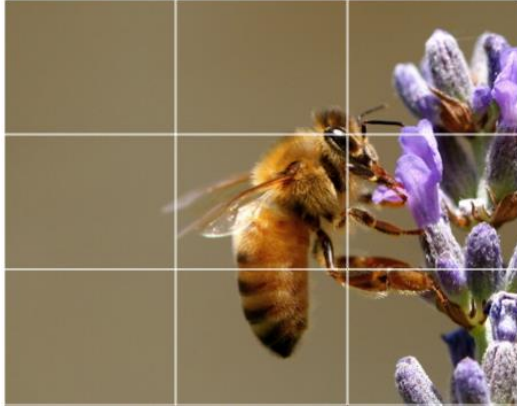


Photography and Composition 101

Rule of Thirds

A Post By: Darren Rowse



Perhaps the most well known principle of photographic composition is the '**Rule of Thirds**'.

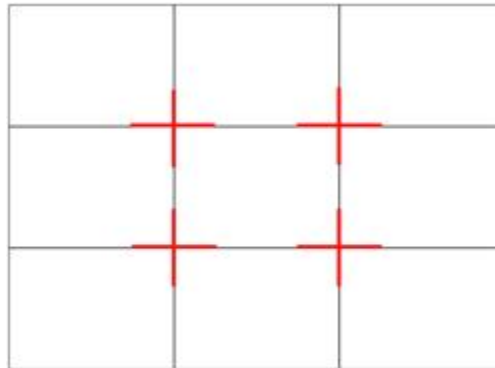
The "Rule of Thirds" one of the first things that budding digital photographers learn about in classes on photography and rightly so as it is the basis for well balanced and interesting shots.

I will say right up front however that rules are meant to be broken and ignoring this one doesn't mean your images are necessarily unbalanced or uninteresting. However a wise person once told me that if you intend

to break a rule you should always learn it first to make sure your breaking of it is all the more effective!

What is the Rule of Thirds?

The basic principle behind the rule of thirds is to imagine breaking an image down into thirds (both horizontally and vertically) so that you have 9 parts. As follows.



As you're taking an image you would have done this in your mind through your viewfinder or in the LCD display that you use to frame your shot. With this grid in mind the 'rule of thirds' now identifies four important parts of the image that you should consider placing points of interest in as you frame your image. Not only this – but it also gives you four 'lines' that are also useful positions for elements in your photo.

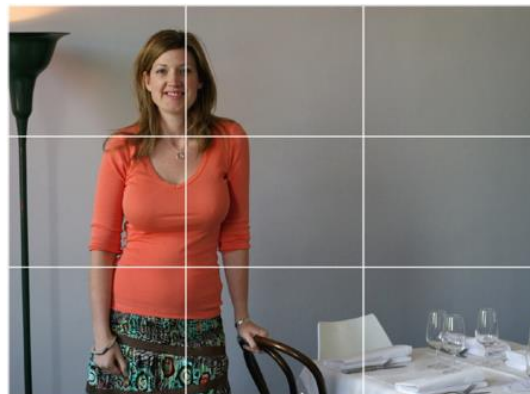
The theory is that if you place points of interest in the intersections or along the lines that your photo becomes more balanced and will enable a viewer of the image to interact with it more naturally. Studies have shown that when viewing images that people's eyes usually go to one of the intersection points most naturally rather than the center of the shot – using the rule of thirds works with this natural way of viewing an image rather than working against it.

In addition to the above picture of the bee where the bee's eye becomes the point of focus here are some of examples:



Another Rule of Thirds Example

In this image I've purposely placed the head of my subject on one of the intersecting points – especially his eyes which are a natural point of focus for a portrait. His tie and flower also take up a secondary point of interest.



In this shot I've placed the subject along a whole line which means she is considerably off center and therefore creating an additional point of interest. Placing her right in the center of the frame could have resulted in an 'awkward' shot.

In a similar way a good technique for landscape shots is to position horizons along one of the horizontal lines also as I've done with the following shot (I'll let you imagine the lines).



Using the Rule of Thirds comes naturally to some photographers but for many of us takes a little time and practice for it to become second nature.

