

Photography I

The Basics Of Composition

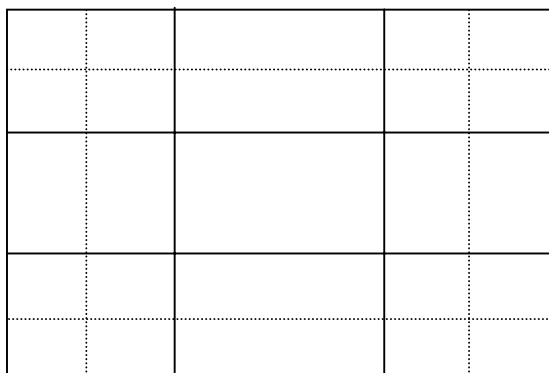
The photograph is an astounding medium. Two dimensional in shape (height and length) it has the ability to show great emotion, extreme detail and amazing color. But to do this, there are certain techniques which need to be used to obtain the most from this visual medium.

The First Rules

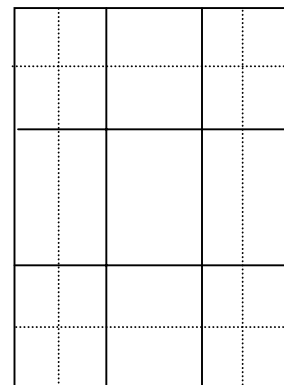
The frame of the camera is the canvas the photographer uses. Unlike the painter, who adds paint to a blank canvas, the photographer is given the entire scene and then must subtract all those elements which are not needed. It is a subtractive art form. If you leave out too much, there is nothing for the viewer to see. Include too much and the image becomes confusing. This is the challenge of the beginning photographer, knowing when “too much” is too much and “not enough” is not enough. A good rule to remember, most times, is “less is more”. By using fewer elements in the image, the image may be more successful. No two images are the same, and although there are some basic rules, none of them are hard and fast. Therefore, the first rule is the rule of acceptance. Do you the photographer like the image? If not, do not take it. You are the ultimate judge for your images. Never compromise this. Following are some other rules which will be useful:

The Rule Of Thirds

Divide the camera frame into a tic-tac-toe board with your mind. It will look something like this:



OR this



The frame can be divided further as demonstrated by the dashed lines.

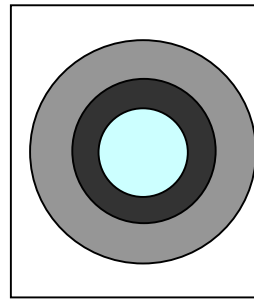
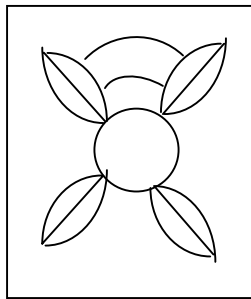
Wherever two lines cross, place a point of interest (a bush, a person’s head or eye, etc.). Also, place vertical lines along the vertical line axes and horizontal lines along the horizontal axes as illustrated in the diagrams. Trees and fence or sign posts are good examples for vertical placements and horizons are a great example of horizontal axes.

Why is this effective? There are two main reasons. First, the mind will naturally divide and image to view it. Placing such visual elements in predefined areas will assist the viewer. The second reason is it helps avoid the possibilities of cutting the image into separate images. If lines are placed at or near the center, the mind will automatically divide the image into two separate images, one to the left and one to the right, or one on top and one on the bottom. We want to avoid this when we compose an image. We want the viewer to look at the *entire* image as a whole, not just pieces of it.

When To Avoid And When To Use Symmetry.

Generally speaking, making an image perfectly symmetrical will not be pleasing for the reasons stated above. The eye will divide the image in half and the result will be the effect of two separate images. Using the rule of thirds as described previously will help to avoid this.

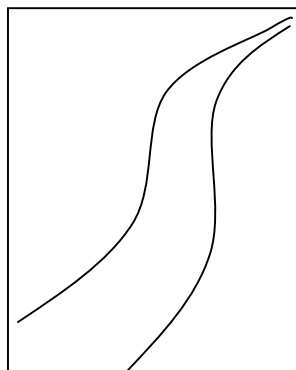
But there are some subjects which will lend themselves to a symmetrical composition. This will usually be the subjects which are symmetrical all by themselves. A ball is a great example, when shot in close-up. Other examples would be the front of a propeller, or a car tire and hubcap. In close, these lend themselves very nicely to symmetrical composition.



