

Playful Siblings
No EXIF Data



Assignment Relevance

Open

Interest, Impact, Creativity

What a great opportunity to catch two bear cubs playing and looking your direction, no less. Hard to think of any wildlife more interesting than bear cubs.

Composition

I like having the subjects more toward the bottom of the frame ... makes them feel closer. More or less centered horizontally ... works fine here. Really FUN shot!

Technical Quality

Based on the green water line in the distance, the shot seems to be leaning left a bit. I would fix that.

Color, Lighting, Exposure, Focus

The photo is a little underexposed for my taste, especially the bears, and most especially the bears' faces. I would start by boosting the shadows and reducing the highlights. Then, take a look at your histogram to fine tune the exposure. The tint is a little too magenta for me, and I think the shot would look better with a slightly warmer white balance.

Mountain Splendor
23 (34)mm, f/27, 1/90, ISO-200



Assignment Relevance

Open

Interest, Impact, Creativity

Not sure where this is, but it reminds me of the Tetons. It's a beautiful scene but it feels kind of empty. It would be nice to have a horse or a man on a horse or a house or something in the foreground. The fence doesn't quite do it for me 😊

Composition

The balance of the foreground, midground, mountains and sky is pleasing, I think.

Technical Quality

An alarm goes off for me when I see apertures smaller than about $f/14$. At $f/16$, your camera will start showing signs of diffraction and it will be diffraction limited at about $f/20$, which means you aren't getting the full resolution/detail in your image. Like all camera settings, you are always making compromises and trade-offs. This article is a pretty good summary of what diffraction is and how it affects your images ... [Diffraction Limited Photography: Pixel Size, Aperture and Airy Disks \(cambridgeincolour.com\)](https://www.cambridgeincolour.com)

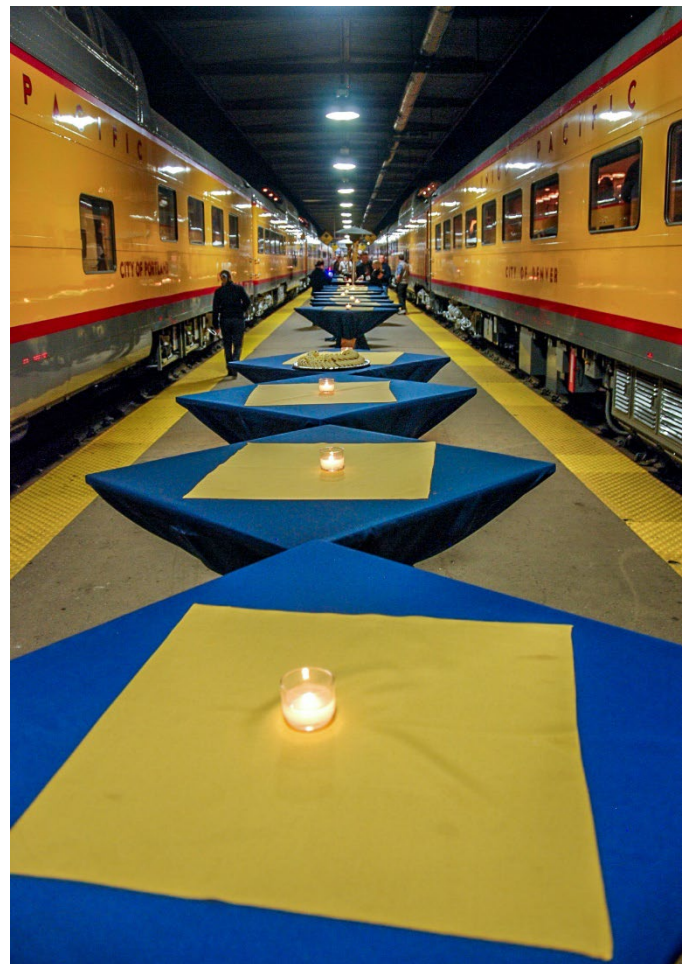
Color, Lighting, Exposure, Focus

The image seems a little underexposed and all the shades of green sort of melt together. I would boost the shadows and pull down the highlights to bring out more detail and then get a white point and black point to maximize contrast and make the colors "pop". Then, maybe add Texture or Clarity to the trees and mountains (I prefer Texture).

You should process the sky separately from the rest of the image if you have tools that allow this. The blue in the sky seemed a little dark to me, so I lightened it a bit. Really dark blue skies don't look real to me, but that's probably just me



Chicago Union Station
18 (27)mm, f/3.5, 1/10, ISO-400



Assignment Relevance

Open

Interest, Impact, Creativity

Interesting location for a party! What would have really made this image interesting would have been precise alignment of the tables, table cloths, and candles so that it looked like a mirror image into infinity. The setup crew failed you. If the alignment had been good, I would have wanted to experiment with a lower camera angle.