In learning how to use the rule of thirds (and then to break it) the most important questions to be asking of yourself are:

- What are the points of interest in this shot?
- Where am I intentionally placing them?

Once again – remember that breaking the rule can result in some striking shots – so once you’ve learnt it experiment with purposely breaking it to see what you discover.

Lastly – keep the rule of thirds in mind as you edit your photos later on. Post production editing tools today have good tools for cropping and reframing images so that they fit within the rules. Experiment with some of your old shots to see what impact it might have on your photos.

5 Elements of Composition in Photography

A Post By: [Darren Rowse](#)

Good Composition is a key element of good photographs yet is something that is hard to define. Instead of looking at composition as a set of 'rules' to follow – I view it as a set of ingredients that can be taken out of the pantry at any point and used to make a great 'meal' (photograph). Alternatively I've often described it as a set of 'tools' that can be taken out of one's compositional tool belt at any given time in the construction of a great image.

The key is to remember that in the same way as a chef rarely uses all the ingredients at their disposal in any dish – that a photographer rarely uses all of the ingredients of composition in the making of an image. Today I'd like to look at five of the ingredients (or tools, or elements) of composition that I draw on in my photography. They're not 'rules' – just things that I consider when setting up a shot.

Pattern



Image by actionlovr

There are patterns all around us if we only learn to see them. Emphasizing and highlighting these patterns can lead to striking shots – as can high lighting when patterns are broken.

Symmetry



Image by straightfinder

Depending upon the scene – symmetry can be something to go for – or to avoid completely.

A symmetrical shot with strong composition and a good point of interest can lead to a striking image – but without the strong point of interest it can be a little predictable. I prefer to experiment with both in the one shoot to see which works best.

Texture



Image by Grant McDonald

Images a two dimensional thing yet with the clever use of 'texture' they can come alive and become almost three dimensional. Texture particularly comes into play when light hits objects at interesting angles.

Depth of Field



Image by orangeacid

The depth of field that you select when taking an image will drastically impact the composition of an image. It can isolate a subject from its background and foreground (when using a shallow depth of field) or it can put the same subject in context by revealing its surrounds with a larger depth of field.

Lines



Image by stevacek

Lines can be powerful elements in an image.

They have the power to draw the eye to key focal points in a shot and to impact the 'feel' of an image greatly. [Diagonal](#), [Horizontal](#), [Vertical](#) and [Converging lines](#) all impact images differently and should be spotted while framing a shot and then utilized to strengthen it. These are just some of the elements of composition that I consider in my photography. They reflect my own style and personality but there are plenty more.

4 Rules of Composition for Landscape Photography

A Post By: [Darren Rowse](#)

While I'm not always a fan of sticking strictly to the 'rules' or 'guidelines' of photography I think they can be well worth knowing and keeping in the back of your mind as you shoot (whether it's so you can follow them or break them for effect). Here's four 'rules' for [landscape photography](#) that might be helpful for those just starting out (ie they're not meant as a definitive guide but rather a starting point) :

1. Diagonal Lines



Using diagonal lines can be a very effective way of drawing the eye of those viewing an image into it and to the main focal point. The 'lines' need not be actual lines – they could be the shape of a path, a line of trees, a fence, river or any other feature in an image. [Converging lines](#) (two or more lines coming from different parts of an image to a single point) can be all the more effective.

2. Geometric Shapes



By positioning key aspects of a landscape on points of a geometric shape you can help create a balanced composition. Perhaps the most common and easiest way to do this is to use a 'triangle' shape between objects in an image with three objects in a frame positioned with one to each side and one more central.

Using Geometric Shapes in this way isn't something that I've done a lot of – but it is one technique to get balance in a shot and if you're clever, to lead the eye into it (in a similar way to the diagonal lines rule above).

3. The Rule of Thirds



The Rule of Thirds gets trotted out more often than any other in all types of photography and is one of the first rules of composition taught to most photography students. While sometimes it can feel a little cliché it can also be a very effective technique in landscapes (although keep in mind that breaking this (and other rules) can also produce dramatic and interesting shots).

