

COMPOSITION

by

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Composition brings harmony to a photograph. It helps convey your point of view & tell your story. A photograph may have one compositional element or many. There are no set rules.

Becoming familiar with compositional elements will help you create better photographs. Try to recognize these elements when you take your pictures, but also analyze the ones you have already taken to see if these elements are there, and you weren't aware of it at the time.

TIPS

1. Try to keep it simple.
2. Define the subject. (It should be clear what that subject is.)
3. Do you want to create excitement, tension, peace, etc. ?
4. Shoot horizontal & vertical if you can.
5. Take a series of shots from long to close up. Vary the composition.

1. Format

Vertical --stately, static, formal, sturdy

Horizontal--relaxed, calm, easy going

Shoot a scene both ways, especially if you tend to shoot most everything horizontally. Treat your 35mm camera like a view camera. It is not as spontaneous as point & shoot, but it makes you stop & think about all the controls (iso, white balance shutter speed, aperture, focusing point, filters) & how you want to compose the scene.

2. Color

Complementary—opposite colors on the color wheel, ie red & green, orange & blue, yellow & purple—creates conflict & contrast

Triad—primary colors (red, yellow, blue) or secondary colors (orange, green, violet)—exciting

Tertiary—2 or more colors in succession on the color wheel)—harmonious

Monochromatic—different shades of one color

Warm/cool colors (warm colors advance/cool colors recede)—creates depth.

Pastoral landscapes tend to have mostly greens & blues, so placing a warm-colored subject, ie red barn, orange/yellow flowers, makes them pop out at you. Cityscapes tend to be gray, but you can find color in buildings, signs, etc.

3. Texture (patterns)—adds detail—one or more textures creates contrast.

Textures are different from patterns in that textures indicate what the object might feel like (paper, bark of a tree, the weave of fabric) & patterns are more a repetition of shapes to create a motif. I simplify and call them both texture.

4. Line

Vertical—stately, static, formal, sturdy

Horizontal—relaxed, calm, easy going

Diagonal—dynamic, exciting,

5. Repetition—elements that repeat themselves like parallel lines, similar shapes, whole objects, etc.

6. Perspective—Several things can create perspective or depth in photographs. Diagonal leading lines that converge to a vanishing point, overlapping objects, selective focus, (blurring the background to emphasize the subject), or objects that get smaller in size the farther they are from the camera can give the illusion of dimension.

7. Symmetry/Balance

Symmetrical—equal on both sides (mirror-like)

Asymmetrical—unequal yet balanced

Radial—things radiate from the center like tree branches from the trunk or petals from the center of a flower.

8. **Form/Shape/Space (Pos & Neg)—geometric shapes such as circles, ovals, triangles etc. or amorphic shapes can dominate a photograph. Using one of more shapes or forms can create interesting compositions. Emphasizing positive & negative space can add drama in your photos.**
9. **Juxtaposition—using objects together that don't normally belong together.**
10. **Rule of Thirds—imagine a tic tac toe grid in your viewfinder. The lines divide your photo into thirds. Use these lines to place horizons or vertical subjects. Also, use the intersections of these lines to place your subject.**
11. **S-curve—meandering roads or streams fall into this category, but you can also see the s-curve in portraiture and other situations.**
12. **Framing—Use tree limbs, arches, or other objects in the foreground to frame the subject.**
13. **Mergers—THINGS TO AVOID**
 - Foreground/background—unwanted object in the background. Ever see a plant growing out the top of someone's head or ears?**
 - Object—two objects in the photograph appear to touch, not overlap**
 - Color—subjects blend with backgrounds, ie squirrels in trees, lizards on leaves, etc.**
 - Border—subject touches the border. Either crop into the subject or make sure when you take the photo to leave the subject a little breathing room.**

Mergers can be done on purpose. I saw one where a man was purchasing some flowers at a farmer's market. He was standing

behind a hanging Boston fern. The man's head was totally obscured by the fern. It made an interesting photograph.

REMEMBER: The composition of your photograph is a subjective thing. Many times there is no right or wrong composition, only preference. I like it one way; you like it another.