

Composition

What is composition? It is the process of arranging elements within an image. Effective composition enables your image to tell a story, direct your eye and captivate your viewer.

In order to have a good composition, you must acquire the ability to “control” the elements in your image.

We will discuss some of the types of elements found in photography which are adapted from the general elements of art.

Lines / Curves

Lines can be very powerful. They can prompt various emotions. They can lead the viewer's eye through the image and direct your eye to a specific object or point of interest in your image.

1. Straight Lines can give a sense of rigidity, structure and tension. A straight line will help convey urgency, starkness & harshness.
2. Lines curved in one direction can give the impression of force in the direction of the bend. The greater the arc, the more force it implies. A slight bend can be associated with grace and beauty. Curves can be formed by natural elements such as rivers, roads and paths.
3. S-curve lines that begin at the bottom of the frame draw the viewer into the photo, taking your eye from the foreground to the background. This type of wavy line will imply an unhurried gentle and graceful movement.
4. Jagged & broken lines may suggest tension and urgency.
5. Horizontal lines in photography provide a sense of stability and calmness. They are often associated with peaceful scenes, such as horizons, calm waters or flat landscapes. This stability can evoke a feeling of stability and permanence.
6. Diagonal lines will create the feeling of force, energy and emotion. Diagonal intersecting lines can create the feeling of action or tension. Parallel diagonal lines can still imply action but would signify greater order.
7. Converging lines will draw your eye into the image. Straight lines that become narrower as they move from the foreground create the most immediate and strongest

eye movement which can create a sense of urgency. They will also add depth to your image.

8. Intersecting lines are a powerful element that can create shapes and focal points in an image. These lines can converge towards a common intersection, object or area, acting as a strong compositional element in themselves. The shapes created by the lines can be focal points, main shapes or even main subject in the photos. The use of converging lines can often result in highly creative, artful compositions, isolating, emphasizing and framing areas.
9. The impressions of each line are fortified when the lines are thicker. Vertical lines give a sense of excitement and power. Heavy vertical lines, such as columns and trees can signify dignity and greatness.

Texture

Texture communicates to the viewer how an object physically feels, which can evoke a sense of touch and enhance the realism of the image.

1. Smooth, gentle textures evoke feelings of softness, calmness and simplicity. Things like fur, fabric and flower petals offer a gentle, soothing appearance which evokes warmth, comfort and delicacy.
2. Rough, hard textures will evoke a feeling of harshness, strength, resilience and rugged beauty. Gritty textures feel raw and edgy. Textures like brick and stone are used in architectural and industrial photography.

Textures are found everywhere. A photographer will primarily use light to emphasize the texture of an object, but composition can also play a role.

Importance of Textures:

1. Visual Interest – Textures can add layers of details to photographs making them more engaging and dynamic. Textures can transform ordinary scenes into captivating photos by highlighting unique patterns and surface characteristics.
2. Emotional Impact-Textures can influence the emotional message. For instance a weathered surface might evoke nostalgia, while a polish surface may suggest elegance.

3. Depth & Dimension-Capturing texture effectively can create a sense of depth and three dimensionality make the photo feel more lifelike and relatable.

Techniques for Capturing Texture

1. Lighting – The way light interacts with a surface is crucial for revealing texture. Side lighting can enhance texture creating shadows that emphasize contours and details. Experimenting with light can result in different results.
2. Camera Settings – To capture fine details, use a higher F-stop (F/6 or higher) to insure sharpness and depth of field. A tripod can reduce shaking which particularly important in texture photography.
3. Composition – Pay attention to the composition and framing of your subject. Look for interesting angles and perspectives that highlight the texture. Closeup shots can reveal intricate details, while wider shots can show the texture interacts with the scene.

Finding Textures

Textures are everywhere and can be found in nature and everyday objects. You can find textures in tree bark, leaves, fabrics, and even in urban areas peeling paint on buildings, brick on buildings etc.

Color

What Is Color Theory in Photography?

