

## GETTING STARTED WITH THE PHOTOGRAPHIC SOCIETY OF AMERICA DISTINCTIONS SYSTEM

This document has been prepared to help PSA members understand the basic principles of the PSA system of photographic distinctions that are earned through acceptances in PSA recognised international exhibitions. It summarised much of the detailed information that is available from the PSA website but it is not intended to replace that information. *Any member applying for Star Ratings or PSA distinctions must read the detailed instructions that can be downloaded from the following links on the Stars/ROPA page of the PSA website.*

### PSA Star Ratings Guidelines

» Star applications in all Divisions now use the application processes described in these documents:

- Star 1-5 Application Instructions: pdf
- Star Ratings Application Spreadsheet: Excel
- Guidelines for Using the Star Application spreadsheet: pdf

This document makes some reference to the FIAP (International Federation of Photographic Arts) distinctions system to help minimise the confusion that often arises when holders of FIAP distinctions apply for PSA distinctions. There are several important differences between the FIAP distinction system and the PSA distinctions systems. Understanding these differences may help you to understand the PSA system (particularly if you have previously applied for FIAP distinctions). The *basic* similarities and differences are summarised in Appendix 1. If you are not familiar with the FIAP distinctions system then simply ignore the references to FIAP.

1. To apply for photographic distinctions through the **Photographic Society of America (PSA)** you must be a financial member of PSA. You can join on the PSA website at <http://www.psa-photo.org>.
2. The distinctions system in PSA is called ROPA - the **Recognition of Photographic Achievement** awards. The distinctions that are available (PPSA, EPSA, etc.) are described in section 21 of this document. These distinctions are based on acceptances in *international exhibitions that have been recognised by PSA*.
3. The most important thing to understand about the PSA ROPA system is that the processes of having *acceptances verified* and the process of applying for a PSA *distinction* are separate (whereas for FIAP distinctions these two things are combined into a single application).
4. In PSA, acceptances are verified (checked and approved) through the **Star Ratings** system. For each Star rating you require a certain number of acceptances (see Section 11 for details) and you are issued with a Star Ratings Merit Award (certificate) as proof (verification) of those acceptances. There is also a Galaxy and Diamonds Ratings system, but that comes after you have progressed through the Star Ratings

system at least to the point where you have achieved 5 Stars in a single Division. The Galaxy and Diamond Ratings systems are described in detail on the PSA website.

5. Once you have sufficient acceptances approved through the Star/Galaxy Ratings system, you can submit a ROPA application online using your Star/Galaxy Ratings Certificates as evidence that you have achieved the number of acceptances required for the distinction (see point 21).
6. A critical point in understanding the PSA system of distinctions is that the PSA is organised around a system of **Divisions** - Nature [ND], Photojournalism [PJD], Photo Travel [PTD], Projected Images [PID], Pictorial Prints [PPD] and 3D [3DD]. The Projected Image Division is divided into two “Classes” – Colour (PIDC) and Monochrome (PIDM). The Pictorial Print Division has four “Classes” - Large Open, Large Monochrome, Small Open and Small Monochrome. International Exhibitions gain approval from these Divisions and *each Division and Class is responsible for processing Star Ratings applications that use acceptances from exhibition sections that were approved by that Division or Class.*
7. When submitting Star/Galaxy Ratings applications you cannot mix acceptances from two Divisions (Nature and Photojournalism for example). Neither can you mix acceptances from difference Classes within a Division – for example, you cannot mix PIDC and PIDM acceptances.
8. All Star and Galaxy Rating applications must be submitted to the Star Ratings Director in the Division or Class in which the acceptances were gained. For example, acceptances in sections of exhibitions that have been recognised by the Nature Division are approved through Star Ratings applications that are sent to the Star Ratings Director in the Nature Division. The contact details for each Star Ratings Director are on the PSA website under the Stars/ROPA menu. You can check which Division recognised each section of an exhibition by looking on the PSA website under the *Exhibitions>Closed Exhibitions* menu item (or in the exhibition catalogue).
9. The Star Ratings system is the same in each Division of PSA. It is based on two components – *titles* and *acceptances*. There are five star levels and the *minimum* number of titles and acceptances for these Stars are:

