

2020 Special Subject Explanations

January: Architectural

This category encompasses habitable buildings or utilitarian architecturally-designed structures such as barns, theaters, airports, factories, office buildings, lighthouses, bridges, monuments, and distinct elements thereof, as well as similar structures that are both aesthetically pleasing and meaningful representations of their subjects. This category includes interior structures such as stairways, windows, and doors, as well as exterior structures such as steeples, towers, and domes. Architectural images should convey the experience of being in and around a building or structure. People may be included in an architectural photo but should not overpower the emphasis on the nature of the structure. An image may be presented in color or monochrome.

Alterations

As with all reality-based divisions, (Nature, Photo Travel, and Photojournalism), techniques that add, relocate, replace or remove any element of the original image, except by cropping, are not permitted. The only allowable modifications are removal of dust, scratches or digital noise, restoration of the existing appearance of the original scene, sharpening that is not obvious, and complete conversion to grayscale monochrome. Other derivations, including infrared, are not eligible. All allowed adjustments must appear natural.

Note: "Restoration of the appearance of the original scene" may include techniques such as HDR, focus stacking and dodging/burning provided they do not alter the contents of the original scene and the result looks natural.

Borders

Borders are optional, but must be 3 or 4 pixels in width and must be white or a shade of grey.

March: Cute

Whimsical, wry, or adorable, the "cute" category is a catchall for appealing to the viewer in an endearing way. There are no boundaries for subjects to feature, and compositional standards applied to all pictorial images still govern in this special subject category. Emphasis, however, is on achieving viewer appeal and emotional response with your image.

May: Night Photography

Photos taken outdoors between dusk and dawn using available light. Light painting is permitted.

July: Macro/Close-Up

Extreme close-up photography, usually of very small subjects, in which the size of the subject in the photo is greater than life size.

September: Minimalism

Composition

“Keep it simple” doesn’t mean “keep it boring”. Contrary to what you may think, a minimalist approach requires a lot of creativity. The use of negative space is an integral part of minimalist photography. A well-placed subject doesn’t have to be large to have a big impact. Deciding what to leave out of the frame and create a stronger image can be challenging and often requires a lot of practice until it becomes the way you see. Train yourself to make those decisions in camera instead of cropping unwanted distractions in post processing. A clever use of depth of field will also isolate your subject from the background by shooting with an aperture as wide (smallest number) as your lens will allow.

Textures and colors

A bright color or contrasting colors make great minimalist subjects. The same applies to textures. The viewer should be able to almost feel the texture. Sometimes it’s all about finding a creative angle to make the photograph. Don’t be afraid the experiment. Shoot straight on, shoot high or low, work your frame until you get the shot that will speak to you.

Lines and geometric patterns

Strong lines make strong images. A good place to get started with minimalist photography is by paying attention to modern architecture around you. Leading lines, and other geometric shapes, can make great backdrops for minimalist pictures. Isolating a bird on a power line, if done well, can make a great minimalist shot. There are great opportunities around you all the time, you just have to learn to see them and that requires practice.

Telling a story

Push your minimalist photography to the next level by telling a story. Minimalist street photography showcases an interesting urban landscape with a human element. The human element, however small, becomes the focal point of the image. Yet, it’s the interesting background that draws the photographer to make the shot. Symmetry, lines, curves, shadows all play a vital part in making the photograph. Sometimes the story and the environment come together spontaneously and it’s the photographer’s job to see it and respond quickly. Other times it requires a bit of patience for the right subject to walk through the frame. A minimalist approach to photography can be applied in nature as well as in an urban environment. You can practice anywhere, so get out there and open yourself to a different way of seeing with your camera!

6 Tips for Minimalist Photos

1. Remove eye distractions. Remove anything that can be taken out of the frame or hide it in shadow. You should have only one main subject in the frame.
2. Make it striking. Whether you go for a splash of color or a splash of light, make it in a way that captures the eye.

3. Make it thought provoking. A photo does not need to tell everything. Compose your image so that your audience has to engage the neurons and think about what you are trying to say.
4. Play with light. Hide and highlight your subject with shadows and light in a way that represents a not-so-common approach.
5. Go for patterns. Repetitive patterns in an image can make it not only beautiful but appealing. Again, do not reveal everything.
6. Details matter. While a wide frame with plenty of information can be beautiful, the secret of minimalism is in the details.

October: Transportation

The category of transportation is open to images that have at least one component involving transportation. This can include any mode of transportation such as car, bus, train, airplane, mule, sled, and so on. The mode of transportation need not be the central feature in the image, but it must be included as a part of the image. Images presented may be shown in color or monochrome.