Composition

I wanted the left and right sides to be symmetrical, and the only element that precisely defines the center of the image is the row of ceiling lights, so I would crop to make that the center line.

Technical Quality

It was probably pretty dark in there, but I would have probably gone with a higher ISO (1000 or so) to allow a little smaller aperture (f/8) and maybe a little faster shutter (at least 1/30).

Color, Lighting, Exposure, Focus

The blue and gold of the table cloths is your strongest color element, but they are underexposed and the blue is almost completely lost. Boost your shadows, bring down the highlights, set white/black points. Then, adjust your overall exposure to make the colors pop. Don't worry if the ceiling lights are "blown out" ... it doesn't matter.

Chicks in a Nest

280mm, f/5.6, 1/4000, ISO-1000



Assignment Relevance

Open

Interest, Impact, Creativity

Great moment, interesting action, maximum cuteness!

Composition

Egret chicks really are little dinosaurs! I would go ahead and crop in from the right to center the birds. That negative space doesn't really do anything for this composition/image.

Technical Quality

At 280mm, you probably don't need a 1/4000 shutter speed for this image unless you are really shaky 😊

Color, Lighting, Exposure, Focus

It is really hard to photograph white birds. You must "protect" the highlights to keep from blowing them out, which means the rest of the image will probably be dramatically underexposed. This is why you need to shoot in RAW format if you aren't already and why you need a good post processing software like Adobe Lightroom. You can recover detail from underexposed areas, but once highlights are blown, they're gone ... there's nothing there to recover.

Anyway ... in your image, I would bring the shadows ALL THE WAY UP and take the highlights ALL THE WAY DOWN. Then, tweak the overall image from there. I used a brush to brighten the left bird's face/eye to more closely match the right bird.

Forked Tongue

300mm, f/10, 1/640, ISO-1600



Assignment Relevance

Open

Interest, Impact, Creativity

Nice snake, not so nice surroundings. My goal in shooting this snake and in processing the photo would be to focus more attention on the snake and less attention on the messy surroundings.

Composition

Not sure what the resolution of your original photo is, but I would crop tighter if possible.

Technical Quality

For pretty much any wildlife image where I am shooting a single animal, I would suggest using whatever is your widest aperture ... maybe f/5.6 or even f/4 if available. Generally, and specifically for this subject/surroundings, it would be good if you have a very shallow depth-of-field with only the animal's head/eye sharp.

Color, Lighting, Exposure, Focus

The snake's nose/mouth and the stick they are resting on are kind of bright "hot spots." You might have been able to stand so that your shadow covered the snake and get more even light and better overall exposure. Just something to think about.

Reflection on the River Tay
19mm, f/5.6, 1/100, ISO-800



Assignment Relevance

Open

Interest, Impact, Creativity

Beautiful scene with great reflection.

Composition

The composition is good, but the sky doesn't look so good. Can't be sure it was really white/overcast or just blown out (over exposed) ... or a combination.

Technical Quality

If you had a tripod available, I would have experimented with long exposures to completely smooth out the water. Maybe f/8-10 and ISO-100 with a shutter speed of several seconds ... whatever was necessary to achieve proper exposure. If you haven't tried this before, it's an interesting and useful technique to have in your *bag of tricks*.

Color, Lighting, Exposure, Focus

There are some patches of blue sky in the reflection at the lower-left corner. The actual sky and the rest of the reflected sky look white or blown out. It would have been nice to exposure for the sky to get any other blue patches or cloud details even though the rest of the photo would have been underexposed. You can recover details from underexposed areas in post processing, but you can't recover details from a blown-out sky.

Finally, as submitted, the trees appear to be just various shades of medium and light green. I played around with the green and yellow hue adjustments to widen the color range into the yellow and golden tones.

Colobus Monkey on Black
300mm, f/8, 1/800, ISO-6400



Assignment Relevance

Open

Interest, Impact, Creativity

Interesting and mysterious!

Composition

The 8x10 crop and negative space on the right are perfect.

Technical Quality

I realize that sometimes you only have a fraction of a second to get the shot, but I wouldn't have shot at ISO 6400 if I had any other option. For this kind of shot, it seems like f/4 or even f/2.8 would have been great. Really, only the eyes need to be sharp or maybe even just one of the eyes.

Color, Lighting, Exposure, Focus

I would really like to see just a hint of detail on the right side of the face. If you shot this in raw, you might be able to reveal a bit more. Of course, it's your photo, so you could just ignore me and do whatever you want 😊 Nice shot!!

Blood Moon Rise in Ft. Worth
150 (225)mm, f/11 1/125, ISO-12,800



Assignment Relevance

Open

Interest, Impact, Creativity

My first thoughts were ... WOW, nice colors, but that's one grainy photograph!! But after a while, the grain sort of *grew on me*. So ... *embrace the grain* if you really like it, or make some strategic decisions about where grain works and where it doesn't.

