on cloning).

When an AI tool is actually used to move, remove, combine or modify photographic elements, they are permissible in the *Open Reality* and *Creative* as well as *Assigned Subject* categories. This would include tools like Photoshop's "Content Aware" and "Generative Fill" tools when used to remove or work on pictorial elements within the overall image. **NOTE**: These tools are NEVER permissible in the *Traditional* or *PSA Nature* categories.

Because every photo submitted for competition must be solely the work of the photographer who submits it, *AI tools that create an entire image from scratch based on verbal or typed input are **not** allowable for competitions in any category*.

Special Yearly Print-Only Competition

Once per Club Competition Season, we will hold a special Print-Only competition, with the date to be set by the Board. There are no editing or subject selection rules for this competition, so you can make use of *Traditional*, *Open Reality* or *Creative* category rules, it's up to you. The one requirement is that the final image and all photographic elements that are used to create it are solely the work of the photographer who submits the print, with the exception that the actual physical print submitted can be printed by either the photographer or a third-party lab.

Submitting your digital images and prints for the special print competition

1. *Print Requirements*
    a. The maximum number of prints allowed is three per special yearly print competition. PRIOR TO the competition, in addition to the physical print you will need to bring to the competition, you must also submit a digital image for each print through the club's competition software, just as you would for a normal club competition. See below for digital image upload instructions. You are then responsible for bringing your physical print(s) to the competition prior to its starting time so they can be assembled and grouped for the judges.
    b. Judging and scoring will be based solely on the physical print, not the digital version. The digital version is needed for tracking and organizational purposes, but will not be part of the judging.
    c. *Traditional*, *Open Reality* or *Creative* rules can be used to create your image, it's up to you. All digital images will be entered in the "Print" Category when uploaded, and during the actual competition the physical prints will be grouped, judged and scored according to the Photography Competition Groups ("M", "A" and "B").
    d. Prints can be submitted on any kind of paper (including Photographic and Fine Art papers), as well as canvas or metal.
    e. **All prints printed on paper or canvas must be matted or mounted**. Although the image is the most important factor when judged, consideration should be given to presentation of your mat or mount. It should be sturdy, neat, clean and enhance the print.
    f. **Dimensions:** The maximum dimension for the matted or mounted print (including the mat or mounting board and the photograph) is 16 x 20 inches. There is no minimum size.
    g. When displayed for the judges, all photos must be anonymous. **They must not be signed or titled on the front, which includes any use of watermarks, graphic signatures or logos that are made part of the printed image. Any prints that display the photographer's name in a way so the judges can see it will be disqualified.**
    h. No framed prints using glass or Plexiglas will be accepted for the competition.
    i. **Please label your prints** with a label on the back upper right corner of your print.
    The label should include the group you are in (B, A, M), the title of the print, your name and an arrow pointing to the top of your print. The name and title on your physical print should match the name and title you used when uploading the digital version prior to the competition. Prints that are not properly labeled may not be accepted.

VI. SCORING

1. *Monthly*:
    A. Three competition judges will score all images entered in each category of our monthly competitions.
    B. Judges will score using a range from six to ten points in half-point increments. Within this range, a score of 7 is considered as an average score.
    C. Within each category, there will be 1st, 2nd , and 3rd place winners. We do not break ties, so in the event of a tie, the tied members will each be awarded that score and placement.
2. *The Year-end Awards Scoring:*
    A. Year-end awards are based on the results of the 8 monthly competitions only. They do not include the results of the Print competition.

B. Each member's five highest scores in each of the five categories (*Traditional*, *Open Reality*, etc.) will be added together. This number will be that member's final score for that category. A final score of 130 or more in any two categories will allow the member to move up to the next group.

3. Picture of the Year Award:
   A. To be eligible for the Picture of the Year, an image must have placed 1st in the photographer's assigned group (i.e. Group A, Group B or Group M) in a regular Club competition. The image can come from any category.
   B. Judging for the Picture of the Year will be conducted by at least one qualified judge and witnessed by two members of the North Haven Camera Club's executive board.

VII. JUDGING CRITERIA

These are the basic elements judges consider when judging a photo.
(Note: before each competition, we review all the rules with the judges)

