

## NOTES ON 1/23/2019 PRESENTATION:

### PHOTOGRAPHY COMPOSITION: IT'S PURPOSE, RULES AND SUGGESTIONS By Steven Kessler

Composition is: arranging, creating, seeing, framing, and cropping. It guides the viewer to see the point or story or message of the photograph. The "point" may simply be an aesthetically pleasing scene, or something containing a more complex story. Even a visually disturbing or discordant outcome is the result of the maker's efforts in composition.

#### You - not your camera - Create Composition:

- Three of the basic ingredients to a good photographer:
  - Knowledge of your camera/gear & its controls
  - Your eye for composition
  - Your artistic vision

Today's cameras have such amazing technology - can do almost everything BUT make a great photograph for you.

- That "but" refers to composition. Composition is 100% dependent on your efforts as the photographer.
- A good picture is not something that cannot be achieved by buying updated or expensive photography gear.
- Even the world's best composition can be ruined because the image is out of focus, badly over or underexposed, or the victim of some poorly chosen camera settings.
- And, on the flip side of that coin, a photographer can make a technically perfect image with a composition that is sorely lacking - the outcome - a less interesting or poor photo.

#### Some Elements Of Photographic Composition:

These include...

- Lines - lines and edges that the eye follows within the photo.

- Color - the variety of colors - and intensities/brightness of each. Or lack of color in Black and White where tones play this role.
- Shape - This can be any closed shape. It doesn't matter if it's a bird, or a plane, or Superman, it is a two-dimensional representation of something we recognize.
- Form - a two or three dimensional structure
- Tone - shade and light defining 'form' helping the eye to see in 3D.
- Texture & Patterns- the surface detail of 'shapes' or 'forms' that help the eye have the feel of the real thing.
- Space
  - Positive space - the space occupied by a shape or form.
  - Negative space - the space between shapes or forms.
- Depth - the viewer's perception of distance between 'foreground' and 'background' in the picture.
- Sharpness - the degree to which an object or particular part of the picture is sharp or blurred.

### THE RULE OF THIRDS:

- Think about what elements of the photo are most important, and try to position them at or near the lines and intersections of the rule of thirds grid.
- Unless you are taking a portrait, often a good idea to position people off to one side of the frame. This provides some "breathing space", shows the subject's environment, and can stop the photo from looking like a "mugshot".
- We are naturally drawn to people's eyes. Placing eyes at one of the intersections on the rule of thirds grid to give the shot a clearer focal point.

### BALANCING ELEMENTS IN THE PHOTO:

- Balance: when elements in photo are arranged in a way that feels natural and pleasing to the eye. A well-balanced composition feels harmonious while an unbalanced one can feel "off" and less engaging or distracting.
- Every element in your photo has a "visual weight", which is affected by things like its size, contrast, color, tone and texture.

**Symmetrical Balance:** Not all balanced photographs are symmetrical, but all symmetrical photographs are balanced. Symmetry is achieved when both sides have equal weight.

#### **Asymmetrical Balance:**

- trickier to achieve but can produce a very interesting photo. More subtle but still gives a harmonious feel to the image.
- When arranging a photo asymmetrically, place the main subject off-center, perhaps using a different compositional technique like the rule of thirds. If the image still feels unbalanced, place one or more secondary subjects in the remaining space.

#### **LEADING LINES:**

- In a photo our eye is naturally drawn along its lines. How you place these leading lines in your composition affects how we view the image, pulling us into the picture, towards the subject, or through the scene. A simple technique, which is versatile, and can enhance most photographs.
- There are many different types of lines - straight, diagonal, curving, converging, etc. - and each can be used to enhance our photo's composition.
- Draws attention to the main subject or focal point of the shot.
- Adding depth and a sense of perspective to make the scene feel more "real" or 3D
- Creating an interesting subject - particularly in abstract photos.

**Diagonal Lines:** Gives sense of movement or change. Draws the viewer through a scene or to a main object. Normally viewed left to right (like

reading). Due to this lines sloping downwards from left to right tend to feel more natural. Lines sloping upwards can add tension and impact.

**Curved Lines:** Feel more natural than straight lines. They tend to work well in photos where you often want to feel the flow of the scene.

**Converging Lines:** When lines meet at a point we focus on that point. Where lines converge is a good place to put your main subject or to lead your eyes through a scene. Converging lines also give a great sense of perspective, and can be used to make a photo feel more three dimensional.