Composition

I really like the composition. To my eye, the buildings are leaning left just a bit, so I used Lightroom > Transform > Auto and a bit of manual tweaking to straighten them.

Technical Quality

With a tripod and at 225mm, you can shoot the moon at 1/15 or 1/8 without motion blur, so that would have brought the ISO and grain WAY DOWN. Since, I only had the existing photo to work with, I tried removing the noise using Topaz Denoise AI. The sky looked better, but the buildings look fake/plastic. So, I used a mask to just remove the noise/grain from the sky. Then, I darkened the sky quite a bit and the rest of the image a little to make the grain less obvious. I liked this compromise. Try it and see what you think.

Color, Lighting, Exposure, Focus

I like how the light at the top of the old Bank One building matches the color of the moon. Nice shot!!

Sandpiper Cafe

No EXIF Data



Assignment Relevance

Open

Interest, Impact, Creativity

It's really hard shooting a large flock of birds ... on the ground or in the air ... but you did a good job of getting most of the birds reasonably well in focus.

Composition

I love the approaching water and the warm light. I don't like it when birds get cut in half at the edge of a photo. I try to remove "partial birds" at the edges when it's possible, so I removed the one on the left edge.

Technical Quality

Everything looks appropriate for the situation.

Color, Lighting, Exposure, Focus

The white balance looks almost too warm for me, so I tried cooling it down a bit. The birds/beach still have a golden hue, but the water is cooler/bluer.

The Red Dragon

400 (600)mm, f/6.3, 1/1250, ISO-200



Assignment Relevance

Open

Interest, Impact, Creativity

Nice Eastern Amberwing ... one of my favorite dragonflies.

Composition

The crop is a little tight for me, but that's a personal preference.

Technical Quality

When you shoot really close with a long lens, the depth-of-field is incredibly shallow. I typically go to f/10-14 for butterflies and dragonflies. You should still be able to have a reasonable shutter speed (maybe 1/500) and ISO (maybe 640) with the smaller aperture.

Color, Lighting, Exposure, Focus

When shooting dragonflies, you gotta nail focus on the compound eye ... hopefully so you can see the individual cells of the eye. Looks like your focus plane was behind the eye, around the leading edge of the wings. The smaller aperture would give you a better chance of nailing it, but it still has to be spot on.

The green hue (blurred foliage?) in the lower-left corner is a little distracting. I would look for a way to match the vignette in the four corners ... copying one of the other corners and blending it in to the green one would probably be the easiest.

High Stepping

600mm, f/9, 1/2000, ISO-2500



Assignment Relevance

Open

Interest, Impact, Creativity

Nice Juvenile Yellow-Crowned Night Heron. I like to catch that *foot-in-the-air* shot too!

Composition

The portrait orientation works great for this shot, and the crop is just tight enough, I think!

Technical Quality

I would shoot at f/5.6-6.3 if available for this type of shot. I like to keep my ISO below 2000 if at all possible.

Color, Lighting, Exposure, Focus

The color is a little too magenta, I think. Use the White Balance eye-dropper in Lightroom or the equivalent in other software. I begin with Shadows up and Highlights down on just about every wildlife shot, and then find White and Black points to make colors/details pop.

Pretty much all wildlife shots benefit for a subtle dark vignette, especially when the background is bright like this.

Juvenile Yellow-Crowned Night Heron
400mm, f/10, 1/1250, ISO-2500



Assignment Relevance

Open

Interest, Impact, Creativity

These birds have such distinctive profiles ... always good for a side shot!

Composition

As is, the logs in the background are much brighter than the subject bird. It should be the other way around. I would begin by cropping a little tighter to eliminate some of the background.

Technical Quality

A side shot like this probably doesn't need f/10. I would opt for a wider aperture (f/6.3) and a lower ISO.

Color, Lighting, Exposure, Focus

Depending on your software, there are different ways to address the background/subject brightness issue. In Lightroom, I would bring down the brightness of the entire image quite a bit ... a half stop or so. Then, I would use a mask to select just the bird and bring up the exposure a full stop or so until the bird shows up nicely and is the obvious star of the shot.

No Bicycles Allowed

4.3 (24)mm, f/3.4, 1/200, ISO-80



Assignment Relevance

Open

Interest, Impact, Creativity

I love shots like this ... my OCD feeds on them 😊

Composition

I think shots like this demand precise alignment and symmetry. I would begin by verifying the vertical and horizontal lines. In Lightroom this would begin by using Transform > Auto. Then, use the Rotation slider to ensure the bridge tower is perfectly vertical. Finally, I would crop from the lower-right until the box on top of the bridge tower is at the vertical center of the image.

