

Exploration: Photography and videography 101

Composition techniques – Answer Key



Textures

Variations in how a surface appears (i.e., the details that visually suggest how something would feel to the touch) can affect the mood of a photo, provide or emphasize dimension/depth, or draw the eye's attention.



Lines

Lines can guide the eye through a photo, provide structure, dimension, and depth, or create interest.

- Horizontal and vertical lines – can be very powerful in providing structure, framing, etc. If you have a horizon, always make sure that it is balanced properly because a crooked horizontal line is obvious and jarring to the eye.
- Diagonal lines – can provide a sense of perspective.
- Curved lines – can make an image feel more natural and can create a calm mood.



Patterns

Repeating elements or groupings of elements, line patterns, or geometric shapes can create interest in a photo.

- Creating and then breaking a pattern in a photo can also make for interesting composition.



Rule of space

This composition guideline relates to the negative space created by what the subject is looking at, the direction they are moving in, or what they are pointing at.



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Composition techniques – Answer Key



Symmetry

There are several ways to think about symmetry in photography to create balance and interest in a shot or to evoke emotions or a mood.

- Horizontal or vertical symmetry – when similar or identical parts face each other on an axis (e.g., a reflection on a horizontal line).
- Radial symmetry – when several similar or identical elements surround a central point (e.g., like a Mandala).
- Centered composition – placing the subject in the center of the shot focuses the attention on the subject.



Black and white

As powerful as colour can be in photography composition, the absence of colour can focus the viewer's attention and heighten other compositional elements, such as tone or texture.



Golden ratio/spiral

Similar to the rule of thirds, this guideline creates interesting and aesthetically pleasing compositions; it follows a mathematical ratio (called the Fibonacci spiral) that can be visualized as a spiral that places the subject or key element near one of the four corners of the frame.



Shapes

Simple forms, such as circles or squares, can be effective in framing elements in a photo, adding structure, or drawing the eye's attention.



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Composition techniques – Answer Key



Colour and tone

The way in which colour is used in a photograph can evoke certain emotions, set a mood, and create an atmosphere; tone refers to the range of lightness versus darkness in your image and can be used to create contrast, draw the eye's attention, and set a mood.



- Warm colours (i.e., reds, oranges, yellows) can evoke strong emotions and attract attention; they're more energetic.
- Cool colours (i.e., blues, greens, purples) can be more soothing and subdued; they can suggest feelings of melancholy or peace.
- Color combinations, such as complimentary colours like yellow and blue, are pleasing to the eye and can help pull an image together.
- Creating and then breaking a pattern in a photo can also make for interesting composition.



Leading lines

Unlike composition techniques that use the lines themselves (e.g. horizontal lines) to create interest in a photo, leading lines are used to draw attention to a focal element or the subject, almost like arrows guiding the eye through the image.



Negative space

Negative space can be thought of as pauses in a sentence that lend weight and emphasis to the words; where you leave breathing room and space in your photograph can affect composition in interesting ways, such as by focusing attention on the subject.



Rule of thirds

This is one of the most well-known guidelines for composition, which is based around the idea of dividing your frame into thirds horizontally and vertically; by placing your subject or point of interest in the left or right third of an image, the composition of the shot is more compelling and can make your subject stand out.



- This is a common grid overlay that can be found on most smartphones and cameras.

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Fill the frame

Composing a shot in such a way that the subject fills up most of the frame eliminates any distracting elements, putting all the focus on the subject, and can be used to emphasize details in the subject; this is the opposite of using negative space to compose a shot.

- A close-up shot is another way to fill the frame by really zooming in on your subject or tightly cropping your image.
- Macro photography is a form of close-up photography where the subject (e.g., an insect) is photographed in such detail that it is actually shown larger than life.



Points or point of interest

A small area can be used to draw the eye's attention to a subject or focal element.



Rule of odds

When working with multiple subjects or objects in a shot, it is better to use odd numbers, such as three or five, to create an interesting grouping.

- There is nothing wrong with having two or four subjects/objects, but it depends on how other compositional elements, such as balance or symmetry, are used to create a visual story (e.g., two opposing subjects, one subject set apart from the three others).



Decisive moment

This compositional technique is about waiting for and recognizing the right moment to take a shot (i.e., being in the right place at the right time while keeping in mind the significance of what you want to capture).



- This concept in photography is not just about taking a photo of movement or capturing an action shot (although that can still apply) but also keeping in mind the various other composition elements that make a great photo.
- The “decisive moment” was coined by photographer Henri Cartier-Bresson and is sometimes considered a photography mindset rather than just a compositional technique.

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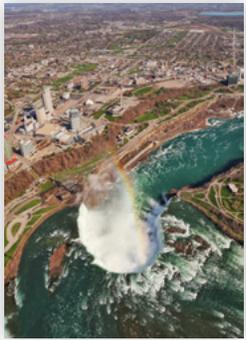
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Viewpoint

The perspective from which you compose your shot can create interest in a photograph by placing the viewer in an unexpected position.

- Worm's eye view – shooting low to the ground can create interesting visuals that distort a landscape and emphasize the subject of the shot.
- Bird's eye view – aerial shots or photos taken from overhead can provide an interesting new perspective on a familiar landscape.
- POV – the first person point of view, such as a shot taken from a GoPro mounted on a helmet or an over-the-shoulder shot, can make a shot feel more intimate or engaging.



Balance

By considering the size and location of different elements in a shot, you can create balance and harmony in your photo; imagine placing weights on a scale to balance the scale.

- You can also create interest in a photo or draw attention to the subject by intentionally breaking the balance.



Framing

To draw attention to your subject, adding a frame within your shot adds interest and focuses the viewer's eye on a specific area.

- A frame doesn't necessarily have to be square or circular and it doesn't have to be entirely closed or complete to effectively frame your subject.



Foreground element

Placing the focus on something close to your camera (such as the subject) and contrasting it with an out-of-focus background creates depth and draws the viewer's attention; alternatively, the foreground can be out of focus and the subject in the background can be in focus.

