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## Composition: An Introduction

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### What is composition?

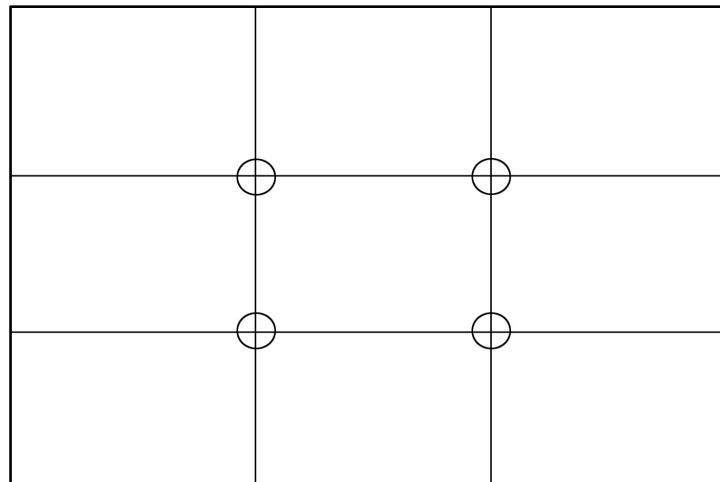
Composition, for many people is a magical, mysterious secret that if they could only understand they would be great photographers. Really, it is just the way the picture is put together. Visual elements come together to make your pictures communicate. How well they communicate is a matter of how effectively you use composition.

When you take a picture, you are stuffing all the information from the scene before you into a little square piece of paper. How you arrange the visual information that you have chosen, is your composition.

There are no absolute rules in composition. In fact, if you take your favorite photograph by your favorite photographer, you might find that it works despite the rules! Don't despair! As you learn and practice making exciting and dynamic composition, you will naturally see when you can bend the rules and when you can use the rules to express your subject.

### Rule of Thirds

One of the first guides to dynamic photographs is the rule of thirds. When the frame is divided into thirds vertically and horizontally, you will have a more dynamic composition. The power points in a photograph are the areas in which the horizontal and vertical grids intersect when the frame is divided into thirds. Subject placed on these power points will have great visual impact.



### Leading Lines

Different objects in the frame can be used to "lead" the viewer into your space and give a sense of space. Fences, trails, sidewalks are all good examples of objects that can serve to lead your viewer's eyes through the frame.

**Foreground, middle ground, background**

This is one of the most dependable and exciting ways to create depth in your images. The illusion of depth will give your viewer a sense of the space as it really was in the world. To photograph foreground, middle ground, and background start by finding objects in each of these areas, and photographing them in dynamic relationship. Your pictures will be more visual interesting and exciting.

**Contrast**

Use contrast and tonal values to give a "sense of light" and drama in order to emphasize the important subject. This will convey your message, and make your image more visually interesting. Keep in mind the usefulness of both value and color contrast. Color contrast comes from the relationship between colors like yellow and blue or red and green. Value contrast comes from light/dark difference. Each will have a different effect on your pictures.

**Edge tension**

Be aware of the edges of your frame!!! The use of the edge of the image area to create a sense that the world goes on beyond the picture or make the viewer curious about the rest, can be very effective. On the other hand, unwanted items peeking in to the corners can wreck an otherwise powerful composition.

**Repeating shapes and lines**

Any shapes or lines that repeat in the frame will create a rhythm in your pictures. It will also keep your viewer interested. Look for multiples of shapes in your subject and use them to spice your photographs.

**Framing**

Framing is when a object in the image is used to create a eye-leading border around the primary visual information. Objects that are useful for framing include branches of trees, doorways, and archways. Framing is a very good way to keep your viewer's attention inside the photograph and on your subject.

**Putting composition to work**

You must practice in order to identify the best composition for any picture. In the field, this means, shoot the first pictures, walk around, see new ways of approaching the subject, shoot again. At home, this means seeing, not just looking at photographs, yours and others. Study a number of photographs for the lines, the shapes, the compositional elements that make the image tick. Then go out in the field again and see if you can emulate your favorites.

**Extra Credit Assignment**

Choose one of the tools of composition Shoot 25 to 45 exposures trying to find new ways to use this tool. Try to get as many different illustrations of that one tool as possible in these photographs. Play, explore, and expose the images and yourself to new ways of composing!