



# TITLING YOUR IMAGES FOR COMPETITION

Abstracted from “Entering Images Into Competition – Definitions and Titling”  
by **Ellie Webster and Claudia Bodmer**

The title is an important aspect in understanding the image, or the story the image is telling. And since image titles are read during judging, in every division you are required to give a title to each image that you submit. Therefore:

- In **Pictorial** and **Creative**, the title can be anything you like. In Creative, try to make your title as creative as your image – be imaginative. Although, if the title is too obscure, especially for a Creative image, the judge may spend more time deciphering the title than commenting on the image itself.
- In **Journalism**, you should include enough information to make it clear to the reviewer **WHAT** the picture is about, **WHERE** it was shot, and **WHEN** it was shot. For example, a photo of a house fire should not simply be titled “House Fire,” but something like “Home on First St., Benicia, Burns to the Ground, October 5, 2009”.

*Think of a **Journalism** title as a caption in a news article of your favorite paper: brief, informative, and accurate.*

- In **Travel**, your title must clearly state what the subject is and its location. For example, “Greek Woman” is not enough information, but “Old Woman in Local Dress on Cobbled Street in Heraklion, Crete” tells the story.

*Think of your **Travel** title as a caption under a photo in a travel brochure: brief, accurate, and gets the tourist’s attention.*

- In **Nature**, titles should be as informative as possible, but try to be concise. In fact, many judges like to see the scientific name, in parentheses, after the common name of the plant or animal. For Nature images, the title is especially important, and the following guidelines should be considered:

***Include the nature story.*** The nature story weighs considerably in Nature judging. But the point of the title is to identify the plant, animal, or non-living part of the natural world and to tell the most interesting points illustrated in the photo. If it is a plant, then point out the fact that it is blossoming. If it blossoms once every two years, or only in the winter, then these educational facts should go in the title. The season is also important for animals. For example, since Goldfinches change their feather pattern from summer to fall, then that should certainly be pointed out. In the case of a dynamite shot of a plant or animal with no obvious story attached, then the location and season of the photo can still go in the title and be informative to the viewer.



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**Be informative, and if possible include scientific Latin names.** An image of a bird flying into a tree needs more information than that in its title. You should try to supply the species Latin name (recommended but not required), the location, and describe briefly what the bird is doing. Something like “Male American Robin (*Turdus migratorius*) Flies Back and Forth, Gathering Material for Nest-building in Spring” would tell the story. Include only what you have observed, not what you imagine might be happening. **Never anthropomorphize (attribute human characteristics to animals).** For example: “Mourning Dove Sits Forlornly on the Nest as She Waits for her Mate to Return” is inappropriate. “Mourning Dove Sitting on Eggs in Her Nest below the Eaves” would be much better, even if the eggs cannot be seen. You presumably know from your observations that they are there.

**Keep titles informative rather than humorous or cute.** Avoid titles like “Bottoms Up!” for an image of ducks with tails in the air, or “The Happy Couple” for polar bears side-by-side.

*It may be helpful to think of the **Nature** title as a caption in biology textbook: brief, informative, and accurate.*

When you are typing in the title, be careful to avoid typos and spelling errors, and always use “Title Case”, with a capital letter at the beginning of each word longer than four letters. Some judges will be at least subconsciously influenced by sloppy titling. If it’s a travel destination, look up the spelling if you’re not certain of it. And verify the spelling of at least the common names of nature subjects.

**In General:** Be BRIEF, INFORMATIVE, and ACCURATE with your titles, to have a successful and winning image. Some cleverness is required, but your cleverness is not the point you want to make to the viewer, and “cutesy” titles rarely help in competition.