

Composition

- ❑ What is Composition?
 - ❑ “Rules” of Composition

 - ❑ Material stolen from
 - *Drawing the Eye, Creating Stronger Images Through Visual Mass* by David Duchemin
 - *Beyond Thirds, A Photographer’s Introduction to Creative Composition* by Andrew S. Gibson
 - *From Snapshots to Photography* by Jim Dicecco
<http://www.bhphotovideo.com/explora/photography/tips-solutions/snapshots-photography>
 - *How to Compose Better Images and Make your Images More Extraordinary* by Adam Welch <http://digital-photography-school.com/compose-better-make-images-extraordinary/>
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What is Composition?

- Each picture tells a story and you are the story teller
 - By “story” I don’t mean *War and Peace*; the story is your personal commentary or narrative
 - Photography is a visual language that replaces words with images, and what you record will communicate and/or convey a message about your subject
 - As the storyteller, you decide what should be dominant and what is supportive in every image by crafting the compositional elements. This is key to making a great image, not just a good one.
- Composition is the way you place elements within the frame in relation to each other and to the frame itself to tell the image’s story. It includes:
 - Your choice of lens,
 - Your choice of perspective, and
 - What you exclude—as well as what you include—from the frame
- In composing an image, ask yourself: What do you want the viewer to look at? The arrangement of elements in the frame should point to that in subtle but intentional ways.

Example: Photo of a Woody on a Beach at Sunset

- As visual storytellers we don't tell, we show. And to show we use the only tools at our disposal - the exclusion of elements that are not part of the story and then the intentional framing and arranging of the required elements. How you do that depends on which elements are most important to you. Let's illustrate this with a simple cliché.
- Imagine you want to photograph a beach at sunset. It's a beach with a sunset - that's your background. But what really draws your own eye is the foreground, an old 1953 Buick Stationwagon—a woody with surfboards on top.
- So how do you create an image that draws the viewer's eye in the same way?

Two Possible Scenarios

- You are in charge of how people read this scene. Your decisions now will affect what they see. Stand way back, at the rear of the car, and shoot the scene headon with a wide lens and what they'll see is a great sunset with a small car silhouetted from the back. That's scene one.
- Now get close with the same lens. Now you have a great car in front of a great sunset but it's still not right. Walk a little to the left so the car is on more of an angle and you're showing more of the car - the lines making a diagonal line that draws the eye along the lines of the car and the surfboards on top (now a very specific and identifiable car) and into the sunset. Your choice of optics and point of view here are determined by what you know about how people will read your image.



Elements in the Two Scenarios Have Different Visual Mass

- Each of the two scenarios gives elements within the frame different visual weight, or mass.
- In the first scenario the sunset has all the mass, the car has very little. The sunset is colorful; the car is not. The sunset is large; the car is small. The sunset takes no effort to interpret; the back of the car is less recognizable.
- The draw on the eye changes in the second scene. The car is larger; it's seen from an angle and is therefore more recognizable. The lines are more oblique, creating more pull on the eye. The car is probably now more sharply in focus than the sunset.
- Two photographs of the same scene, yet the elements within the scene as captured have different visual mass from one frame to another and therefore are read very differently. Which one is right? That depends on what you're trying to express.

Understanding Composition

- Composition is important because you have to get it right when you take the photo. It's one of the things that separates good photographers from the less skilled, and master photographers from the merely good. Great photographers use composition in skillful and inspired ways to tell their stories. You can wield the magic of Photoshop and Lightroom to do some amazing things—but you can't use them to fix fundamentally flawed compositions.
- To lead the viewers of your image to what you want them to see, you need to know what draws the eye and how to achieve balance between elements in the image. We'll cover this next.
- Note, though, that even though we see through the eyes, we perceive with the mind, emotions, and memories. Those things influence the way we as individuals see things and perceive them.
- As a result there are no absolute “rules” of composition. But composition has been studied and refined by artists for centuries, and by photographers since the invention of photography nearly 200 years ago. This has led to many guidelines that can aid artists and photographers.

