

Composition

**A Guide to taking better
photographs.**

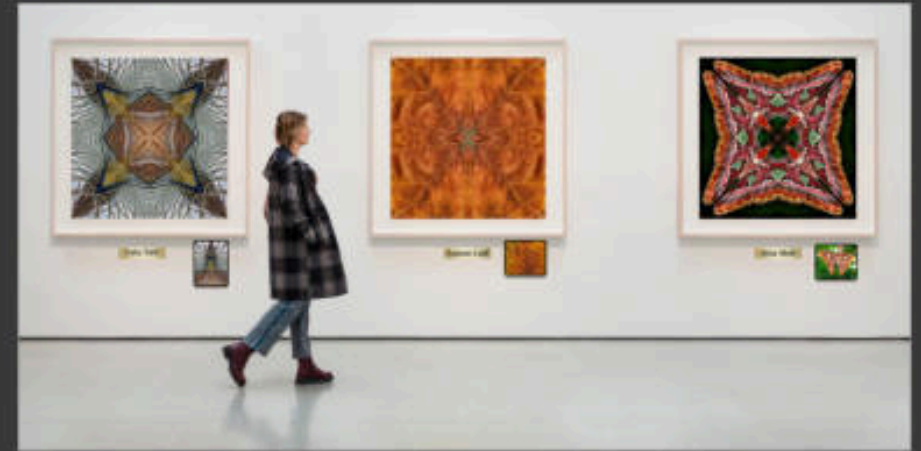


Composition is where you put attention

It is an editable visual guide to arranging subjects, lines, space, depth, light, and color.

But we already know about composition, don't we.

Rule of Thirds,
done and dusted !!!!



BUT, there is more to Composition than just the **Rule Of Thirds**, There are about 30 different rules that can be applied to make an image more interesting. However Rules can be broken if it suits the subject.

Equipment does not compose an image.
You Do!, by where you stand, what you include or do not.

Every image is a choice about attention.

A strong photo has a clear subject, a path for the eye, and nothing that fights that path.

Weak photos usually fail because too many things shout at once.



GOLDEN RATIO AND SPIRAL

This is another well known rule that is a tighter cousin to the Rule of Thirds

01

The Spiral is a Path, not a target you must hit..

02

Useful when the eye should curl into the subject.

03

A curve in a road, a coastline, or a staircase can echo that inward path.

04



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OTHER RULES

CENTRED SUBJECT AND SYMMETRY

01

Centre the subject when the scene is balanced left-right or top-bottom.

02

Symmetry feels formal, calm, or graphic.

03

Placing an image in the Centre is not lazy if the picture is built for it:.

04

Symmetry works when the shape is strong and the edges are clean



HORIZONTAL PLACEMENT

01

A No No! - A horizon through the middle of an image often splits the photo in half.

02

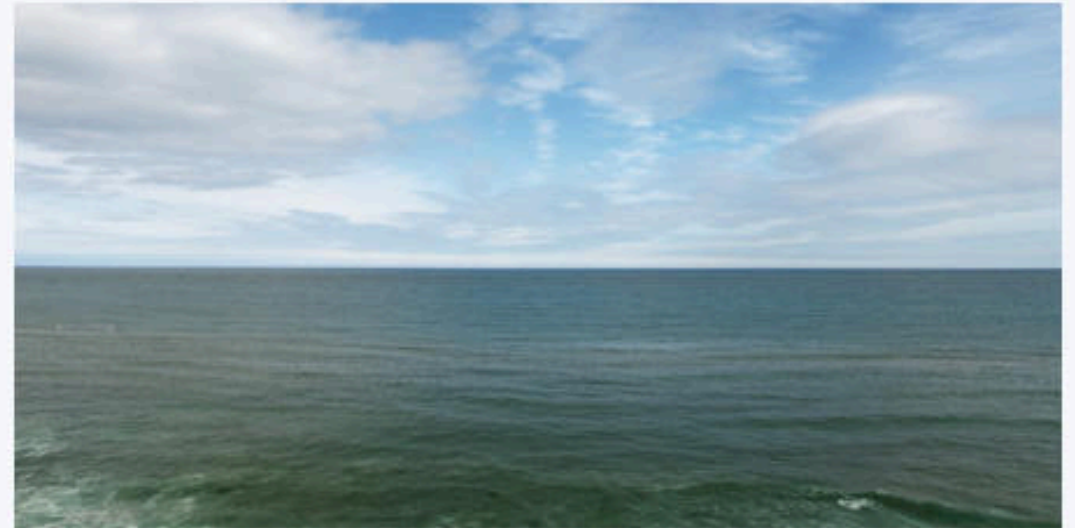
Low horizon: sky and mood dominate.

