

## Composition

**“You don’t take a photograph,  
you make it.”**

- Ansel Adams

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## Composition Defined:

Composing a photograph involves:

- making deliberate choices about the various elements in an image,
- how those elements are arranged, and
- how they interact to tell the story in the photo.

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## Composition is:

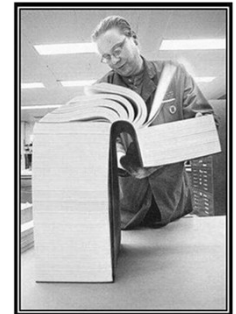
- Free
- Independent of “camera”
  - Any image-making device
- Subjective
- Optional
- **YOUR CHOICE!**

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## WHY CARE ABOUT COMPOSITION “RULE”?

Suggestions or encouragement:

- Help you make a photograph;
- Be deliberate about how photo looks
- Include visual aspects that hold viewer’s attention;
- Create a unique image;
- Experiment with creative variations;
- “Try it, you’ll like it!”



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## Begin at the End

What is the point of this photograph?

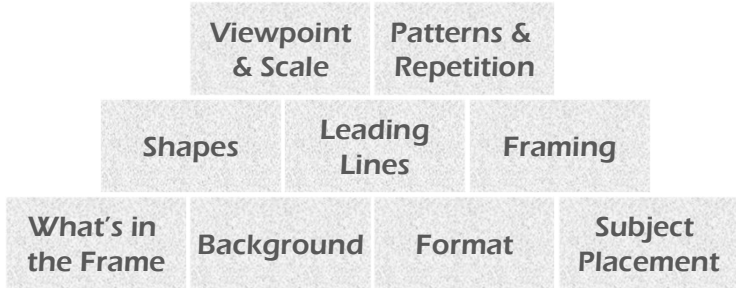
What do I want the viewer to feel, think, know?

What story is this photo telling?

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## Composition

### Building Blocks for Better Photos




The diagram is a pyramid with four levels of building blocks for better photos:

- Level 1 (top): Viewpoint & Scale, Patterns & Repetition
- Level 2: Shapes, Leading Lines, Framing
- Level 3: What's in the Frame, Background, Format, Subject Placement

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## What's in the Frame



The diagram shows a grey box on the left containing the text: "Subject: primary interest", "Other elements play a supporting role", and "IN". To the right of the box, the word "DISTRACTERS" is written above the word "OUT".

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## A few words about distracters

Distracters:

- Bright and sharp objects that draw our attention away from the subject.
- They steal the show.
- They hide in plain sight.
- They may hang out near the edges of the frame.
- Search them out and eliminate them!

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### WHEN THE BACKGROUND IS THE DISTRACTER

- Reduce background's distraction by:
  - Darkening background and/or increasing light on subject;
  - Blurring the background
    - Using shallow depth of field;
    - Blurring in post processing;
  - Cropping;
  - Changing shooting position;

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### WHEN THE BACKGROUND IS HELPFUL

- Provides context to the photo's "story";
- Does not over-shadow the subject;

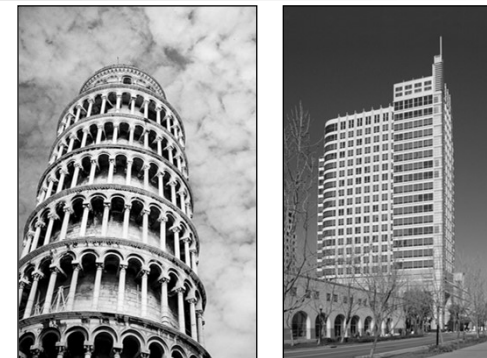
10

### WHEN THE BACKGROUND IS HELPFUL



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### FORMAT - VERTICAL



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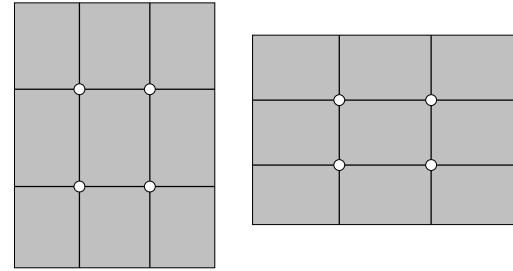
# Composition – Building Better Photos

