

HOW TO PREPARE FOR PORTFOLIO REVIEW EVENTS

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HOW TO PREPARE FOR PORTFOLIO REVIEW EVENTS

Introducing yourself and your work to industry professionals at a portfolio review event is a proven path to relationships. These popular events are growing regionally and nationally. Review events offer participants opportunities to share work with members of our field who can make a difference in your career. Sessions typically last 15 to 20 minutes, and the number of sessions you will have depends on the scale and length of the event. Registration fees vary; events organized by non-profit organizations are typically less expensive than those run by for-profit businesses. Some offer accompanying educational programming, enriching your experience overall.

To ensure return on this investment, do your homework on the event and the reviewers. Understand the selection process and all related policies. Create memorable leave-behind pieces and follow up with professionals who responded positively to your work.

GOALS & RESEARCH

Be clear about what you want to accomplish: Is your goal to receive feedback on a “work in progress?” Are you seeking advice regarding technique, editing, and presentation? Are you asking for advice regarding gallery contacts, photo editors, art directors, graphic designers, editorial assignments or commissions? Or, do you wish this initial opportunity to be a chance to introduce yourself and your work? At the start of your review, let the reviewer know what you hope to gain as you begin your session.

No matter what you are seeking from the reviews, research the biographies of the Reviewers towards requesting sessions with those who are most likely to accomplish your desired goals. Once you receive your final list of Reviewers that have been assigned to you, study deeply.

TIGHTLY EDIT & PRACTICE

Edit your presentation to a number of images that allows you to present your body of work in an efficient manner (I suggest a maximum of 20). If you have two or more bodies of work, perhaps one has been completed, another may be on-going or even just begun, consider bringing smaller selections of each and ask which the reviewer would prefer to see. While there is likely time to look at everything you want to share, be mindful that it may be impossible to discuss all work you bring. Based on your selection of photographs on your overall goals.

Practice your presentation - keep it short and simple! Plan to speak clearly and concisely on your work and make sure that your presentation is LESS than the appointed time to provide opportunity to gain feedback/advice from the reviewer.

PRESENTATION & PRINT HANDLING

Presentation and 'first impressions' are important.

Reviewers realize that the majority of you will be traveling to the event and have size constraints on what you can carry on an airplane, train, or bus. They don't expect you to bring a large, matted portfolio with interleaving tissue between each print, or individual plastic covers to be removed.... This type of presentation is cumbersome for you and time consuming - remember you have 20 minutes to discuss your work, so taking time away from sharing your prints is time lost. Consider removing bags and any interleaving tissue before your sessions. Find a balance between what you feel best conveys your body of work without compromising the safety of your fine prints.

If presenting a body of work (or two), print your images in a similar style on the same type/size paper you have selected for that series. If possible, bring samples of what you consider exhibition-quality prints: if larger, bring several examples in a tube, or cut/taped to fit into the same size box as the bulk of your presentation will fit into. If these larger prints have been exhibited, it is helpful to share an installation view, perhaps as the initial image you share with Reviewers. If you are not sure of what paper/size is best for a current project, showing the reviewers samples of those choices can lend valuable, timely advice. Do not provide an all-digital presentation if you are hoping to effectively introduce your work to professionals for purposes of exhibition or gallery representation. A digital tablet can never convey your sense of craft.

The folding tables you will be presenting your work on will be approximately 3'x6'; if your final print size is larger than that, have several samples rolled in tubes with a supplemental, more manageable portfolio for general viewing.

Select a box, book, or portfolio that allows you to show the photographs relatively quickly and safely and be seen without damaging prints. Some prefer a drop-down box, enabling you to slide the work out rather than lifting the work out of a tight fixed-sided box. Remember that you will be moving work in/out/in/out frequently over the course of the reviews.

KNOW THE REVIEWERS

Print a copy of all the reviewer biographies and insert into a 3-ring binder to keep at your fingertips to refresh your memory as needed. Research their institutions, professional activities and refresh your memory prior to your meeting. Reviewers will appreciate the efforts you make to prepare for your session with them.