03

High horizon: land, water, or foreground dominates

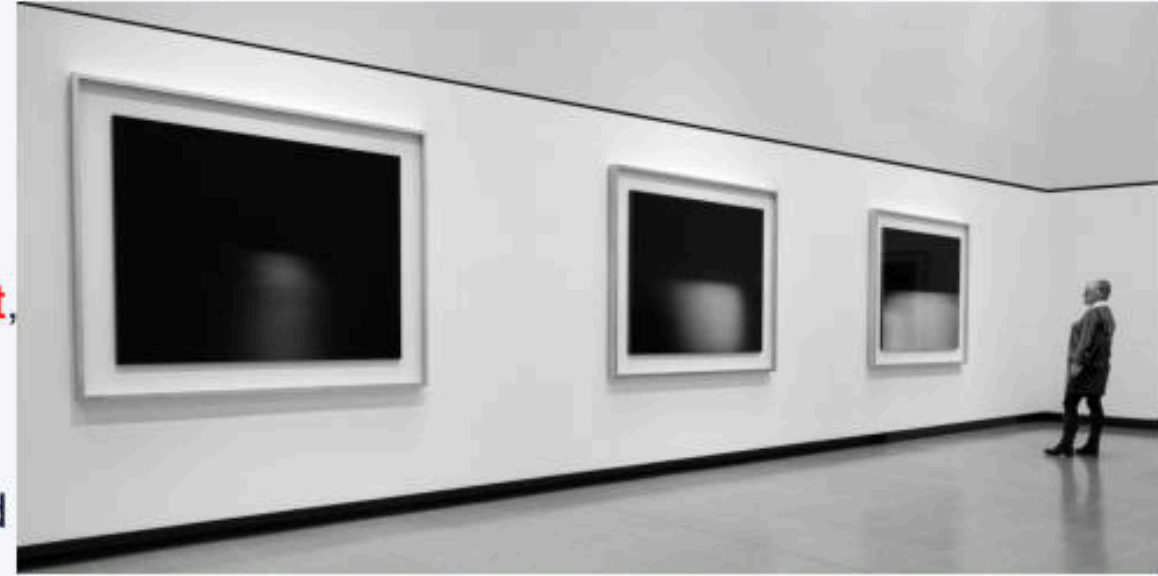
04

IMPORTANT! - Keep the horizon level unless a tilt is deliberate.



LEADING LINES (my favorite)

- ➡ A leading line is only useful if it delivers the eye somewhere worth arriving.
- ➡ A road that exits the corner with no subject is an **exit**, not a lead.
- ➡ Stand, so the line enters from an edge or corner and ends on the person, the building, or the light.



DIAGONALS

- ➡ Diagonals feel faster than horizontal or vertical lines.
- ➡ They create tension and depth.
- ➡ A diagonal from corner to corner is the strongest, and the easiest to overuse.



TRIANGLES AND IMPLIED GEOMETRY

- ➡ Three points make a stable, readable shape.
- ➡ The triangle can be literal or implied by gaze, limbs, or objects
- ➡ Geometry organizes chaos.



CURVES & S-CURVES

- ➡ A curve slows the eye down and feels organic.
- ➡ An S-curve is a path with a change of direction..
- ➡ Rivers, paths, spines, and coastlines do this naturally
- ➡ Curves are gentler than diagonals. They work when you want depth without aggression. **TIP!** The mistake is a curve that wanders and never arrives. Give it an end: a figure, a boat, a bright patch, a vanishing point.



FRAMING

➡ Use something in the scene as a border around the subject.

➡ Doorways, branches, windows, arches, and crowds all frame.

➡ The frame should be darker, softer, or simpler than what it surrounds.

➡ A frame concentrates attention and adds depth because something sits in front of the subject. **TIP!** Keep the frame from becoming a second subject. If the arch is sharper and brighter than the person, you photographed the arch.



FILE THE FRAME

- ➔ Move closer until the subject occupies the picture.
- ➔ Cut extraneous background instead of hoping the crop will save it.
- ➔ Edges should feel intentional, not accidental.



NEGATIVE SPACE

➡ Empty area is an active part of the design.

➡ It isolates the subject and sets the mood: calm, lonely, vast, graphic.

➡ The empty area needs a clean tone, not clutter that you forgot to notice.

