

iMAG



Photographic Composition

Introduction

Introduction



One of the main reasons why some pictures are better than others is because of their strong composition. That's what this presentation is all about. We're going to explore how composition can improve your photographs.

Introduction



Think of composition as a pleasing selection and arrangement of subjects within the picture area. Some arrangements are made by placing figures or objects in certain positions. Others are made by choosing a point of view. You can shift your camera very slightly and make quite a change in composition.

Introduction



After you've learned the guidelines, you'll realize that well-composed pictures often take careful planning and sometimes patient waiting.

Guidelines

- **Simplicity**
- **Rule of Thirds**
- **Lines**
- **Balance**
- **Framing**
- **Mergers**

You'll find that these composition guidelines will become part of your thinking when you're looking for pictures, and soon they will become second nature to you.

Introduction



Photographic composition is an expression of your natural sense of design. These guidelines will help you sharpen your natural sense of composition and take better pictures.

Simplicity

Simplicity



What is the subject?
Cactus?
Telephone?
Bridge?

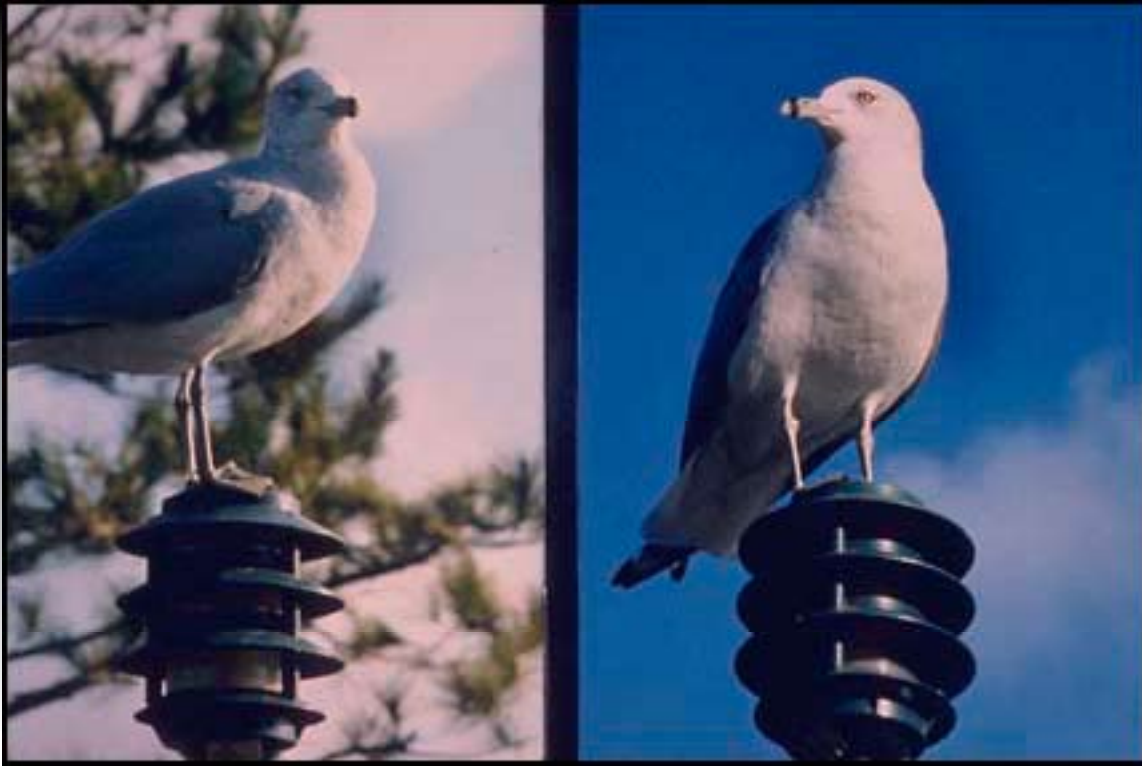
The first guideline is **simplicity**. Look for ways to give the center of interest in your pictures the most visual attention. One way is to select uncomplicated backgrounds that will not steal attention from your subjects. Let's see how we can improve this photo by looking for visual simplicity. First, let's decide if we want our center of interest to be the public telephone, the bridge, or the cactus.

