



Licentiate of the Irish Photographic Federation

Distinction Assessment Handbook

LIPF



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1. General Information

The Licentiate of the Irish Photographic Federation (LIPF) is the foundation of the IPF distinctions pathway. The applicant is required to submit a panel of ten mounted prints in two rows. The Licentiate recognises sound photographic competence and is designed to confirm that an applicant can:

- control their camera and basic photographic technique,
- produce consistently competent images,
- present work clearly and professionally,
- demonstrate a solid understanding of photographic fundamentals.

Who can make a Licentiate application?

Anyone, whether a member of an IPF club or not, may apply for Licentiate assessment. No prior distinction is required.

What the Assessors Are Looking For

At Licentiate level, assessors are concerned with **competence, control, and consistency**. A successful Licentiate panel will demonstrate:

Image quality	Appropriate control of contrast, highlights, and shadows; Accurate colour balance (or tonal control for monochrome work); Clean files and prints, free from obvious blemishes or technical defects
Cohesion and consistency	A balance between cohesion and variety across the panel; No single image that significantly weakens the overall submission. Licentiate panels are assessed holistically. One weak image can affect the outcome.
Composition and editing	Sound composition and visual organisation; Editing choices that strengthen the panel rather than distract from it
Use of light	Appropriate and effective use of light in relation to the subject matter
Presentation	Correct print sizing and mounting; Clean, neutral, professional presentation

The IPF provides several distinction sittings per year. It is strongly recommended that prospective applicants attend at least one sitting before preparing their own panel. This helps applicants understand how the assessment is conducted and provides valuable guidance when preparing work.

Subject Matter and Categories

Licentiate applicants may submit work from any photographic subject or genre. At Licentiate level panels may include mixed subject matter.

Panels may also be comprised of one subject or genre, however, these panels will require a variety of photographic techniques and approaches to demonstrate an appropriate level of competence in photography.

Editing and Manipulation at Licentiate Level

Editing at Licentiate level should support the image, correct technical issues and enhance the subject matter sensitively. Common causes of failure at this level include over-processing and uneven finishing.

AI generated images

Images or elements of images that are exclusively generated by AI are **not** permitted. AI enabled editing techniques embedded in various software products, such as sharpening, noise reduction etc., are allowed.

Confidentiality

All assessments are conducted anonymously. An applicant's name is announced only where a panel is successful.

To ensure fairness and independence, assessors do not vote on panels submitted by members of their own clubs, nor on panels where they have provided specific advisory guidance. In this situation assessors remain present while a panel is being viewed so as not to draw attention to their involvement.

Assessors are not available to discuss the outcome of individual panels with applicants on the assessment day. Formal feedback, where applicable, is provided through the established process.

Applicants are asked not to approach or canvass assessors who are participating in an assessment. Any attempt to influence the assessment process may result in the disqualification of a panel.

2. Preparing Your Panel - Practical Guidance

Applicants are advised to follow the preparation process set out below. It is very important not to rush your application as there are several sittings throughout the year. If you are not ready, wait for the next sitting.

(i) Select your images and seek advice

Before submitting a panel for assessment, it is strongly recommended that applicants seek advice on image selection and panel construction. Applicants are encouraged to:

- Attend at least one distinction assessment sitting before preparing a panel
- Engage with IPF distinction advisory sessions when available
- Seek guidance from experienced photographers, mentors, or current distinction holders

While the final Licentiate panel consists of 10 prints arranged in two rows, for initial review, it is important to show an advisor approximately 20 un-mounted prints. It is not necessary at this early stage to prepare all prints to final submission standard. Postcard size should be sufficient. You can choose a small number printed at the intended size and on the intended paper to test suitability if you already have some ideas in this regard.

Panels may be entirely colour, entirely monochrome, or a mix of both. Where colour and monochrome are combined, particular care should be taken to ensure cohesion is not compromised.