Negative space is not “nothing.” It is the shape around the subject. **TIP!**

➡ Watch for a bright spot, a twig, or a horizon bump that breaks the emptiness



BREATHING ROOM AND DIRECTION

- ➡ Leave space in front of a gaze, a gesture, or motion.
- ➡ The nose, the eyes, the front wheel, or the bow of a boat points to where space belongs.
- ➡ **Negative !!!** Space behind a moving subject feels like the moment already passed.



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EDGES AND CROPPING

➡ Check all four edges before you shoot.

➡ A crop should remove distraction or strengthen a shape, not repair a weak standpoint.

Negative !!! –

➡ 1. Do not cut joints, eyes, or hands unless the cut is graphic and deliberate.

2. Do not have stray objects or distractions on the edges or corners



BALANCE AND VISUAL WEIGHT

- ➔ Large, bright, sharp, or high-contrast things feel heavier..
- ➔ Symmetrical balance is calm.
Asymmetrical balance is more alive.
- ➔ A small bright object can counter a large dark mass.
- ➔ An off-centre subject balanced by a smaller shape, a patch of light, or a block of colour



RULE OF ODDS

01

Three or five similar things often read more easily than two or four. Three objects, three people, or three trees with one clearly primary.

02

Use it for objects and small groups, not as a headcount rule for crowds.

03

Negative !!! - Two subjects compete. An odd count avoids a neat pair that the eye splits down the middle.

04

Rules Can Be Broken



PATTERN, RHYTHM AND THE BREAK

01

Repetition builds order: windows, columns, faces, waves.

02

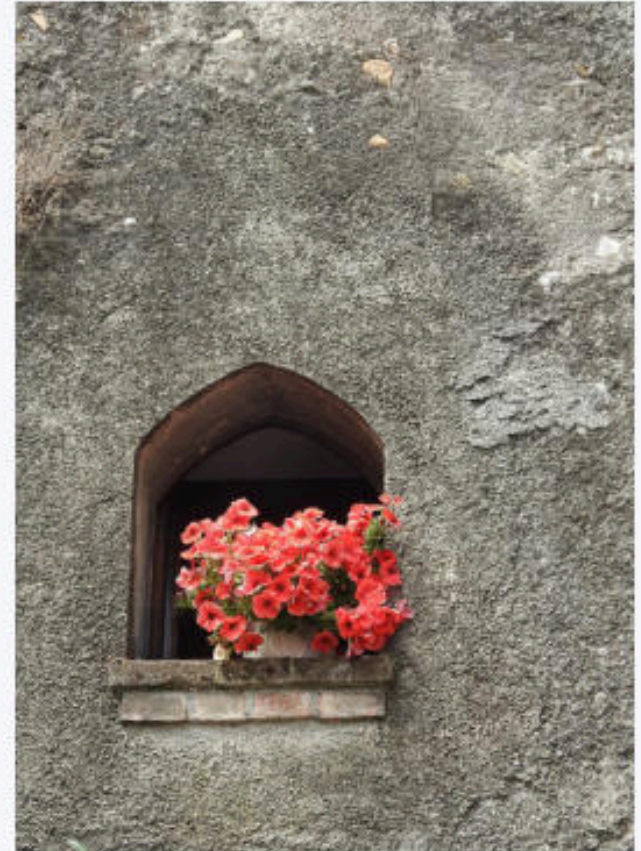
Rhythm is repetition with a beat, including variation in size or spacing.

03

One break in the pattern becomes the subject.

04

A pure pattern can be beautiful and also static. The eye likes a rule and then an exception: a red door in a row of grey ones, a person in an empty colonnade



JUXTAPOSITION AND CONTRAST

01

Juxtaposition is comparison inside one picture: new against old, huge against tiny, a quiet face against a loud sign.

02

Contrast can be size, age, light, colour, sharp vs soft, or idea.

03

Both elements need to be readable.

04

Two unlike things in the same frame so that each explains the other.

05

Negative!!! - A clever contrast that is muddy is just clutter.



SCALE

01

Without a familiar object, size is a guess.

02

A person, a hand, a door, or a boat tells the viewer how big the scene is.

03

Scale can be the subject: the human is there to measure the place.