Simplicity



We chose the cactus as the main subject. And by moving in closer and using the plain sky as the background, we have simplified and improved the appearance of this photograph.

Simplicity



Compare these two pictures of the same subject. The busy background on the left camouflages the seagull. See how the one on the right is simpler and better.

Simplicity



Compose your photograph so that the subject is obvious. See how eliminating the parking lot makes the purpose of the picture easier to understand.

Simplicity



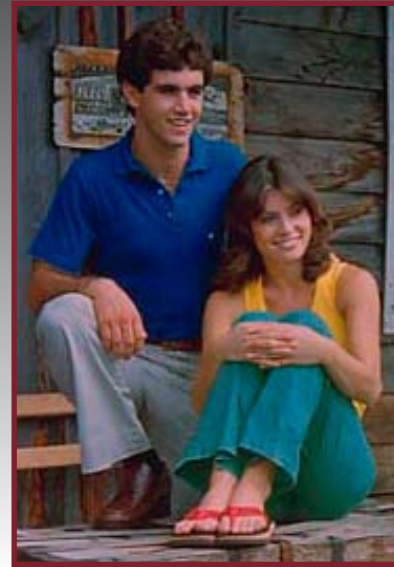
Remember: we're talking about composition simplicity, and here's another decision you'll probably have to make. How much of your subject should you include, and should it be framed horizontally as we have done here?

Simplicity



Another way to compose this picture is inside a vertical frame.

Simplicity



Take a look at these two compositions again. Which one do you prefer? Which tells a better story? Remember, a **far shot** shows the subject and the scene, and a **medium shot** shows only the subject.

Simplicity



So, you can simplify your pictures and strengthen your center of interest by selecting uncomplicated backgrounds, avoiding unrelated subjects, and moving in close. If you want to make your center of interest even more dynamic, place it slightly off center in your frame as we have done with this young artist.

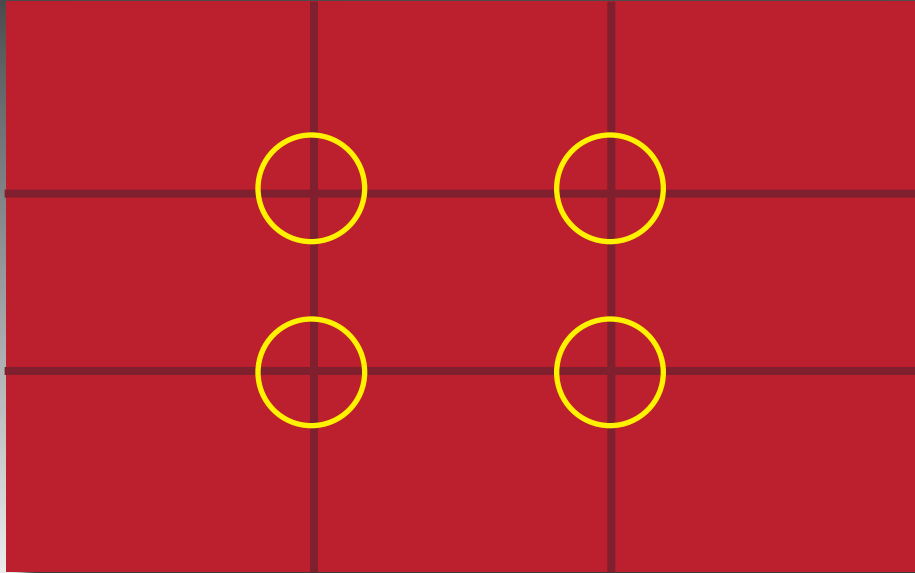
Simplicity



Generally, pictures with subjects directly in the center tend to be more static and less interesting than pictures with off-center subject placement.

