Steyning CC - Suggested Genre and Theme Briefs 2025/26

These definitions are provided in order to prompt ideas for how to go about set genre and themed competitions / appraisals.

The questions I ask in the briefs are the ones I would ask when I am appraising these things. No judges are the same, of course, but our appraisers will be aware of the briefs, and so hopefully we will all be on the same screen, so to speak.

One of the first questions I ask when assessing themes and genres is “could I tell the theme from simply seeing the photograph?” If the answer is yes then the picture will almost certainly be a good fit. This is always a matter of interpretation. Examples include:

- a cityscape may ‘contain’ Architecture, because all buildings have inherent architectural qualities, but is the picture ‘of’ or ‘about’ architecture?
- a portrait of a leopard shows an animal with ‘Patterns in Nature’ on its coat; but is the picture ‘of’ or ‘about’ the patterns?
- a landscape that includes a river or the sea may ‘contain’ Water; but is the picture ‘of’ or ‘about’ water?

The great thing about set themes is that they take us outside of our normal comfort zones. They are a great way to expand our expression through photography, so be bold and have fun.

… Ken Scott
Summer 2025

Print genres

- Monochrome
- Street
- Flora

PDI themes

- Different point of view
- Power
- Environmental issues
- Wet
- Geometric patterns
- Old

PDI Theme Definitions

PDI Themes Competition: Monday, 3 November 2025 (hand-in Monday, 20 October)
Themes: Two entries per member from different Themes – Different Point of View; Power; Environmental Issues

Different Point of View
We all see things typically from eye level. A photograph with a "different point of view" – or PoV - invites the viewer to see the world differently. Such could include a very low or very high position, viewing an object or scene from an unusual angle, or taking a viewpoint that is partially hidden.

If you read this as 'a different opinion', then that might be an alternative subject approach, but it would need careful titling and a clear, coherent message.

A couple of potential pitfalls:

- An Abstract could be considered a "different point of view" but unless the subject matter is recognisable then it might fit better in that genre, Macro / Close-up likewise.
- A few years ago then a drone image would have been considered a 'different point of view'. Now they are commonplace "views from a high place" unless they have a considered compositional quality.

Power
What does it mean to be powerful? How can you depict that? Ideas include:

- Human or animal strength
- Mechanical strength, as in powerful machines
- Power infrastructure, such as power generation or grid transport (pylons / turbines)
- People power in relationships, as expressed in body language or evident by position or role in society
- Powerful, as in an image that evokes strong emotions – we have all seen "powerful" photographs

In all of these it is probably not sufficient to simply show a powerful thing. For example we know that a Formula One car is powerful. Therefore, we should think about what power means, and what would cause a viewer to say "that is powerful".

Environmental Issues
So much of life could be construed as an Environmental Issue. There are some obvious things:

- Pollution – marine, rivers, atmospheric, smoke
- Rubbish – litter, plastics, landfill
- Traffic – congestion, vehicle size
- Fossil fuels – mining, quarrying, power generation
- Agriculture – ploughing, pesticides
- Bio diversity – loss of habitat

The opposite of these i.e. where 'green' alternatives are clearly being used progressively, would make good alternatives depictions. Again, take care simply not to photograph the thing. Ask yourself "what is the issue and how is it clearly evident in my picture".

PDI Themes Competition: Monday, 9 February 2026 (hand-in Monday, 26 January)
Genres: Two entries per member from different Genres – Wet; Old; Geometric Patterns

Wet
This is not a theme about water per se; we know water is wet. 'Wet' is the effect that water or a liquid has on something else, i.e. does it look wet:

- Wave edges wetting the sand in contrast to dry sand textures
- Glistening rocks
- Animals with wet fur or people with wet clothing
- Droplets of water on polished surfaces or hanging in trees
- Rain on the streets or wet weather generally

There are some colloquial definitions of wet too, which you might explore.

Geometric Patterns
What makes for a geometric pattern? One definition suggests that is "a pattern of lines and geometric figures that are arranged in a repeated fashion, often symmetrically".

This is one for you to explore. Geometric patterns are found in cultural art, especially Islamic and Arabic designs; in architecture and structural forms; in fabrics and decorative tiles.

In view of the art connections however, beware simply photographing art straight, or including that art in a broader context. Instead, can you find your own shapes and lines in the world and arrange them to make your own visual patterns.

Old
How old is old? It depends to an extent on your perspective, so this theme is open to broad interpretation.

The questions are many:

- Does it look old?
- Is it evidently old even it is well cared for – e.g. vintage cars, heritage buildings?
- Is it contrasting with something new?
- If it is a human or animal subject, what does 'old' or 'age' mean to you?

The essence again in photography is probably in asking "what are the visual qualities that say 'old' in the image?" that go beyond our knowledge of the subject matter.

Print Genre Definitions

Print Genres Competition: Monday, 16 March 2026 (hand-in Monday, 2 March)
Themes: Two entries per member from different Themes – Monochrome; Street; Flora

Monochrome
Monochrome is a craft genre, covering any subject and subject-matter. A monochrome photograph gives the impression of having no colour (i.e. black, white, shades of grey), or it may be toned in a single colour across the entire image e.g. sepia or selenium.

Partial toning or spot colour is not permitted.

Monochrome is an interpretation of tonal values and contrasts. Tonality is important to the mood and effect of the image and should be considered carefully. Tonality can be wide (a full range) or limited (high-key or low key / pure black and white such as Lith); there are no rules about "detail in blacks" or "paper white". But be sure to use tonality purposefully in your composition.

Flora, Trees, Leaves, Grasses
This is a multi-genre class where any plant life – flora, tree, leaves, grasses – is eligible, wild or cultivated, presented in any style, including artistic presentations and treatments. It is deliberately broad to encourage floral / plant photography in an exciting and expansive way

These could include:

- a formal, illustrative style, like botanical art
- a documentary Nature style, which tells a 'nature story'
- abstracts, composites, still life

It is important that your subject matter forms the major part of your composition. For example a landscape with trees in it is not a picture of and about the trees.

Street
A Street photograph most often depicts a candid and momentary street scene. It usually includes people; if not then it should be characterised by a noticeable moment or arrangement of objects, to distinguish it from an urban landscape.

Street photography often assumes most impact when there is a 'decisive moment' of expression, interaction, body language, mood, placement of figures and objects, or timing.

Street photography can include events happening on the street such as parades or protests or performances. It can also include people working, such as buskers or market traders.

A street photograph can also reference contemporary social trends and fashions. Without these elements, street photography probably has more future historical value than present interest.

In a candid image the subject person will be apparently unaware that they are being photographed. Portraits could be made with the subject's permission provided they still appear as if going about their daily business and not 'posing' for a photograph.

With all people photography, take care to work sensitively and to be especially careful with photographing children.