04

TIP!! - Mountains, machines, and buildings often look smaller in photos than they felt. Include something whose size everyone knows, and place it where it does not steal the scene



DEPTH: FOREGROUND, MIDDLE, BACKGROUND

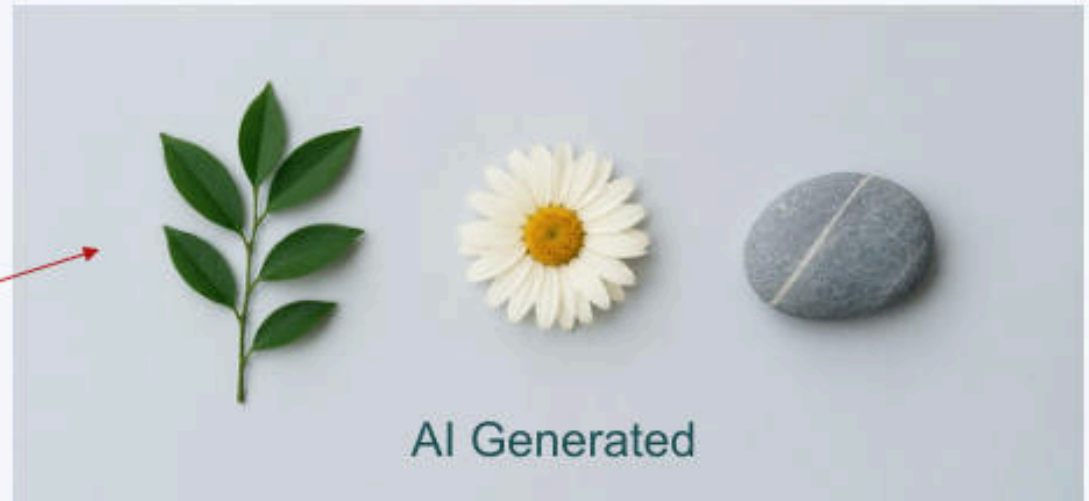
01 Three distances make a place feel enterable.

02 Foreground anchors. Middle holds the subject. Background locates it.

03 Overlap is what sells depth, more than blur alone.

04 You do not need all three layers every time. You just need enough separation so that the eye can walk into the picture.

05 **Negative!!!**- Flat photos happen when everything sits on one plane.



LAYERS AND OVERLAP

- ➔ Overlap tells the viewer what is in front.
- ➔ A clean gap between layers keeps them from merging.
- ➔ **Negative!!!** - Side-by-side objects with no overlap look like stickers.
- TIP!!!** - If two shapes touch at the edge and share the same tone, they fuse.
- ➔ Shift until one clearly passes in front of the other, and until their tones or colours separate. This matters in crowds, markets, forests, and city streets more than in open landscapes.



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VIEWPOINT AND CAMERA HEIGHT

01

Negative !!! - Eye level is neutral. It is not always the best.

02

Low angle: subject feels larger, sky becomes background.

03

Negative !!! - High angle: pattern and layout appear. The subject can feel smaller.

04

Most people shoot from standing eye height, so most photos look like that. **TIP!!**- Kneel, lie down, climb a step, or hold the camera overhead or below. **The subject may not change.**

05

The background almost always will. A clean background is often just a different height, not a different location.



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PERSPECTIVE AND LENS AS A COMPOSITION

