

# Changes to N4C Competition rules for 2022

Several changes to the N4C Interclub Competition Rules have been approved by the N4C Board. These changes will impact both prints and projected images starting with images submitted to the January 2022 Interclub competition. These rules changes may impact club competitions occurring in 2021 if winners of those competitions are submitted to 2022 N4C Interclub competitions.

This article will explain the changes in detail. However, we strongly recommend that you read the full text of the rules, which can be found on <https://n4c.org/> under the menu item *Competitions*, then click on “New Competition Rules for 2022 (PDF)”.

## Compound Images

Perhaps the biggest change is the introduction of the concept of a Compound Image. In practice, what we are now calling “compound images” have been submitted to our competitions in the past; some people, including judges, believed they were allowed under the existing rules, and others did not. The Board decided to allow for greater creativity and make it explicit that they **are** allowed. Here is the definition:

*A "compound image" is two or more images displayed within a frame, either superimposed or adjacent. One title is given for the entire compound image. A compound image will be viewed, critiqued, and evaluated as a single image. For prints, a "frame" is a single mount or mat. For projected images a frame is a single image file.*

The concept of the Compound Image is exemplified by the Triptych, as in figure 1. Here three images are presented within a single frame, but conceptually they are viewed and understood as a single photograph. More complex compound images are allowed, including overlapping images, for example see figure 2.



*Figure 1. A photographic triptych consists of three images usually arranged with a plain border between them. The work may consist of separate images that are variants on a theme or may be one larger image split into three. A triptych is a special case of a polyptych, the difference being that a polyptych may consist of any number of images greater than one. A polyptych is an example of a “compound image” for the purposes of the N4C competition rules. Photo by Lisa Langell.*

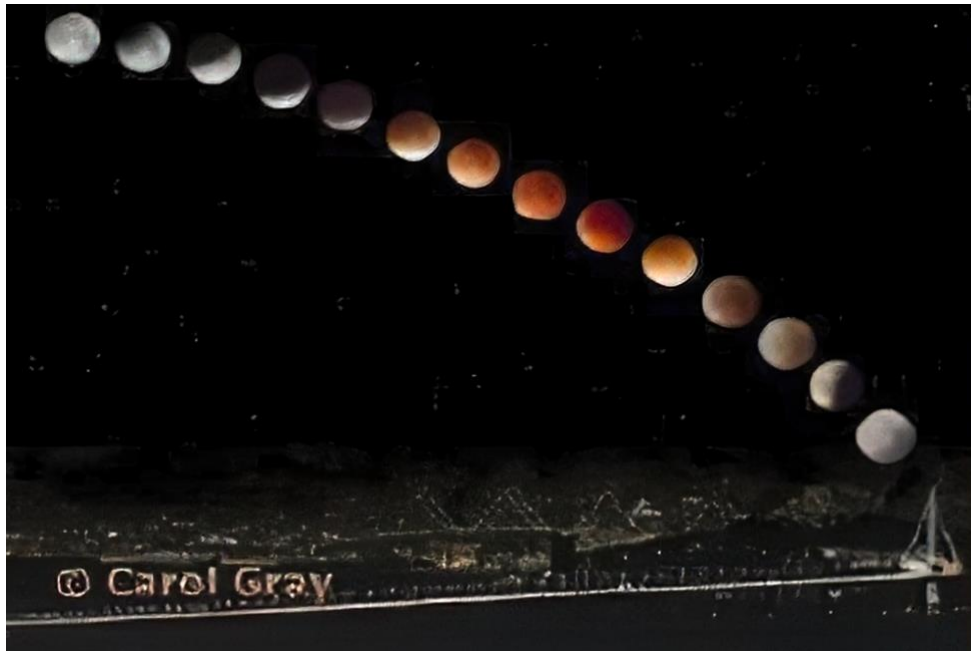


Figure 2. In this photograph multiple images of the moon in different stages of an eclipse are superimposed to create one photograph. This is another example of a compound image. Photo by Carol Gray.