Technical Quality

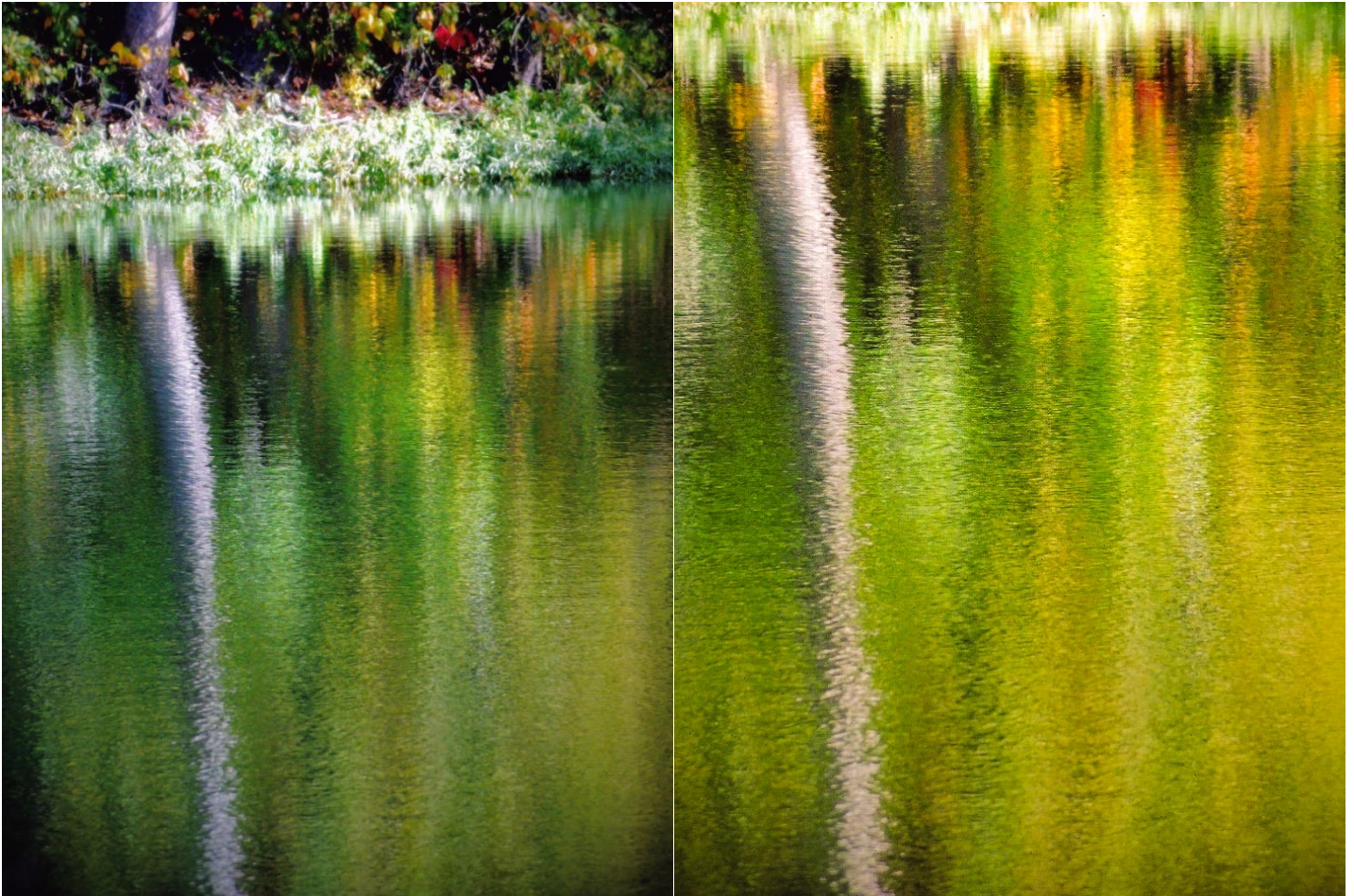
Normally, I would start at about f/10 for this type of shot, but I don't see any issue with depth-of-field, so let's say "good as is"!

Color, Lighting, Exposure, Focus

The image is pretty darn good at this point, but I'm always looking for more drama. So ... I would select everything except the sky and add some Texture and/or sharpening ... making it a little *gritty*. Then, I would select just the sky and play around with Clarity to make those cloud more ominous. Just some things to try 😊

Watercolor

4.71 (27)mm, f/1.7, 1/60, ISO-249



Assignment Relevance

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Interest, Impact, Creativity

I like the reflection part of the photo, but the non-reflection part at the top sort of “gives away the secret.” And, the *real part* at the top just doesn’t measure up to the abstract/impressionistic beauty of the reflection.

Composition

Based on my comment about the real part of the photo, I would try cropping off the top of the image, but there are probably more creative things you could try “in camera” if you were shooting a shot like this again.