01

Wide lenses exaggerate near-far distance and stretch edges

02

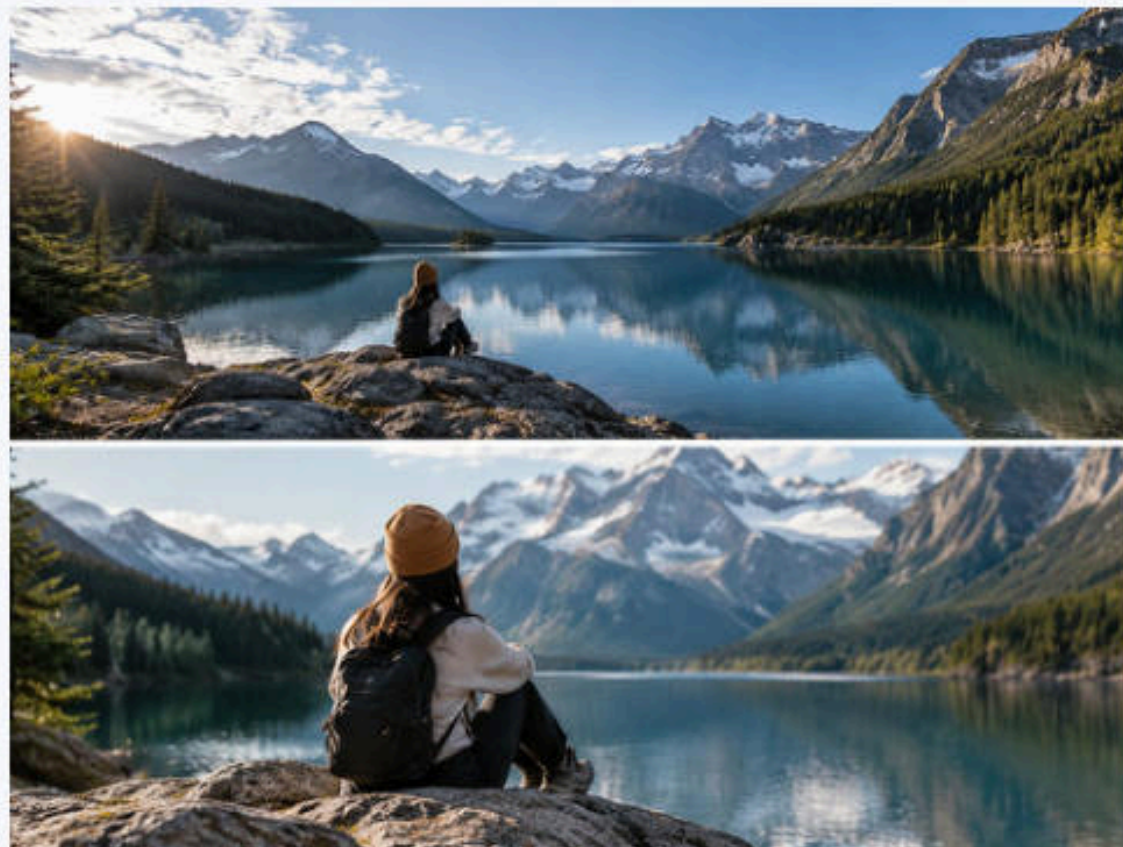
Longer lenses compress distance and simplify the background.

03

Move your feet first. Zoom second.

04

Focal length is a compositional tool, not just magnification. A wide view includes context and can bend a foreground into a lead. A longer view stacks distant layers and knocks out distractions. If the background is ugly, a longer lens or a step closer often beats hoping the edit will blur it enough.



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LIGHT AND STRUCTURE

01

Light places the subject as surely as a grid does.

02

Side light reveals texture. Back light separates. Front light flattens.

03

Negative!!! - A bright area pulls the eye even if it is not the subject.

TIP!! - Look at the brightest and darkest patches before you look at the object. If the brightest patch is a sidewalk behind the person, that sidewalk is your subject whether you meant it or not. Move the person into the light, or wait until the light moves. Shade can be a frame. A shaft of sun can be a spotlight.

04



The subject should be the Robin.
But, despite being too small in the frame, the sign is the brightest part and dominates

COLOUR AND TONAL SEPARATION

➡ Complementary colours vibrate:
blue/orange, red/green, yellow/purple

➡ Similar colours feel quiet and unified

➡ The subject should separate from the background in tone or colour, not only in focus.

➡ A red coat in a grey street needs no speech. A brown dog on brown dirt may be beautifully focused and still disappear. Separation can be colour, brightness, or both. If you cannot see the subject in a squint, the tones are too close.



Caravan really stands out against Green foliage



Wild Pig just blends in with the background

TEXTURE

01 Texture needs raking light and enough resolution to feel touchable.

02 It can be the subject, or the surface that supports a subject.

03 **Negative !!!** - Too much texture everywhere is noise.

04 Bark, fabric, rust, skin, and water become photographs when light skims across them. Flat overhead light hides texture. Fill the frame if texture is the point.



SIMPLIFY

01

One idea per frame.

02

Remove anything that does not serve the subject.

03

Change angle, wait, or step closer. Those are edits you make before the shutter.

04

Simplification is the technique underneath the others. Thirds, frames, and lines fail if the picture still contains three competing ideas.

05



Simplicity

ASPECT RATIO IS A COMPOSITIONAL CHOICE

01

A square stresses shape and balance

02

A wide frame stresses place and panorama.

03

A tall frame stresses height, posture, and vertical lines

04

Choose the ratio for the picture, not from habit.

05

The same scene can be three different photos. A horizon epic wants width. A standing figure or a waterfall often wants height.



BREAK THE RULES ON PURPOSE

01

Centre if centring is the idea

02

Cut the joint if the fragment is the purpose.

