

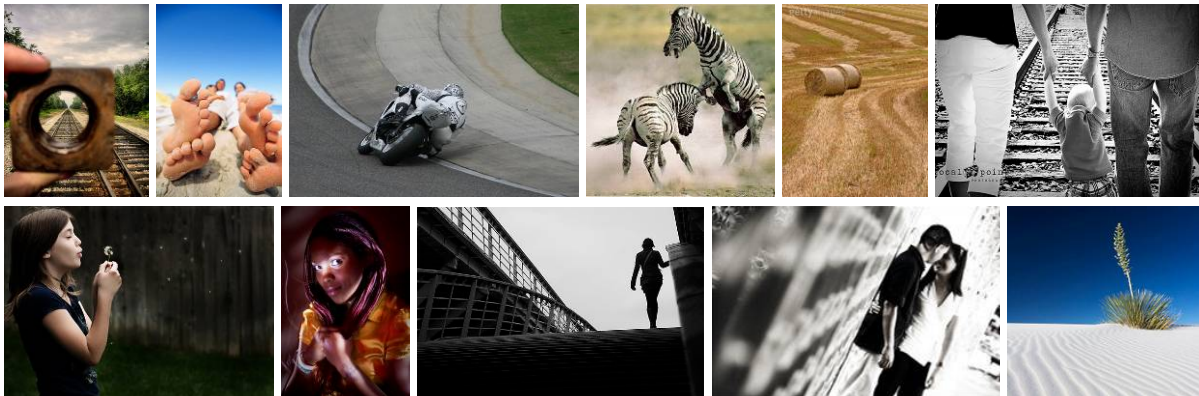
PHOTOGRAPHY

Exercise: Basic Composition

A planned photograph has a purpose – maybe it's to convey an emotion, display a product, or show conflict or contrast. Whatever your intent is, a photograph must be well composed in order to be effective.

To do this, first and foremost, ensure that your photograph has a **focal point**. This is the region of the photograph that the photographer wants the viewer's eyes to be drawn towards. The focal point may be a person, a feature (eyes, hands) an object, or even an empty space.

Look at the examples below. What are the focal points of these pictures?



A well composed photograph has a clear focal point but *how* do you achieve a clear focal point in your photographs? Here are some guidelines to help you compose photographs effectively. These are not rules – as you will see countless examples of effective photographs that do not follow these guidelines.

Five Guidelines for basic composition:

1. Unclutter the background
2. Obey the rule of thirds
3. Seek balance
4. Use lines
5. Capture repetition

Five Guidelines for effective composition:

1. **Unclutter the background so that there is nothing to distract the eye.**
This is probably the most important rule of them all. Ensure your focal point is obvious.
2. **Obey the rule of thirds.**
The rule of thirds is such an important compositional guideline that the entire next assignment will be devoted to developing it.
3. **Ensure that your photograph is balanced.**
This can be achieved via symmetrical balance or asymmetrical balance.

Symmetrical balance is achieved when two halves of a photograph have equal visual mass. Symmetrical balance is sometimes called *static balance* as it is typically used to show unmoving subjects. To achieve effective symmetrical balance look for subjects with inherent symmetry or place your subjects symmetrically within the background.



Asymmetrical balance is *usually* more interesting than symmetrical balance. In asymmetrical balance the imaginary halves of the photo are still there, however instead of mirror images on each side of the picture, the elements are different in size, shape, weight, tone, and placement. Balance is established by equalizing the elements in spite of their differences.



4. **Use lines effectively.**

Lines play an important role in the rule of thirds (we will discuss this “rule” in the next assignment.) Lines can put emphasis on elements within the photograph, suggest a mood, or illustrate a relationship between elements.

Vertical lines are parallel with the sides of your photograph.



Horizontal lines are parallel with the top and bottom of your photograph. Horizons are the most common horizontal line to be found in photographs.



Diagonal lines can grab the attention of the viewer and may be used to lead the eye to a particular element (in this case they are called **leading lines**.)

Diagonal lines can be found by altering your perspective near parallel lines formed by streets, sidewalks, stairs, waves, etc.



Painters discovered that the inclusion of an **s-shaped curve** in their art added a feeling of movement to an otherwise static image. The s-shape is aesthetically pleasing and is capable of standing on its own in an image.



5. **Repetition creates an image with impact.**

Repetition can be boring in life, but in photography it can create impact. Once you get an eye for spotting repetitive patterns, (it takes some practice) you'll be amazed by what you see.



(If you find repetition in your photography too boring – experiment by purposefully breaking this 'rule')

3. Photograph a body part (hand, arm, leg, etc.) so that an **"S" curve** serves as the primary focus of the image. The "S" curve must be blatantly obvious. The curve must be a long continuous s-shaped curve that fills the frame. Keep your image clear of clutter. Choose your best photograph and attach it here.

4. Photograph school supplies (pencils, paper clips, etc.) so that **repetition** is the primary focus of the image. You may choose to "break" the pattern to increase interest. Keep your image clear of clutter. Choose your best photograph and attach it here.