PREPARE PROMOTIONAL MATERIALS FOR REVIEWERS

Produce a simple promotional piece (print) that will serve to remind the reviewers of your work, as well as providing them with your current contact information; use an image shared during the event for better recollection. Make sure it is small enough for reviewers to file in a traditional (8-1/2 x 11) folder for ease in referencing your work. Multiple pages/sheets should have your name and contact information on EACH individual page should they get separated. When Attending the Review: Timing is Everything

BE ON TIME! If you are late for your scheduled review appointment, the time will not be made up.

Be courteous to fellow photographers by respecting the appointment time and pack up your materials before the next person's session is set to begin. Your colleagues will appreciate this and reviewers will be aware of your professionalism.

Consider making a small "portable" portfolio to have with you at all times throughout all events, i.e. a box of 4x5s, an 8x10 presentation book of prints, or laser/inkjet copies to be able to share your work with other photographers and reviewers if there is an opportunity outside the formal review sessions.

MAKE NOTES

Make notes for your reference as soon as possible following each session on the bio sheets you prepared - who you saw, their comments on the work and/or on specific images, printing, presentation, general advice, and other remarks you will want to review.

In addition to making notes directly on these pages, consider bringing an audio recording device to capture your session with reviewers, adding a voice memo app to your phone, etc. so you can listen to the reviewer's advice again. **ALWAYS** ask their permission before recording, and presume that permissions granted are for your personal use only – do not quote conversations in any public form (such as Facebook, Twitter, your website) without additional permissions.

Do not assume that each and every Reviewer wishes to keep more than a simple business or promotional card, or that they find your work of interest to them for future exhibition or publishing projects. At the end of each session, ask the Reviewer if they would like additional materials for future reference, and if so, indicate whether you can provide these on site or offer the courtesy to ship items to their office following the event (at your expense). Also ask if they would like to be kept informed of your work as it evolves, and if so, in what format? Do they prefer that you update them via email? Sending something in print via US Mail? This is a rare opportunity to set the course of continuing the dialogue, and plan on following their preferences.

Be sure to ask reviewers for their business card if you intend to add them to your mailing list.

Keep your business and/or promotional cards handy, and distribute them. Ask for cards from other professionals at the event to add to (or begin) your promotional mailing list. Ask for cards from fellow photographers, and maintain contact with your professional community.

AFTER THE EVENT

Write each reviewer and thank them for their insights towards your work, their advice and the time they gave to you, and respond to their comments and suggestions directly. I encourage clearly reminding them that they met you at the event you attended. Ideally, your promo will have an image that you shared with Reviewers at the event – this too will help the Reviewers connect your name with your work. If you choose email rather than a hand-written note, be mindful of the subject line – perhaps “Met at (event name) Reviews.”

In summary: you will initiate relationships at portfolio review events – it is up to you to cultivate those relationships after the event.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Mary Virginia Swanson is an author and educator who helps artists find the strengths in their work, identify appreciative audiences and present their work in an informed, professional manner. Her seminars and lectures on marketing opportunities have proven to aid photographers in moving their careers to the next level.

Swanson served as the Executive Director of the 2016 LOOK3 Festival of the Photograph in Charlottesville, Virginia. She is the recipient of the 2015 Honored Educator from the Society for Photographic Education, the 2013 Lifetime Achievement FOCUS Award from the Griffin Museum of Photograph and the 2014 Susan Carr Award for Education from the American Society for Media Photographers (ASMP).

She co-authored with Darius Himes the acclaimed Publish Your Photography Book: Revised & Updated (2014). Her current book project is Finding Your Audience: An Introduction to Marketing Your Photographs (2017).” Mary Virginia’s web site is www.mvswanson.com Instagram feed is @maryvirginiaswanson and LOOK3 Festival can be found at www.look3.org.