2025-2026 Delaware 4-H

Photography Skill-A-Thon Study Guide

The Delaware 4-H Photography Skillathon is an opportunity for 4-H photography project members to demonstrate the skills and knowledge they have learned in the photography project area. The guide has been developed to assist 4-H volunteers and 4-H members in preparing for the County and State 4-H Photography Skillathon. There are two divisions for this contest: Junior and Senior. Junior participants must be between the ages of 8-12 in 4-H age. Individuals 13 and older must complete the Senior contest. If a Junior chooses to participate in both divisions, they must complete the Senior level contest first. The top ten Senior participants from each county are eligible to participate in the state contest. Should ten Seniors not be available, Juniors may be asked to participate in the state event.

References for this event are the 4-H photography project manuals 1, 2 and 3, kodak.com and wikipedia.org. An online Photography Skill-A-Thon Training Guide that includes study information and links to pre-recorded Photography Workshop sessions is also available. Workshop topics included: Composition, Still Life and Quality Judging tips.

Training Materials and Samples available [online](#) and from the County 4-H Office.

If you need special accommodations to participate in this contest, please notify your county 4-H office, two weeks in advance of the event.

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JUNIOR

Part 1 – Identification of Editing Techniques

Members will be given before and after photographs and will have to match the sample to the type of editing technique used. Types of editing techniques could include:

- Cropping
- Change in Brightness
- Straightening
- Rotating
- Change of size

Training Idea: Have members work on a smartphone or computer to become familiar with the process of using apps to enhance and make changes to photographs stored on the device.

Editing Example:

Original Photo   **Cropped Photo**

Part 2 – Lighting

More Information can also be found in Book 1 – Photography Basics p. 20-35
Members will be asked to demonstrate 3 different types of lighting in photography during the contest. There will be an object in a box and members will be asked to use a flashlight to show three different types of lighting to the proctor.

Types of lighting could include:

- Natural Light

- Artificial Light / Use of Flash

- Backlighting / Silhouette

- Front Light

- Side Light

- Overhead Light

- Underlighting

Training Idea: (Taken from Book 1 – Photography Basics Page 28)
Have a photo shoot to experiment with different types of light!
1. Find an object like a stuffed animal and go into a dark room with a flashlight. Shine the light on the object from the front, back, top, bottom, and side and take photos of each angle.
2. Go outside and take photos of a person or object using the sun as natural light. Take photos of your subject at different angles. Try this on sunny, overcast, and dreary days to see the difference.
3. Study the photos. What do you see? Which photos do you like best and why?

Part 3 – Quality Judging Classes

(Color or black and white) subjects will be selected from the following list. Members will be asked to rank photos in two of these categories based on the criteria of what makes a good photograph.

1. Animals   2. Individual   3. Marine   4. Flowers

**Please be aware that Junior members will also review three sets of written reasons for one class of photographs. They will need to select the reasons that were written correctly for that class. Please review the reasoning sample sheet in the photography skill-a-thon kit for the correct way to write reasons.

Quality Judging Points

There are quality-judging points that should be considered when ranking quality judging classes. These points include:

1. **Clarity** – Clear photograph. Main subject is not blurry or distorted.

2. **Composition** – Uses some type of composition (See pages 6-10 of this document to review composition types)

3. **Focus** – Main subject is in focus.

4. **Exposure/Lighting** – Balanced amount of light.

5. **Appeal** – Photo is nice to look at.

6. **No Distracting Elements** – Nothing that takes away from the subject, such as a branch, other people, busy background, etc.

7. **Photo Tells a Story** – The viewer can see why the photo was taken.

Training Idea: Encourage members to bring in photos. Have the members review and discuss each photograph by considering the quality judging points. Select four photographs that are related in subject matter based on one of the categories listed above. Have members rank the four photos based on the criteria of what makes a good photograph.

A variety of photos to practice quality judging can also be found at the Kansas State 4-H website: https://www.kansas4-h.org/events-activities/contests/photography-judging.html

SENIOR

Samples and Training Materials available online or from the County 4-H Office

Part 1 – Composition Poster – County Contest Only

4-H'ers will be asked to bring 10 photographs (taken by the member) that represent different types of composition to the county contest. Members will use eight of these photos and their creativity to design a poster to show their knowledge of composition. Be sure to label each photo with the correct type of composition! Posters will be scored based on labeling the correct type of composition as well as neatness. Members will be provided with a 14x22 posterboard, writing utensils (markers, colored pencils, etc.), stickers, construction paper, glue and scissors to help them create their poster.