03

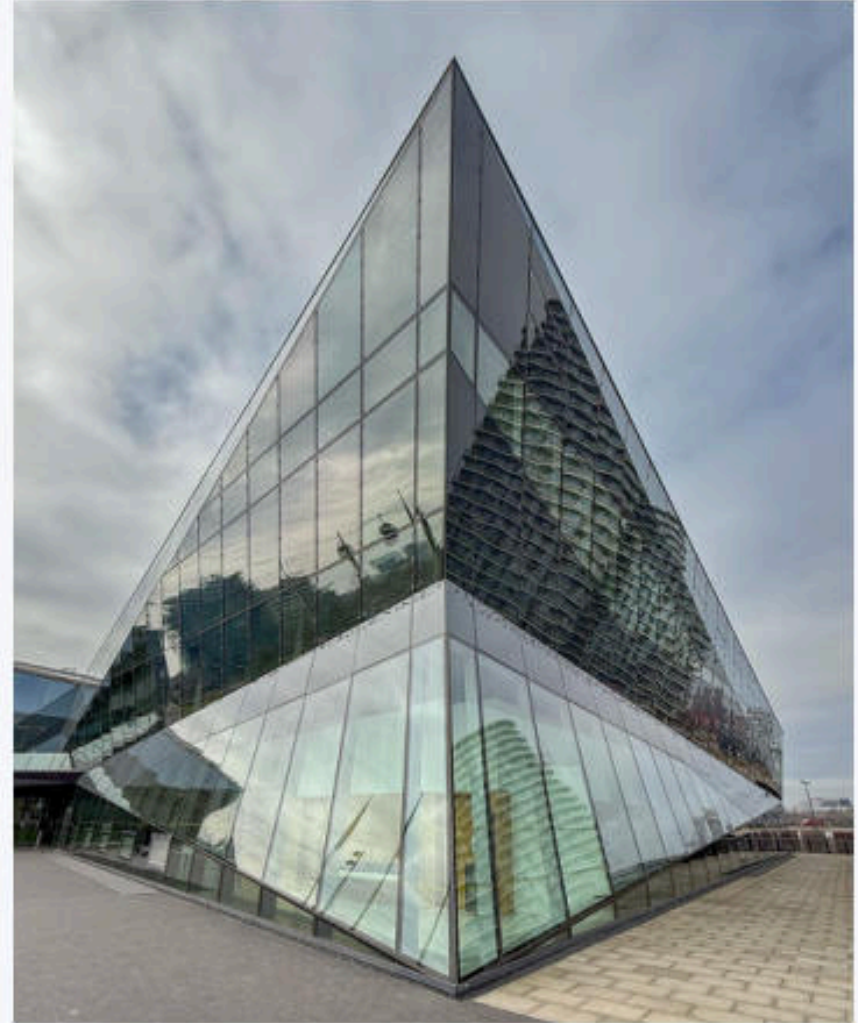
Tilt, it if unease is the idea.

04

Negative!!! - Breaking a rule without a reason just looks unfinished.

Or

Rules are descriptions of what often works, written after the fact. A centred, symmetrical, horizon-in-the-middle photo can be the right photo.



Field checklist

Before you press the shutter, ask yourself a few simple questions.

1

When you point the camera, what is the subject?

2

What should the eye hit first?

3

Is the background helping or competing?

4

Where do the strongest lines go?

5

Is there space in front of the gaze or the motion?

6

Do the edges cut anything by accident?

7

Does the subject separate in light, tone, or color?

8

Would a step left, a kneel, or a closer position fix it faster than a crop?

My favorite frames — and why each works



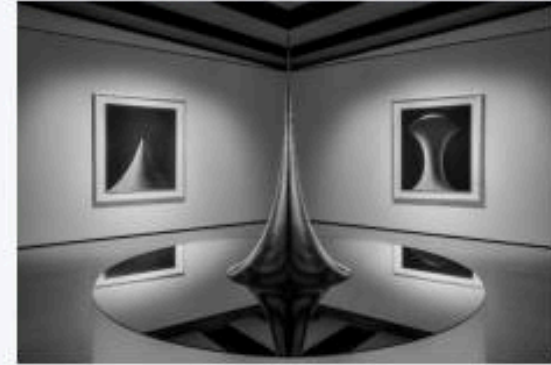
Frame 1: I like this image for its low viewpoint, three being the ideal number of subjects. It also breaks the rules because they are not looking at the camera.

FRAME 1 / THE DECISION



Frame 2: This image is a typical Rule of Thirds. The bonuses are; 1. The theme, Traffic Lights – Stop to Go, 2. The motion of the lady and 3. The Reflection.

