

COMPOSITION BASICS

STOP!! DON'T CLICK THAT SHUTTER BUTTON!

Before you shoot anything, think about the composition you are about to create. Below are some suggestions to consider before you take the photograph.

As a place to start your composition ask yourself 3 questions:

1. What is the main subject of my image?

- The most prominent object, theme or topic

2. How do I emphasize the main subject?

- Isolate the subject
- Use motion blur (slow shutter speed)
- Use fast shutter speed to freeze motion
- Use selective focusing
- Subject placement within frame
- Get close and fill frame with subject

3. What do I leave out of my image?

- All things that are irrelevant to the main subject
- All things that detract from the main subject
- Look out for cluttered foregrounds and backgrounds
- Watch for distractions: trees growing out of people's heads;
- Rivers and fences running through ears, etc.,

Everyone is in a hurry to take pictures. The real battle is in learning to take real photographs, ones that really matter and this always comes down to composition. Handling the gear is easy by comparison.

Composition is all about the arrangement of elements within the viewfinder's frame, to evoke emotion from the viewer of the final image. What attracts us to great photographic images?

- They make us
- wrinkle our brow -
- smile -
- feel happy -
- feel sad -
- feel peaceful -
- feel disturbed -
- feel angry -

- feel like laughing -
- feel shocked.

If a photograph can evoke any of these emotions, it can be said to have Impact. The basis of impact in a photographic image is placement and possibly enhancement of that subject, within the viewfinder frame of the camera.

Composition refers to the arrangement of line, shape and contrast within the frame of the photographic Image. Effective composition arranges the elements, (objects, colors, horizons, patterns, etc.,) that show the viewer your personal world view of the subject. It is a matter of knowing what to leave out of the image. The greatest influence on our reaction to a photograph is the position of the main centre of interest. This should almost never be placed at dead-centre in the frame, as any sense of implied movement dissolves. The result is usually static and boring.

Very specific to stock photography are the Rule of thirds, and allowing for copy-space (leaving room for text)

The rule of thirds comes into its own when using subject placement within the frame- Imagine your camera viewfinder with a nine-segment grid (like a tic-tac-toe, (Noughts and crosses)) grid

The most aesthetically pleasing position to site your subject will be on one of the four intersections of this imaginary grid, which also gives you two horizontal guides, and two vertical guides. There are many ways of using this imaginary grid:

- Horizontal lines are used to place horizons- 1/3 down from top for earthy renditions, and 1/3 up from bottom for more dreamy effects.
 - You can use vertical lines for positioning trees, poles, vertical subjects
 - When filling the frame with, for instance, a head-shot, eyes should be placed 1/3 of the way down from the top
 - For landscapes, you can use this imaginary grid-by focusing on the 1/3 up from bottom gridline, you will be correctly focusing 1/3 into your distance, as you should be for landscapes
- There are many elements to consider when composing your images, such as:

Position of horizon

Framing

Line

Perspective

Depth

Balance

Color

Contrast

Shape

Pattern

Tone

Viewpoint

Brightness

Scale

Shock

The photographic image's frame doesn't just come from the edges of your viewfinder. Be careful that framing the things surrounding the main subject doesn't trap the subject, or detract from it. Don't use if the image doesn't require it. Lines, in the image have a certain effect on how the viewer's eye travels through the photograph:

Implied lines, always straight, between interacting objects, or between an object and whatever is ahead of it.

Upright lines give feelings of strength and balance throughout the image.

Curved lines convey peaceful movement, but the steeper the curve, the more tension and force.

Diagonal lines give feelings of action and dynamism.

Perspective lines show dynamic movement in the direction of the lines

Jagged lines convey unhurried and peaceful movement.

It's the control of composition that determines the "WOW" factor in photography, and it is very important, if you are going to take worthwhile photographs, to master that control. Where Lighting and Exposure, are pure technique, or the science of photography, Composition is the art of photography.

Creativity is the understanding and manipulation of composition elements within the frame of the camera's viewfinder.

On Seeing Creatively:

Developing a creative eye is about seeing things in a different way. A personal visual focus rather than obvious point of view. When we first use a camera we take pictures of all the obvious things around us, landmarks, people we know, family pets, etc., and after some time taking these mundane, overdone subjects, boredom starts to take effect (hopefully) and if we get bored enough, we, (well, some of us anyway) tend to look further than the obvious for our photographic endeavors, hopefully encouraging us to present our personal view of the World. Remember back when you were a kid?, where anything could be whatever you imagined it to be? As we age we develop set-in-concrete ideas of how something should look, and that's where the problem lies. How about, (photographically, anyway,) going back in your imagination to that child-like innocence, and start looking at things the way you decide how they should appear? What would a worm see- if it looked up? Or a bird-looking down- I recall reading somewhere a woman and her 3-year old were out shopping, in a department store, at Christmas-time, and the child was crying. "what's up with you?" the mother asked," We are here in this beautiful shop, and we are going to buy some nice things to take home with us-look at all the lovely things they have here". She looked down and noticed the child's shoelace was undone. In bending down to re-tie the child's shoelace, she understood why the crying- all the child could see from his height, was a forest of grown-up's legs-he couldn't see all the beautiful Christmas decorations or gifts- he wasn't tall enough to see above the counters. Here's a challenge: Spend a day taking photos of everyday things from a height of 600mm to 800mm, how a small child would view them. isolate part of an overall scene, using the camera's viewfinder -Show things how they are not normally viewed. Use light creatively, to show texture, give mood or to produce silhouetted shapes. Use

telephoto lenses for landscapes-wide angle lenses for portraits - take photos into the sun - take pictures while jumping in the air -

Place horizons where you want them to be. After a while creative vision becomes as natural as breathing, and when this occurs, you can concentrate on capturing the moment : The peak of action -a fleeting glance- certain lighting conditions. Learn all the “Rules” of composition-then see how many you can break, while still communicating powerful images. Try not focusing on the point of interest, instead focus on shape, or form. Decide what you want to emphasize-what message you want to convey to the viewer. Look for pictures within pictures. Try looking at a scene through a 28mm wide-angle lens, change to a 200mm telephoto lens, and see how many different pictures you can isolate within that scene.

Working the subject

Instead of just taking the one picture from the angle you first saw it, try “Working the subject”, that is, cover the subject from as many angles as you can, to get the best from each photo opportunity. Here’s a checklist:

- From the front
- From behind
- From the left
- From the right
- From up close
- From far away
- From above
- From below
- Capture detail
- Unusual angles
- Into the light
- Include foreground

Maybe after all of this you just might get a photograph to come close to your vision and to WOW your viewer.

Just be patient. Remember your first 10,000 photos will be your worst!