Technical Quality

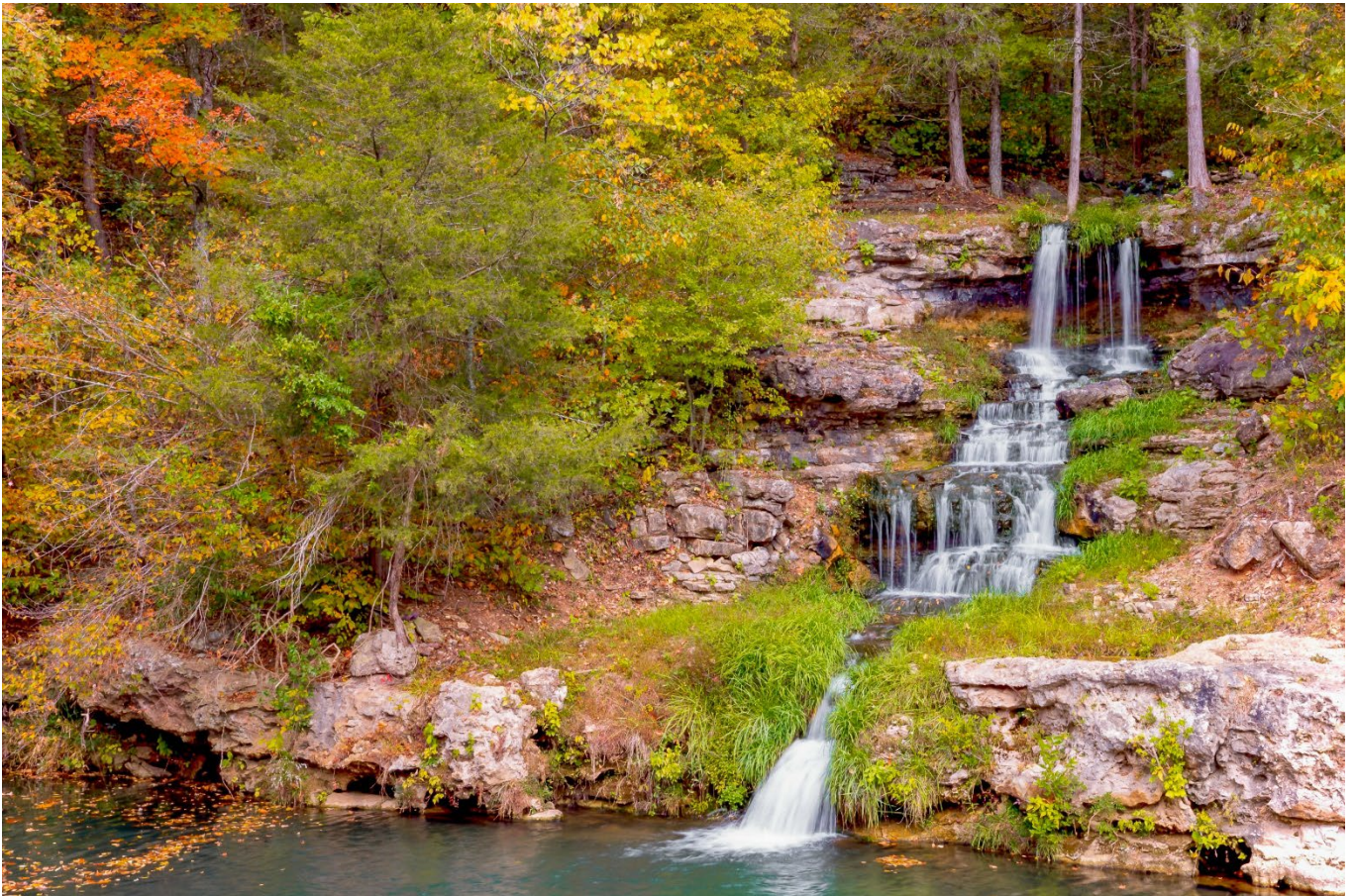
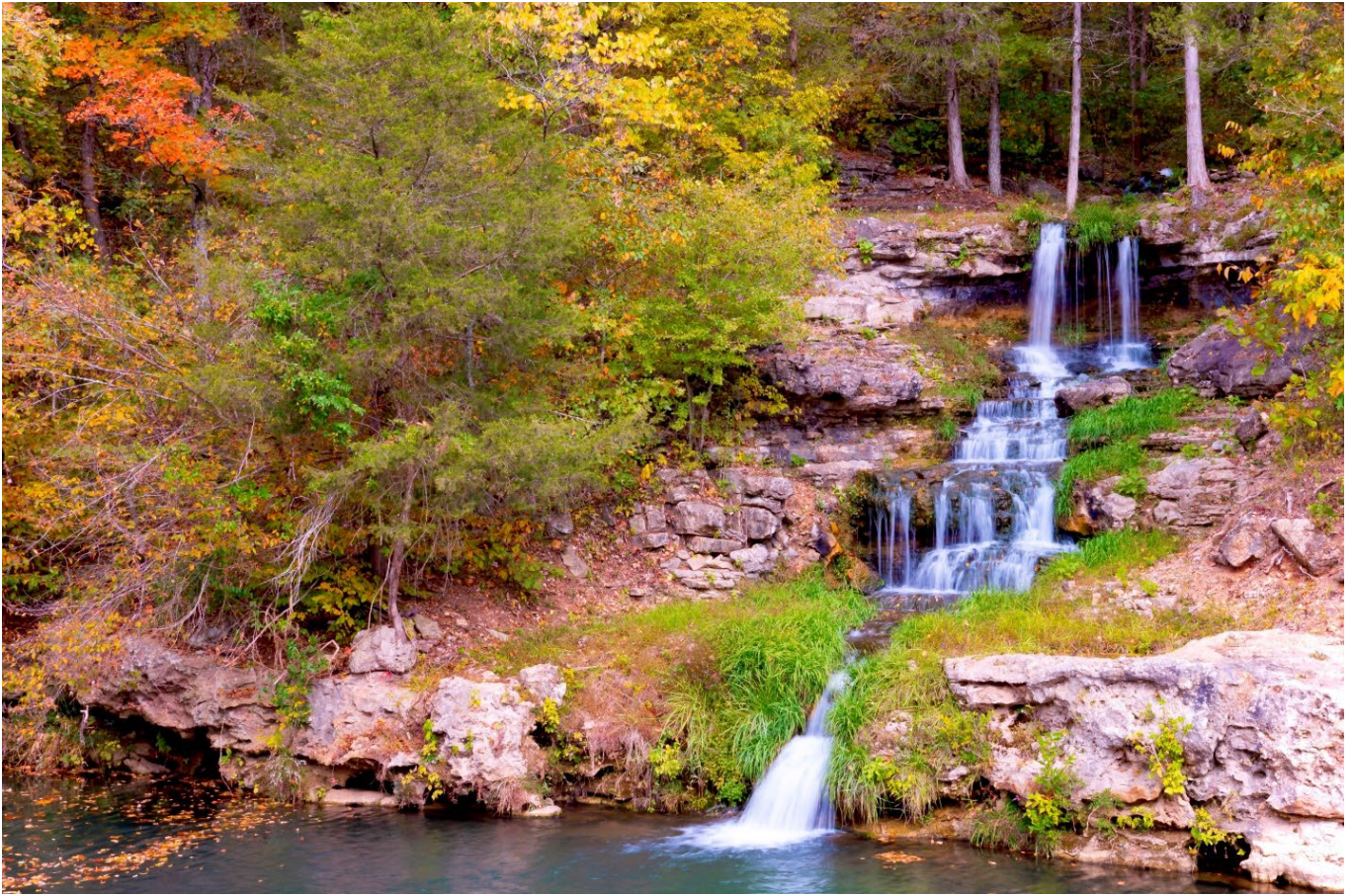
This image is really more about feelings than technical quality. The highlights at the top of the image are blown out, but it doesn’t really matter much here.

