

Digital Photography

The Design and Composition of a Photograph: Checklist

There are countless possibilities that a photographer must consider when shooting a photograph. These are questions of design, composition, personal style, camera techniques and photo editing techniques.

1. What will you place within the rectangular frame?
2. How will you place it within the frame?
3. Should it fill the whole frame or just a part of it?
4. Should your subject be placed at the top, bottom, side or center?
5. Should you shoot the image horizontally or vertically?
6. Should the frame contain a single object or several?
7. What should you include in the foreground? Middle ground? Back ground?
8. Should you shoot in color or black and white?
9. What camera angle is best?
10. What type of lighting will work best?
11. Do you want to use asymmetrical or symmetrical balance?
12. Will the shot require editing?

Website Assignments: Provide answers on the back of this sheet.

1. Visit
http://photoinf.com/General/Lee_Frost/The_Art_of_Composition_-_Landscape.htm
Read the article, *The Art of Composition*, by Lee Frost. List and explain her 7 steps and why she feels each is important.
2. Visit
http://photoinf.com/General/Gloria_Hopkins/Photographic_Composition_Articles_-_Breaking_all_the_Rules.htm
Again, read the complete article, *Breaking the Rules*, by Gloria Hopkins. She takes 4 compositional guidelines and ignores them. Look carefully at each photo, read her comments, and tell me if you agree...why or why not?
3. Visit
http://photoinf.com/General/Theresa_Husarik/Photography_Tips_-_Composition_Refreshes_her.htm
Now you're getting it....READ the article, *Composition Refresher*, by Theresa Husarik. There are 12 labeled images. Click on 4 of your choice and summarize the explanation.

Classic Composition

Ever since Niepce made the world's first photograph circa 1827, photographers have concerned themselves with the best way to arrange the image they were capturing.

Commonsense rules and tips soon arose including such advice as “keep the horizon straight” and “avoid placing background objects so they seem to be growing out of the subjects' head.” Also, from the beginning, attempts were made to work out methods of composition based on aesthetic theory. Photographers known as **pictorialists** were very influential and their ideas linger on even today. They sought to achieve ideal beauty in their pictures and believed the best way to do this was to imitate the neoclassical or academic style of painting.

The pictorialists based their method on the “golden mean” of the Italian Renaissance. From this concept, they derived the famous “rule of thirds”. Other “rules” were: don't put the horizon line in the middle of the photo, every picture needs one center of interest, always lead the eye into the photo – not out of it – don't place the principal subject in the center of the photograph.

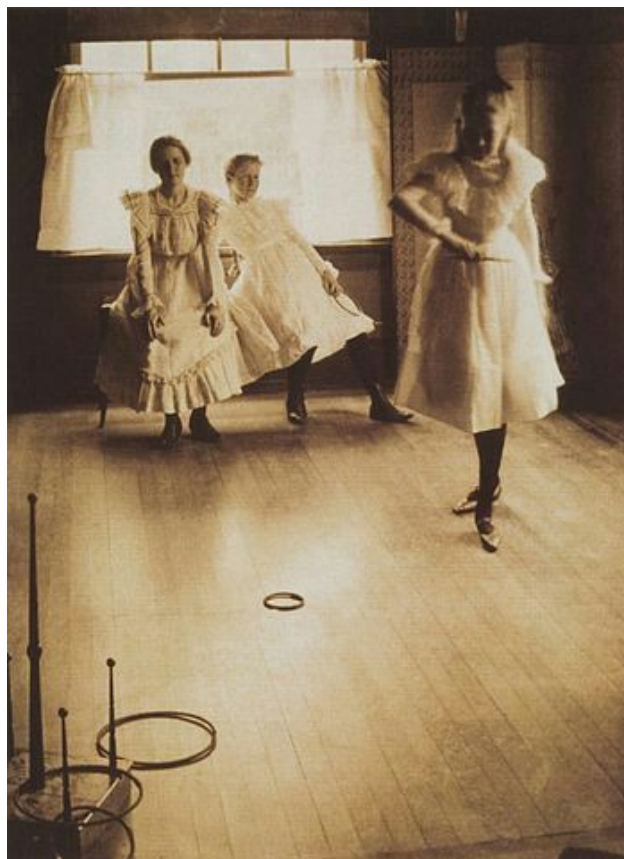
The Bridge, Venice, by Alvin Langdon Coburn, 1908 exemplifies pictorialist composition. It has one principal center of interest – the woman crossing the bridge. She is located in the top one-third, left one-third part of the picture. The curved reflection of the bridge in the water and its arch above lead the eye to the woman, the focal point.



Adolf De Meyer, 1907 achieved a powerful simplicity in the close up still life while rigorously adhering to the compositional rule of thirds.



Ring Toss, Clarence H. White , 1899.



Decline of Pictorialism

Pictorialists ranks once included such masters as Alfred Stieglitz, Edward Steichen, Alvin Coburn and Clarence White, all of whom produced powerful images and **fostered the establishment of photography as fine art.**

However, pictorialism's influence declined long ago for many reasons. It overemphasized the importance of composition as an end in itself producing images of "compositional clichés". But, most crucial, its imitative, painterly approach became increasingly inadequate as photography evolved its own way, dramatically expanding the human vision and altering perceptions of the world.

Photographers increasingly rejected the structures of classical notions about composition to explore uniquely photographic ways of seeing that totally ignored pictorial composition.

Breaking the Rules: Henri Cartier-Bresson (next 3 photographs)





William Kline



Whether you like classical or contemporary composition, an effective composition uses the basic visual elements and principles of design to form a compelling image. Composition that works is not strictly enforced by a set of rules, but arises from the needs and opportunities of the situation. Attempt to get the effect you want using pictorial style or contemporary trends. Most importantly, put something of yourself in the photographs you make – they'll mean more to you and the persons viewing them.

Composition Review

1. Define/explain composition **in your own words**.
2. What is meant by “the center of interest” and why is this important .
3. Why should you avoid busy backgrounds?
4. Fully explain the “rule of thirds” and how this concept originated.
5. Why is “framing” an important compositional device?
6. Which do you think is more effective – symmetrical or asymmetrical balance? Why?
7. View the photo by Adolf De Meyer. What other compositional elements are evident in the photograph?
8. View **Ring Toss** by Clarence White. List and explain all the classic compositional devices in the photograph.
9. What was the major achievement of Pictorialism?.