

## Camera Composition

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The arrangement of elements and their relationship to the background of an image.

Compose pictures that get attention and deliver your message.

In general, good pictures result from careful attention to some basic elements of composition, together with appropriate lighting and an interesting subject. There is, however, no "right" way to take a picture. Three photographers recording the same scene may create equally appealing photographs with entirely different composition.

*The important question to ask is - "What message do I want my picture to deliver?"*

### Here are a few basic guidelines to get you started:

#### Point of Interest

Identify a primary point of interest before taking the picture. When you've determined which area is the most important to you, you can compose to emphasize it. (Studying advertising photographs is a good way to get acquainted with emphasis in composition.)

#### Simplicity

Be sure that only the things you want the viewer to see appear in the picture. If there are numerous objects cluttering up the background, your message will be lost. If you can't find an angle or framing to isolate your subject, consider using depth of field control to keep the background out of focus.



#### Contrast

A light subject will have more impact if placed against a dark background and vice versa. Contrasting colors may be used for emphasis, but can become distracting if not considered carefully.



#### Balance

Generally, asymmetric or informal balance is considered more pleasing in a photograph than symmetric (formal) balance. In other words, placing the main subject off-center and balancing the "weight" with other objects (smaller or lower impact) will be more effective than placing the subject in the center.



#### Framing

A "frame" in a photograph is something in the foreground that leads you into the picture or gives you a sense of where the viewer is. For example, a branch and some leaves framing a shot of rolling hills and a valley, or the edge of an imposing rock face leading into a shot of a canyon. Framing can usually improve a picture. The "frame" doesn't need to be sharply focused. In fact if it is too sharply detailed, it could be a distraction.



## Viewpoint

You can often change a picture dramatically by moving the camera up or down or, stepping to one side. One of the best ways to come up with a prize-winning photograph is to find an "unusual" point of view.



## Direction of Movement

When the subject is capable of movement, such as an animal or person, it is best to leave space in front of the subject so it appears to be moving into, rather than out of, the photograph.



## Diagonals

Linear elements such as roads, waterways, and fences placed diagonally are generally perceived as more dynamic than horizontal.

## Rule of Thirds

Last, but not least, is something called the "rule of thirds." This is a principle taught in graphic design and photography and is based on the theory that the eye goes naturally to a point about two-thirds up the page. Also, by visually dividing the image into thirds (either vertically or horizontally) you achieve the informal or asymmetric balance mentioned above.



Although there are many ways a photograph can be composed effectively by basing it on the use of "thirds," the most common example is the placement of the horizon line in landscape photography.

If the area of interest is land or water, the horizon line will usually be two-thirds up from the bottom. On the other hand, if the sky is the area of emphasis, the horizon line may be one-third up from the bottom, leaving the sky to occupy the top two-thirds.



*Remember that these are only guidelines, not hard and fast "rules." While a novice can achieve quality output quickly with these guidelines, experienced photographers who know the rules often find very creative ways to break them, with excellent results.*