

Composition

Suitable composition is essential for effective image design. Experienced photographers will often break the rules to make a point or create a mood. Before breaking the rules, you should know and practice the basics. After that, you can begin to experiment.

To follow the **rule of thirds**, imagine that your camera's viewing screen is etched with grid lines, resembling a tic-tac-toe game. As you view your scene, place the subject at one of the intersecting points. Emphasize dramatic skies by placing the horizon low in the frame, along the lower line of your imaginary grid. If the sky is dull, but important to the story, place it at the higher line. In a portrait, place the most important element- the closest eye perhaps- at an interesting point in the frame.

Leave space for a moving object to "travel into"; if it's an inanimate subject at rest- such as an animal or a person- leave space for it to gaze into if it is not looking into the lens. In a scenic picture, persons should be less than 1/4 the height of the frame and looking at the centre of interest.

A **foreground frame**, such as an archway, gate, door, or branch can be used to strengthen the composition. In some cases, a large expanse of pale sky can be eliminated with a frame.

A framing device near the bottom of a picture can be equally useful to fill in empty spaces or eliminate clutter. Use care with depth of field; the framing object should be sharply rendered or completely blurred away. Don't overuse framing; it can become clichéd.

For landscapes, try to find **leading lines** that will take the viewer's eye into the image to the centre of interest- from left to right or bottom to top. Examples would be a road receding toward a mountain, the "S" curve of a river, or a series of fishing boats or rocks in the background at various distances from a village. A left to right diagonal movement of the eye or a "C" composition are considered very effective. There should be no strong unbroken horizontal line near the bottom of the photograph; this presents a "mental hazard" since the eye wants to enter a scenic picture from the bottom.

Try to find a clear **centre of interest** or an **interesting pattern**.

Balance large masses with smaller ones, with the large mass closer to the centre. (Think of a "see-saw".) Avoid placing the main object and secondary object on or near a vertical or horizontal line.

Fill the frame. Walk closer, use a longer lens, or crop to exclude superfluous elements. Choose a **camera orientation** that matches the lines in the subject (horizontal or vertical) and thus avoid wasted space at the edges of the frame.

Pay attention to **bright areas** which pull the viewer's eye away from the primary subject. Darken them in printing, or crop to eliminate them.

Check and double check the background for **mergers** (e.g. tree growing out of subject's head). Avoid contact mergers by separation or overlap. Avoid tone and colour mergers (e.g.. subject's dark hair blending into a dark background in a portrait).

Compose boldly. Consider other artistic components when looking for a picture in any vast scene. Look for the **rhythm** of repetitive elements, a dynamic **diagonal**, **contrasting colour**, **texture**, or **shape**, or a **unity of design**.