A. **Impact:** When viewing an image for the first time, Impact is what captures the attention of the viewer in any photograph. Impact comes from an image's appeal, significance, drama, originality, or how it is presented.
B. **Story**: Does the photograph effectively convey the photographer's the message or intent when taking the picture? Especially important for entries in the PSA Nature category, but it applies to all categories.
C. Technique: This criterion applies to both the use of the camera and any editing software. It shows whether the photographer knows his/her tools. When judging an image's technique, a judge might make observations such as: Is the image sharp? If it is not sharp, did the photographer know what (s)he was doing to get a special effect with blur or softness? Is the image underexposed or overexposed? If it is either, was it done for a reason? Is the image cropped properly to make a nice presentation? Technique can refer to pure technical perfection in a projected digital image or print, or to special effects such as high contrast, high or low key, masking processes, etc.
D. Lighting/Exposure: Taking a picture is all about capturing light. It is essential that the photographer learns how to capture good lighting and achieves proper exposure. Photographs in competitions are often marked down when important details of the subject are not well conveyed to the viewer because of improper lighting or exposure.
E. **Composition:** Has the photograph's subject matter been presented within the frame in an effective or pleasing manner? Good composition brings the viewer's eye to see what the photographer intends the viewer to see. Good composition could include any combination of the following:
   a. **Emphasis**: There should be one principal subject or theme in a good photograph, with everything else subordinate to it. The image should embody harmony and simplicity of arrangement. Sometimes everything in an image works together to create a center of interest.
   b. Balance: Balance has to do with how colors, shapes, photographic elements, tones and contrast are distributed throughout the image. Horizontal lines, leading lines and placement of subject matter are also factors in evaluating balance.
   c. Unity: A good photograph manages to show its subject in harmony with its surroundings. If there are lines that cut through the image, they should not divide the image into parts. There should not be areas of empty space that do not add value. A good photograph should draw the viewer's eye smoothly into the image and encourage it to move around without distraction,
   d. Color: Color conveys a mood or impression which can strengthen the message or impress the viewer with a particular sensation.
   e. Lack of Distractions: A good image is free of distracting background elements or merges, and it avoids overly bright corners or edges, or "hot spots" which distract the viewer. A viewer should not be left with a feeling of incompleteness; for example, no arms or legs should be cut off by the edge of the image unless it is being done deliberately by the photographer to achieve an effect.

VIII. JUDGING GUIDELINES

Score Range, in half points	6-10
Average Image	7
Perfect Image	10

Judges: Comments should be constructive and should help the photographer improve their technique and see things that might not have been seen before.
Photographers: Please understand that judging is a personal opinion and there are various points of view. Judges' comments are provided to help us become better photographers.

Scoring should consider the following:

Impact:

* Does the image evoke emotion?
* Does the image tell the intended story?
* Does the image show creativity?

Technical Quality:

* Sharpness
* Appropriate Depth of Field for the subject
* Exposure
* Lighting
* Accurate color
* Details in shadows and highlights
* No accidentally over- or under-exposed areas

Composition:

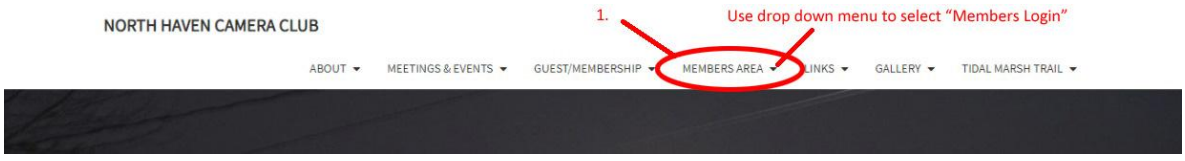
* Good cropping
* Is the subject identifiable?
* Good arrangement of subject
* Emphasis
* Balance of subject in image
* Unity of image
* Movement of viewer's eye within the image
* Captures and holds viewer's attention
* No bright sections to distract the viewer's eye from the subject

IX. SUBMITTING IMAGES FOR COMPETITION

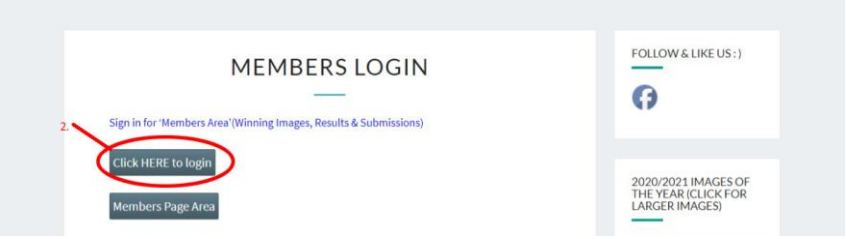
Entering Digital Images:

Go to www.northhavencameraclub.com

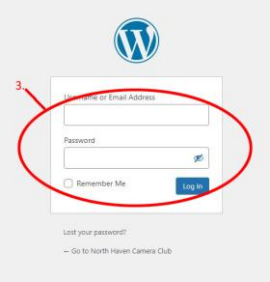
1. Click on Members Login under "Members Area" menu item



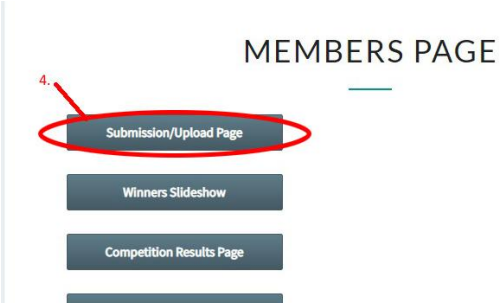
2. Click on "Click here to login"