Star Rating	Minimum No. Titles needed	Minimum No. Acceptances needed
1	6	18
2	12	36
3	24	72
4	48	144
5	96	288

10. You can see from the table above that the average number of acceptances you need for each title is three. However, in your Star Ratings applications you can use titles with only one acceptance and there is no limit on the maximum number of acceptances you can use for any title. For example, on your Star 1 application in PIDC

you might use three titles that each had just one acceptance and three titles that each had five acceptances (to give a total of 6 titles and 18 acceptances). You could also use more than the minimum number of titles; for example, in a Star 1 application you could use 9 titles that each had 2 acceptances.

11. When you apply for Star 2 *in a Division or Class where you already have Star 1*, the titles and acceptances that you used for Star 1 *in that Division or Class* are included in the totals. For example, if you used 6 titles and 18 acceptances for Star 1 in PIDC, those titles and their acceptances would be part of the 12 titles and 36 acceptances that you use for Star 2 in PIDC, and so on. Refer to the table in Appendix 2 for a visual representation of this system.
12. Every image you enter in a PSA recognised international exhibition must have a *unique* title. If you enter an image in a Nature section (print or digital), for example, and then enter the same image in a Projected Image section it must have the same title. Once an image has been accepted in a PSA recognised exhibition you cannot enter it again under a different title.
13. The PSA considers that colour and monochrome versions derived from the same image capture to be the same image and they must be given the same title.
14. When you submit a Star Ratings application it is always a good idea to include two or three extra titles and their acceptances, just in case there are any errors in your application. Any approved titles or acceptances above the minimum requirements will be carried over for you to use in your next Star Ratings application (up to Star 5).
15. When each Star Ratings application is approved you will be asked to pay a fee (currently US\$12 but US\$15 from 1/1/2019). This is paid by PayPal through the PSA website. When the fee is paid you will be sent a Star Ratings certificate. Keep these certificates safe as you will need to refer to them when you apply for a ROPA distinction.
16. All Star Ratings applications are made on a spreadsheet that is submitted by email to the Star Ratings Director. You can download the spreadsheet and instructions for using it from the links shown in the introduction of this document. To apply, you simply fill in the details on the spreadsheet and email it to the relevant Star Ratings Director so that your acceptances can be verified.
17. You can apply for more than one Star at a time (within a Division or Class). For example, if you have sufficient acceptances you could apply for Star 1 and Star 2 in Nature at the same time. If you do this, the two applications are combined rather than being treated as separate applications. However, you must obtain Star 4 in a Division before you apply for Star 5 in that Division.
18. Once you have achieved a 5 Star rating in a Division (e.g. Nature) you can continue to have acceptances recognised in that Division through the Galaxy Ratings system (and beyond that through the Diamond Ratings system). Details of those systems are

available on the PSA website. They are simply additional ways of having acceptances approved (verified) and you probably will not move into the Galaxy system until you have achieved at least your PPSA distinction. However, it is worth checking the Galaxy rules before you apply for your Star 5 in any Division because once you achieve Star 5 all titles that have been used in your Star applications in that Division or Class are 'retired' and cannot be used in Galaxy applications.

19. The Star/Galaxy/Diamond applications are simply the mechanism for having your acceptances approved or verified (checked against the information that PSA has received in the electronic reports from recognised exhibitions). No matter how many Stars/Galaxies you have obtained, this does NOT entitle you to use any letters after your name. You still have to formally apply for the relevant PSA distinction. These applications can be made online – details of how to apply are under the Stars/ROPA menu item on the PSA website.

20. The number of acceptances required for each ROPA distinction are:

QUALIFY (QPSA): 54 acceptances supported by Star Rating certificates from one or more PSA Divisions.

PROFICIENCY (PPSA): 288 acceptances supported by Star Rating certificates from one or more PSA Divisions.