FRAME 2 / THE DECISION



Frame 3: This image somewhat breaks the rules as the main focus is the centre object radiating from a reflective surface.. It's complemented by the top triangular shapes point to the main object.

FRAME 3 / THE DECISION



WHAT MAKES SOMEONE
WANT
TO LOOK AT AN IMAGE



HOW DO WE ARRANGE A PHOTOGRAPH ?

WHAT MAKES SOMEONE WANT TO LOOK AT IT?

This opens up several engaging topics without repeating the Composition rules.

INTENSION

What is the photograph really about?

We have this all the time with judges and titles.

“A person at a bus stop” describes the subject; but much better to describe the image “Nowhere to be, Somewhere to go” suggests an intention and it tells a story.

What do you want the viewer to notice, feel or wonder?



LIGHT AS MOOD, NOT JUST EXPOSURE

Here, we explore how the direction, quality, and colour of light change the emotional character of an image. Hard light might feel harsh or dramatic; soft light might feel gentle or subdued—but neither has a fixed meaning.



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TIMING AND ANTICIPATION



An interesting photograph often depends on a fleeting expression, gesture, coincidence, or relationship between moving subjects. Discuss anticipating a moment rather than simply reacting to it.

STORYTELLING AND WHAT YOU LEAVE UNEXPLAINED

Photographs can suggest what happened before the frame and what might happen next. An unanswered question can hold attention more effectively than a completely explained scene.

*Does this image tell a story,
or invite us to invent one?*



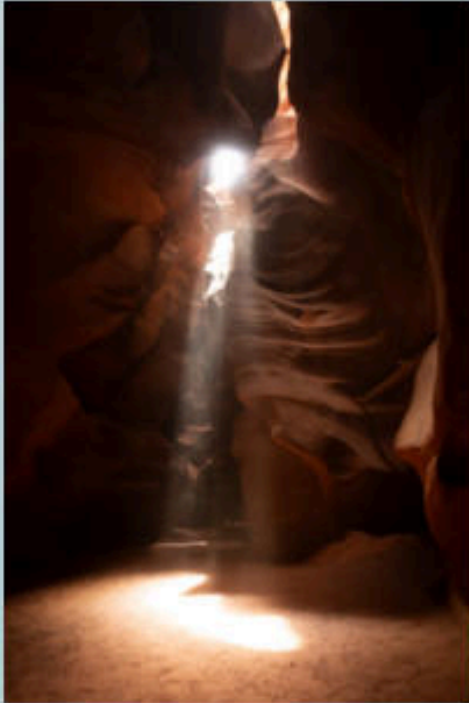
MAKING THE FAMILIAR - UNFAMILIAR

Ordinary subjects become interesting through close observation: an unexpected detail, unusual scale, reflection, weather condition, or viewpoint.

*Similar to the previous image this image tell a story.
"Time to Capitulate" !!!*



CONTRAST BEYOND LIGHT AND DARK



Look at contrasts of meaning: old and new, order and chaos, intimacy and distance, luxury and neglect. These relationships can give a photograph an idea, not merely an attractive arrangement.

AI Generated using original image as a reference, Prompt: remove trees and lamppost

EMOTION AND HUMAN CONNECTION

Expression, posture, gesture, and relationships can matter more than technical perfection. For portraits, discuss how conversation, trust, and patience influence the result.