Rule of thirds

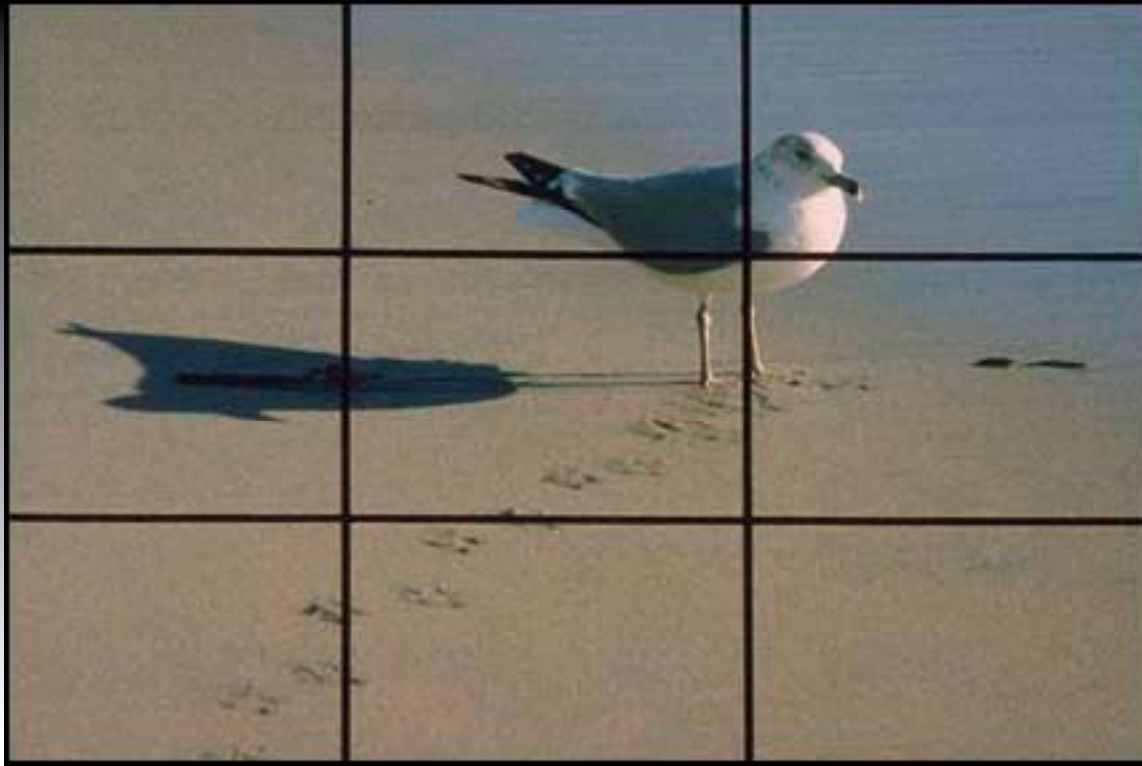
Rule of thirds



You can use the **rule of thirds** as a guide in the off-center placement of your subjects. Here's how it works.

Before you snap the picture, imagine your picture area divided into thirds both horizontally and vertically. The intersections of these imaginary lines suggest four options for placing the center of interest for good composition. The option you select depends upon the subject and how you would like that subject to be presented.

Rule of thirds



We picked the upper-right position for this subject so that we could see the full shadow and most of the tracks that lead to the seagull.

Rule of thirds



The lighthouse seems well placed in the upper right just because the rest of the scene fits nicely into the format.

Rule of thirds



Here's a case where you have excellent subject control. You can have the model pose anywhere along the walkway. The rule of thirds indicates this placement which also gives the model a definite path to follow within the picture area.

Rule of thirds



You should always consider the path of moving subjects and, generally, leave space in front of them into which they can move.

Rule of thirds



If you don't, here's what can happen! This jogger looks like she's going to run right out of the picture.

Rule of thirds



By placing the subject in the lower-left position, we've used the rule of thirds and given the jogger plenty of room to run within the picture.

Rule of thirds



Here's another action shot where it's important to leave more space in front of a moving subject than behind it.

Rule of thirds



You can also apply the rule of thirds guidelines to the placement of the horizon in your photos. Here the center position of the boat and horizon results in a static feeling.

Rule of thirds



Let's move the horizon to the upper third and the sailboat to the left. Remember, these are the only guidelines. So if you don't like this subject placement, try another.

Rule of thirds



Like this. We've moved the horizon line to the lower third. In general, place the horizon high or low in your scenes, and avoid in the middle.