3. Enter Username and password



4. Click on Submission/Upload Page

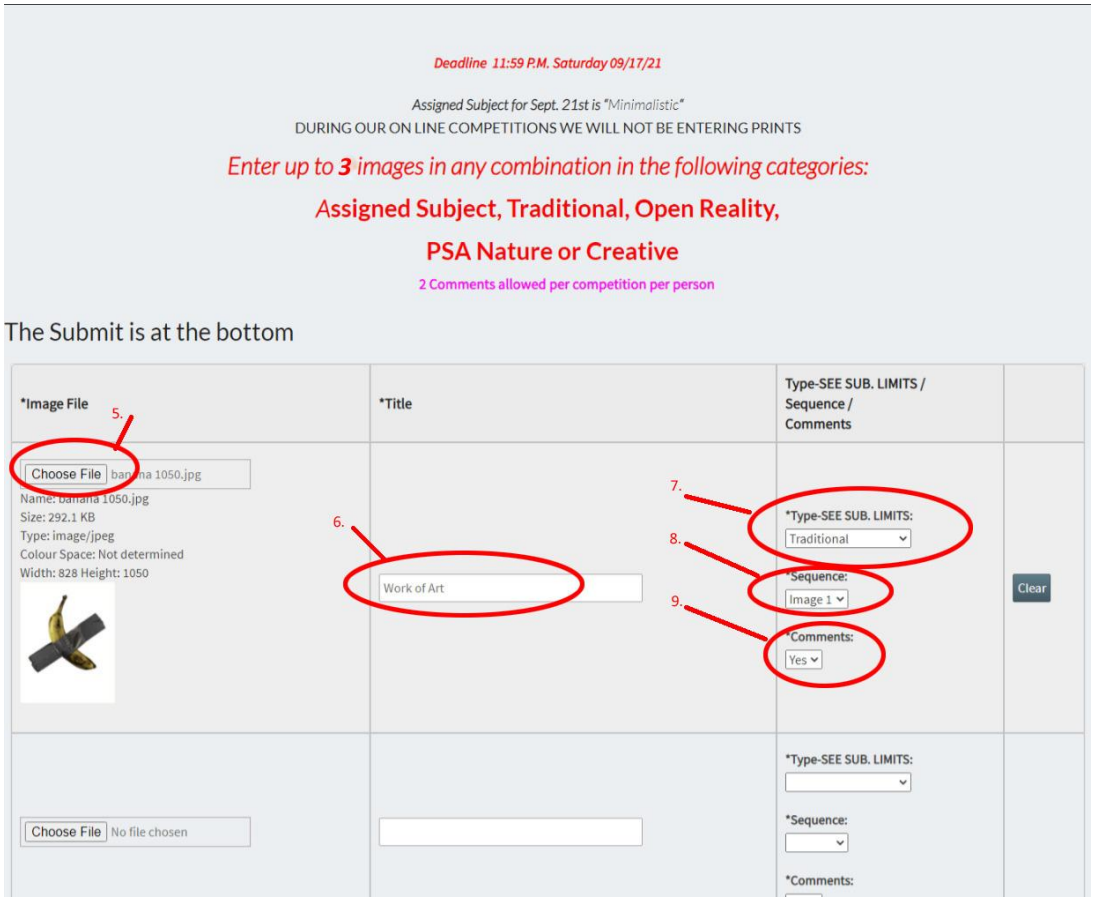


5. Click "Choose file" and browse to find your image.
   Image must be a .jpg of 2 MB or less, and maximum dimensions are limited to either set of:

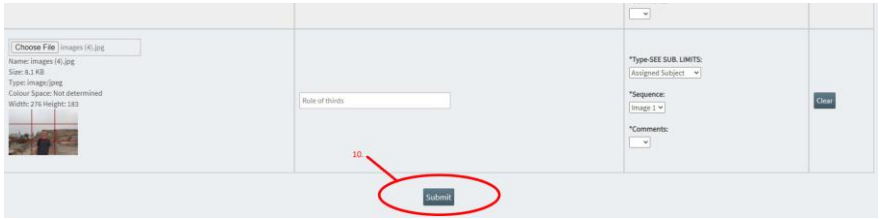
   - **1400 px width x 1050 px height (4:3 aspect ratio)**
   - **1920 px width x 1080 px height (16:9 aspect ratio)**

   Note that if the photo is vertical (portrait format) it must be resized to 1080 px height.

6. Give your image a title. (Numbers, special or foreign characters are NOT allowed in the title.)
7. Choose your category: *Assigned Subject*, *Traditional*, *Open Reality*, *PSA Nature* or *Creative*.
   (For the annual print competition only select PRINT)
8. Sequence your image: Sequence your images 1 through 4
9. Choose *yes* or *no* to request a comment from the judges (except no comments in *Creative* category).



10. Once completed, click on submit on bottom of page to enter your images



11. If you wish to make changes after submitting your entries, click on "add, change or delete".