**Posters will be returned after the contest so members can enter them in the State Fair as a Photography exhibit. **

More Information can be found on pages 6-10 of this document and in Book 2 - Next Level Photography p. 36-56.

Training Idea: Encourage members to bring in digital photographs at a project meeting and review composition in terms of rule of thirds, golden triangle, golden rectangle, lines, lighting, simplicity, balance, framing, pattern, and texture. Have members analyze the pictures and evaluate what is good, bad, and what principles of good composition could be applied in a different way to make the photographs better. Have them practice designing a poster at home!

Part 2 – Photography Concepts

Members will be asked to define photography concepts used when taking quality photographs.

Concepts may include: Aperture/F-Stop, Camera Modes (Program, Shutter Priority, Aperture Priority, Manual), Exposure, ISO, and Shutter Speed. **More information can be found in Book 3 - Mastering Photography p. 10-27.**

Training Idea: Photo Shoot Ideas to review these concepts can be found on pages 10, 14 and 20 in Book 3 – Mastering Photography

Part 3 – Still Life Photography

Members will be given ten photos and asked to select the five photos that represent Still Life.

4-H'ers will **also** be asked to create and photograph a Still Life arrangement demonstrating a specific composition. **More information can be found on page 11 of this guide and in Book 3 - Mastering Photography p. 42-45.**

Still Life Training Idea: Encourage members to select items that are related to each other and arrange them to compose a scene for a still life photograph while also demonstrating different types of composition.

Part 4 – Quality Judging Classes

(Color or black and white) subjects will be selected from the following list. Members will be asked to rank photos in three to four of these categories based on the criteria of what makes a good photograph.

1. Animals   2. Marine   3. Individual   4. Groups of People   5. Flowers   6. Still Life

Please be aware that Senior members will be required to provide **written reasons for at least two classes of photographs**. Please review the reasoning sample sheet in the photography skill-a-thon for the correct way to write reasons.

Quality Judging Points

There are quality-judging points that should be considered when ranking quality judging classes. These points include:

1. **Clarity** – Clear photograph. Main subject is not blurry or distorted.

2. **Composition** – Uses some type of composition (See pages 6-10 of this document)

3. **Focus** – Main subject is in focus.

4. **Exposure/Lighting** – Balanced amount of light

5. **Appeal** – Photo is nice to look at.

6. **No Distracting Elements** – Nothing that takes away from the subject, such as a branch, other people, busy background, etc.

7. **Photo Tells a Story** – The viewer can see why the photographer took the picture.

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Training Idea: Select four photographs that are related in subject matter based on one of the categories listed above. Have members rank the four photos provided based on the composition and criteria of what makes a good photograph. Encourage members to explain their reasons for ranking the photographs as they did.

A variety of photos to practice quality judging can also be found at the Kansas State 4-H website: https://www.kansas4-h.org/events-activities/contests/photography-judging.html

Composition – Review for Quality Judging (Junior and Senior)

More Information can also be found in Book 2 - Next Level Photography p. 36-56.

1. **Rule of Thirds** – A guideline that proposes an image should be imagined as divided into nine equal parts by two equally spaced horizontal lines and two equally spaced vertical lines (tic tac toe board on a photo). Important compositional elements should be placed along these lines or their intersections to make photographs more appealing to the eye.
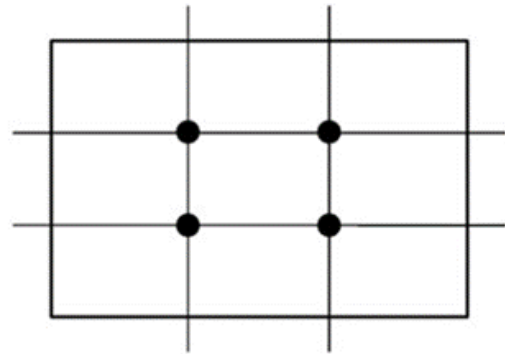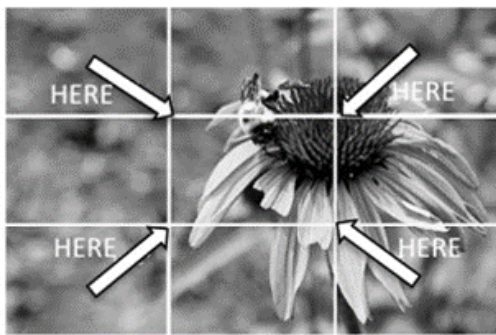