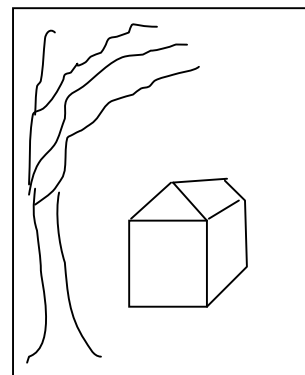
Leading The Eye

As a photographer, we want people to *look* at our images. We want them to not just take a glance at them, but to actually examine them. One technique which is very useful is to force the eye to take a predetermined path through the image. This is more commonly known as “leading” the eye. Some great ways to do this include:

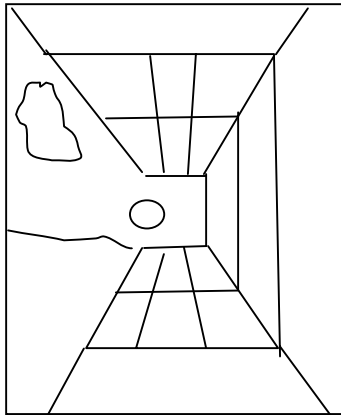
The “S” curve



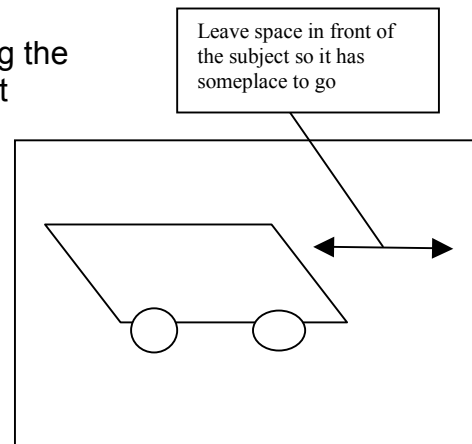
Framing



Converging Lines



Leading the Subject

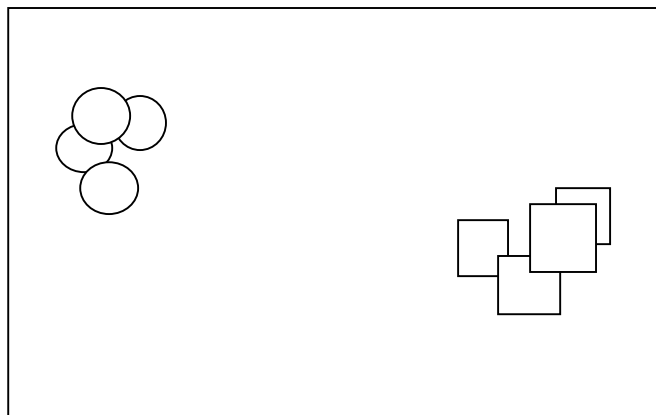


Go With The Subject

As new shooters, it is common to hold the camera in the horizontal position most of the time. However, not all subjects are horizontal. Some, such as people and trees, are already vertical and turning the camera so the frame is in a vertical position will allow you to take full advantage of the vertical aspects of your subject.

Using Balance

Balance is not necessarily symmetry. Balance includes taking unrelated subjects and putting them on opposite sides of the frame to “balance out” the weight of the image. As an example, below there is a frame with a set of circles (apples?) with a set of squares (boxes?). Also, they are not on the same horizontal plane. Notice how the image looks balanced, yet it is not symmetrical.



Abstracting The Subject

Like the old TV Series, "Out of Limits", you the photographer have full control over what the viewer of your image will see. You do not always need to capture the *entire* image. Sometimes a piece of it, even a very small piece of it, is all that will be necessary to create a dynamic shot. As an example, instead of shooting the entire basketball, get in real close and only catch a couple of the stripes and the nubs on the surface of the ball. Include one edge so there is the feeling of roundness and you have an abstract. This is another great aspect of photography. You can make an ordinary object extraordinary by just changing the perspective the viewer will see.

These are some of the basics for composing images. They are used by photographers and painters alike. Even motion picture and television will use some of these techniques. As you watch a movie on television over the next couple of days or weeks, see if you can find any of the compositional techniques presented here. Also, look at the work of other photographers and painters and see how they compose various images. Most of this work can be done with a quiet afternoon in your local public library. And don't be afraid to experiment. Although many things have already been tried, your unique way of looking at the world may present a new approach others have yet to see!

Have fun!