(ii) Panel planning

A Licentiate panel is assessed as a set, so the way the images work together matters. Before confirming your choice of images, check for:

- **Balance:** avoid clustering very dark/light images together; spread colour intensity and subject weight across the panel.
- **Repetition:** remove near-duplicates (same subject, same angle, same moment, same treatment).
- **Consistency of finishing:** ensure white balance, contrast, sharpening and noise reduction feel consistent across the set.
- **Flow:** aim for a natural visual journey across the two rows (for example, vary subject distance and viewpoint so the eye moves).
- **One weak image:** if one print is clearly below the rest, replace it. Aim for consistent quality rather than variety for its own sake.
- **Overall composition:** Visual balance and flow are very important: images should lead the viewer's eye *into* the panel rather than out of it, with orientation, line, shape, and colour

used to create cohesion and equilibrium across both rows, often anchored by a strong central image.

(iii) Printing your images

Once you are satisfied that your work has attained the required standard for Licentiates select your 10 coherent images for printing. Printing too early is one of the most common and costly mistakes made by first-time applicants. So, take your time with your decisions.

Images should not be printed excessively large as large prints emphasise any small errors or flaws. The emphasis is on competence, not impact through scale.

Use a good-quality, general-purpose photographic paper. It should be noted that images are viewed under LED daylight calibrated lighting, at a slight reclined angle. Images printed on very high gloss paper may be difficult for assessors to see due the reflective quality of the medium.

(iv) Mounting requirements

Prints must be mounted (framed prints will not be accepted). Poor mounting can significantly weaken an otherwise competent panel, so attention to detail is advised.

- The maximum mount size is 40 × 50 cm.
- Presentation and mounting should be sympathetic to the subject matter.
- Mounts should be clean, neutral, and consistent.
- Ensure prints are secure in their mounts and not prone to slipping.
- Avoid “bubbling” or lifting of prints, as this affects viewing and may influence the assessment outcome.

(v) Orientation and labelling

- Where there may be ambiguity regarding landscape or portrait orientation, mark the top of the image with ‘top’ or an arrow ↑ on the reverse side.
- The back of each mount must be clearly numbered 1–10 to match your layout, with one starting top left and 10 finishing bottom right.
- Make sure your numbers match up 1 to 10 with your hanging plan (see below). Where there is any discrepancy the visual hanging plan will be used to organise your images on the boards.
- Details such as image title or the author’s name must not appear on the front of the mount.

(vi) Hanging plan (required)

- You are required to create a digital layout/hanging plan (A4 is sufficient).

- This digital layout is provided to the distinction secretary along with your ten digital images.
- The individual images will be included in the Images of Distinction booklet, laid out as per your hanging plan.
- The digital hanging plan will be included in the website archive of successful panels. You should therefore not add image numbers to this digital copy of your hanging plan.
- A printed copy of your hanging plan is required on assessment day.

(vii) Prepare your submission for assessment day

- Print panels are presented in person on the morning of the assessment (see appendix 1 for guidance regarding overseas applications and the transport of images)
- You will present your ten images, numbered on the back from 1 to 10. Indicate 'top' at the top on the back of any print where there is ambiguity regarding orientation.
- Include a single print of your panel layout/hanging plan to assist the print handlers when arranging your submission.
- You can choose to manually add/write the number you have placed on the back of the mounted print (1-10) underneath the thumbnail images on this printed copy of your hanging plan ensuring that these numbers match.
- Remove any protective plastic film from mounted images before presenting, as prints cannot be assessed through protective coverings.

3. The Application Process (Online)

This section describes the online application process, which takes place approximately six weeks before your assessment day. You can complete the online application form on www.irishphoto.ie.

You will be asked to:

1. Provide personal and contact details, please ensure your email is correct as this is the method we will use to contact you and progress your application. Check your SPAM or junk mail regularly
2. Confirm the distinction level (licentiate/ LIPF)
3. Confirm eligibility
4. Confirm affiliation status of your club and contact details
5. Pay the application fee. The fee for licentiate assessment is available on the distinctions page of the IPF website. Payment can be made by PayPal at the point of application or by bank transfer. An application is not complete until payment has been received.

Provide digital images

After the form is completed and payment made, applicants must provide digital versions of their images and their hanging plan using the instructions provided by the distinction secretary.

Digital file requirements:

- Format: JPEG, high quality
- Colour space: sRGB
- Size: suitable for printing in small format (distinction brochure), 1,600 px on the long side; 300 DPI.
- Digital files must accurately represent the printed images as these images will be used for the Images of Distinction booklet and the website archive of successful panels.