What We Are Drawn To

- The human figure before anything else
 - On a tighter scale we're drawn more to the face; and on a tighter scale yet, we're drawn to the eyes first.
- Objects that are large before objects that are small
- Objects that are bright before objects that are dark
 - More strictly, though, it's more about which tones stand out. We are drawn to contrast.
- Elements that are sharp and in focus before elements that are out of focus
 - This too is a function of contrast as the focused elements are those with the cleanest contrast between themselves and their out-of-focus surroundings.
- Elements that are recognizable before those that are less recognizable
- Elements that are presented obliquely or in perspective (diagonal lines) before elements that are flat, vertical or horizontal
- Elements that are warm before elements that are cool
 - But, as with bright/dark elements, this really has more to do with which colors stand out.
- Elements of emotional significance over those with none
 - That's why a technically perfect photograph resonates less with the heart and soul of the viewer than a less-than-perfect image of something that pulls the heart.

What catches the eye



What catches the eye

- ◆ Brightest object in the composition



What catches the eye

- ◆ Brightest object in the composition



What catches the eye

- ◆ Brightest object in the composition



What catches the eye

- ◆ Brightest object in the composition



What catches the eye

Sharpest object
in the
composition

What catches the eye

- ◆ Sharpest object in the composition



What catches the eye

- ◆ Sharpest object in the composition



What catches the eye

- ◆ Sharpest object in the composition



What catches the eye

People

What catches the eye

- ◆ People (Strong attraction)



What catches the eye

- ◆ People (Strong attraction)



“Rules” of Composition

- The items on the previous slides draw the eyes. But to assemble them into a successful composition requires carefully placing and balancing them.
- The important thing is not just where the elements in an image are, but the relationships between them and other parts of the photo, including any negative space. Visual elements need to be placed where they have the most impact. They need room to breathe, they need to be related to the other elements in the photo, all the while considering the overall balance, harmony, and energy of the image.
- This had led to a number of empirical “rules” of composition.



