

# CLUB EDUCATION PLAN

The search for knowledge and the desire for self-improvement are sharply evident in camera clubs where members hope to increase their photographic skills.

Most clubs have only a handful of advanced workers. The majority of their members are beginners, or those with little experience. This larger group may lack the perception to see a good picture or the ability to take or make a good picture. These members need help to improve; hence, the need for or desirability of some form of photographic education.

Most club activities are instructional in intent. Attending lectures, demonstrations and field trips, studying successful competition images, viewing PSA club programs, all contribute to members' photographic knowledge. Even social meetings play a part in instruction by offering members an opportunity to discuss their avocation and exchange helpful ideas.

Technically and artistically, photography is changing rapidly. To keep pace with such change, progressive clubs have found the most positive and effective answer is a planned and continuing education plan. It inspires and stimulates artistic talents inherent in almost everyone and also offers tested methods along with the latest techniques for making better pictures.

Not only individual members benefit from such a plan, but the organization as a whole benefits. Photographic education is a morale booster for the entire club. Courses and workshops have proved to be an effective method of attracting new members. Not only does this keep a club alive and thriving, it also increases members' enthusiasm.

## SOME FIRST CONSIDERATIONS

No club is too small or isolated or lacking in funds to establish some form of organized education. The plan may be simple and applicable to any group. The method adopted by a particular club depends on its size, division of interests, degree of members' proficiency and availability of instructors. Clubs should not be afraid to start modestly and then expand as they gain experience.

Developing any educational program requires study and planning. Appoint a Chairperson for such a project. He or she, in turn may appoint assistants or a committee. As with any new club activity, all members should be offered an opportunity to make suggestions.

There are three generally accepted forms of instruction used by clubs. They are listed below and treated in detail later.

- \* Individual or small-group instruction, usually in members' homes.
  - \* Lectures, demonstrations, and workshops held as part of a club's regular programming.
  - \* Courses and schools, usually open to the public, to which an admission charge is made.
- Some clubs use all three; others use combinations or variations of them.

Some subjects can best be taught in the form of lectures, where, with the aid of their notes and reference material, students afterwards practice on their own. But there is little question that learning-by-doing is preferable to the lecture method, especially with beginners.

Today many clubs operate with different groups devoted to digital, monochrome, nature, etc. In such cases, each group usually handles its own instructional needs. When smaller clubs must combine different photographic media, subjects should be of both general and specific interest so as to satisfy the needs of all members.

## **THE PROBLEM OF INSTRUCTORS**

Obviously the better the instructor, the better the instruction. Knowledge of the subject is mandatory, but this alone is not sufficient. Teachers must be able to inspire, to stimulate and to express themselves in simple terms. They should see problems from the standpoint of the less experienced. Competent teachers must be objective and unprejudiced in their photographic preferences. Above all, they need tact and patience.

Many clubs have developed excellent, even outstanding, teaching staffs from their own membership. Advanced amateurs who make high quality images and can tell or show others how to do it can become fine instructors and can raise the standards of the club. They will derive satisfaction from sharing their knowledge with others and can inspire other club members to develop from the amateur ranks to well trained teachers.

Sometimes a new or small group may not have members who are sufficiently competent to teach. Then the club may find it necessary or preferable to draw instructors from outside its own membership. Guest teachers can present a fresh approach or the latest techniques and if they are well-known authorities, can contribute prestige and promotional appeal to the teaching effort.

Professional guest instructors generally charge a fee; others may offer their services gratis. They may be local people or from nearby communities. Sources are advanced amateurs from other clubs, professionals, representatives of manufacturers and distributors, camera store owners, professional lecturers and teachers, etc. It is surprisingly simple to find adequate teachers if the subject is approached with determination.

Whether to use one or a group of instructors depends on the length and the scope of the project and the availability of qualified teachers. With a short course, say up to six sessions aimed at beginners, often one individual handles the full load. However, with longer courses and more advanced and diversified topics, most clubs prefer a "faculty" of teachers, each covering their own specialty.

Allow the instructor to instruct! Provide assistants, or a committee to handle management details. These include taking care of seating arrangements, attendance fees, and records, providing students with notes, setting up and operating equipment; in fact, everything essential to the smooth functioning of a class.

## **TEACHING AIDS**

Psychologists tell us that only a fraction of what we see and hear is actually retained by an individual. For this reason it is essential that students be provided with some form of instructional aid. Taking personal notes is important but not enough.