## FORMAT - HORIZONTAL



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## SUBJECT PLACEMENT - Rule of Thirds



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## SUBJECT PLACEMENT - RULE OF THIRDS



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## RULE OF THIRDS - WHERE TO PLACE SUBJECT?



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**RULE OF THIRDS - WHERE TO PLACE SUBJECT?**



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**RULE OF THIRDS – DOMINANT HORIZONTAL LINE**



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**RULE OF THIRDS – DOMINANT HORIZONTAL LINE**



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**RULE OF THIRDS – DOMINANT HORIZONTAL LINE**



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**RULE OF THIRDS – DOMINANT VERTICAL LINE**



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**RULE OF THIRDS – DOMINANT VERTICAL LINE**



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**DIRECTION - WHERE TO PLACE SUBJECT?**



Does the subject have a "direction?"

- Moving or facing

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**DIRECTION - WHERE TO PLACE SUBJECT?**



Leave more space in front of the subject's direction

Give subject some room to move or look into the frame

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**DIRECTION - WHERE TO PLACE SUBJECT?**



Leave more space in front of the subject's direction  
Give subject some room to move or look into the frame

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**DIRECTION - WHERE TO PLACE SUBJECT?**



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**IS IT EVER OK TO PLACE SUBJECT IN THE CENTER?**

Let the subject guide you.



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**IS IT EVER OK TO PLACE SUBJECT IN THE CENTER?**

**Symmetry!**  
Let the subject guide you.



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**SUBJECT PLACEMENT – ADDITIONAL TIPS**

Leave space  
between subject  
and edges of  
frame



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**SUBJECT PLACEMENT – ADDITIONAL TIPS**

Or fill the frame!



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**WHAT IF YOU HAVE MORE THAN ONE SUBJECT?**

Avoid  
arranging  
subjects in a  
straight line



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**SHAPES can help arrange elements in an image**

Shapes can help  
arrange  
elements for  
visual energy



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SHAPES can help arrange elements in an image

Triangle



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SHAPES can help arrange elements in an image

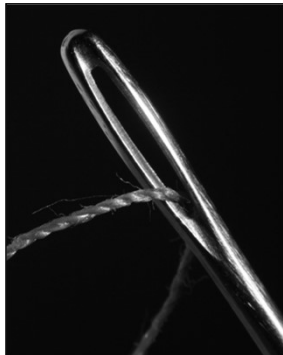
Diagonal line  
between  
elements



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SHAPES can help arrange elements in an image

Subject  
positioned  
along  
diagonal  
line



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SHAPES can help arrange elements in an image

Subject  
positioned  
along  
diagonal  
line



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**SHAPES** can help arrange elements in an image

**Subjects positioned along curved line**



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**SHAPES** can help arrange elements in an image

**Subject positioned along diagonal line**



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**LEADING LINES** guide the viewer's attention

- **LEADING LINES** invite the viewer to enter the image;
- **LEADING LINES** connect elements in an image;
- **LEADING LINES** can be physical objects, such as a road, path, fence, shapes, perspective, and contact between elements.
- **LEADING LINES** can be implied, such as eye contact, pointing, direction of movement.

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**LEADING LINES** guide the viewer's attention



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**LEADING LINES** guide the viewer's attention

Do leading lines need to lead to a subject?



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**LEADING LINES** guide the viewer's attention

Do leading lines need to be straight?

"S" curve



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**LEADING LINES** guide the viewer's attention

Implied lines



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**FRAMING** contains the viewer's attention

- **FRAMING** uses elements at the edges of the photo to keep the viewer's eye from wandering off.
- Frames can be physical objects, (e.g. tree, foliage, wall, pole, window, doorway, archway).
- Framing will often add depth to an image.