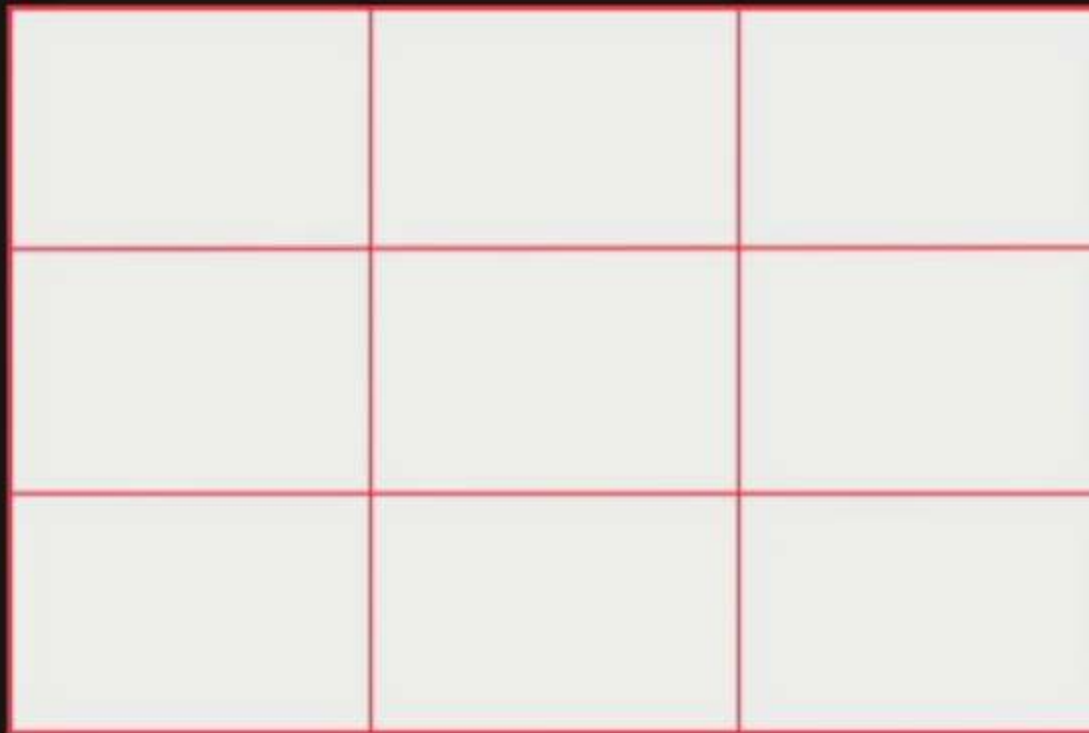
Photographic Rules

- Rule of Thirds
 - Cropping
- Balancing Elements
- Symmetry
- Diagonal
- Disequilibrium
- Depth of Field