A comprehensive course outline, lesson by lesson, will prepare participants for the subject to be covered. If the material is correlated to reference books, it will encourage study and provide guidance during practice. This is indispensable in lecture-type instruction. Some club teachers have prepared their own texts, but there are a number of excellent and inexpensive pamphlets and books which may be used for this purpose.

The old adage, "One picture is worth a thousand words," can and should be applied to photographic instruction. Just talking about a process is not enough. Each technique should be demonstrated whenever possible. Points should be driven home by using visual aids: photos, charts, drawings, etc.

Often clubs must draw on outside sources to fill their instruction needs. Many PSA services, available to member-clubs, will be found especially suited for this purpose. They are available through the PSA Club Services web site: [www.psa-clubservices.org](http://www.psa-clubservices.org)

### **THREE GENERAL TYPES OF EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMS**

\* **Individual and small group.** This is the simplest form of personal instruction and may even start with only one teacher and one pupil. Meetings generally take place informally in members' homes. Group size may range up to a dozen, depending on individual home facilities. If the number grows beyond this size, the group becomes cumbersome. Then it is best to form another section, with a different teacher, if possible.

Although informal, this type of instruction should be planned carefully. With a small group, it is simple to familiarize students with equipment operation, to demonstrate various Photoshop procedures, to scan slides, and similar techniques. Here the personal relationship between instructor and student is extremely valuable. The shy beginner soon loses self consciousness and under encouraging guidance and rapidly gains confidence. This should result in a greater desire to participate in club activities.

Individual instruction is not limited to small clubs. It has proven advantageous in large ones as well. One big metropolitan organization has developed a successful coaching system in which its director brings together those who need assistance and those who are able and willing to give it. It has been most successful with beginners and new members.

\* **Instruction as part of general programming.** Most club activities are educational in intent, with lectures, demonstrations, and workshops scheduled throughout the year. So, in many cases, the foundation of a course already has been established. It is then comparatively simple to group six or more related subjects in their proper continuity and to offer them at regular intervals on club meeting nights. This concentrated presentation is more effective than lessons scattered indiscriminately over a longer period.

Most clubs are small enough to allow the presentation of demonstration-participation programs in which members learn by doing. Numerous techniques can be conducted under normal room lighting.

Question and answer periods are necessary with any educational program. Many beginners want to ask questions but don't. To get things started, have someone "cued" to fire a question. Once started, other students will respond. Discussion sessions should be included, even if informally. Much can be learned from hearing why and how other photographers take and make pictures.

\* **The Club School.** While subjects covered under this form of instruction are similar to those taught under the preceding heading, there are important differences. The club school usually is open to the public with a fee generally charged for the course. Classes often are held at a place other than club quarters and usually on non-regular meeting dates.

Courses vary in length, with most running between six and twelve two-hour sessions held weekly or every other week. These figures do not include field trips, an important and desirable supplement to an instructional program. It is better to have a course too short than too long. Some clubs repeat the same course, especially for beginners, each year. Others prefer to change the material presented.

This may sound like a risky and costly undertaking, especially for small or medium-sized clubs but the experience of groups that have tried it show this is not the case. Granted, much more planning and effort must be expended, but this is offset by increased benefits. The club school, besides providing members with instruction, is an excellent means of attracting new members. A well-planned, well-promoted course should return a good profit as many clubs have reported. One club sold nearly 200 tickets at \$10.00 each for a beginner's course of five lecture-

demonstrations. After paying expenses including an instructor's fee, the club banked \$850.00, which was used later to purchase new equipment.

Financing a school course can be a problem. No doubt, the first expense will be for a suitable location. Few clubs have large enough meeting places to seat the necessary number of students comfortably. In most communities, schools, churches, clubs, or YMCAs rent space for a reasonable fee. As a precaution, cover such public gatherings with liability insurance.

For all but a few school courses, a fee is charged. Not only does this cover necessary expenses, it should result in a tidy profit. Most photographers seem to value instruction more highly if they have to pay for it. Generally, clubs charge a flat fee for the entire course, as opposed to tickets at a slight premium for individual sessions. Sometimes both methods are used simultaneously.

In many cases, clubs offer their own members a reduced fee, somewhat lower than that charged the public. The cost difference is about equivalent to club dues for a year, so an outsider who decides to attend the course is under strong motivation to join the club.

