Thousand Oaks Photo Group
Photo Challenge Guidelines

(March 12, 2026)

Revision Summary: Our photo challenge guidelines have not changed, but we felt it important to clarify our statement on the use of Artificial Intelligence.

- **Use of Artificial Intelligence*** – The use of photo editing tools that incorporate artificial intelligence (AI) is permitted in our photo challenges. Many tools commonly used for purposes of noise reduction, dust removal, spot removal, sharpening or similar enhancements incorporate AI features, and there are no restrictions in their use. However, the maker's original photograph should remain the primary information content for the final product.

**See the detailed description of the use of AI in section 1.5 of this document.*

Introduction: Guidelines for the Thousand Oaks Photo Group's (TOPG) photo competitions were completely revamped in 2021. Since then, we have not made any changes to these guidelines except for changing image size specifications and in the use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in digital photo processing. Advancements in AI have entered the photographic world at an ever-increasing rate, permeating many aspects of our photo-editing environment. It is practically impossible to enhance and edit images without the use of tools which incorporate AI. We understand this, and we fully ascribe to use of AI tools for editing images.

Highlights:

- *Images submitted in both the assigned and open categories are typically pictorial. Occasionally, a challenge assignment will specify that special conditions exist for this challenge, and any special rules will be included in the challenge description. The open category is always pictorial.*
- *All images must be submitted no later than 10:00 PM on the immediate Wednesday before the club meeting.*
- *Send digital images to PhotoEntries@tophotogroup.org.*
- *Images must be no larger than 1920 pixels wide and 1080 pixels tall.*
- *Images must be submitted as jpeg (jpg) images using the SRGB color space.*
- *Be sure to follow our file naming requirements exactly. See Section 3.1.2 in this document.*

1. General Requirements:[1]

Images submitted to TOPG photo challenges are judged for their technical and *pictorial* merit. They should be properly exposed, be appropriately in focus, and have appropriate depth of field. Imagery should have impact and appeal and strong composition. Our guest judges do their best to interpret our rules and judge images accordingly. Judging by its very nature is subjective, and TOPG members should understand this before submitting images for critique and judging.

1.1. **Eligibility Qualifications** – Only paid-up club members of the T.O. Photo Group may enter our monthly photo challenges.

1.2. **Number of Images -** You may submit a total of two images per monthly challenge. You may choose to submit your images into the same category, or you may submit each image into different categories.

1.3. **Resubmission of Images** – You may submit the same image in subsequent months. Once an image has received a merit-level score, it may not be resubmitted in any subsequent challenge for the current challenge year. In subsequent years, the image may be submitted into a challenge, but it may never be submitted into the same division/category where it received recognition.

1.4. **Basic Image Editing Requirements** – All images must be made by the entrant utilizing a camera as the primary recording device. The maker may add artwork and computer-generated graphics if these components are also created by the maker. The use of commercially produced textures, borders and similar features is also allowed. In all cases, the maker's primary image must be the predominate element of the final presented image**.**

Certain assigned categories and themes may include additional constraints such as color, monochrome, photojournalism, date of capture, etc. In all cases, the specific monthly challenge guidelines will explicitly state any constraints and restrictions.

1.5. **Use of Artificial Intelligence** – Artificial Intelligence (AI) features permeate many photo-editing tools in use today. These tools may be labeled as being "AI," but many are not. TOPG understands the use of these tools are essentially unavoidable in today's world. Consequently, the use of photo editing tools that incorporate artificial intelligence is permitted in our photo challenges. We have adopted the AI guidelines of Photographic Society of America (PSA) for our photo challenges. The material provided below is

[1] General Requirements adapted from S4C competition guidelines: https://www.s4c-photo.org/competitions. Some concepts have been borrowed and adapted, statements have been paraphrased, and some sections have been directly lifted from S4C requirements because they have been succinctly and concisely written over time and we could not state them better.

sourced from PSA's document "Division Definitions" which includes editing guidelines for the use of AI tools. This document was revised in 2026. The complete document can be found at https://psaphotoworldwide.org/page/division-definitions.

> ***Permitted AI-enhanced editing:*** *includes editing tools that perform transformations, enhancements, or corrections based exclusively on the existing pixel data captured in the author's original photograph without introducing externally-sourced content.*
>
> ***Prohibited AI-enhanced editing:*** *includes any AI-assisted processes for synthetic image generation that incorporate external image data, visual elements, textures, objects, or scenes not originally present in the author's photograph are prohibited.*
>
> *Outpainting tools (generative fill) which allow you to expand a cropped image using a context-aware extension of the original photo are permitted, unless restricted by the Division's definition. Other generative AI tools that generate new synthetic visual content based on external image data not originally present in the author's photograph are prohibited, regardless of how small the edited area.*

TOPG strives to strike a balance between free use of AI tools and totally banning them. Members may use AI tools in accordance with the guidelines stated above. AI tools may be used for purposes of noise reduction, dust removal, sharpening, spot and small area removal, or similar enhancements. However, the maker's original photograph should remain the primary information content for the final product. However, images or components of images solely created by AI are not allowed.

