

1. Why Have a Photo Challenge Group?

Photo Challenge Groups will help you grow as a photographer and an artist. By being challenged to seek out and create certain types of images on a regular basis you will have a reason, direction and a deadline to **develop your creativity**. By sharing images with others you will learn new ideas and your input will also **help others grow** too.

If the members in your Photo Challenge Group are committed to fulfilling the challenges and meeting on a regular basis, you will get a lot out of it. It is important to be flexible when scheduling meetings, but **the key is to remain committed to meeting regularly**.

At some point it may be necessary to skip a month or two. We took a sabbatical during the July/August months, because of vacation schedules. However, the key is to schedule the next meeting date before taking the break. If you do not have a future meeting date, it's all too easy to postpone it indefinitely.

Bottom Line: If you place a high value on your group and its purpose, you will receive an equal or higher value in return.

2. How Does a Photo Challenge Group Work?

Photo Challenge Groups are small groups of **three or four members** who meet once a month to share photos and provide constructive feedback to each other. Each member takes a turn being the leader. The leader gets to pick the photo challenge topic for the month. The leader is also responsible for coordinating the critique meeting, such as hosting the meeting and/or sending out meeting reminders.

Between meeting dates, members create **ten new images** based upon the challenge topic. Ideally members will upload photos or email them to each other before the next meeting. This gives everyone a chance to review the images and consider what they will say during the critique.

We use a gallery on **PBase** to share images. We typically upload images a day or two before the meeting and we add our feedback comments online, under each image. However, we don't add comments to every image, nor do we require that any comments be added.

Being able to preview the images before you meet can be very helpful. It gives you time to reflect on what you do or don't like, and to come up with potential feedback ideas, without taking time during the meeting. Meetings will run more smoothly, and you can focus time on certain images that merit an extended discussion.

Using this approach, we have found that our meetings last about **90 minutes**.

During the challenge period, you may find that you have images that you'd like to share, but that don't adhere to the current challenge. That's fine! We set up a separate '**sharing gallery**' on PBase where we post those images. You might also share images by bringing prints or slides to your meeting too.

The Challenge Meeting

The process at the challenge meeting is fairly straightforward. We simply gather in front of a computer with a large monitor and access the images we have uploaded to PBase. We then go through the images one-by-one, in the order that they are within the directory.

Most everyone has experienced judging and critiques at Westbridge. So, odds are, you'll find that providing feedback to others will come naturally to you. The primary objective is to be supportive and provide helpful feedback. If you don't like an image, explain what turns you off about it. But, if at all possible, offer ideas that you think would make the image better.

Be honest. Be kind. Be supportive. Be helpful.

If you are stumped about what to say about an image, ask probing questions that will help you evaluate the image. Such as "What drew you to this image?" or "What made you stop and take this picture?" or "What do you like about this image?" If the person responds, "Well, I don't like this image" or "I just took it to fulfill the challenge assignment" then they shouldn't expect much feedback from the other members. But you can always offer alternative ideas that might stimulate discussion. For example, say "What if, instead, you tried {this technique or approach}?"

If you are finding it difficult to provide feedback, please feel free to contact **Tom Snide** (Tom@TCSsoftware.com), **Dave Dillahunt** (ddillahunt@gmail.com) or **Eric Erickson** (eerickso@columbus.rr.com). We'd be happy to offer some helpful tips. Schedule permitting, we could also show up at one of your meetings to help guide you.

At the end of the meeting, the next person in line becomes the new 'leader' and that person gets to suggest the challenge. Pick the target date and location for your next meeting.

Idea: If you have more than one challenge idea and cannot decide which one to do, consider assigning the topics for the next two or three months. Then, knowing in advance what the topics will be, it's fair game to begin creating images for all of the topics at the same time.

3. How to Get Started

First, talk with the other members in your group and decide:

1. the best **time** to meet
2. **places** where you'd like to meet
3. **how you plan to share** images
4. decide the **first challenge topic**
5. **pick a leader** for the first topic (this person coordinates/hosts the first meeting)
6. the **first meeting date and place**

4. Challenge Topic Ideas

The challenge topic ideas are endless. We've posted some on the Westbridge web site to help get you started. On the home page, type '**challenge ideas**' into the search window and you'll find an article listing potential photo challenge topics.

A number of folks asked if we could suggest specific topics, so we will do that too. Here's the first:

Challenge #1: Low Light

Coincidentally, this also happens to be January's assigned Westbridge competition topic. ;-)

One final note: If you run into a creative roadblock, don't be afraid to do 'research' on your topic. Use the Internet, the library - or whatever you like - to learn more about techniques you can use and new approaches you can take.

Have fun!