Position key points of interest in a landscape on the intersecting point between imaginary 'third' points in an image and you'll help give your image balance and help those focal points to really capture attention.

4. Framing Images



While adding points of interest to a foreground is an important technique for adding interest to landscape shots – a similar technique is to ‘frame’ the shot by adding interest to other parts of the edges of an image.

Perhaps the most common way of framing a landscape shot is to include an overhanging branch in the upper section of a shot. Similarly framing a shot with a bridge might work.

Rules are Made to Be Broken?

Of course while knowing the rules can be important – knowing when to use them and when to break them is a talent that great photographers generally have. Practice these techniques – but don’t get so worked up about them that they kill the creativity that you have.

Let me finish with a quote about Rules of Photography from Photographer Edward Weston to help give us a little balance on the topic:

“To consult the rules of composition before making a picture is a little like consulting the law of gravitation before going for a walk. Such rules and laws are deduced from the accomplished fact; they are the products of reflection.”

Working the Lines in your Photography

A Post By: [Darren Rowse](#)



When considering the composition of an image one of the elements that I suggest digital camera owners look for are 'Lines'.

The lines that can be found in images are very powerful elements that with a little practice can add dynamic impact to a photograph in terms of mood as well as how they lead an image's viewer into a photo.

Over the next few posts I'll consider three types of lines, 'horizontal', 'vertical' and 'diagonal'. Each one has a different impact upon a photograph and should be looked for as you frame your shots.

Learning how to use lines in photography doesn't just happen. It takes time and practice to become good at it.

A good way to practice is to go back through older images that you've taken and look for lines that worked well and those that didn't.

Then next time you go out with your camera, before you frame your shot consciously ask yourself what lines are in front of you and how you might use them to add something to your next shot by working with them rather than against them.

Also ask yourself whether the lines form any interesting patterns that you might be able to accentuate to add a further layer of interest to the shot.

Using Horizontal Lines in Photography

A Post By: [Darren Rowse](#)



There's something about a horizontal line in an image that conveys a message of 'stability' or even 'rest'. Horizons, fallen trees, oceans, sleeping people – all of these subjects have something about them that speaks either of permanency and timelessness or rest.

Horizons are the most common horizontal line to be found in photographs and they often act as a dividing point in a photograph – in effect an anchor that the rest of the image is formed around.

If you want to accentuate the calming stable impact of a horizon one effective technique to use is to shoot your images with horizontal framing (with the longest part of your camera's frame from left to right).

Alternatively if you want to reemphasize horizontal lines shoot with your camera in a vertical framing.

Keep in mind that unbroken horizons can often lead to a photograph feeling somewhat static or dull and a good strategy is to use other shapes in the landscape you're photographing to break things up and give a point of interest (mountains, trees, buildings etc).



Horizons should generally not be placed in the middle of your frame. This leaves an image feeling unsettled compositionally. A much more effective technique is to place them in the upper or lower third of your frame.

Layers of horizontal lines can create rhythm or patterns in an image that can become the focus of an image in and of itself.

Lastly work hard to keep your [Horizontal lines horizontal](#) and square with the edges of your image's frame. There's nothing more frustrating than viewing a picture that is slightly off center.

Using Vertical Lines in Photography

A Post By: [Darren Rowse](#)



Vertical lines have the ability to convey a variety of different moods in a photograph ranging from power and strength (think of skyscrapers) to growth (think of trees).

As horizontal lines can be accentuated by shooting in horizontal format vertical lines can be used very effectively by swapping the way you hold your camera into a vertical framing. This lengthens the vertical subject further which can emphasize it's height.

The other option is to break this rule and frame your vertical subject horizontally which will give it the sense that your image can't contain it (quite effective if the vertical lines are very strong).

Once again it's important to attempt to keep your vertical lines as much in line with the sides of your image as possible. This is not always possible if you're shooting looking up an image as the subject will taper off towards the top – but attempt to keep it's center as straight as possible and you should be ok.

Keep in mind the Rule of Thirds when you have strong vertical lines in a photograph. Placing a line directly in the middle of a shot will effectively cut your image in half. This can be used with dramatic impact but also can leave your image looking segmented.

