



The Art of Composition

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NMUG (May 2026)

 Overview

Guiding Principles

- **Attentiveness** — get it right *“in camera”*
- **Understanding** — know the *“Rules”* to break the rules well!
- **Intuition** — *“Feels Right”* beats *“Measured Exactly”*!
- **Selfishness** — The Luxury of the Amateur!

Guidelines (that help me)

- The Rule of Thirds
- Balance the ‘Visual Weight’
- Find Geometry & Symmetry
- Shoot from ‘their’ level
- Room to ‘Look’ Into
- Landscapes Need Depth
- Give Close-ups Context

Principles

**Attentiveness, Understanding, Intuition
& Selfishness**

 Attentiveness

Get it Right "In Camera"

- Minimise the Easy Fixes:
 - Is it **level**?
 - Could **keystoning** ruin this? Am I approximately **face-on**?
 - Is the **exposure** as good as I can get it?
- Avoid the Difficult Fixes — cloning, generative fill ...
 - Is there anything poking in from the **edges**?
 - Are there avoidable **distractions**?
 - Am I leaving enough **room** around the subject?

Beware the Unfixable!

- Focus Failure
- Background “mergers”
- Distracting Backgrounds

 Understanding

Know the Rules to Break the Rules Well!

- All “rules” have a silent context — their “why”

“Give moving objects room to move into ... so your composition doesn't feel claustrophobic”

“Give people room to look into ... so your portrait feels balanced”

- The silent context is what we *usually* want — but not always!
- When you want the opposite, *break the rules!*
- Don't do it by half — avoid “the sloppy valley” (too close looks accidental)

 Intuition

"Feels Right" beats "Measured Exactly"!

- All the photographic "rules" are **guidelines**, at most, and often just **suggestions**!
- Photographs are **art**, not science — a composition that **feels** right **is** right!
- **Numeric guides** and desirable **ratios** are useful approximate suggestions — merely **options** to consider!

 Selfishness

The Luxury of the Amateur!

The word "**amateur**" comes from the French *amateur*, meaning "lover" or "enthusiast."

— Lumo (Privacy-first Chatbot)

- Ignore the crowds pushing for conformance
 - Keyboard warriors love to pontificate about what is "good" and what isn't — their opinions are built on mental quicksand!
 - Algorithms try to incentivise the latest fissionable trend

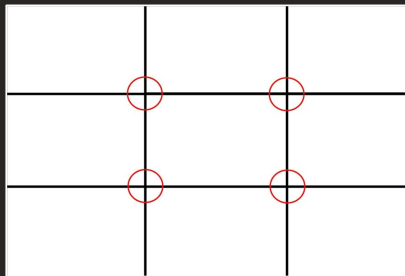
Your compositions should bring you **joy** — **express** yourself!

Rule of Thirds

A Guideline

 “That Grid”

- One of the best known “Rules”
- It’s 3x3 Grid is ubiquitous
 - Cropping tools
 - Camera view screens
- This is often a good suggestion to consider
- Everything about this “rule” is approximate — imagine the word “around” in each of the clauses!



THE “RULES”

1. Vertical Lines Look Best one-third-in from either side
2. Horizontal Lines look best one-third from the top or bottom edge
3. Subjects are best placed at the crossing points on the grid

Balance Visual Weight

A Guideline

 Visual Weight

Visual weight is the relative amount of attention an element draws within a photograph's composition.

Think of it as **visual gravity** — some elements pull the eye more strongly than others.

— Lumo (Privacy-first Chatbot)

- The better the visual balance, the more harmonious a composition will feel.
 - Best to consider balance before firing the shutter
 - Cropping, especially to a different aspect ratio, can help balance a photo

Geometry & Symmetry

A Guideline

 Seek Shapes & Symmetries

Shapes

- Good compositions often have a pleasing big-picture '*shape*'
 - A strong diagonal element
 - A triangular region of interest
 - A central circle of interest
- Found geometric shapes are opportunities
 - Architecture
 - Macros of every-day things

Symmetry

- Symmetries come in many forms
 - Reflections
 - Grids
 - Rotations
- Broken Symmetries really catch the eye

Shoot from their Level

A Guideline

 Get on **their** Level

- We're used to seeing things from human head-height — **alternative perspectives** are unusual, so they **catch the eye!**
- The most compelling compositions are often shot from the subject's 'eye' level
- **CAVEAT:** other unusual points-of-view might work even better!

THE EXPECTED

- Kids
- Pets
- Animals

THE UNEXPECTED

- Flowers
- Ornaments

Give Room

A Guideline

 Empty Space Brings Harmony

- Main subjects that are somehow lopsided feel uncomfortable centred
 - People, wild-life, and things moving across the frame need more space 'in front' than 'behind' to feel balanced
 - Faces looking left or right need room to 'look' into
 - The same applies to anything even vaguely face-like (flowers!)
- Visual 'weight' needs to be balanced for a harmonious feel
- **Caveat:** if you want to create tension, to make viewers feel uncomfortable, invert the advice!

Landscapes Need Depth

A Guideline

 Reality is 3D, Photos are 2D

- Landscape Photographs often fail to capture the 'feel' of the place
- The common causes
 - The world is 3D, photographs are flat — need to somehow capture a sense of depth!
 - Landscapes can impress with scale, but without an anchor, photographs can't capture that
 - Humans notice details of all sizes — photographs that don't capture that often feel bland

STRATEGIES:

1. Three Layers
2. Leading Lines
3. A place to 'stand'
4. Foreground Framing

 The Three Layer Strategy

- Simultaneously captures a sense of depth, and of details at multiple scales
- Seek compositions that have:
 - An interesting foreground detail
 - The main landscape in the mid-ground
 - Any interesting backdrop
- Moving a few paces in any direction dramatically changes the foreground but barely affects the mid-ground and background
- Crouching low often opens interesting foreground opportunities!

 Leading Lines

- A photograph that “pulls” the eye feels inherently 3D
- Converging parallels immediately add depth and draw the eye in that direction
- Winding narrowing paths feel inherently inviting to humans!
- **CAUTION:** leading lines have to lead the eye somewhere interesting!

 A Place to Stand

- A dramatic view is only dramatic in context
- When you're actually there you have an innate sense of where your standing, and where your looking, so you 'feel' the drama
- Photographs of vistas without an anchor miss half the story!
 - Simply stepping back to include some of the 'edge' often works well
 - Framing the scene with something in the foreground often works well

 Foreground Framing

When there are not three obvious layers and no opportunity to offer a place to stand, then framing some of all of the scene with something in the foreground can provide the needed depth

- Trees or other vegetation are often available
- For views from buildings, stepping back a little to include the window frame can work well
- Frames can still work well when silhouetted

Give Closeups Context

A Guideline

**** Closeups Mean More with Context

Small things live somewhere!

- Closeups with a sense of place tell more of a story
- Tread Carefully — there's a fine line between a sense of place and a distracting background
 - Shallow depth of field is the simplest way to avoid distractions
 - Even very out of focus backgrounds can give a sense of place
 - Lighting can help de-emphasise the background

Have Fun!

Experiment
Study Photos you Like!



Questions?

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