Every member should help to sell tickets for the course. While some camera stores and other channels distribute tickets, the majority will have to be disposed of by club members. By conducting a drive for advance registration, the club will obtain a good idea of the probable enrollment, and so will be prepared to "handle the crowd." Many club schools must limit attendance. If this is the case, it should be so stated in all announcements. At a course held in a fairly large city, at least 20% more prospective students turned up at the last minute with the result that the hall was over-subscribed and many had to be turned away.

Special mention should be made of the "short courses" now offered by several well-known photographer teachers. In some cases, the visiting speaker presents two or more lectures on consecutive nights or over a weekend. In the latter case, four or five sessions are held from Friday night through Sunday. These capsule courses are becoming increasingly popular.

Be thorough but brief in promotional literature. Include the objectives of the course, an outline of the subjects to be covered, the names of the instructors (with short biographies), fee, if any, and how and to whom paid. Be explicit about dates, time, and place. Many clubs also include information about themselves -- date and location of meetings, dues, and other pertinent data of interest to prospective members. And why not add beneath club name, "A Member of The Photographic Society of America since XXXX"? Copies of the PSA logo (in different sizes) together with instructions for their use are available on the PSA Club Services web site.

## **OUTLINES OF COURSES**

The subjects to be covered are dictated by the need and desires of a club. Most basic and beginner courses, however, follow a general pattern. The outlines of three typical courses which follow give a general pattern of instruction:

**GENERAL COURSE** (Ten weekly sessions. plus two field trips yearly.)

1. CAMERAS. Get acquainted with the equipment you will use. Bring your camera.
2. FLASH TECHNIQUE: A demonstration regarding using flash.
3. DIGITAL TECHNIQUES
4. PORTRAITURE: A demonstration of lighting for all types of portrait photography.
5. COMPOSITION IN LANDSCAPES: How to see and take pictures that capture the outdoors.
6. PRINTING: Techniques that produce sharp, sparkling prints.
7. COLOR PHOTOGRAPHY: A discussion of light quality and color harmony.

8. PHOTOGRAPHY OF INANIMATE OBJECTS: A demonstration of lighting arrangement and proper handling of subject matter.
9. "THIS IS MY PICTURE:" Bring your images for analysis.

**MONOCHROME COURSE** (Twelve weekly sessions, plus a field trip.)

1. PHOTOGRAPHY FUNDAMENTALS.
2. YOUR CAMERA AND ITS OPERATION: Students bring their cameras.
3. LENSES AND FILTERS: Camera accessories.
4. DIGITAL PAPERS: Various types and how they are used.
5. EXPOSURE CALCULATIONS: Significance of proper exposure and white balance.
6. COMPOSITION: Where subjects fit in the picture space.
7. HOME PORTRAITS AND LIGHTING TECHNIQUES.
8. PANEL DISCUSSION: Panel to answer questions from the Course.

**COLOR COURSE** (Five weekly sessions, plus a field trip.)

1. YOUR CAMERA AND WHAT IT CAN DO: The basic elements of a camera and their functions will be discussed: the lens, the shutter, the diaphragm, the focusing device, etc. The scope and limitations of various cameras adaptable to color photography will be covered.
2. THE RIGHT EXPOSURE EVERY TIME: How to calculate the right exposure in all varieties of picture situations and under various light conditions. Examples showing right and wrong exposures. Exposing indoors and outdoors: portraits, indoor views, children, pets, etc.
3. OUTDOOR COLOR PHOTOGRAPHY MADE EASY: Improving vacation pictures, picnic pictures, outdoor portraits, action pictures, sports pictures, etc. Better technique. Better arrangement. The right viewpoint. Camera angles. Outdoor color photography from dawn to dusk, the year 'round. Outdoor night pictures in color. Composing the picture for the most pleasing results.
4. COMPOSITION: An interesting and major phase in creating a picture, which entails especially the consolidation of pictorial images in definite and proper order.
5. FROM NOVICE TO GRADUATE: From beginner to expert in regular stages. Adhering to sound practices. Seeing the picture before capturing it. Color can mislead. Use of reference encrypted information. Titles and locations. From indiscriminate to discriminate color photography. Ideas for picture possibilities. The instructor will illustrate with pictures covering his or her own experience from beginner to international exhibitor.