Keep an eye out for vertical lines that are repeated in patterns in your images as they can be used to great impact – particularly if they are contrasted with other shapes and lines going in different directions.

Using Diagonal Lines in Photography

A Post By: [Darren Rowse](#)



Diagonal lines generally work well to draw the eye of an image's viewer through the photograph. They create points of interest as they intersect with other lines and often give images depth by suggesting perspective.

They can also add a sense of action to an image and add a dynamic look and feel.

Consider how you might use diagonal lines to lead the eye to your photograph's main subject or point of interest.

Different studies have been done into how people view images and many of them say that a natural way into an image is by traveling left to right and so a diagonal line starting at the bottom left and moving to the top right of an image can be quite useful and natural.

Of course you wouldn't want to split your image into two with a harsh line from corner to corner – rather look for patterns and curves between shapes that might do this naturally.

Also rather than making a line go from the very corner to the opposite corner it's often good to make them off centre and go to either side of corners.

Keep in mind that numerous diagonal lines leading in different directions and intersecting with one another can add a sense of action to your photo but adding too many diagonal lines might make it chaotic and confusing.



As with both horizontal and vertical lines – diagonal lines that are repeated through out an image can create very effective patterns that can easily become the subject of a photograph themselves. A recently plowed field or the ridges on a sand dune might be good examples of this.

Tips for Objective Evaluation of Composition

A Post By: [Elliot Hook](#)

Composition is one skill within photography that we can probably never master, but just continually develop. The composition we choose when taking a photograph, i.e. where we choose to place the boundaries of the frame, the perspective we choose to employ from the chosen focal length, how we choose to arrange objects within a scene etc, all influence the way a viewer interacts with the image, and so are all crucial to the success of any given image.

When a composition of an image is broken down to the most basic level, it can almost always be considered as the balance and interaction between different shapes, patterns and light within the scene. It is very easy to critically assess the photographs of others in this way within a couple of seconds of laying eyes on them, however, how often do we apply that objective critique to our own images?



Here I've outlined the major components that contribute to the composition of this image, namely: the three groups of stones leading in from the foreground, the two blocks of dark tone acting as triangles drawing in from the right, and the movement in the clouds leading the eye in from the top of the image.

Personally, there are times when I find it very difficult to 'see' my own images in this way as I can have a strong emotional attachment to the image that can cloud my judgment. What do I mean by emotional attachment? One of the big draws of photography for me is to be outside, amongst nature, seeing scenes unfold in front of me that no-one else is witnessing at that point in time. Therefore, after photographing an awe-inspiring sunrise across a landscape, it can be difficult for me to separate the resulting image from the experience of being there whilst taking

the image – I can end up seeing my images through ‘rose tinted’ glasses and not judging them with the objectivity that others will.

One effective way to overcome this is to not process images immediately, but to leave them for a few days or weeks until the memory of that moment of taking the photographs isn’t quite so fresh in your mind. That way, you will see the image with fresh eyes, as others will.

Another method I find very useful is to rotate the image by 180°, i.e. turn it upside down, during post processing. When you do that, the image in front of you no longer resembles the landscape that you captured, but instead resembles the series of shapes and patterns the make up the composition of the landscape. When the image is upside down, it becomes very easy to be objective about how well balanced elements within the landscape are and to see the distribution of positive/negative space; therefore it becomes easier to decide where to crop an image or to see where you may need to dodge/burn to help direct the eye to the points of interest.



An image from the Lake District, UK, straight out of the camera. It is a very busy landscape, with a lot going on, so I needed to whether the composition works as is, or if any additional processing could help lead the eye of the viewer.



By turning the image upside down, it is easier to distill the key components of the composition, namely: the cascade of water running towards the bridge, the road over the bridge to lead the eye further into the scene, and the hatched circle of interest in the background, being pointed towards by the triangle of well lit hill side.



The final image, with processing influenced by the upside down evaluation.

So, if you haven't tried this before, give it a try the next time you're processing images and I think you'll be surprised how useful it can be, and not just with landscapes either. Do you have any other tips for ensuring you are evaluating the composition of your images objectively? If so, please share them in the comments.