**BACKGROUND:** You take what you thought would be a great shot & find the final image lacks impact because subject blends into or is distracted by a busy background. Human eye is excellent at distinguishing between different elements in a scene, but a camera has a tendency to flatten the foreground and background. This can impact an otherwise great photo. Can be overcome when shooting - look for a plain/unobtrusive background & compose shot so that it doesn't distract or detract from your subject.

**FRAMING:** World is full of objects which make perfect natural frames, such as trees, archways and holes. Good placement of these in composition helps isolate the main subject from surroundings. Result is a more focused image drawing eye more naturally to the main subject.

**CROPPING:** A photo can lack impact because main subject is so small it becomes lost in its surroundings. By cropping tighter around the subject you can eliminate background distractions & ensure main subject gets the viewer's undivided attention. Don't be afraid to get in closer.

**DEPTH OF FIELD:** The human eye naturally recognizes what we view in 3D. But photography is a two-dimensional medium - choose your composition carefully to convey the sense of depth present in the actual scene. Including foreground objects of interest in the frame is one way to give the photo a more 3D feel.

**THE RULE OF ODDS:** Psychologically, an image is more visually appealing if there are an odd number of subjects. Theory proposes that an even number of elements in a scene is more distracting - viewer not sure which one to focus his or her attention on. Odd numbers of elements are seen as more natural & easier on the eye.

**FILL THE FRAME:** Filling the frame with your subject can be very effective in some situations. Helps viewer focus on main subject without distractions & to explore more details of this subject, which might not happen with other distracting elements. Works very well in close up or macro photography.

**SIMPLICITY AND MINIMALISM:** Simplicity can be a powerful compositional tool - sometimes "less is more". Photos with uncomplicated or muted backgrounds are examples - they don't distract from the main subject. Can also create a simple composition by zooming in on part of your subject or focusing on a particular detail.

**ISOLATE YOUR SUBJECT:** Using a shallow DOF can isolate your subject - effective way to simplify your composition. By controlling your chosen aperture, you can blur the background that might otherwise distract from your main subject. Useful technique for shooting portraits or macro images.

#### **CHANGING YOUR POINT OF VIEW WHEN SHOOTING:**

Most photos are taken from eye level. Consider changing this to create a more interesting & original composition of a familiar subject.

#### **SOME ALTERNATE VIEWS/ANGLES WHEN SHOOTING:**

- Sit down
- Lye down
- Looking Up
- Climb up high/Shoot looking down
- Vary lenses or focal lengths
- Through a glass/water/etc.
- Shoot from under or below something
- Reflections or reflected objects
- Side angle of your subject
- Rear view of your subject      ETC.....

**LOOK FOR COLOR (COMPLEMENTARY) COMBINATIONS:** The use of color itself is an overlooked compositional tool. Use of color theory is natural for graphic designers, fashion designers and interior designers but not always to photographers. Certain color combinations complement each other well and can be more visually striking. A color wheel shows complementary colors.

**RULE OF SPACE:** The rule of space relates to the direction the subject(s) in your photo are facing or moving towards. If you are taking a photo of a moving object, there should be more space left in the frame in front of the main subject than behind it. This gives the viewer a heightened sense of movement and holds more interest.

**WATCH YOUR HORIZON PLACEMENT:** The horizon in your landscape image shouldn't be in the center. Instead, compose your image to bring the sky or land up or down to move the horizon off-center. By doing so, you'll create a more interesting image. Keep that horizon out of the middle.

**THE SCALE OF OBJECTS IN THE PHOTO:** Including a sense of realistic scale allows a viewer to better relate to your composition. Adding people to a landscape can work better to represent scale.

**SHOOTING LANDSCAPE & PORTRAIT STYLE:** Take some time to determine whether to shoot your image horizontally or vertically. The former is a great way to help you show off-width, while the latter can enhance tall objects and emphasize height. A good suggestion: Shoot in both and decide later which view is best. Also: Sometimes a square image works best.

**PEOPLE AND ANIMALS- REMEMBER THE EYES:** Remember to keep those eyes in focus.

**CONSIDER BLACK AND WHITE OR TONING:** In some instances, using monochrome or toning is more ideally suited to your subject. In those cases, forget the color wheel and visualize your subject in black and white.

**REFLECTIONS- WATER AND OTHER:** Using reflections is another way to add perspective and symmetry to an image. Use this composition technique as a way of showing something dynamic, creative and different.

**IN CONCLUSION:**

- OBSERVE FIRST - TAKE YOUR TIME - DON'T JUST SNAP AWAY:
- If you have the time - Really consider your subject and its setting and what you want your image to say.
- Your creativity & camera skills are your only limitations
- Try out - All of the above we just reviewed
- ALWAYS REMEMBER TO HAVE FUN!!