2. **Golden Triangle -** Draw an imaginary diagonal line from one corner to the opposite corner. Draw a second line from another corner and intersect the line at a right angle. Frame your shot so that it fills one of these 3 triangles. Another way to use this rule is to make sure that there are three subjects of equal sizes in each of the three triangles.
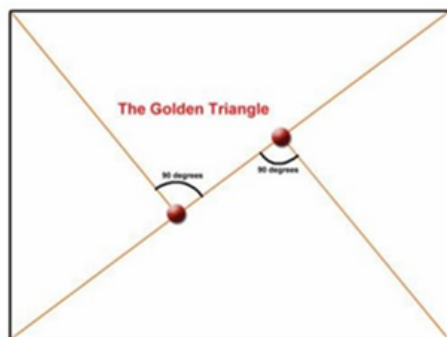
3. **Golden Rectangle** – Draw an imaginary line that divides the photo (rectangle) into a square and another rectangle. Divide the new rectangle into a square and rectangle. Divide this small rectangle into another square and rectangle. Continue drawing inside these tiny "golden rectangles" until you have a spiral that circles in and gets smaller and smaller. The spiral that is created has a way of leading your eye from the focal point outwards.
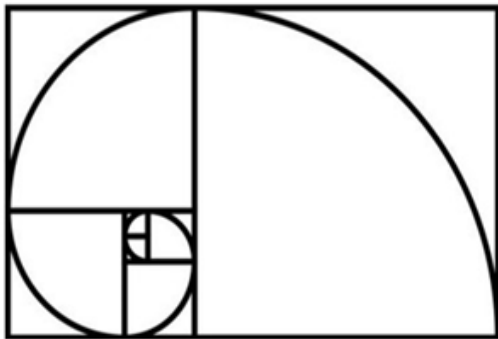
4. **Lines** – The lines that can be found in images are very powerful elements that with a little practice can add dramatic impact to a photograph in terms of mood as well as how they lead the viewer into a photo. Learning how to use lines in photography doesn't just happen. It takes time and practice to become good at it. Types of lines include horizontal, vertical, diagonal, and s-curves.
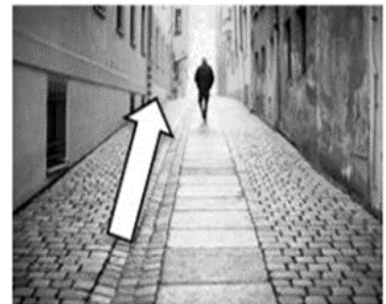
5. **Lighting** – You need light to take a photograph. Did you know photography means "drawing with light?" There are many different types of light. Natural light refers to light from the sun (can be used both outside and inside). Artificial light refers to all other light sources including camera flashes and lamps. Lighting can make the difference between a good photo and a better one. The more experimenting you do, the more you will learn about how to use light to your advantage.

6. **Simplicity** – Simplicity is the key to most great photographs. The simpler and more direct a photo is, the more clear and stronger the photo turns out. There are several things to be considered when we discuss simplicity. First, select a subject that lends itself to a simple arrangement; for example instead of photographing an entire area that would confuse the viewer, zoom in on some important element within the area. Second, select different viewpoints of camera angles. Move around the scene or object being photographed. View the scene through the camera viewfinder. Look at the foreground and background, try high and low angles as well normal, eye-level viewpoints. Only after considering all possibilities should you take the picture. See beyond and in front of your subject. Be sure there is nothing in the background to distract the viewer's attention from the main point of the picture. Likewise, check to see if there is anything objectionable in the foreground to block the extract of the human eye into the photo. The last point of simplicity is to tell only one story. Ensure there is enough material in the picture to convey an idea, but only one idea.
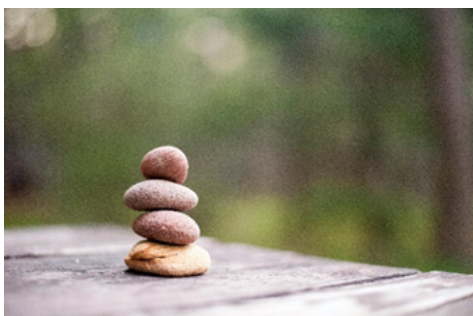
7. **Balance** – Balance in photographic composition is a matter of making photographs look harmonious. Each element in a photo has a certain amount of value in respect to all the other elements. Every tone, mass, shape, tree, rock figure, building, line, or shadow contributes a certain amount of weight that must be arranged correctly in the composition to give the impression of balance. The subject's placement within the photograph area is a factor that must be carefully considered.