Rule of thirds



Just as it's usually best to place horizons off center, it's also best to place verticals off center. For instance, in the picture on the left, the subject is centered, but on the right, the photographer got a more effective photograph by simply changing the viewpoint.

Lines

Lines



Lines also play an important role in composition. This sculpture has some beautiful lines, but they're obscured by the busy background. Let's simplify this picture by moving our camera viewpoint in close to the base of the sculpture. Now we can look up and see the lines against a clear blue sky. the picture on the right is much more dynamic because of the strong diagonal lines.

Lines



Imagine this view without the diagonal rays of sunlight and you'll probably agree: diagonal lines are dynamic!

Lines



You can use diagonals as leading lines to provide a way into the picture. It's a simple and easy path for the eye to follow to the main subject.

Lines



You can also use repetitive lines to draw viewers' attention to your center of interest.



One of the most common and graceful lines used in composition is called the **S curve**.



Here's another S curve that forms a diagonal leading line. This picture is also improved with a well-placed center of interest, and the result is a photograph that's easy to look at.



Here's what we're looking for. The flamingo has relaxed, and his neck now forms a pleasing S curve against a better background. So, the S curve is an attractive shape to look for when you compose a photograph.

Lines



Geometric
shapes

You can use other simple geometric shapes to help your picture composition. Can you see the triangle you get by connecting imaginary lines between the three figures? This triangle adds strong visual unity to this picture.

Lines



Notice how many triangles are formed by this couple and their reflections. You can help yourself develop an artistic eye by studying pictures to find the strength of their lines, geometric shapes, and balance.

Balance

Balance

Achieving good balance is another one of our guidelines for better picture composition. Notice how the leaves, the window, and the couple all seem to be in the right place. The camera viewpoint and subject placement were all carefully selected to create this well-balanced photograph.



Balance



Good balance is simply the arrangement of shapes, colors, or areas of light and dark that complement one another so that the photograph looks well-balanced, not...

Balance



...lopsided like this. Karen looks like she's going to fall right out of the picture due to lack of visible support.

Balance



Now we've moved our camera viewpoint and have included the much-needed wheel to support our subject. Karen is still off center, but the picture is balanced.

Balance



Imagine that these two couples are standing at either end of a pair of scales. They are evenly balanced, so this is a classic example of **symmetrical balance**.

Balance



Here's an example of **asymmetrical balance**. The large single head balances the smaller child on the right. In general this type of balance is more interesting to look at than symmetrical balance.

Balance



For example, this is a balanced photograph, but the subjects can be separated into two vertical pictures - which tends to divide the viewer's attention.

Balance



There are usually several ways to arrange or balance your subjects. You may choose the style on the left because you'd like to convey a feeling of formality - or you may prefer the more relaxed informal pose. They're both well balanced.

Framing

Framing



No, this is not what we mean by **framing**, although the principle is the same.

Framing



What we mean is to frame the center of interest with objects in the foreground. This can give a picture the feeling of depth it needs to make it more than just another snapshot.

Framing



Whether or not you use a frame for a picture will depend on each new subject. What you choose as a frame for the scene will, of course, vary as well.

Framing



The Washington Monument on the left is composed in the center without a frame. The picture on the right has a stronger feeling of depth and tells a more complete story because the photographer chose an appropriate foreground to complement the Washington Monument.

Framing



The horses and their riders add considerable foreground interest to this scene. The overhanging tree branches complete the frame and add depth to the subject. When you use people for scale and foreground, make sure they look into the picture area.

Framing



Both of these interpretations of the Iwo Jima Monument effectively use framing for added dimension and interest.

No matter what subjects you choose to photograph, you should avoid mergers.

Avoid

Mergers

Mergers



The **merger** of this tree with Dave's head is so obvious, you probably think no one could avoid seeing it before snapping the shutter. Remember: we see things in three dimensions, so it's easier than you might guess to focus our eyes on the principal subject only and not see the background at all.

Mergers



Avoiding mergers is our sixth guideline for better composition. You can be sure the camera always sees mergers, so look for plain backgrounds before you pose your subject. In this case the correction was simple because the two settings were only a few feet apart.

