

COMPOSITIONAL GUIDELINES

Organizing the various elements within the frame of the viewfinder in order to create an effective design is more challenging than it might seem at first. Good composition allows you to convey messages and emotions through the images that you shoot.

- How do you make a compelling photograph?
- What is the center of interest?
- How do you get the viewers gaze to focus where you want?
- What should be included or excluded in the frame?

Rule of thirds

As you look through your camera's viewfinder, imagine there are lines dividing the image into thirds, both horizontally and vertically, essentially dividing your image into nine equal-shaped blocks. Frame your subject at one of the intersection points instead of in the center of the viewfinder.

Now, with this said, many photographers make a very good living breaking this rule, but your photography will become much more interesting and visually stimulating if you use the rule of thirds when framing your subjects.

Framing

Careful framing of your subject can make a dramatic difference in your photos. Remember—every photo has a foreground and background, so use them together to add an interesting element to the shot.

Use foreground elements to frame your photo's subject. Architectural elements work well (windows, doorways, arches, and so on), but you can find any number of interesting elements to use for framing your photos. The important point here is the subject. Make sure your subject still is the focal point of the photograph.

Visual cropping

Crop your photos visually before you take them. Look into the corners of the viewfinder. Do you see things that shouldn't be there? You can remove, or crop, these elements from your photos simply by moving closer to your subject, zooming in on your subject, or moving your subject within the viewfinder. Try different angles. Look for anything that will diminish the impact of unwanted objects in your photos.

Fill the Frame

Robert Capa, a WWII photojournalist said it best, when he said, "If your pictures are not good enough, they you're probably not close enough." Get the subject into the frame so there is no doubt what the photo is all about.

Angle of View

Believe it or not, the best angle for a photo is not always upright and directly in front of the subject. Some of the most interesting photographs are those taken from a unique vantage point. Birds eye view and worms eye view. Climb a tree to take a picture of your child lying on the grass

Always ask yourself if the photo would look better taken as a landscape or portrait shot. Look for angles that are interesting and demonstrate the mood and inspiration you're trying to capture.

Balance

Achieving good balance in your photographs requires the correct combination of colors, shapes, and areas of light and dark that complement one another. Balance implies that the visual elements within the frame have a sense of weight.

Large objects generally weigh more than small objects and dark objects weigh more than light colored objects. The position of the elements is also critical.

Perspective

To capture the essence of what you experience when viewing a scene, it helps to add an element to your photo to convey this perspective.

Draw the viewer in

Lines, a path, a row of telephone poles, or even a line of chairs in your child's school can serve as elements in a good photo. Avoid trees or objects coming out of people's heads.

- **Lines** - Vertical lines denote strength, height and power
- Horizontal lines connote width and stability
- Diagonal lines give a sense of movement & energy
- Curved lines are sensuous

Light and Shadow

Positive space is where shapes and forms exist; negative space is the empty space around shapes and forms. In the photo below the black area is negative space and it serves to balance the area in which the marmot and rock occupy.

Areas of a picture that contain "nothing" are important visual elements that provide balance in an image.

Photographing Children

There are many things that go into creating a successful photograph. Before we can begin to discuss the importance of composition and framing you should consider the following suggestions to maximize on your success rate:

1. Are you comfortable with your equipment?

Read your manual so that you can achieve your technical and artistic goals.

2. When should you photograph your subject?

Timing is everything.

Be patient and wait for the right moment to press the shutter – even if that moment comes on a different day.

Also consider time of day.

3. Where should I photograph my subject?

Consider your location.

Background

Avoid Mergers

Find the direction of your light source and place your subject accordingly.

4. Are your subjects doing something they love? If you're shooting them "happy" – be it playing in the park, or listening to a bedtime story, you'll get the best results.

5. Is there another adult on the scene to help out?

It's tough trying to be a successful mom *and* photographer at the same time!

6. When should I use the flash? Your flash can fill in shadows around the eyes and the rest of the face even on a sunny day.

7. Are you backing your photos to an external hard drive?

You must! Uploading to shutterfly or an online printing service is not considered backing up.

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