   1. <u>Symmetrical or Formal Balance</u> – This is achieved when elements on both sides of the photo are of equal weight. The idea of formal balance can be related to a seesaw. Photographs with formal balance may look static and unexciting; however they do present an air of dignity. Formal balance does not always mean a photo has to have the seesaw in perspective.


   2. <u>Asymmetrical or Informal Balance</u> – This type of balance is usually much more interesting than symmetrical balance. In asymmetrical balance the imaginary central pivot point is still presumed to be present; however, instead of mirror images on each side of the photos area, the subject elements are notably different in size, shape, weight, tone, and placement. Balance is established by equalizing forces in spite of their differences.

8. **Framing** – Framing is another technique photographers use to direct the viewer's attention to the primary subject of a photograph. Positioned around the subject, a tree, an archway, or even people can create a frame within the photographed area. Subjects enclosed by a frame become separated from the rest of the image and are emphasized. An element used as a frame should not draw attention to itself. Ideally, the frame should relate to the theme, or the story, of the photo. Not only is framing an effective means of directing the viewer's attention, it can also be used to obscure undesirable foregrounds and backgrounds. The illusion of depth can be created in a picture by the effective use of framing.
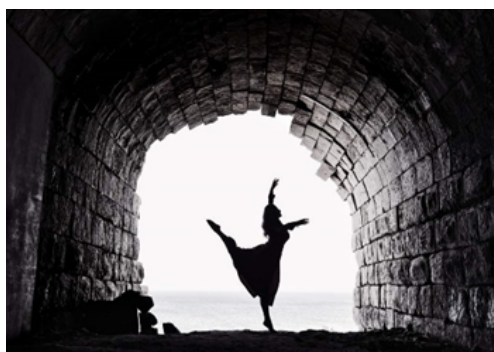
9. **Pattern** – Creating your photos around repeating elements or patterns provide your photo with unity and structure. Pattern repetition creates rhythm that the eyes enjoy following. When lines, shapes, and colors within a photo occur in an orderly way, they create patterns that often enhance the attractiveness of photographs. When a pattern is used as a supporting element, it must be used carefully so it does not confuse or overwhelm the viewer. Photographs that are purely pattern are seldom used, because they tend to be monotonous. Patterns should be used to strengthen and add interest to your subject, and not overpower your photograph.
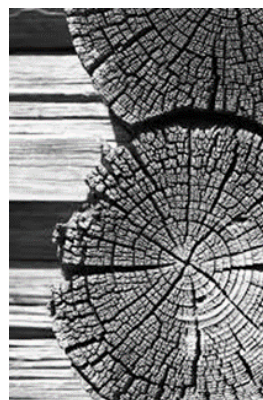
10. **Texture** – This process helps to emphasize the features and details in a photograph. By capturing "texture" of objects being photographed, you can create form. When people observe a soft, furry object or a smooth, shining surface, they have a strong urge to touch it. You can provide much more of the pleasure people get from the feel of touching such objects by rendering texture in your photos. Texture can be used to give realism and character to a photograph and may in itself be the subject of a photograph. When texture is used as a subordinate element within the photo, it lends strength to the main idea of the photograph. Texture and lighting go hand-in-hand. Hard lights and shadows can make things look very textured and sharp, soft lighting can make things look more flat and less two-dimensional.

Still Life Photography – SENIORS ONLY

More information can be found in Book 3 - Mastering Photography p. 42-45.

Still Life Photography usually refers to an attractive arrangement of non-moving objects. 4-H photography usually focuses on created still life, rather than found still life. Often, the photographer will take much more time setting up the exact composition, placement of items, and lighting than they will spend taking the photograph.

Flower and food arrangements are popular still-life subjects, but you can try any objects you wish. Still life can include one item or dozens of items, there are no rules! If you choose to include multiple objects, typically they show how related to each other so that the still-life scene reflects a common theme. Once you have the items placed where you want them, you may need to adjust the lighting either by adding some type of light source like a lamp or waiting for light to enter the area through a window.