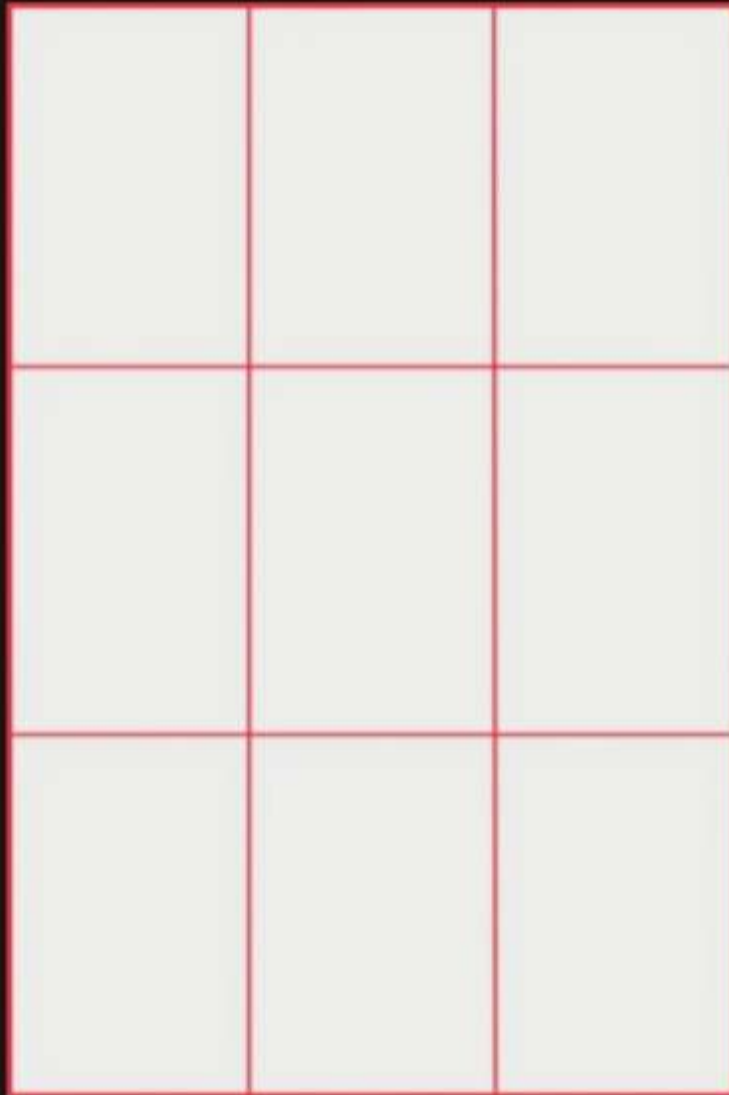
Composition

Rule of Thirds

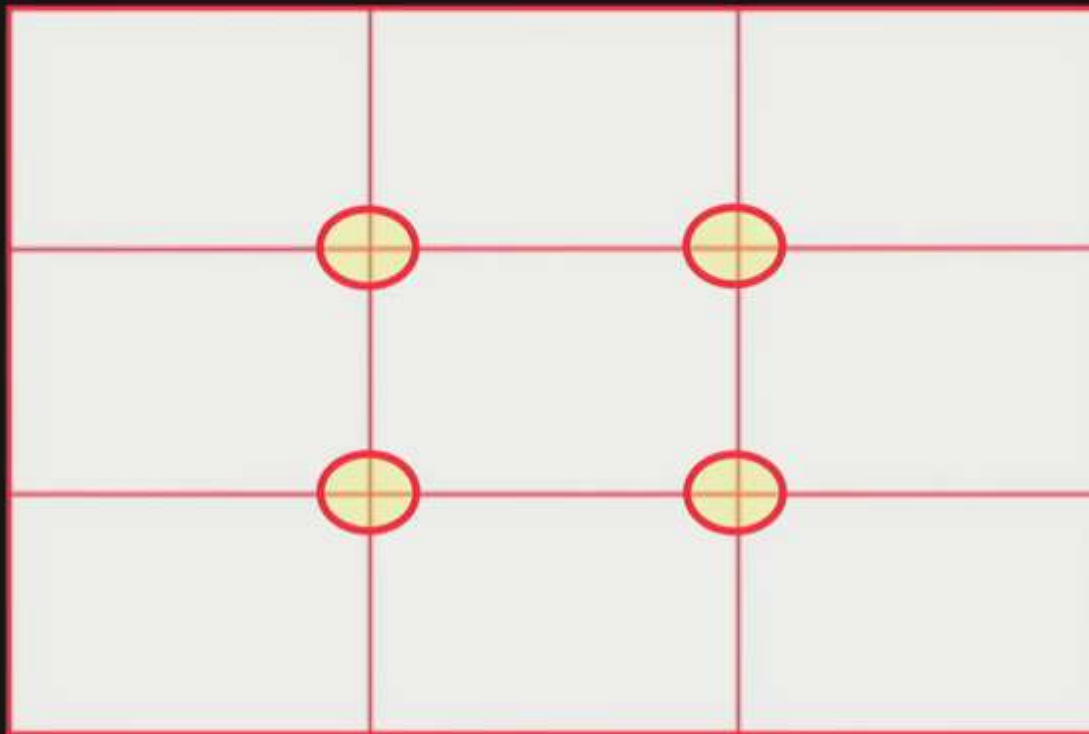