Mergers



This is a fun picture, but when we cut people in half or trim their head or feet, we've committed a **border merger**. This is often caused by poor alignment of the photographer's eye in the camera viewfinder. To avoid border mergers, line your eye up squarely behind the viewfinder and adjust the picture format to leave a little space around everyone.

Mergers



Near mergers may not be quite as objectionable, but they can steal attention from your center of interest. Near mergers are objects or lines that are just too close to the principal subject. In this case the ball and umbrella tip seem to merge into one.

Mergers



Compare the two photos.

By changing the angle, the picture becomes more dynamic and interesting.

Prize winners

Prize winners

Now let's look at a few prize winning photos and see why the judges gave them such high scores.

In this picture, the photographer arranged the subjects in a simple, well-balanced composition. he also made good use of diagonal lines.



Prize winners



By getting really close, the texture and facial expression of the subject is emphasized.



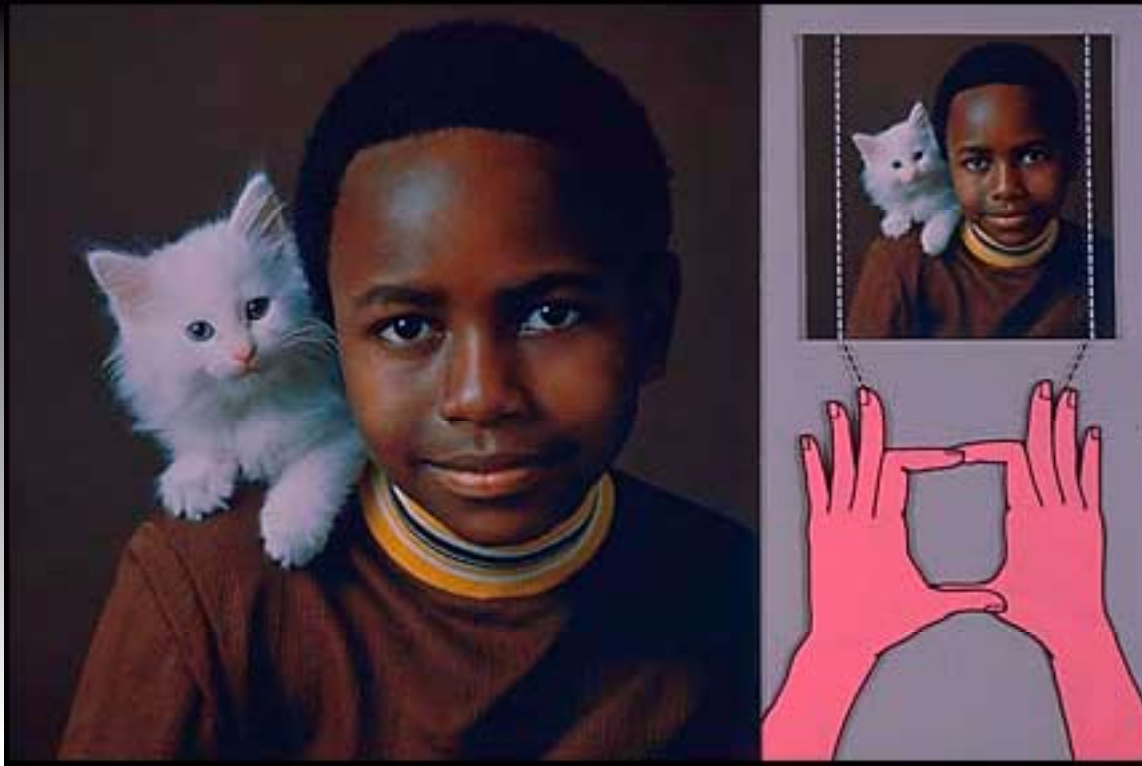
This picture of a frog is an excellent example of a close-up. It makes good use of simplicity and, despite its centrally placed horizon, it has viewer impact.

Cropping



Here is an example that shows that cropping will often improve the composition.

Cropping



This picture is cropped to a square format. Is that really the way you'd like it? To see if you'd like to change its proportions, hold your hands out in front of you and try cropping this as a vertical. You've probably seen artists do this. Now try a horizontal cropping. this is a good way to look at pictures, improve them, and develop your photographic eye.