To better understand Compound Images, it is useful to compare them to Sequences, defined as follows:

*A “Sequence” is two or more logically connected images constituting a single entry. The images in a sequence are viewed sequentially and should work together to communicate a message in a way no individual image would. Beyond its own merits, each individual image should contribute to the sequence as a whole.*

*For prints, a sequence is two or more images in a single mount or mat. For projected images, each image is in a separate file.*

This definition is the same one that we are familiar with; there is no change. The key difference between a Sequence and a Compound Image is that the images in a Sequence are viewed and understood as independent images, albeit ones that work together to tell a single story. A compound image is always considered a single image, regardless of the number of component parts.

(As an aside, note that while images in a sequence are viewed one after another, there is no requirement that the images correspond to a time sequence of events, although this is often the case.)

Compound images are only allowed in the “pictorial” divisions: Color Prints, Monochrome Prints, Creative Prints, Pictorial Projected Images, Monochrome Projected Images and Creative Projected Images. Sequences are only allowed in Nature and Journalism whether prints or projected.

For projected images, there is little ambiguity between a compound image and a sequence. A compound image will be displayed as any other single image, while for a sequence the images are displayed one after the other. The difference may not be so obvious with prints. While a triptych may be easily recognized, other forms of compound images may look similar to a print sequence. Making this distinction is a creative challenge to the photographer. However, we do not want any compound image disqualified because it is mistaken for a sequence. Hence the definition of a Compound Image also includes this paragraph:

*A print which includes two or more images in a division that allows compound images but not sequences should be judged and critiqued as a compound image.*

Whether or not compound images are allowed in any given division is summarized by a new column in the table in section *2.8 General Rules – Competition*.

## Monochrome vs. Grayscale

N4C has for many years maintained an expansive definition of a “monochrome” image. The current (2021) definition states, in part, “A monochrome image refers to an image in tones of black and white (grayscale), but also includes images made of tones of a single color.” This remains the case. However, it has perhaps been little noticed that the definition of Nature contains the statement “Color images can be converted to **grey-scale** [sic] monochrome.” However, the “Nature” row of the table in Section *2.6 General Rules* simply says “YES” in the “Monochrome Allowed” column. The new, 2022 rules remove this ambiguity and also bring consistency to Nature, Journalism and Travel.

The new definition of monochrome reads:

*A monochrome image refers to an image in tones of a single color. **Grayscale is a specific subset of monochrome using tones of black and white.** Besides grayscale, other examples of monochrome include for example, sepia images, which display tones from light tan to dark brown, and cyanotype images (blueprints).*

The definitions of Journalism, Nature and Travel have been adjusted for consistency: in all cases these three divisions allow color and grayscale images, not the more general “monochrome.” These requirements are summarized in the table in section *2.8 General Rules – Competition*. For each division, the column “Monochrome (M) or Grayscale (G) Allowed” will have either a “NO” (color only), “M” (Any form of monochrome allowed), or “G” (Grayscale only allowed).

An example of allowed and disallowed versions of an image are shown in figure 3.



Figure 3. The image on the left is a grayscale image and could be entered in the Travel Divisions. It could also be entered into the Monochrome Divisions or Pictorial Projected Image Division. The sepia toned image on the right will not be allowed in the Travel Division but could be entered into the Monochrome Divisions or Pictorial Projected Image Division. Such toned images are also not allowed in Nature or Journalism. Photo by Douglas Stinson.

