

COMPOSITION BASICS

Composition is the placement or arrangement of visual elements in a work of art. The images presented in this lesson were all taken in one location. The following comments are not really rules, but are guidelines and suggestions for improving your photos when you take the picture, and when you work with the image later.

Rule Of Thirds - Imaginary lines are drawn dividing the image into thirds both horizontally and vertically. You place important elements of your composition where these lines intersect.



Left To Right and Room To Move – Objects that imply movement often look better positioned so that they are facing right, possibly because we are used to reading from left to right. They also may look better with space in front of them.



Vertical Format – Turn your camera on end for taller objects like people and trees.

Leading Lines – Look for a line going from the camera to the main subject.

S-Curves – Any S shaped object is a strong composition element. It can be a leading line or the main subject.

Foreground, Middle Ground, Background – An image with all three of these elements can be very strong, especially landscapes.

Center of Interest – A single center of interest is often better than two competing objects, although an odd number, like three objects, often works well.

Backgrounds – Look for distractions and try to eliminate them by changing your position or zooming in.

Diagonals – Diagonal subjects are often very strong, and you can try tilting an object to make it diagonal.

Move In Close – Try to eliminate objects that compete with your center of interest by moving in close.

Light And Shadow – Shadows can help emphasize an object in the light. Side lighting often creates good shadows.



Framing – Depth can be added to an image by shooting through an opening, such as branches on the edges of the image, or a window.

Mergers – It can be difficult to see detail when objects don't have separation, and we are all familiar with the photos of antlers growing from someone's head.

Depth of Field – Increasing or decreasing your depth of field by changing f stop can be a valuable composition tool to change backgrounds or create an artistic effect.

Layers – A layered composition can add depth and interest, and can be similar or different subjects.

Horizons – Try to keep your horizons level.

People – People tend to look better with their head tilted slightly and hands at different levels.

Change Your Position – Try taking photos from a low angle or a high angle. Look for an unusual viewpoint.



Unusual Subject Matter – Look for unexpected objects. Try to see things differently.

Change lenses – A wide angle lens can alter perspective, a telephoto lens can compress the scene, and a close-up lens shows us things we might not normally notice.

Highlights – Bright spots attract the eye.

Color or Black and White – Bright colors attract the eye, especially red. Black and white can increase drama or provide an artistic view.

Cleanup – Look for distracting items in your photos and remove them before taking the photo, or reposition yourself to avoid them.

Border Patrol – The edges of your photos are likely to have junk you don't want because your viewfinder usually shows less than the final image. So, check your borders and retouch or crop out unwanted distractions.

Cropping – One of the advantages of digital photography is the ability to easily crop your photos. Don't be afraid to change the shape of your photo to create the most pleasing image. For example, you can remove empty space to create a panorama, or shift the center of interest for the rule of thirds.



Digital advantage – Photoshop and other digital imaging software allows you to be creative. Try different light adjustments, textures, framing, and much more.