EXCELLENCE (EPSA): 700 acceptances supported by Star Rating certificates (or Galaxy/Diamond certificates) from one or more PSA Divisions.

MASTER (MPSA): 1,500 acceptances supported by Star Rating certificates (or Galaxy/Diamond certificates) from one or more PSA Divisions.

MASTER 2 (MPSA2): 2,250 acceptances supported by Star Rating certificates (or Galaxy/Diamond certificates) from one or more PSA Divisions.

GRAND MASTER (GMPSA): 3,000 or more acceptances supported by Star Rating certificates (or Galaxy/Diamond certificates) from one or more PSA Divisions.

There are also bronze, silver, gold and platinum *levels* of Grand Master and they require 5000, 7000, 9000 and 11000 acceptances respectively.

You MUST have your acceptances verified through the Star/Galaxy Ratings system before applying for each ROPA award.

21. The acceptances that you use for lower level awards are included in the total number of acceptances you need for higher level awards. For example, the 288 acceptances you use for PPSA are counted as part of the 700 acceptances you need for EPSA.

22. Although the Star/Galaxy/Diamond ratings are approved within each Division or Class, the acceptances that have been approved in this way can be combined across Divisions and Classes to satisfy the requirements for ROPA distinctions. *For example*, PPSA could be achieved in these ways:

288 acceptances in Nature approved on a Nature Division 5 Star rating.

OR

144 acceptances in Nature approved on a Nature Division 4 Star rating, plus  
144 acceptances in Photo Travel approved on a PT Division 4 Star rating.

OR

72 acceptances in Nature approved on a Nature Division 3 Star rating, plus  
72 acceptances in Photo Travel approved on a PT Division 3 Star rating, plus  
72 acceptances in PIDC approved on a PIDC 3 Star rating, plus  
72 acceptances in PIDM approved on a PIDM 3 Star rating.

OR

Any other combination of Star Ratings that gives you a total of 288 approved acceptances.

23. You do NOT have to apply for lower level ROPA awards before applying for a higher level. For example, if you have sufficient titles and acceptances for PPSA you can apply for that distinction without having been granted QPSA.

24. There is no waiting period between Star Rating or ROPA applications. After you have achieved your PPSA, you can continue to accumulate acceptances and have them approved through the Star/Galaxy Ratings system. As soon as you have a total of 700 approved acceptances (including the 288 you used for PPSA) you can apply for EPSA. This process continues as you move through the different levels of distinction.

25. When you apply for a Star Rating you can use acceptances that you received in PSA recognised exhibitions up to one year prior to joining PSA.

26. To use acceptances that you gained more than one year prior to joining PSA you can purchase Stars Buy Back Years. You can use any number of acceptances from that buy-back period provided they were in PSA recognised exhibitions and meet all the normal conditions for Star Ratings applications. Full details of the Buy Back scheme are on the Stars/ROPA page of the PSA website.

27. It is worth remembering that some images can be used to achieve acceptances in more than one Division or Class. For example, you may have a Nature image that gains acceptances in the Nature section of some exhibitions and gains acceptances in the PIDC section of other exhibitions. All those acceptances can be used for Star applications *in the relevant Division or Class*. Of course, you cannot use the PIDC acceptances in a Nature Division Star Ratings application and you cannot use the

Nature acceptances in a PIDC Star Ratings application regardless of the subject matter of the image.

28. When you submit a Star Ratings application the details are checked against a database. The information in that database comes from the Electronic Data Acceptances Spreadsheet (EDAS) that each recognised exhibition must send to PSA. If the EDAS information contains errors there will be a problem approving your application, so please check the paper or electronic catalogues from exhibitions before submitting your Star Ratings applications. It is your responsibility to ensure that the data you submit is accurate and that you have followed all the instructions on the PSA website. Please take special care with your application and remember that the Star Ratings Directors are volunteers. If your application is accurate and correctly formatted it should be processed promptly.
29. You can find lists of PSA recognised exhibitions (organised by year) on the PSA website (select "Exhibitions" from the menu and look for the links on the left of the page). In most cases, all the sections of an exhibition will be recognised but occasionally there will be themed sections that are not recognised.
30. When an exhibition is judged, the organisers have 30 days to submit their EDAS report to PSA. Your Star Rating application cannot be processed until PSA receives the EDAS reports for all the acceptances you are claiming. On the list of exhibitions on the PSA website, the name of the exhibition is highlighted in yellow after the EDAS reports have been received.
31. If you have any questions about Star Ratings please email me.