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**FRAMING** contains the viewer's attention

Find natural items to place at edges of frame.



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**FRAMING** contains the viewer's attention

Frame subject by shooting through a physical opening



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**A few words about FOREGROUNDS**

- Foreground elements add depth, context and interest to an image.
- A strong foreground framing element at the bottom of the image gives it a solid base of support.

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**FOREGROUND** elements add depth and context to an image



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**Position an element to create a foreground subject**



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**FOREGROUND elements give an image a solid base**



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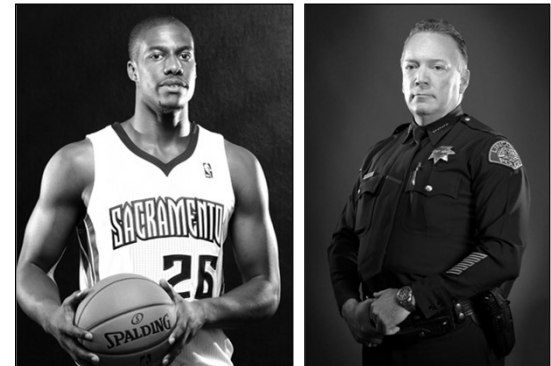
### **VIEWPOINT & SCALE**

- Vary the camera position to match the subject. Pointing the camera up or down changes the strength or dominance of the subject
- Unusual perspectives give the viewer a new way to know your subject.
- Point-of-view (POV) viewpoint engages the viewer with a first-person perspective.
- Include familiar items that help clarify the subject size.

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### **VIEWPOINT**

Upward angles make the subject appear dominant.



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**VIEWPOINT**

Photograph children at their level.



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**VIEWPOINT - Photograph taken at eye level.**



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**VIEWPOINT**

Photograph taken at low level.



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**VIEWPOINT - Photograph taken from above.**



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**VIEWPOINT – Looking down.**



57

**VIEWPOINT – Looking up.**



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**VIEWPOINT**

**Point of View**



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**VIEWPOINT - Immersion**

**'If your pictures aren't good enough, you're not close enough.'**  
*- Robert Capa*



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## VIEWPOINT

When photographed straight-on, buildings look two dimensional



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## VIEWPOINT

When photographed from a corner, the perspective gives buildings a three-dimensional feel

...add a framing element...

...remove a distracter and correct perspective



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## SCALE

Include familiar elements to give sense of scale to subject



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## PATTERNS & REPETITION



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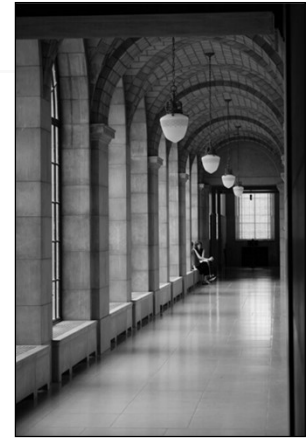
**PATTERNS & REPETITION**



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**PATTERNS & REPETITION**

Include a different element to break up the pattern or repetition.



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**CONTRASTS & JUXTAPOSITION**



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**RULE OF ODDS**

Odd number of subjects is preferable to an even number.



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### RULE OF ODDS

Odd number of subjects is preferable to an even number.



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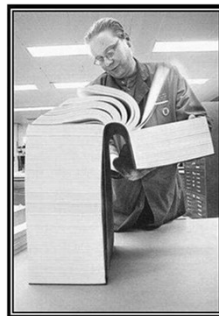
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### Begin at the End



- What is the point of this photograph?
- What do I want the viewer to feel, think, know?
- What story is this photo telling?

Did I make a good photograph?

Your answer won't be based on how many composition rules you used, it will be based on how well it illustrates your answers to the questions above.

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