Cropping



Horizontal
cropping

Here's a simple cropping guideline. Include the portions of your subject that you feel are most interesting and important. For instance, you may like this portrait of Pat in a square format, or cropped to a horizontal.

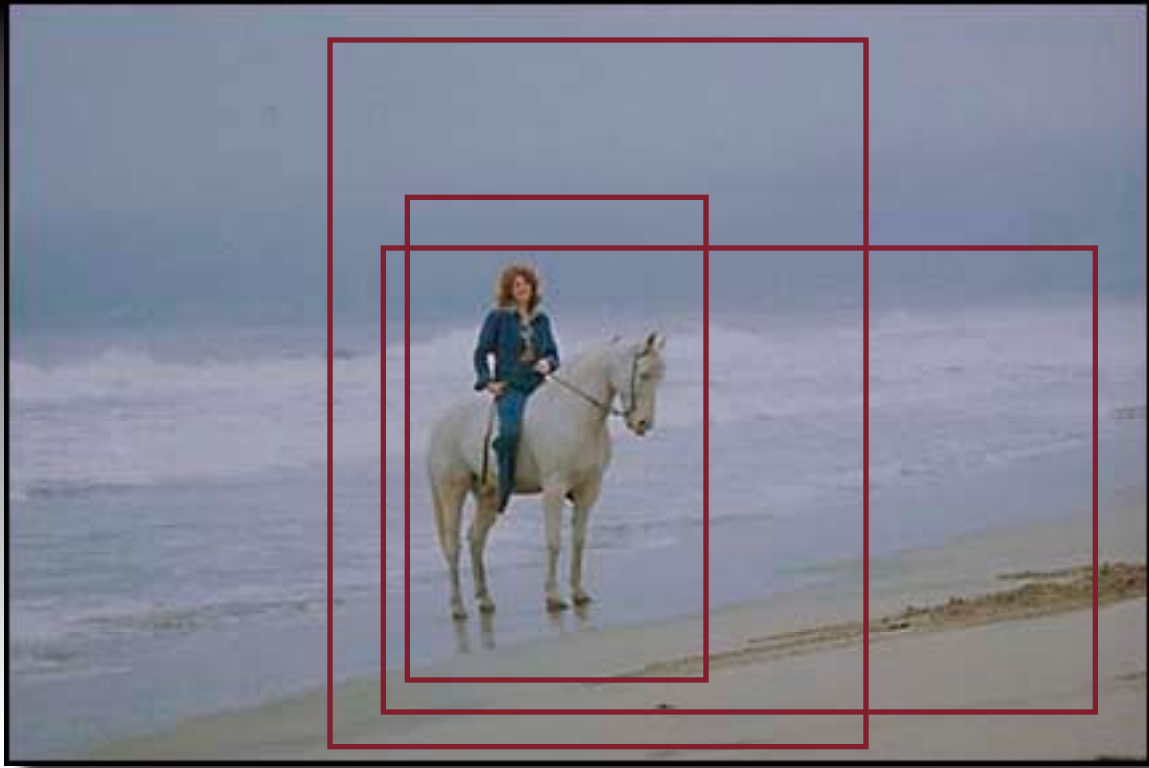
Cropping



Vertical
cropping

However, many people prefer portraits of individuals that are cropped vertically. The subjects seem to fit better. The choice, of course, is yours.

Cropping



Here's a photograph that has simplicity and a strong center of interest. The photographer composed it with plenty of extra space around the subject to permit a variety of print croppings. How would you crop this picture - horizontal or vertical? and where would you place the center of interest?

Decisions

Decisions



Are those flags really needed? Do the flags contribute to the composition of the picture? Hold a pencil up in front of you and block out the flags. What do you think? Can you explain why the flags help or hinder good composition?

Decisions



Which of these views do you prefer? Can you explain why?

You be the judge.



Do you think this picture shows an effective use of composition and why?



Do you think this picture shows an effective use of composition and why?



Do you think this picture shows an effective use of composition and why?



Review the information in this presentation and complete the questions on your study guide.