



Skill Builders: Scenic Evaluation Concepts & Methods

Because scenic quality is so subjective, it is helpful to base findings on commonly used scenic evaluation concepts as described here.

- Intactness

Intactness refers to the degree to which the landscape is untouched in its original form, whether this be natural or historic. For example, intact natural landscapes could include unspoiled wilderness areas; intact historic landscapes could include well-preserved historic districts or sites.

- Variety

Variety refers to the amount and diversity of differing visual features in the landscape. Normally, the higher the level of variety in a scene, the greater the level of interest.

- Color

Color can enhance interest in a scene. Consider the quality and intensity of color in the landscape as seen in rock formations, soil, water, sky, vegetation and manmade features.

- Contrast

Contrast refers to the amount of difference in shading, color, texture or form of landscape features. For instance, the stark contrast of an open face of granite on a mountainside surrounded by green vegetation provides more interest and appeal than a mountainside completely covered with trees.

- Scale

Scale refers to the way in which the height, length, width and bulk of buildings or other manmade features relate to others and to the natural landscape. A tall, thin building might seem out of scale on a flat beachfront or on open rangeland. A large, bulky building would be out of scale with small summer cottages.

- Order

Order is achieved when elements appear to relate to one another; order is lost when one element is clearly not part of a set. For example, when a white concrete building appears in the middle of a row of brick townhouses, the order of the streetscape is lost.

- Harmony

Harmony expresses the degree to which the individual features work together to create a pleasing whole. To the degree that each of the above visual concepts is applicable in a scene, harmony is achieved if they balance and complement one another.



Scenic Evaluation Methods

Scenic evaluation systems typically score attributes or rank visual preference as a foundation for assessment. Adapt these two types of scenic evaluation methods for your byway.

1. Attribute-Scoring Systems

Attribute-scoring systems look at the attributes and features that make up a view or roadway segment and assign each element either a quantitative score or a qualitative ranking. For example, a quantitative system might give a particular roadway segment a score of 8 for integrity, 6 for color, and so on. Other systems rely on qualitative assessments, such as “distinctive,” “noteworthy,” and “commonplace.” Still other systems simply call for recording whether or not a particular feature, such as a stone wall, occurs within a given segment of roadway. Most of these attribute-scoring systems also use some type of weighting system to arrive at a final determination of scenic quality.

2. Visual Preference Systems

Visual preference systems do not attempt to analyze why a view is scenic, but rather to rank many views based on the responses by representatives of a community or user group. Typically, people are shown a series of photographs of different views and score the views based on their preferences. Visual preference surveys are sometimes used to support an attribute-based scenic evaluation method.