Color, Lighting, Exposure, Focus

With an abstract image like this, you might try pumping up the saturation/vibrance or looking at some special effects ... the Orton Effect for example. Have FUN!

Mini Waterfall

38mm, f/20, 1/8, ISO-100



Assignment Relevance

Open

Interest, Impact, Creativity

I really like this scene. It's the type of location you could go back to again and again ... different times of day, different seasons.

Composition

I am curious about what more there is to see past the bottom of the image, but that's just me. The composition is solid as is.

Technical Quality

I usually try to avoid apertures smaller than about $f/14$. At $f/20$ your camera is *diffraction limited*, which means you aren't getting the full resolution/detail in your image. Like all camera settings, you are always making compromises and trade-offs. This article is a pretty good summary of what diffraction is and how it affects your images ... [Diffraction Limited Photography: Pixel Size, Aperture and Airy Disks \(cambridgeincolour.com\)](http://cambridgeincolour.com)

Color, Lighting, Exposure, Focus

Exposure and focus are good, and for the most part the colors look nice except for a very slight magenta cast. However, all of the falling water has a pronounced bluish-purple halo around it. This can happen sometimes as a by-product of other processing. Since there is no naturally occurring purple in the image (and very little blue), you could simply remove most or all of these colors. I tried that and thought it looked more natural. You'll have to decide.

Sullen

112mm, f/7.1, 1/200, ISO-400



Assignment Relevance

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Interest, Impact, Creativity

What a beautiful little boy, sullen or not, and what a great moment to capture.

Composition

Problem is, the bright spot on the brick and the white downspout behind the boy's head are stealing the attention in the shot. This would be a great place to use the new AI Generative Fill feature in Photoshop to get rid of those distractions. I tried it and it work very well!

