

MAKING IMAGES WITH IMPACT

Adding the “Wow Factor” through Composition

We are drawn to certain images more than others. Why? In my opinion it has to do with the use of composition more than anything else. I would like to go over the rules of composition, and help you to see how they make stronger, more exciting photos, and photos with the “Wow Factor.”

Photographic composition is simply the selection and arrangement of subjects within the image area.

First you learn the rules for good composition. After you learn the rules, you’ll realize that most photographs with good composition take careful planning and sometimes require patience. You’ll find that the rules of composition will become part of your planning when you are creating new images and soon they will become second nature.

Strong Center of Interest, Rule of Thirds

Have one strong center of interest. You may want to include a secondary subject, but make sure that it doesn’t take away from the main subject.

Avoid putting the center of interest in the center of the picture. If the main subject is dead center, it looks static and uninteresting. It is much better to place your center of interest according to the rule of thirds. Divide your viewfinder into thirds both vertically and horizontally, then place your subject at one of the four places where the lines intersect. Choose the position in frame according to the needs of the subject.

When placing the horizon line, place it either in the upper third or lower third but usually not in the exact center of the image.

Keep It Simple

Aim for an easily identified single subject, with an uncluttered background. Check out the background as you look through the viewfinder. Your audience will see any distracting elements, so try to eliminate them before you take the photo.

Line

Use line to create interest and lead viewers’ eyes to the subject. Roads and shadows can be used, for example. Carefully choose angles to enhance the image. Shadows are ever changing, so patience may be necessary.

Balance

Balance can be formal or informal, but images should be balanced left to right and top to bottom.

Framing

Frame the subject within the photo to create interest and depth. Tree branches, windows, doorways all make great frames.

Light

Use light for correct exposure and to create interest, mood and contrast.

With front lighting, the sun shines directly on the subject. The subject will appear flat.

With side lighting, the sun shines on the side of the subject, which creates texture and depth. Side lighting can be more flattering on human subjects than front lighting.

With backlighting, the sun shines on the back of the subject, directly into the camera. Use flash or reflected light (large white or silver reflectors) to light up subjects and their faces.

Avoid Mergers

Unnecessary objects in a photo will interfere with the main subject.

Color merger occurs when there is not enough color separation between the subject and the background. They blend together, e.g., black cat against a dark background.

Background mergers when an object in the background merges with the subject, e.g., a telephone pole or tree appears to be growing out of someone's head.

These are the basics on composition. Take time to study your favorite photographers' work. Look at photo books and study photos in magazines like National Geographic. Visit art shows and museums. Then practice taking photos incorporating the rules of composition.