Rule of Thirds



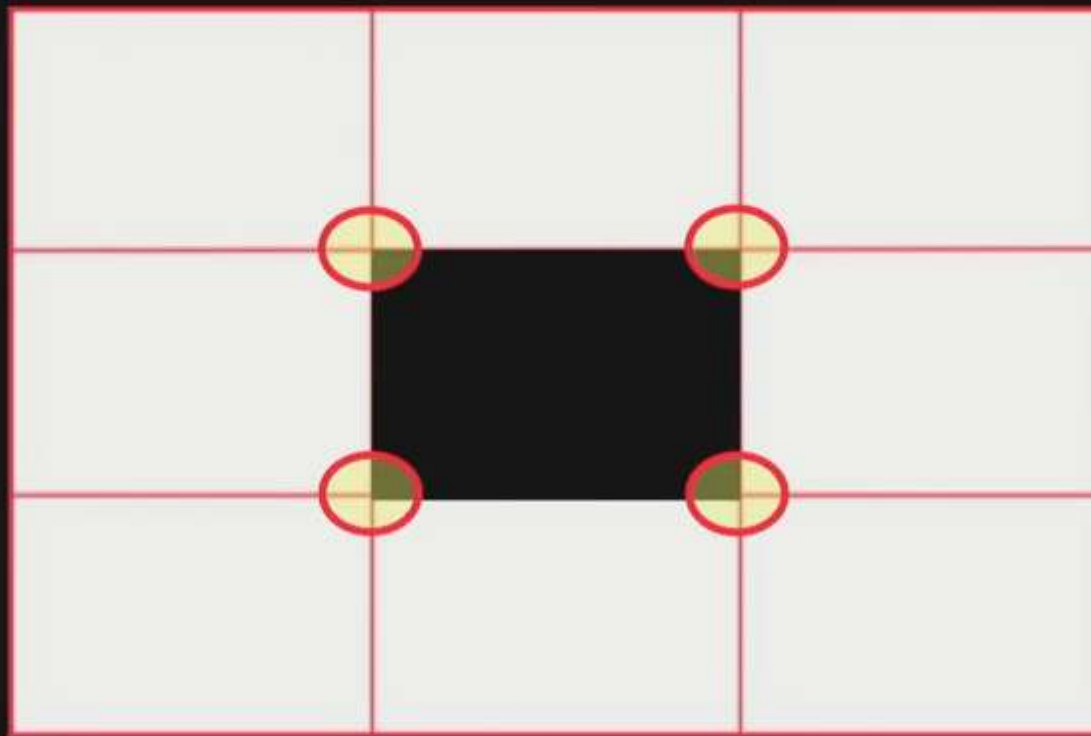
Rule of Thirds