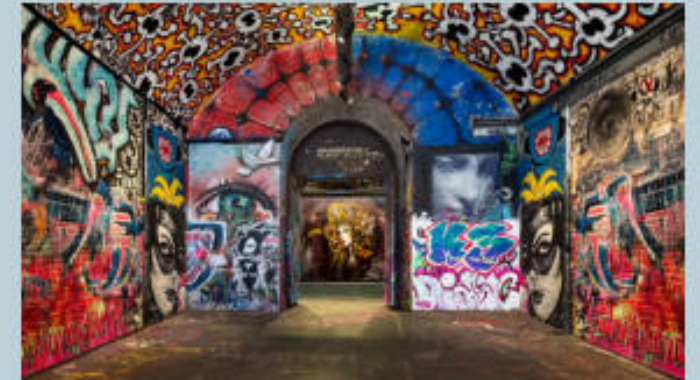
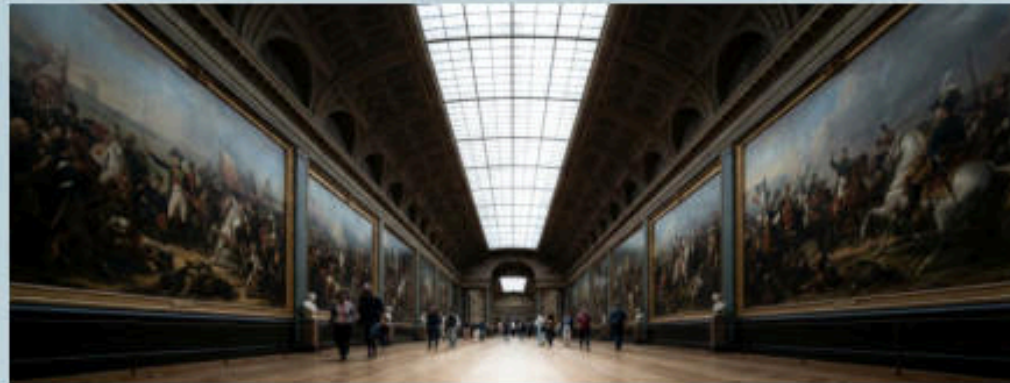
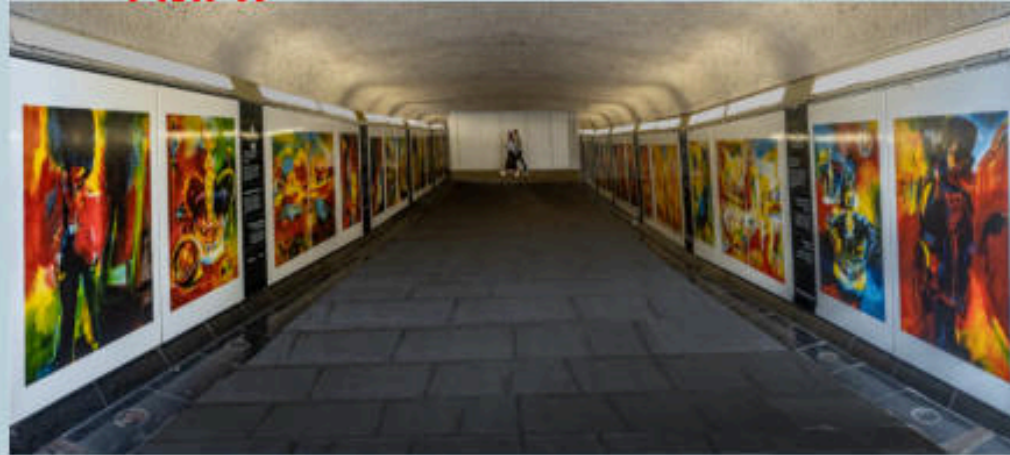
Question ? *Can a technically imperfect photograph be more powerful than a flawless one?*



PERSONAL PERSPECTIVE

What makes a photograph recognisably as yours?

Not hard to guess - **LEADING LINES**



Your interests, experiences, humour, and repeated fascinations shape what you notice—not just your choice of camera settings.

EDITING AND DECISION MAKING

Some photographers are purists. What they take is what they want to show. However, there are many like me, that would like to enhance/manipulate their images to improve them, in fact most judges require artifacts/bright areas to be removed or toned down.

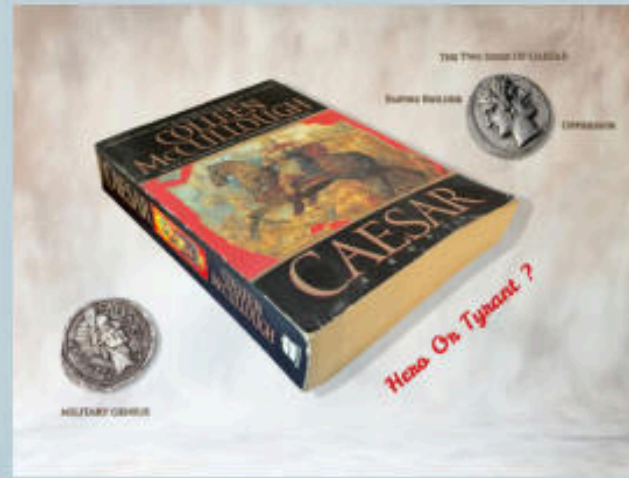
Choosing the strongest frame, controlling colour, and directing attention through tonal adjustments all help clarify intent.

Processing can strengthen an idea, but it rarely substitutes for one.



INDIVIDUAL PHOTOGRAPHS VS

Some ideas need more than one image.



A detail, an idea, a portrait, and an action shot can work together

Negative!!! - Avoid including several images that all say the same thing.