## Travel

Images submitted to Interclub Travel Competitions starting in January 2022 will be judged against the following definition:

*A Photo Travel image expresses the characteristic features, culture, or feeling of a land as they are found naturally. There are no geographic limitations. Images from events or activities arranged specifically for photography, or of subjects directed or hired for photography, are not permitted. Close up pictures of people or objects must include features that provide information about the location.*

*Techniques that add to, relocate, replace, or remove any element of the original image, except by cropping, are not permitted. The only allowable adjustments are removal of dust or digital noise, restoration of the appearance of the original scene, and complete conversion to grayscale. Other derivations, including infrared, are not permitted. All images must look natural. The title should give the location and complement the travel story.*

Most of the changes clarify the meaning without changing the intent. However, there are several notable changes. All these changes are driven by the purpose of Travel photography, which is to show how the world really is, not how someone wants us to view it or to arrange it in a way that makes the “best” photograph.

Perhaps the biggest change is the addition of “*Images from events or activities arranged specifically for photography, or of subjects directed or hired for photography, are not permitted.*” This has always been implicit in the definition, which currently states, “*...portray a*

land, its distinctive features or culture in its **natural state**.” Events staged for photography are not the culture in its natural state. The new definition calls this out explicitly. Note that the emphasis here is on truth-telling, not on how the subjects came to be arranged the way they were. For example, if you came across a wedding party posing for their photograph, you may decide this is a good opportunity to photograph traditional wedding outfits. This would be allowed in travel because posing for photographs is a normal part of a wedding ceremony, it is not being staged for your benefit as a travel photographer. One example of a staged image is shown in figure 4. Additional examples of can be found at <https://psa-photo.org/index.php?staged-travel-images>.



Figure 4. This image may look like a great travel photo, but it is staged and so not allowed in the Travel Divisions. The locals do not dress up so elaborately when making these cages. You will find many adaptations of this scene. Sometimes the shot is taken with a birdcage as a frame. Note: this photo would be allowed in the Pictorial Color Print and Pictorial Projected Image Divisions. Adapted from a PSA document by Nadiam Filaiggi.

Another major change is the addition of “*The only allowable adjustments are removal of dust or digital noise, restoration of the appearance of the original scene...*” This makes more explicit what modifications are allowed. I draw your particular attention to the phrase “*restoration of the appearance of the original scene*”. This means corrections for limitations of the imaging system are allowed. Specifically, selective darkening and lightening, HDR and stitching multiple images together are allowed. Again truth-telling is the criteria: you can correct for the limited dynamic range of your camera and display, but just like you can’t clone out an object, you can’t darken it just to make it disappear. (Note: this description of allowed manipulations applies equally well to Journalism and Nature photographs.)

One contentious issue is portraits in travel photography. Portraits are not mentioned explicitly. They are covered in the current definition by “*Close-up pictures of people or objects must include distinguishable environment*.” It is not clear what “*distinguishable environment*” means. The new definition clarifies this by stating “*Close up pictures of people or objects must include features that **provide information about the location***.” Photographs of people that could have been taken in a studio are not allowed. There will always be disagreements among judges as to

how much information is enough information, but there should be something in the image which says the picture was taken at a particular place. Examples of allowed and disallowed Travel portraits are shown in figure 5. For more compelling travel portraits, learn about *environmental portraiture*. One place to start is <https://digital-photography-school.com/environmental-portraits/>. While not restricted to travel, environmental portraits show something about the relationship between the person and the environment in which the photo was taken. For example, the picture may be of a person in a work setting.



*Figure 5. The clear center of interest in the photograph on the left is the two individuals, yet there is enough additional content to establish a sense of place. Although the two photographs on the right show individuals wearing clothes characteristic of a place, the photographs could have been staged in a studio for all we can tell, and so are not allowed in Travel. Adapted from a PSA document by Tom Tauber.*

Finally, Travel, like Photojournalism and Nature, is a specialized division designed to provide a home for people who are interested in a particular style of photography. An image may be a great photograph, but not belong in Travel. Some more properly belong in Journalism. All will find a place in the Pictorial Divisions.

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Note: This article is also available in section 4.8 *Commentary and Clarifications of Competition Rules and Division Definitions* in the downloads area of <https://n4c.photoclubservices.com/>. A great deal of other valuable information is available there as well. Check it out.