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**APPENDIX 1: A BRIEF COMPARISON OF PSA DISTINCTIONS AND FIAP DISTINCTIONS**

	<b>PSA</b>	<b>FIAP</b>
Who can apply?	Any financial PSA member.	Members of national photographic federations that are affiliated with FIAP. (Some other special options.)
Waiting period after joining before application can be made.	No. Star Ratings applications can be made immediately.	Yes. First FIAP recognised acceptance must have been received at least 1 year before first distinction application.
What acceptances can be used?	Only those in sections of exhibitions that have been recognised by PSA.	Only those in exhibitions under FIAP patronage.
Acceptances prior to joining can be used to obtain distinctions.	Yes, but there are limits and “Buy Back” may be necessary.	Yes.
Each FIAP Honour/ROPA distinction requires a minimum number of acceptances.	Yes	Yes
Number of acceptances required for first award.	QPSA 54 acceptances	AFIAP 40 acceptances
Awards require acceptances for a specified minimum number of different images.	Yes  18 different images for PPSA	Yes  15 different images for AFIAP
Some images must gain awards.	<b>No.</b> Only acceptances.	Yes for some distinctions.
Acceptances must be received in specified minimum number of countries.	<b>No</b>	Yes
Acceptances must be received in specified minimum number of salons.	<b>No</b>	Yes

Limits on number of acceptances that can be claimed from any exhibition.	<b>No</b>	Yes for some distinctions, and circuits are treated as a single exhibition.
Limits on number of acceptances that can be claimed from any country.	<b>No</b>	Yes for some distinctions.
Set number of acceptances must be for prints.	<b>No</b> – except in the Print Division where all acceptances must be for prints.	Yes for some distinctions.
Acceptances that are recognised	All PSA recognised sections of exhibitions.	FIAP approved exhibitions, subject to salon and country limits.
Grouping of acceptances for verification.	Only acceptances within a PSA Division/Class can be applied to Star Rating applications in that Division/Class (e.g. PIDM or Nature).	No distinction between acceptances in different categories (e.g. colour, mono, nature, digital, prints).
Acceptances verified by ...	The relevant PSA Division Star Ratings Director.	Verifying Officers appointed in each FIAP member country.
Acceptances verified ...	<b>Progressively</b> through the Star Rating system.	At the time a distinction application is submitted.
Photographic files have to be submitted with application.	<b>No</b>	Some files have to be submitted for some distinctions.
Format for applications.	Electronic applications for Star Ratings are submitted by email.  ROPA applications are made online.	Paper application form.
Application submitted to ...	Online after sufficient acceptances have been approved through the Star Ratings system.	A Verifying Officer and then to the country FIAP co-ordinator and then to FIAP.

One set date each year by which distinction applications must be submitted	<b>No.</b> <i>Star Ratings and ROPA applications can be submitted at any time.</i>	Yes
Wait time between submission of distinction application and notification of result.	Usually several days.	Several months.
Wait time between distinction applications.	No mandated wait time between applications and no limit to how many Star Ratings or ROPA distinctions can be obtained in any year.	Yes, one year between applications up to EFIAP/p and 3 years between EFIAP and MFIAP.
Masters distinction can be obtained through exhibition acceptances.	<b>Yes</b>	No. Must be obtained by submission of a portfolio.
Distinctions awarded for life.	<b>Yes</b>	Yes

If you have any questions relating to this document please email me ([roykillen@mac.com](mailto:roykillen@mac.com)).

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