Color theory is how photographers use colors to create emotion, harmony, and visual impact in an image. It's based on how colors interact with one another on the color wheel.

The Color Wheel

Here's a visual of the basic color wheel, showing primary, secondary, and tertiary colors:

- **Primary colors:** Red, Blue, Yellow
- **Secondary colors:** Green, Orange, Purple (made by mixing two primaries)
- **Tertiary colors:** Mix of primary and secondary colors (e.g., red-orange, yellow-green)

Complementary Colors

These are opposite each other on the color wheel — they create contrast and energy.

Blue & Orange Common in portraits and cinema; adds warm vs. cool tension

Red & Green Nature's balance (flowers, leaves, sunsets)

Analogous Colors

Colors that sit next to each other on the wheel create a harmonious and calm look.

Blue–Teal–Green Feels cool, peaceful, and natural

Red–Orange–Yellow Warm, energetic, and vibrant

Monochromatic Colors

Using one hue with variations in lightness and saturation. Great for mood and simplicity.

All shades of blue calm, cohesive aesthetic

Triadic Colors

Three colors that are evenly spaced on the color wheel — they create balance and vibrance.

Red–Yellow–Blue Energetic and playful

Warm vs. Cool Colors

- **Warm tones** (red, orange, yellow) → energy, excitement, warmth
- **Cool tones** (blue, green, purple) → calm, tranquility, distance

Color and Emotion in Photography

Color	Common Emotional Effect
Red	Passion, intensity, danger
Orange	Energy, enthusiasm, warmth
Yellow	Happiness, optimism

Color	Common Emotional Effect
Green	Growth, nature, calm
Blue	Trust, serenity, melancholy
Purple	Creativity, luxury, mystery

Individual colors can evoke a different mood or energy. Generally, colors fall into one of the following categories.

1. Warm colors (Advancing Colors)
2. Cool colors (Receding Colors)

Warm colors such as reds, yellows and oranges will be great for grabbing attention. Red for example can evoke feelings of passion, energy & excitement.

Cool colors such as blues, greens and violets evoke calmness and serenity. Blue often gives a feeling of peace & tranquility. Green connects you to nature and violet can add drama to a sunset.

Understanding and effectively using color in photography can significantly enhance the visual appeal and emotional response of your image.

Space/Balance/Rhythm/Negative Space/Scale

Space

Space can be either positive or negative.

Positive space is the area of an image or focal point which stands out and immediately gets your attention and is effectively used to enhance composition and storytelling.

Examples would be:

1. People
2. Objects
3. Buildings
4. Or any visual feature intended to be the focus of composition

The negative space is the area surrounding the object. It is often simpler, less detailed or visually quieter than the positive space. Its purpose is not to compete with the subject, but to provide visual balance, breathing room and emphasis

Examples would be:

1. Sky
2. Open Fields
3. Water
4. Blank Walls
5. Fog
6. Uncluttered background elements

Positive and negative space shape the viewer's experience. Balanced composition guides attention and sets the mood.

More negative space creates simplicity, calmness and openness.

More positive space creates intensity, activity and visual complexity.

Effective use of space strengthens storytelling and prevents visual clutter.

These spaces work together instead of being at odds. An effective image features a distinct subject while providing enough surrounding area to naturally direct the viewer's gaze.

How to use space effectively

1. Start with a clear subject to define the positive space.
2. Simplify the background to avoid distractions.
3. Use empty or open space intentionally to influence mood.
4. Shoot both wide and close to compare how space alters composition.
5. Place subject off center using Rule of Thirds to activate negative space.
6. Use contrast to separate the subject from the background.
7. Look for strong shapes, outlines or silhouettes to strengthen visual presence of the subject.
8. Ask yourself: "Where does the viewer look first?" If the answer is unclear, simplify again.

Balance

Balance is used to either unite a photo or create division. There are three ways to achieve balance.

1. Symmetry – Both side of the image reflect the same subject matter – like a mirror image.
2. Asymmetry – Contrasting elements that balance the image. For example a textured surface on one side with a smooth matte on the other.
3. Radial Balance Symmetry – Elements that are spaced equally around a central point, like spokes on a wheel.