Technical Quality

I would gotten closer to the subject and shot this at f/4 and at 24mm to achieve better bokeh (blurred background).

Color, Lighting, Exposure, Focus

As submitted, the boy's face is in shadows and underexposed. I would use Lightroom masks, especially the new Select People features, to enhance the boy's face ... lighten skin, eyes, lips, etc. ... and to deemphasize everything else. His face and eyes should be the stars of the image.

Berry Proud Cedar Waxwing

No EXIF Data



Assignment Relevance

Open

Interest, Impact, Creativity

What a great Cedar Waxwing shot!! You got all the key components ... the yellow tail, the red “wax” on the wing, etc. ... and the berry is perfect.

Composition

Whenever possible, I like to simplify and *declutter* my wildlife backgrounds. You already have a nicely-blurred background, and although it is easy to overuse the new AI tools, I do like how good they are at removing distractions like the sticks in your image’s background. I tried removing them and liked the results.

Technical Quality

Your submitted file didn’t contain any camera/setting info, but the results tell me that whatever they were, they worked well for you on this image. Good job!

Color, Lighting, Exposure, Focus

All good! I tried warming up the white balance a bit and like the way it looks.

Green Chilling

600mm, f/9, 1/2000, ISO-800



Assignment Relevance

Open

Interest, Impact, Creativity

Green Herons always seem to have an attitude and are great subjects. Nice shot!

Composition

Framing and cropping are good. A reflection always adds interest to a composition even when the water isn't smooth enough for a clear reflection. It looks like you could have gotten lower to take the shot. Lower angles help separate your subject from the background/surroundings ... almost always a good thing! As submitted, the water has quite a few specs of "stuff" on/in it. Unless these have some special meaning in the shot, I usually get rid of them along with any other distractions. I like smooooooth water 😊

Technical Quality

No real reason for f/9 when shooting a single subject, especially a profile like this. I am guessing you could have gone with f/6.3 or maybe even f/5.6. One of the reasons professional photographers' shots look professional is that they are using shallower depth-of-field and getting more subject separation/background than non-pros.

Color, Lighting, Exposure, Focus

As submitted, the overall shot is fairly dark and the subject doesn't really stand out. I would bring up the shadow and take down the highlights. Then, set White and Black points, and tweak the overall exposure. If the subject still isn't "popping," I would use a mask or some other method to select/adjust the subject's tone/brightness separately.

Hanauma Bay

300mm, f/5.6, 1/800, ISO-400



Assignment Relevance

Open

Interest, Impact, Creativity

Another one of those places you could return to and photograph again and again ... if you get to Hawaii a lot 😊

Composition

Framing/cropping seem appropriate for the scene/location. The action of the waves and splashes is great! Too bad you weren't blessed with a more interesting sky, but you get what you get. When you don't have an interesting sky, it often better to shoot tighter and capture much less sky.

Based on the horizon line, your shot is leaning to the left a bit. It's always a good idea to check the alignment first thing, especially when you have such a well-defined horizon line.

Technical Quality

I would have probably started at about f/10 for this type of shot, but depth-of-field isn't really an issue in your shot, so just a thought.

