

## Ten Rules of Composition

These rules will help you greatly when you are trying to decide how to construct a photograph. The rules fall under the following ten categories:

### Ten Rules of Composition

#### Frame within a Frame

The viewfinder in your camera is a rectangle with four sides. The very edge is referred to as the frame. When you frame the main subject using the surroundings within the scene — such as a mirror, window, or doorway, mirror, etc. — this is called “framing within a frame.”

In the example above the interaction of two men within a window frame falls within the larger frame of the camera. The window holds the image together as if they were on a stage, and the elements in the shop add visual interest and humor.

#### Rule of Thirds

Imagine dividing the frame inside your viewfinder into three vertical and three horizontal sections. Placing the main subject on one of these imaginary lines will add more visual interest. Try to avoid framing the main subject in the center of the frame unless it is necessary.

The image, taken from French Vogue, places the model in the first third of the frame. Placing her weighted to one side and keeping the opposite side clean breaks up the symmetry of the scene. Your eye automatically swings left.

#### Point of View

Just as you don't want to always stand still and place everything in the middle of the frame, you may also want to change your camera angle to get your idea across. Lie down, climb high, or get close — all in the name of experimentation.

One important thing to remember when using Point of View in your photography is that your intention is to transport the viewer to a different perspective, a perspective that they might otherwise not be able to see on their own.

#### Worm's Eye View

You occasionally may want to put the camera on the ground and shoot from a “worm's perspective.” The fashion shot above accentuates the shoes and pants, and makes for a dynamic, upbeat image.

#### Bird's Eye View

You may want to shoot from overhead by standing on a ladder or shooting from the top of a roof. Try to imagine what the image would look like from a bird's perspective. This image of wrestlers was taken for a college brochure. It not only transforms a gymnasium setting into a beautiful graphic visual; it also draws our attention to the action in a unique way.

#### Point of Reference

Have you ever seen a photograph of a person standing beside a giant redwood? By photographing the person

next to it, the viewer can understand the true enormity of the tree. You can also reverse the point of reference to show the smallness of an object.

The gymnast on top of the beam gives the viewer vertigo, a dizzying sense of height. We also get the sense of the size and weight of the steel beam she is performing upon.

### Macro/Close-Up

Don't be afraid to get too close. Move in and move out. Show your visual range. Check the manual of your camera to find out just how close your lens will focus when used on the macro setting. This close-up of Evander Holyfield's ear records a dramatic snippet of boxing history.

### Truncation

Truncation means cutting off a part of something, or shortening something by cutting. In the case of the camera, we can use the camera's viewfinder to crop out part of the main subject. It is sometimes just so simple and boring to always show the entire subject. The example of the legs on the bed allows the viewer to imagine what is happening in the other part of the frame.

### Symmetry

Symmetry is a simple concept to understand; if you split a symmetrical image in half (in this case, down the center), then both sides of the image would (for the most part) mirror each other. The men in this example are balanced within the frame, as they have been placed roughly the same distance from the center on opposite sides, while taking up a similar amount of space in the shot. The shot is additionally balanced through the placement of light and dark, as well as the use of pattern and body posture.

Instead of allowing an image to be equally balanced on both sides of the center, an asymmetric composition uses something to break up the balance. A simple example, such as this fashion image, has tipped the weight to the right side of the frame; the subject here takes up a large portion of that one side.

### S-curve

The intention of an S and C curve is to get the viewer's eye to move around the inside of the frame. In the best case, the S-curve will touch three or more sides of the frame. This causes the viewer's eye to snake around back and forth before the eye stays focused on the main subject. In this example of a C-curve composition, of wheelchair athletes, the eye travels through the frame along the track chalk lines, landing on the subject(s).

### Selective Focus

Selective focus is the term used to describe a shot in which only a small section of the scene, or only part of the subject, is in focus, and the rest of the image is out of focus.

You can achieve shallow depth of field by choosing a longer lens as well as choosing a low aperture (f2.8 or f4). This photograph of Bill Gates has selectively focused on his hand.

### Motion

This rule refers to camera motion or subject motion. When the camera is set at a slow shutter speed, it will capture the subject moving. The example above of a bullfight was taken with a hand-held camera; both the subject(s) and the camera are moving. The image of bobsledders was taken with a tripod; only the subject is caught in motion.

Stop action uses a camera to freeze motion. This is simple to achieve with a fast shutter speed. The hurdler above has stopped right at the peak of the action.

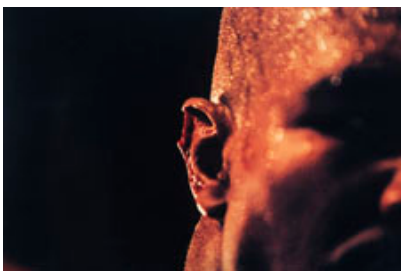
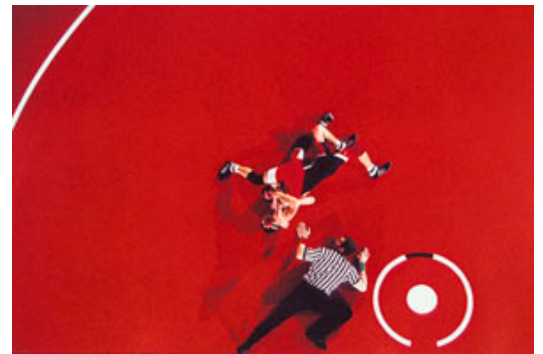
## Juxtaposition

Another term for juxtaposition could be irony; juxtaposition is often used to create humor in a composition. The photographer places opposite elements side by side in the same scene to communicate an idea. The most successful examples, such as the baby on the examining table, occur when the photographer has set them up. This is a good chance to push your most creative and humorous ideas.

## Repetition

Another way to get your idea across is to hit the viewer on the head. Clobber them with repetition and your idea will speak loud and clear. By using several instances of a similar subject, the photographer's intent comes across effectively. It can make for a memorable image, such as the group photograph shown here.







## Five Rules of Design



1. Line: Imagine a pencil line or a brush stroke; a visual equivalent can appear anywhere within a scene. Here is an image of a young girl set against a wall of lines. She seems perfectly bordered by the lines, and the viewer tends to follow the lines up and down the image.



2. Texture: There are obvious uses of texture (fabric, walls, natural forms), and also those that are not so usual (skin, sky), in design. The model in white above stands out against the texture of the tall row of trees behind her. Here the photographer has juxtaposed a soft element against a hard background.



3. Shape/Form: By selecting to include specific elements and by their placement in the frame, the photographer can effectively use shape and form in a composition. This fashion photograph draws our attention to the woman by placing her beside a solid, simple form. The shape is obvious and dominates the design of this photograph since the elements fill the frame; in fact, they looked squeezed into the frame.



4. Pattern: Pattern is very easy to identify, but also very easy to confuse with repetition. Pattern is all about design and could be located anywhere in the scene. This image of the pool has the group of men as a repeated element even though they are not symmetrically placed.



5. Color/Value: The use of color and value is bigger than ever these days in advertising. Here is a car advertisement for Saturn that is bright and bold; the photographer uses saturated colors and rich hues to get the consumers' attention.