A balanced image lends a sense of stability and an unbalanced image creates unrest. Both are OK depending on what the desired outcome. Move your camera around to achieve different perspectives to emphasize balance.

Rhythm

All forms of art including photography have rhythm as a vital element. In photography, rhythm involves repeating or alternating the visual elements of a scene. This would be achieved through textures, colors, shapes and lines. Rhythm can create balance and harmony in photos.

Rhythmic photos or photos with energy can create a sense of movement, flow, liveliness or intensity within the image. A photo with energy feels active or dynamic. Energy can come from lines, color, gestures or visual tension.

There are 5 types of Rhythm

1. **Random Rhythm** – A photo that is less structures or does not follow a regular pattern is considered a random rhythm. Random rhythm is more erratic which means it can be used to create a send of tension or movement in a static scene. For example a field scattered with cows, leaves scattered on the grass or the sky scattered with hot air balloons.

Effect-The eye is prone to move when it encounters an image with scattered elements. Randon rhythmic photos make for a more engaging viewing because they create a sense of movement.

2. **Alternating Rhythm**-When two or more parts of an image are repeated. The repetition can be varied or exact in colors, shapes and lines. Examples would be the white and black keys of a piano or keyboard or the two - tone stripes of a shirt.

Effect-Alternating rhythm produces a more vibrant and exciting image as opposed to the singled repeating part of the regular rhythm.

3. **Regular Rhythm**- Regular rhythm involves the repetition of patterns such as shapes, lines or colors. Regular rhythm can create a sense of harmony in a photo which is why it is often found in nature or created artificially by fences or building structures. Examples would be a fence or a row of trees in a forest.

Effect-Regular rhythm produces a sense of calmness and orderliness in a photo. There is a soothing and relaxing effect caused by the repeating patterns.

4. **Progressive Rhythm**-The progressive rhythm just the like the regular rhythm, involves repetition of comparable elements. The difference is how we see the repetition, because in progressive rhythm the repeated part varies in size on each repetition. Examples would be a row of trees vanishing into the horizon or the ripples that appear after throwing a stone into a pond of water.

Effect-Progressive rhythm not only directs your attention but also affects how the eyes moves while viewing the image. The changes in tempo from huge to tiny always enliven or calm the viewer.

5. **Undulating Rhythm** – Undulating rhythm is created by a series of curved lines which can be in different colors, lengths and thicknesses. Examples would be waves of the ocean, rolling hillside or a curvy road.

Effect-Undulating rhythm lacks sharp edges resulting in uneven ups and downs rhythm.

How to create rhythm:

1. Look for repeating shapes, lines or forms.
2. Fill the frame to emphasize repetition.
3. Use leading lines to guide the viewer's eye.
4. Experiment with perspective to strengthen patterns.
5. Use depth to show repetition across distance.
6. Break a pattern intentionally to create a focal point.

How to create energy:

1. Use diagonal lines to create movement.
2. Capture movement through motion blur or freeze action.
3. Use vibrant or contrasting colors.
4. Capture expressive gestures and natural emotions.
5. Shoot from unexpected angles.

Rhythm can be a powerful tool that can be used to tell a story or send an impactful message

Without rhythm your photo may appear static, lack impact, fail to evoke emotions or fail to capture the viewer's attention.

Shape / Form

Shapes in photography play an important role in composition, influencing visual interest and guiding the viewer's eye.

Shapes in photography refer to the two-dimensional outlines or contours of objects captured within a frame. They can be categorized into two main types - geometric shapes and organic shapes.

Geometric shapes: Circles, squares, rectangles and triangles. They are found on manmade structures like buildings and urban landscapes. Geometric shapes can convey stability, order and structure. For example:

1. Circles – Represent energy and movement, drawing the viewers eye around the image.
2. Squares & Rectangles - Impart a sense of stability and solidity.
3. Triangles – Can convey stability when upright but may introduce tension when inverted.