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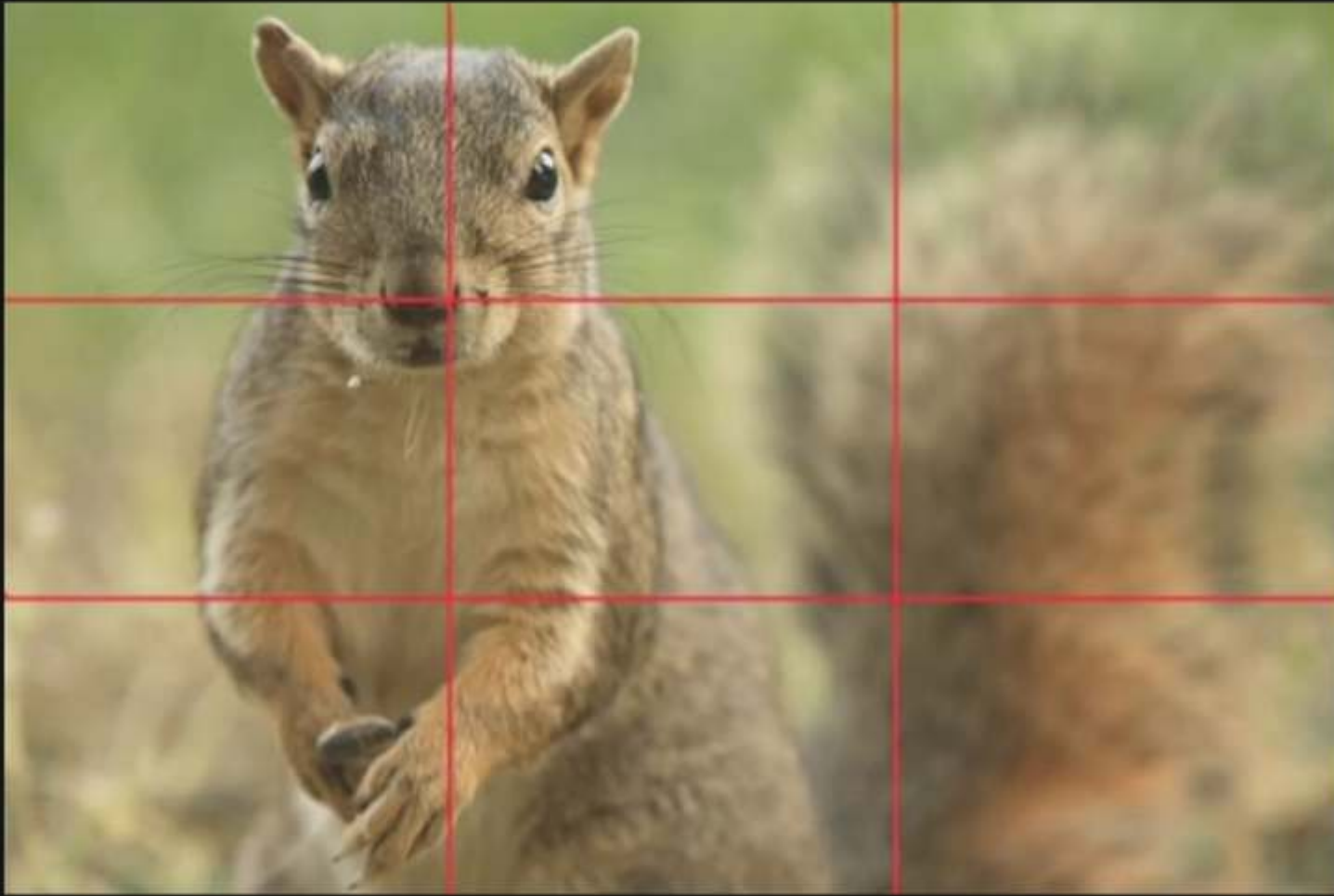