4. Assessment Day — What to Expect

The distinction assessment process is long-established within the IPF and is designed to be fair, transparent, and consistent for all applicants. Assessment takes place in person and follows a clear sequence.

Arrival and panel presentation

On the morning of the assessment, you will present your panel to the Distinctions Secretary at the registration desk.

Assessment will commence approximately 45 minutes later, so try to relax and get a cup of coffee or tea while you wait. This is an opportunity to meet other applicants and clubs before the assessment session takes place.

The assessment process

- Each Licentiate panel is assessed live and presented in accordance with the submitted hanging plan.
- The panels are presented on special display stands under appropriate lighting conditions.
- All panels are anonymous. Where a panel's author is known to an assessor through giving advice or being in the same club, that assessor will abstain from the vote.

- There are typically five to six assessors, selected for their expertise in the submitted panel genre and topics. The assessors' group is chaired by the Chair or Deputy Chair of Distinction Assessors.
- First, the assessors view the panel from their seats as a complete set.
- The panel is then examined closely for overall consistency and for processing or printing flaws.
- Assessors may, in some instances, re-arrange prints if it is considered that this assists the panel.
- A preliminary (indicative) vote is taken by the assessors. This vote is not visible to the audience and is not a final decision.
- At the Chair's discretion, assessors may comment on the panel, speaking for or against its acceptance.
- A final vote is then taken. Decisions are made by simple majority. In the event of a tie, the Chair of Distinctions Assessors has a casting vote.
- At the conclusion of assessment for each panel, the outcome is announced publicly.
- Where a panel meets the required standard, the Distinction Secretary will state the words that all applicants hope to hear: "*The panel succeeds!*"
- The successful applicant's name and club (where applicable) are announced.
- Applicants whose panels do **not** meet the required standard **remain anonymous**. Their names are not announced on the day.

Outcome and presentation

Once all assessments for the sitting have concluded, a presentation ceremony takes place.

Successful applicants are presented with the official Licentiate certificate, and the Licentiate distinction pin (green).

The presentation is made by the IPF President, or by a nominated delegate acting on the President's behalf. Successful applicants may thereafter use the post-nominal letters **LIPF** in accordance with IPF rules.

Ratification by the IPF National Council

Notwithstanding the presentation of certificates and pins, in every case a successful assessment by the assessors takes the form of a recommendation to the IPF National Council that the distinction should be awarded. The National Council must ratify the award to validate it.

Annual Fees

Your Licentiate is subject to annual renewal fee. If the annual fee is outstanding, you may not use the letters LIPF or describe yourself as a Licentiate of the Irish Photographic Federation (This does not apply to Lifetime distinction holders).

The annual distinction holder's renewal fee is €30 (€20 for persons over 65 years), payable annually in January.

A lifetime fee option of €400 is also available.

Annual fees should be paid on receipt of payment request by renewals@irishphoto.ie on www.irishphoto.ie using PayPal or by Bank Transfer (the IBAN is provided in the acknowledgement email).

If You Do Not Succeed

Not succeeding does not mean you are not a good photographer. It means the panel did not yet demonstrate a consistent Licentiate standard.

Applicants who do not succeed receive written feedback, which typically addresses consistency, technical control, finishing and presentation. This written feedback will be included with your images when you collect them after the assessment sitting.

Applicants are encouraged to reflect on the feedback, seek advice, refine their panel, and reapply when ready.

5. Progressing Beyond Licentiate

Many photographers use the distinctions pathway as a structured development plan, progressing at their own pace. For photographers who wish to continue:

Associate (AIPF) builds on Licentiate competence and looks for the emergence of a personal style within a declared category.

Fellowship (FIPF) requires evidence of mastery and a clearly defined photographic voice.

6. Contacts and Help

All queries should be sent to:

Distinctions: distinctions@irishphoto.ie

General IPF enquiries: info@irishphoto.ie

Renewals enquiries: renewals@irishphoto.ie

Please allow reasonable time for responses as the IPF is run by volunteers. This is particularly important close to application deadlines, so please ensure questions regarding producing a panel have been answered before you apply.