

Top 10 Tips for Youth Photo Exhibitors

1. *Hold your camera steady.* Kodak says the most common problem with photos is camera shake. When you're ready to shoot a photo, hold the camera tightly against your face, take a deep breath, and gently squeeze the shutter button. Whenever you can, lean against something to steady yourself when you shoot. If you're taking a picture of something that doesn't move, set the camera on something, like a wall or tripod, to take away the shakes.
2. *Get close to your subject.* Look through the viewfinder of your camera. Does your subject – the person, animal, building or landscape that you want to capture on film – fill the viewfinder frame? If not, move in closer. Take another look. Does your subject fill the viewfinder now? If not, keep moving in until there's nothing in the viewfinder except your subject, then shoot. (Note: if you move closer than four feet with many cameras, your subject will be out of focus. So read your camera manual to find out the minimum focusing distance for your camera.)
3. *Watch the background behind your subject.* Keep the background simple so your subject stands out. Good simple backgrounds include the sky, grass, snow, blank walls, dark shadows or anything else that is clear and uncluttered. If your background is busy, viewers will be distracted and not see the subject in your photo. So, remove any clutter from the background before you take a picture. You can also move yourself or your subject so the background is clear when you aim your camera.
4. *Use the rule of thirds in your photos.* What's the rule of thirds? Find an old photograph or a picture clipped out of a magazine that you can write on. Find a marker. Now pretend to be playing tic, tac, toe on your photo. Draw the four lines of the tic, tac, toe grid. Notice that there are four points where the four lines intersect. The rule of thirds in photography encourages you to place your subject at one of these intersecting points . . . and not in the center of the photo. Which intersecting line? Look at the subject. Is it looking or pointing in one direction? Place the subject at one of the intersecting lines so that it is looking *into* the picture not off. Leave more space in front of your subject than behind. Why use the rule of thirds? Because it's more interesting and dynamic than having your subject placed in the middle of your photo.
5. *Use leading lines in your photos.* Try to include a line in the foreground that leads your eye to the subject. Think of a railroad track that leads your eye to a train coming down the track. Leading lines like this add interest to a photo because they add depth. Without depth, photos appear flat and two-dimensional. Leading lines give you 3-D photos! These lines are everywhere: sidewalks, driveways, tree trunks, silos, sides of buildings, etc. You just need to find them and use them in your photos.
6. *Frame your subject in the photo.* Try to include something in the foreground that frames your subject. A common frame that we often see employed in landscape photos is a tree branch in the foreground, framing a large subject such as a barn or lake in the background. Like leading lines, frames are everywhere: door frames, swings with chains, fences, gates, etc. You just need to find them and incorporate them into your photos.

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7. *Follow the mounting requirements in your county fair book:* correct size of photos and mounting board, color of mounting boards, mounting glue and other mounting materials. (Hint: rubber cement works well for temporary mounting at county fairs. It also is easy to clean up. Never use photo or art corners for mounting, even if they're not forbidden in the fair book.) Present a clean, neat exhibit with all cement and pencil marks removed.
8. *Follow good layout rules for a photo exhibit.* That means no extra artwork on the mounting board, such as curlicues, drawings, arrows, or balloons for quotes. Never mount your photos at an angle or on a slant. Judges want photos set squarely and neatly on the mounting board. If titles and captions are required, spell the words correctly, use proper grammar and don't use cliché or overused phrases. If titles and captions are not required, neatly number your photos, left to right and top to bottom – the way we read a page. If cropping is allowed crop photos either to a square or a rectangle, not a circle, triangle or other odd shape. If you're entering a video, limit it's length to the minimum time allowed. (Three minutes is a long video!) If a class calls for "My *best* photo," it means the photo that you think best meets the rules of composition. If you have a photo of your favorite pet or friend, it may be your *favorite* photo because of the subject. But if it is not well composed, i.e., it is not your "best" photo," replace it with a photo that will rate higher with the judge.
9. *Provide technical information about your photos:* camera used to take the pictures, type of film, type of lighting, exposure details, etc. A 3x5 card with this information attached to the back of your exhibit works well. If this technical information is not required at your county fair, assume that the judge will ask for it during face-to-face or conference judging. Be prepared. Having the information somewhere on the board saves time for judges and also gets you in the habit of recording this vital information.
10. *Don't worry about the type of camera you use for your photos.* Any camera will do. Judges are being encouraged to judge each photo primarily on the basis of its composition and story-telling ability. You can take interesting, well-composed photographs with any camera. So even if you're using a \$100 camera, you can compete with someone using a much more expensive camera . . . as long as you submit photos that follow the rules of composition and tell a story.

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