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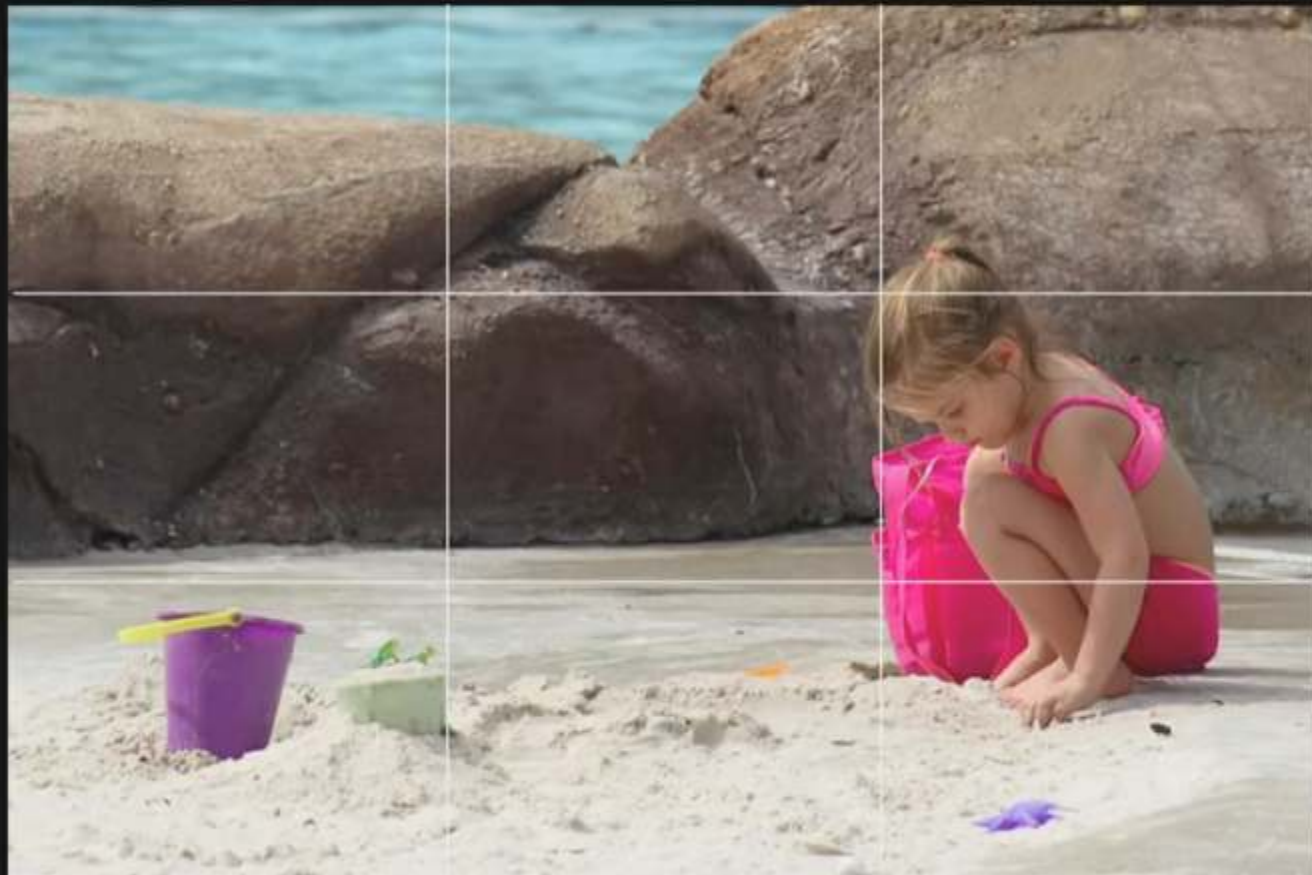
Rule of Thirds



