



More Thoughts on Photo Critique

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In my first article on the subject of photo critique, [The Art of Image Critique](#) published in October of 2001, I provided some essential guidance on how to make the most of the photo critique process. That guidance remains as relevant today as when it was published. What follows is some insight on the "social dynamics" of the process and additional recommendations on how to make the most of the experience.

Participation in Internet photo critique forums is something many photography enthusiasts try at some point. Our success at utilizing these useful resources to improve our own work depends on several important social factors.

Leave Your Ego at the Door

Posting our first photos in a critique gallery is a time of both excitement and trepidation. It's human nature to need praise, especially for something that we have put our "heart and soul" into and there's no better place to get some good ego-stroking than in a forum setting. At the same time, we may dread or even avoid posting any photos at all in fear of having our work criticized in public and our ego crushed. While this may be the emotionally safe route it also deprives us of the good feedback that will help us improve most rapidly. No doubt about it, we must remain objective and dispassionate, and take all comments on our work for what they are - the opinions of other people. If someone takes the time to post their comments - regardless if those comments are positive or negative - we must be thankful for the time and effort taken to do so. The photo critique process is a 2-way street and it's up to each of us to make the most of it by being as objective and dispassionate as possible when evaluating our own work.

No Comments Posted

The only thing worse than negative comments is no comments at all. In most cases, negative comments will quickly identify some flaw in our work - poor composition, soft focus, etc. Though such criticism may remain difficult to accept, it at least pinpoints potential problems with our technique. However, what are we to think when no one comments on a photo we have posted?

The "no comments" scenario can be due to a number of issues. However, in most cases it is simply a matter that the photo is perceived as neither wonderful nor terrible. The viewer may feel indifferent about it and finds it difficult to say anything good or bad about the photo. In other words, the photo is good enough to avoid criticism, but not good enough to elicit praise, leaving it stuck in a feedback vacuum. After posting a few photos that fall into this category, it's easy to understand how we would become discouraged from further participation. However, there are ways to deal with the "no comments" situation.

Get Sociable

Like any other social gathering, the best way to get the most from a photo critique forum is to communicate with other participants. Take some time to comment on the photos of others. A common misconception is that we need to offer some expert advice to justify our comments, but nothing could be further from the truth! Even if we do not feel qualified to offer advice on how to improve a photo, simply stating why we like or dislike a photo is reason enough. Don't forget, we post our photos in forums to get opinions on them! The more we comment on the work of others, the more they will begin to comment on ours.

Offline Communication

Sometimes we may feel that what we have to say may embarrass the photographer, or that the photographer may take our forum commentary the wrong way. In these cases there's no better way to convey our point-of-view than by email. Communicating by email is like pulling someone "off to the side" at a social gathering to share something in private and in greater depth than if there is a crowd within earshot. Taking our commentary to email in a forum setting is also an act of respect for both the photographer and the community at large, sparing others from "overhearing" private conversation.

Taking it to email is also a great way to get unstuck from the "feedback vacuum" on our own work. As new participants looking to

get sociable with the group, it won't take long for us to find a few forum participants who we have come to admire for either their photographic prowess or their care and honesty in providing comments. These are the people we should contact offline to ask for their comments. Being approached in such a way will be received as a compliment, and they will most likely provide commentary that will prove useful in improving our work. This will also help build relationships and make forum participation all the more rewarding.

Participation in an Internet photo critique gallery can be a very useful tool for improving our work. Along with [The Art of Image Critique](#), keep the points above in mind to make the most of the experience!

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