

Digital Photography

Composition: the most important factor in creating a successful photograph and developing a personal style.

What is Composition?

Composition is the start of the photographic process on the creative side. Composition refers to the way you select and organize the visual details of your photograph to convey meaning.

Composition is the placement of elements within the frame of the photo. Compositions may be very straightforward or very complex. However, trying to cram too much within the border of a photo will result in a loss of unity – the viewer is confused and cannot tell what the photographer was trying to communicate.

The Functions of Composition:

Effective composition means that the pictorial elements have been selected, emphasized and used in such a way that the central idea of the photographer is communicated to the viewer. To achieve this, you must decide what to include and what to eliminate.

To make your photograph a work of art it should convey a feeling or evoke a response from the viewer. This means that your photograph will be about something, some single object or subject or group of objects will stand out as the reason for the photo. This subject will dominate or appear to be the most significant, interesting part of the photo. This is called the *center of interest or the focal point of the photo*.

Will every photo you take have a center of interest? Not necessarily. Photographs may be successful based on their tonal values or rhythmic qualities alone, where pattern or texture become the dominant theme of the photo.

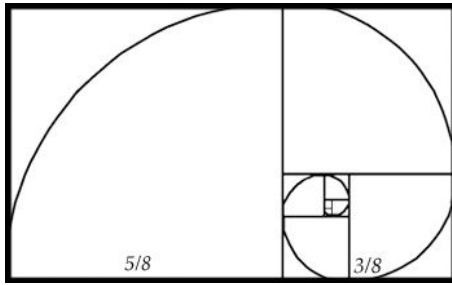
General Compositional Guidelines:

1. Rule of Thirds

One of the most important guidelines to emphasize the center of interest is the *rule of thirds*. Conceived by the ancient Greek, Pythagoras, this is the most recognized and applied compositional theory. When the frame is divided into three parts horizontally and vertically, the lines of intersection are ideal or “natural” placement points for the dominant element in the photo. When you place elements of your composition along these lines or six points of intersection, the image will appear well composed. The rule of thirds, golden mean, golden spiral and golden triangle all embody the same basic principle, which is about balance, effective use of the frame and drawing the viewer to the key points of the composition. Classic composition never places the horizon line in the center of the photo, but one of the thirds. This is called *splitting the frame* equally between the foreground and sky. Also, be careful of placing your center of interest in the exact center of the photo.



Rule of Thirds



Golden Spiral



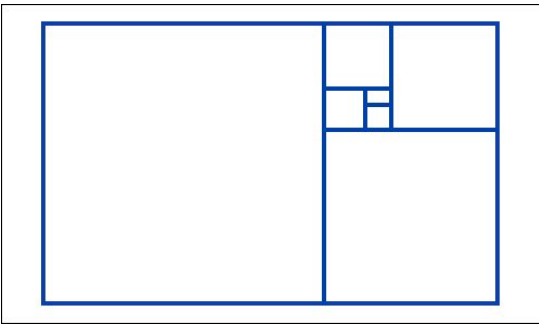
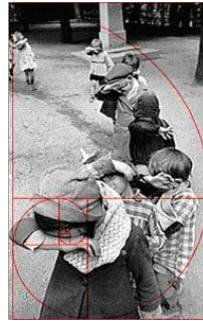
Golden Spiral



Golden Spiral



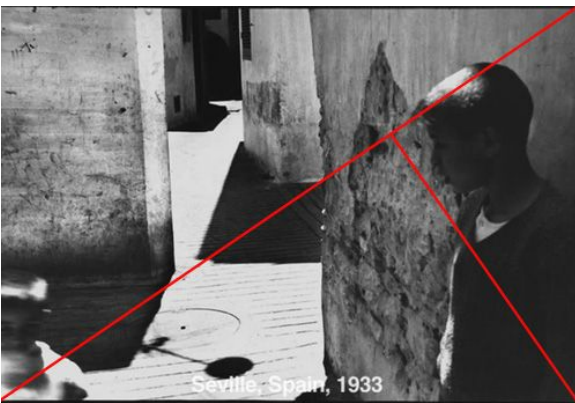
Golden Spiral



Golden Mean



Golden Mean



Golden Triangles

2. Simplified Background

A simple, uncluttered background will create a complete focus of attention on the subject (your center of interest). There may be nothing in the background or it may be deliberately blurred.

3. Movement into the Frame

The direction in which a subject faces or moves creates a space expectation on the part of the viewer, whose eye is drawn in the direction of the movement. Unless adequate space is provided, the viewer's eye tends to move beyond the frame and away from your photo. Class composition believes that to give emphasis to your subject, usually you should provide a space within the frame for your subject to look into, face into, or move into.



4. Control of Detail

Select the details that are to be included and excluded from your photo. One common mistake is including too much detail. Try to eliminate details that distract the viewer from the central idea or the center of interest. Avoid busy backgrounds and watch for mergers, an element usually in the background such as a tree directly behind your subject.

Another method of emphasizing or not emphasizing details in a photo is to control their *relative sharpness*. Use your lens (or editing software) to blur backgrounds while keeping your center of interest sharp (focused).



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5. Dominance

Controlling the *relative size* is another way of creating emphasis or dominance. Larger objects will stand out more than smaller ones.

6. Contrast

A bright object stands out against a dark background; a dark object against a light background.



7. Angle of View

When a photo is shot from a normal eye position with the axis of the camera parallel to the ground, it is called an eye-level shot. Although this may be the most natural, it can also be very common-place and boring. Dramatic effects can be achieved by low angle (called worm's eye), high angle (birds eye view) and tilted camera.



6. Leading Lines, Eye Flow

Leading lines may be actual lines, such as roads, fences or implied lines such as two people looking at each other. Leading lines will lead the viewer (eye flow) through the photo or to the center of interest.

An "S" curve line is a wavy or curved line – a stream, swan's neck or a winding road.



Perspective is similar to leading lines, however the lines must converge or appear to come together.

7. Framing

Framing is a compositional device which not only “frames” your subject, but also creates a sense of scale. The classic example is an overhanging tree branch, a doorway or window.



8. Balance

Creates a sense of stability in a photo. Balance may be *symmetrical or asymmetrical*.

Symmetrical balance is a type of balance in which objects or subject matter are repeated in a mirror like fashion on each side of the central axis. Students often refer to asymmetrical balance as “off-centered” meaning that the center of interest is on one side or the other, but is balanced by an equally visual weight.