Rule of Thirds



Rule of Thirds



Cropping



Cropping



Balancing Elements

Balancing Elements



Balancing Elements



Balancing Elements



An Experiment With Balance



Maori Bay, New Zealand, 2011

Canon EOS 5D Mark II, 26mm, 30 seconds @ f8, ISO 100

An Experiment With Balance

- This photo has a simple composition. The eye moves from the big rock to the small islands in the distance and back to the large rock again. The large rock is the main focal point of the photo, and the others pull the eye through the photo so that the viewer takes in the rest of the scene. The movement of the eye through the photo creates energy.
- If there were just one island in the background, the viewer's eye would move between the two focal points. It still has energy, it's just that the eye moves between these two points instead of all around the scene.
- Without any islands in the background, the composition has changed again. It's become a lot more restful as the absence of the islands in the background doesn't pull the eye through the image. The composition doesn't have as much energy.



Symmetry

Symmetry



Symmetry



Symmetry





Diagonal

Diagonal



Diagonal



Diagonal



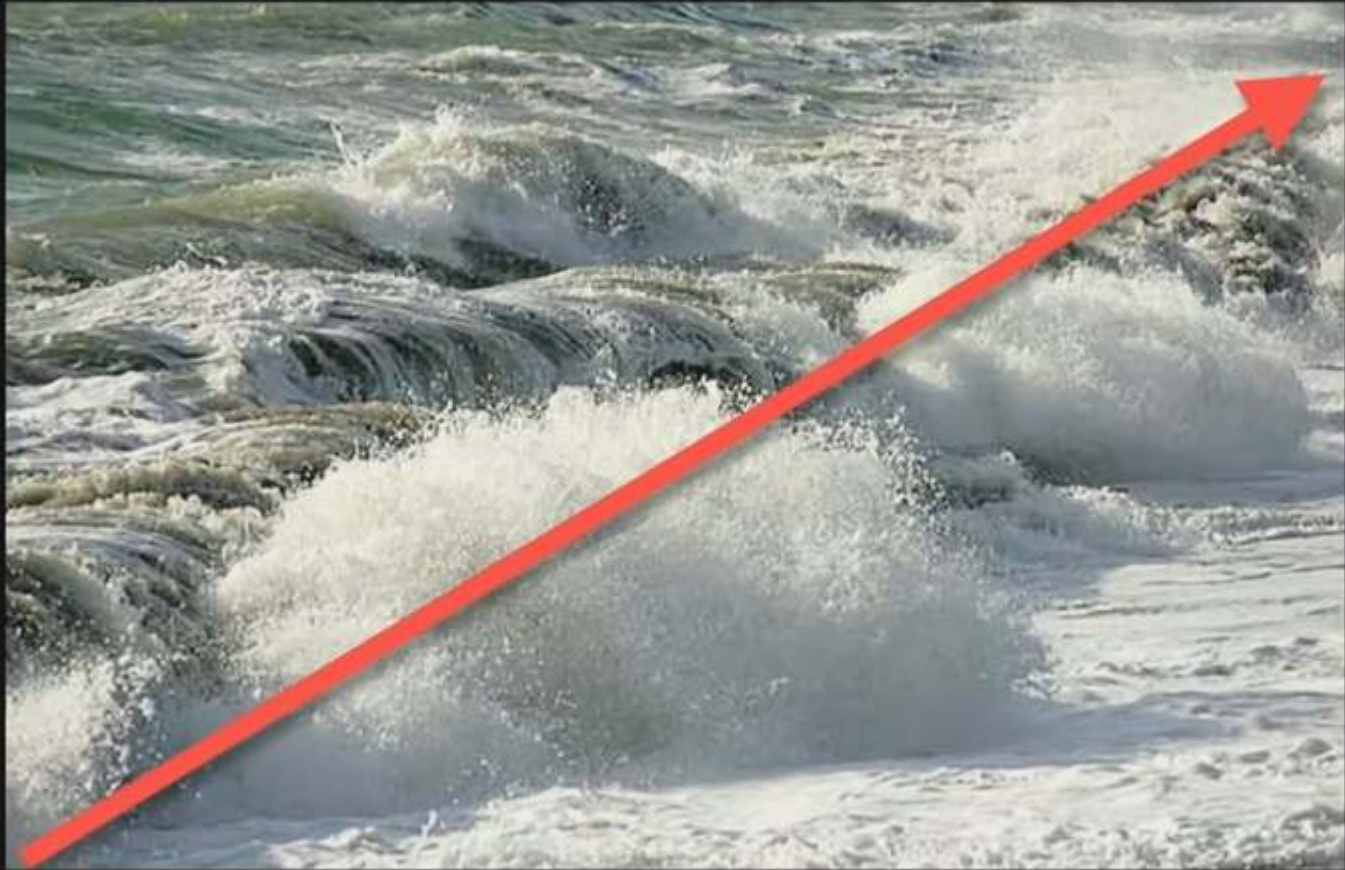
Diagonal



Diagonal



Diagonal



Diagonal



Diagonal





Disequilibrium

Disequilibrium



Disequilibrium



Depth of Field

Depth of Field



Depth of Field



Depth of Field



Depth of Field



Compositional Devices

- Three Dimensions
- Leading Lines
- Framing
 - A Way to Break the Rule of Thirds
- Fill the Frame
- Patterns and Textures

Composition

3

Dimension

3D



3D



3D



3D



Photos by Jim Dicecco

3D



Leading lines

Leading lines



Leading lines



Leading lines

Converging Leading Lines



Leading lines



Leading lines



Leading lines



Leading lines



Leading lines



Leading lines



Framing

Framing



Framing



Framing



Framing



Framing



Framing



Framing



**Fill
the
Frame**

Fill the frame



Fill the frame



Fill the frame



Fill the frame



Fill the frame



Patterns and Textures

Patterns and Textures



Patterns and Textures



Patterns and Textures



Patterns and Textures



Patterns and Textures



Advice

- Get It Straight
- Watch Your Background
 - And its relative, “Border Patrol”
- Simplify

Get

it

Straight

Get it Straight



Get it Straight



**Watch
your
Background**

Watch your Background



Watch your Background



Watch your Background



Watch your Background



Watch your Background



Border Patrol

- Make sure the edges of the frame do not contain unwanted distractions
- Their job is to keep the eye imprisoned within the frame and not let it escape.



Border Patrol

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Simplify

- When in doubt
 - Simplify, simplify, simplify
- A good composition includes elements that contribute to the image's story and excludes everything else

Quotes from Ansel Adams

- “There is nothing worse than a sharp image of a fuzzy concept.”
- “A good photograph is knowing where to stand.”
- “There are no rules for good photographs, there are only good photographs.”