There are also organic shapes which are irregular and free flowing and commonly found in nature. They include curves and forms that do not have defined edges such as the shape of a leaf or the contours of a flower.

Organic shapes add a sense of movement and softness to images.

Examples

1. Rigid shapes – evoke a sense of structure
2. Curved shapes – evoke harmony and balance
3. Overlapping shapes – can often create one larger visual area or shape – other elements such as color, texture and light can further separate overlapping shapes.
4. Use open shapes – use a window or doorway to create sub frames in your image
5. Shapes – use to create a sense of scale for objects in the scene

Form

Form is hard to define in a few words, but it has a specific feeling you can learn to detect the more you practice.

Form refers to the apparent three-dimensionality of objects. Although photos are flat, objects in them are perceived to have three-dimensions or in other words form.

If you capture a photograph of a coffee mug from above, the mug will look like a perfect circle – lacking form. If you shoot the mug from eye level the mug will look like a cylinder-emphasizing form.

Form will emerge through light and shadows:

1. Lighting direction which creates depth perception through highlights, midtones & shadows.
 - a. Side lighting will reveal surface textures by creating contrast between illuminated areas and dark shadows.
 - b. Back lighting will create rim lighting and defines the object's edges and separates subjects from the background creating depth and tonal separation.
 - c. Overhead lighting will define curves and textures.
 - d. Front lighting will flatten the form.
2. Perspective and angles will change the relationships between elements.
 - a. Shoot from multiple heights to explore different form relationships
 - b. Use foreground elements to create layered compositions
 - c. Incorporate diagonal lines to lead views eye through the frame

How to Capture Form

1. Observe how light and shadow fall on your subject
2. Use shadows intentionally to define edges

3. Experiment with different shooting angles
4. Simplify your background to make the form stand out
5. Adjust exposure and contrast for clarity
6. Try black and white to emphasize tone and structure
7. Use texture and pattern to reveal volume

Abstract forms will emerge when familiar objects transform into pure visual elements through:

1. Unconventional angles that distort recognition
2. Extreme close-ups that isolate form details.
3. Shadow play that creates new shape relationships.
4. Light manipulation that emphasizes volume texture.

Scale

Scale refers to the relationship between the size of objects within a photo. It helps the viewer understand how large or small something is by comparing it to something more familiar. Because a photograph flattens real-life space into two dimensions, the true size of an object can be unclear. Showing scale allows the viewer to grasp size, depth and proportion. It is important for composing visually compelling images. Photographers can use scale to highlight particular elements, add context, and support visual interpretation.

Here are some techniques to show scale in your photos.

1. Use recognizable objects: Incorporate people, buildings or other objects that are known sizes to help the viewer understand the scale.
2. Perspective & Distance: Closer objects appear larger.
3. Framing: Including/Excluding items will affect perception.
4. Lense Choice: Wide-angle exaggerates; telephoto compresses.
5. Forced perspective: Create a visual illusion of scale by positioning the subject in relation to a reference point.

Types of Scale in Photography

1. Human Scale – Person shows size of surroundings
2. Environmental Scale-Natural elements create reference
3. Forced Perspective-Manipulates distance to trick the eye
4. Micro/Macro Scale – Shows tiny details at large magnification

How Visual Clues Influence Scale

1. Foreground, midground, background layers create depth
2. Leading lines guide perspective
3. Shadows and lighting define volume
4. Repetition gives visual comparison

Common Mistakes

1. No reference object so viewer can't judge size
2. Shooting from eye level-flattens space
3. Using a telephoto lense -compresses distance

How To Apply Scale

1. Use people or familiar objects
2. Change your position (closer/farther)
3. Use wide-angle lenses
4. Try forced perspective
5. Layer your composition
6. Think Emotionally – match the mood to scale

Examples

1. Photograph a friend beside a tall structure
2. Hold the sun between your fingers (forced perspective)
3. Capture a macro shot of a small object
4. Use a road leading into the mountains to show depth.