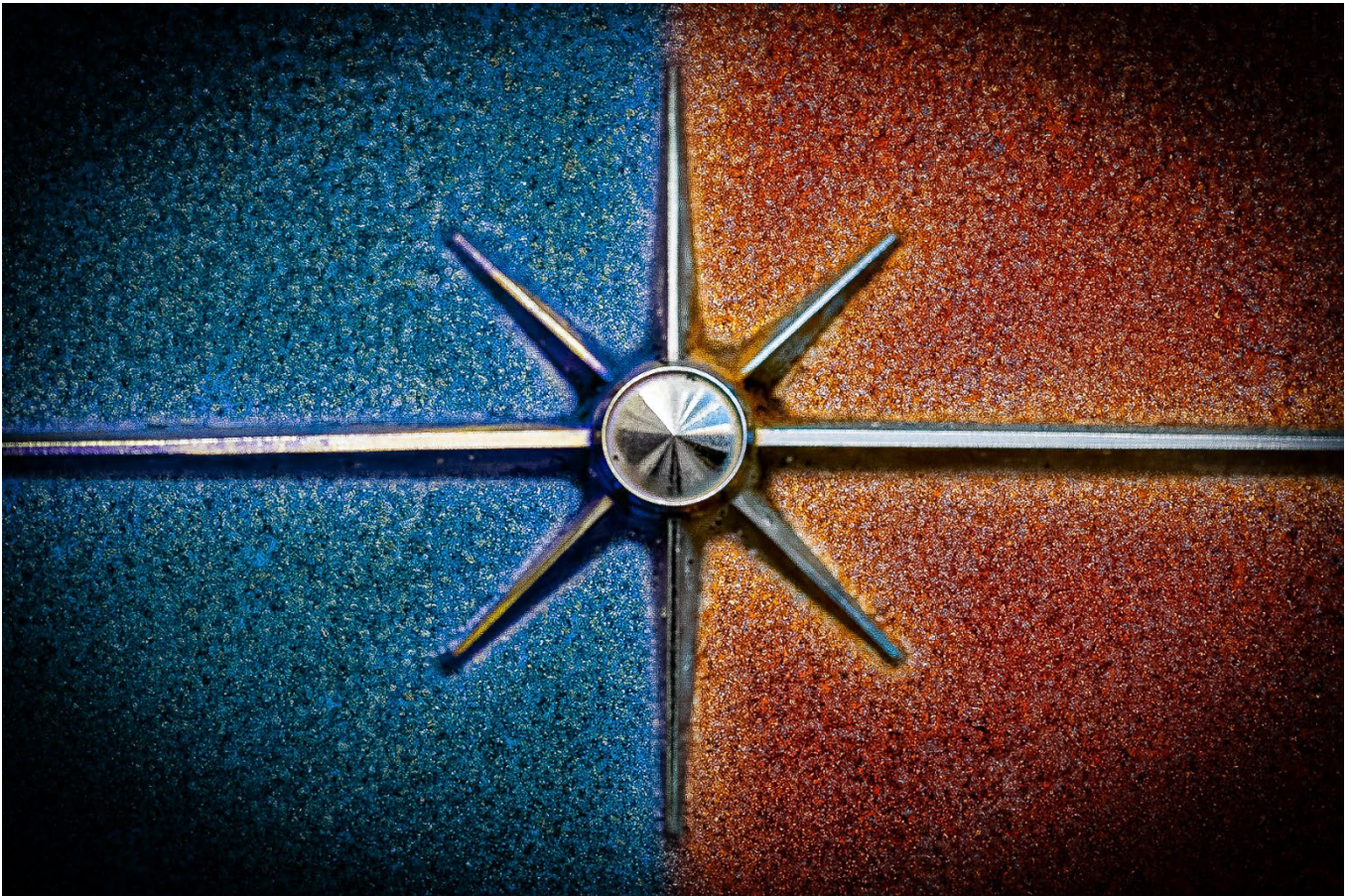
Color, Lighting, Exposure, Focus

The colors in the foreground water are kind of weird, but I can't put my finger what it is. Water is just weird sometimes. I would bring up the shadows in the rocks to reveal a little more detail. If you shot this in RAW format, there should be some details in there. I would also warm up the white balance in the rocks/water.

Unfortunately, many of the highlights in the waves/splashes are blown out ... just flat white with no detail/texture ... at least in this JPG. Again, if you shot this in RAW format, you might be able to go back to the original and recover something ... maybe. Whenever you're shooting in bright light with lots of highlights, you gotta be careful. You can usually pull out some details from underexposed areas/shadows. Blown highlights are gone forever!

Rusted Retro

116 (174)mm, f/4.8, 1/2000, ISO-500



Assignment Relevance

Open

Interest, Impact, Creativity

I'm not sure what this is ... part of a car or some other machine? Seems that the point of the photo is the emphasized the grit, texture, detail, etc. of the rust, so it's a little disappointing that the focus on the rusty part is kind of soft. Let's talk about how to make that better 😊

Composition

It's a symmetrical starburst. Dead center seems like the right composition to me!!

Technical Quality

It's a stationary object, I assume, so shutter speed can be just about any value, especially if you have a tripod. I think you want the shot to be gritty and grainy, so ISO is sort of irrelevant. You just want everything to be in focus, so the key setting is aperture. With your camera at 116mm and f/16 at a distance of about 10 feet, the depth-of-field is a foot and a half. From what I can see/guess, that should get everything in focus.

Color, Lighting, Exposure, Focus

Since this object is sort of abstract and we don't really know what it is, as long as you nail the focus and exposure, you can do pretty much anything you want with the color. Just for fun, I downloaded a random photo of a rusty metal plate and made a composite with your photo to try to illustrate my comments. Have FUN!!

Sailing in Iona Scotland

150mm, f/6.3, 1/400, ISO-200



Assignment Relevance

Open

Interest, Impact, Creativity

Interesting! I don't usually associate Scotland with mountains or sailing, but I've never been there, so what do I know?

Composition

Because there doesn't appear to be anything particularly interesting about the background, I assume the boat is the star of the shot, so I would crop in a little to focus on the boat. And since an inflatable dingy kind of spoils the romance of being "at sail on the open water," I removed it. Of course, I don't know what the shot means to you, so I could be all wrong!

Technical Quality

Your settings are certainly reasonable and appropriate for the scene you were shooting, and the sharpness and depth of field are good.

Color, Lighting, Exposure, Focus

Again, because the boat seems to be the star of the shot, I brightened it up a bit. I also increased the blue saturation and texture of the water. Nice shot!