



National Mensa PhotoCup Competitions

This year, as usual, you, the national Mensas (NMs), have the opportunity to run your own PhotoCup competitions for your members. Of course you're free to decide your competition deadline, select your own jury, award your own prizes, and so on.

However, it's very important that you read this document right to the end, even if you've been running a PhotoCup for many years, as it explains everything you need to know, plus a link to a MASTER document that contains all the resources we've created to help you run a successful competition: for example, PhotoCup rules, a NM entry form template that you're welcome to use, editable "Campaign-in-a-box" marketing materials, and other essential information.

Please let us know if you have any questions: photocup@mensa.org

PhotoCup 2026

This year, just like last year, we're asking you to share ALL your members' photos with us (via a Google drive link that's enabled with editable access). **Deadline:** 12:00 p.m. (UK time), **August 31st**

Why are we asking for a copy of all the images?

Because we want to encourage:

- Equal opportunities for all members
- Greater inclusivity
- Increased participation

How will these aims be achieved?

- By making greater efforts to publicise/promote/market the competition worldwide
- By collaborating with a corporate partner/sponsor
- By providing high-quality prizes and other awards
- By adding a range of subcategories (e.g. "Best Story Award", "Social Impact Award", etc.)
- By creating two global competitions:

What are the two global PhotoCup competitions this year?

- 1) Mensa International PhotoCup 2026
- 2) Mensa PhotOlympics 2026

What is "Mensa International PhotoCup 2026"? And how will it work?

It's the same as it's always been: the search for the "Mensa International Photographer of the Year". And, just as we did last year, ALL the entries received from Mensa members worldwide will be judged blind by the MI PhotoCup jury.

What does “judged blind” mean?

It means that the MI PhotoCup jury won't know who the NM PhotoCup juries have chosen as their top 3 (winner and runners-up).

All the entries – from members of NMs that ARE running PhotoCup competitions and from Direct International Participants (members of NMs that are NOT running PhotoCup competitions this year, as well as Direct International Members) – will go into **one big photo pool** to be scored and processed by the MI PhotoCup jury.

Your NM PhotoCup jury and the MI PhotoCup jury will of course have different opinions, and the judging criteria used will not be the same in every country, but that's fine. By the way, you don't have to use the MI judging criteria but can if you want to – it's up to you. We'll publish the MI judging criteria and send you a copy as soon as it's ready.

Just like last year, all your participating members will have 2 chances to win (to become the NM PhotoCup champion and/or the MI Photographer of the year). Well, actually, they'll have 3 chances, because your NM's top 3 (winner and 2 runners-up) will enter the Mensa PhotOlympics.

What is “Mensa PhotOlympics”? And how will it work?

The NM team with the 3 best photos overall will be crowned “Mensa PhotOlympic Champions 2026”, receiving a trophy, a framed certificate, and other prizes, which will be presented to the NatRep of the winning NM at the Bucharest IBD+ Meeting in October. (Of course the “Mensa International Photographer of the Year 2026” will be announced at the same time.)

The Mensa PhotOlympics 2026 entry form can be found in the *PhotoCup 2026* MASTER document. The Mensa PhotOlympics 2026 team entries will be judged by the MI PhotoCup jury AFTER the main competition (MI PhotoCup 2026) has been judged. This means they can't be influenced by your top 3 photos when judging the MI PhotoCup 2026 entries.

How will the Mensa PhotOlympics entries be judged?

Using the same criteria by which all the MI PhotoCup 2026 entries will be judged.

The NM with the highest aggregate score will be the Gold medal winners; the 2nd- and 3rd-placed NMs will be the Silver and Bronze medal winners, respectively.

Note: the top 3 photos submitted by the Direct International Participants (DIPs) will compete in the Mensa PhotOlympics as the “International Team”.

What's the basic timeline for NMs?

- By **August 31st**, the MI PhotoCup Team will have received all the submitted images (all the NM members' photos will join the DIPs' photos in one big pool - a central image repository).
- In **September**, all the photos in the pool will be processed and ranked by the MI PhotoCup jury, and they'll select the winner (“MI Photographer of the Year 2026”), in addition to the 2nd- to 10th-placed entries. The MI PhotoCup Jury will then judge the Mensa PhotOlympics team entries submitted (by all the NMs, plus the “International Team” of DIPs).
- In **October**, at the IBD meeting, there will be a PhotoCup 2026 presentation, when all the winners and runners-up will be revealed, prizes will be awarded.

What else is happening this year?

Best Story Award

Just like last year, on the DIP entry form, in addition to submitting their photos, participants have the option to include a short story or description of **one** of their photos. We think it's a nice addition to the competition, as it adds context and emotion to the photos.

The MI PhotoCup jury will judge all the submitted images without seeing these stories. However, once the judging has finished, the submitted stories will compete for the **Best Story Award**.

If you think this written element would be a positive addition to your own PhotoCup competition, please put it as an option on your entry form.

We recommend asking your members to keep it concise (within **100 words**). Creativity, originality, and emotional impact will be considered in the judging process (exact criteria to be decided).

By all means, use this tagline: *"Share the story behind your favourite image for a chance to win the Best Story Award"*.

Other Award Categories

Just like last year, prizes/awards will again be offered for other additional categories, such as "best artistic composition", best black & white image", "social impact award", "closest representation of THE NATURE OF MENSA" (as per the Constitution of Mensa, section I.):

1. to identify and foster human intelligence for the benefit of humanity;
2. to encourage research into the nature, characteristics, and uses of intelligence; and
3. to provide a stimulating intellectual and social environment for its members

More good news and surprises will be coming your way this year! We'll be in touch again soon!

Now, please open your [***PhotoCup 2026* MASTER document**](#)