1.6. Finally, nothing in the submitted image may identify the maker.

1.7. **Disqualification** – Images submitted in an assigned category that do not comply with requirements for a specific challenge will be disqualified. The maker will be contacted, if possible, by the challenge team. If time allows, the maker can submit another image or request the image be moved to the *open* category. Please note, our challenge stagers do their best to get things right. Their decision is final.

1.8. **Judging** – Judging of the images are conducted by a qualified, experienced photographer. The judge will critique that image and assign a score according to the club's image scoring system:

SCORE	Description
9	Images exhibiting exceptional technical skill and impact
8	Images with very high technical skill and impact
7	Good images, worthy of award consideration
6	Average quality images
5	Below average images, needing improvement
4	Below average images with serious defects
3	Images which do not address the Assigned Theme or Topic

2. **Categories** – There are two separate *categories* in every photo challenge, *Assigned* and *Open*.

2.1. Assigned Category Requirements

2.1.1. **Topic or Theme** – The intent of the Assigned Category is to challenge club members to create images that conform to specific guidelines for each month's challenge. Images submitted in the assigned category will be judged on how well they address the assigned theme in addition to general requirements stated in the General Requirements (Section 1).

Assigned Category topics are typically announced during the first meeting of the year, posted on the club's website, and are included in TOPG email messaging.

2.1.2. **Editing** – You may freely edit your images according to the General Requirements in Section 1 above, *unless restricted by an Assigned Category topic/theme*. Guidelines for the monthly topic/theme will explicitly describe any limitations for that particular challenge.

2.2. Open Category

2.2.1. **Topic** - There are no assigned topics in the Open category. You pick the theme for your image.

2.2.2. **Editing** – You may freely edit your images according to the General Requirements in Section 1 above.

2.2.3. **Size Restrictions** - All images must be resized to a **maximum of 1920 pixels wide and 1080 pixels tall** (*neither dimension* may exceed those measurements). See the article entitled *Resizing Your Images for Contests* on our website.

2.2.4. **File Naming** – Digital images must be renamed according to the following template:

category_maker name sequencer_image title

The *category* will always be either "assigned" or "open." The *maker's name* is the first and last name of the maker. The *sequencer* defines the order of presentation, 1 or 2, if you submit more than one image into the project image division. Finally, the *image title* is a descriptive title (not a file number). As an example, the following are sample file names:

Assigned_David Smith 1_Sultry Sunset.jpg and
Open_David Smith 2_Cool Sunrise.jpg

Do NOT use ALL CAPS. DO use *spaces* and *underscores* for legibility and readability. Even if you only submit one image in the monthly challenge, you must include the sequencer.

For details see Resizing and Naming Instruction on the TOPG Website.

2.2.5. **Submitting Your Digital Images** – Digital images are submitted via email to the following email address: PhotoEntries@tophotogroup.org. An email will be sent back to you to confirm receipt of your images(s) or to notify you if corrections are. If you do not receive a confirmatory email, presume that your images(s) were not received and contact the club for assistance. Enter early to be sure you have time to get your images entered with the correct naming conventions.

3. Image Competition Process

Images are submitted by club members to the TOPG Photo Challenge Manager several days before the monthly photo challenge. The Photo Challenge Manager prepares the images for the monthly review by cataloging them and building necessary spreadsheets for recording the challenge results. Prior to the monthly photo challenge, two activities occur. First, the Photo Challenge Manager makes the images available for review by the judge prior to the monthly meeting. Care is taken to ensure the anonymity of the maker and the title of the imagery. Second, the Photo Challenge Moderator prepares a web presentation for public review by the assigned judge. Web-based presentation tools are used to present images to the judge and the viewing public simultaneously at the time of the photo

challenge. The following procedure is followed:

- The moderator reviews the scoring guidelines with the judge.
- The moderator describes the challenge description.

For each image submitted for review, the moderator presents each image for review, one at a time:

- The moderator will display the image and announce its name.
- The judge will critique the image and assign a score according to the club's image scoring system.
- The names of makers whose images receive a score of 8 or 9 will be announced by the moderator.

4. **Use of Images** - Any image entered in a club challenge will be published in a gallery on the club's website. It may also be posted on the club's Facebook and Instagram pages and/or used in a club newsletter and publicity materials.

5. **Conformity of TOPG Photo Challenge Guidelines to Rules and Guidelines for Other Organizations** – TOPG members are welcome to submit the same imagery to TOPG and other organization's photo competitions. However, we caution the maker to understand submission rules for each organization may differ. Thus, images submitted under TOPG guidelines may not be eligible for other organization's competitions and vice versa. Be sure to understand the rules for each organization that you wish to submit images for competition.