

Most of us can “see” in the ordinary sense of the word, but unless sight is guided by creative vision, picture-taking efforts seldom result in compelling imagery.

Anyone with a good camera can take decent photos, but learning how to see and use light effectively is an essential building block to becoming a good photographer. To learn to see, creatively, is a skill that will take your photos from ordinary to extraordinary and will help you to appreciate the simple things that you see around you every day.

This workshop is designed for various levels of expertise. You can set your own pace and choose your level of learning. The prompts in this set are similar to a full semester of study in any introductory photography course. Take your time, look around, try to see your surroundings through your lens and perhaps you will see things in a way you have never before.

Assignment:

For each prompt, a photo is assigned based on instructions. Following the prompts in order is recommended, however it will be helpful to skim all assignments before starting, to ensure you are keeping an eye out for subject matter that matches each project.



CAMERA SKILL

Each prompt includes DSLR tips and is meant for those who want to improve their camera techniques. Skills are meant to build upon the last and should be followed in order.

PHOTOGRAPHY

Composition Skill - Simplicity

When choosing the subject of your photograph, it can be difficult to notice the clutter that often surrounds it, distracting the viewer from what should be emphasized. Creating a simple composition helps to command attention and place focus and emphasis on the subject.

The easiest way to do this is to close in on your subject, excluding as much of the surroundings as possible. On the other hand, if you want to include some of the environment, try and keep it as uncluttered as possible. Try and include only the elements that make your image stronger.

Consider: **NEGATIVE SPACE**. How do they use negative space (empty space in the image) to give the subject room to breathe?



CAMERA SKILL

Set your camera to Auto Mode. This mode gives your camera permission to control everything: ISO, Shutter, aperture and other important controls not mentioned yet.



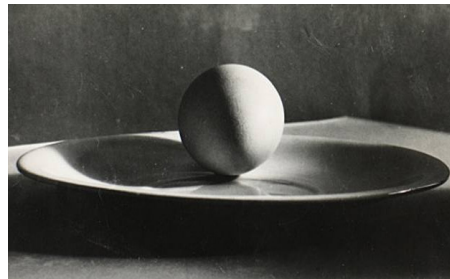
Auto - No Flash
Auto



Auto
Auto - No Flash

Assignment:

For this photo choose a subject matter that you find interesting. Focus in on it in a way that emphasizes only the subject matter. Simplify the background by “zooming in” or changing the angle of your shot.



Josef Sudek, *Untitled (Egg on a Plate)*, 1930

SIMPLICITY

Composition Skill - Line

Lines can be straight, curved, jagged, thick, thin, horizontal, vertical, diagonal, etc. Each evokes a unique mood and has the ability to draw the viewer's eye around the frame.

When a line brings the viewer's eye from point A to point B, consider the end-point of the line. Is there something there that is interesting to the viewer? Is the viewer being directed there for a purpose?

When a line curves or forms an S shape, this often brings your eye from point A to B to C. Often times, the line directs the viewer back to point A. This is a good way to bring the eye around the frame.



CAMERA SKILL

Enable your camera for manual focusing. This may be a switch on the lens itself or is often found in the front/bottom portion of your camera body. Choose manual and turn the lens ring to control your focus.

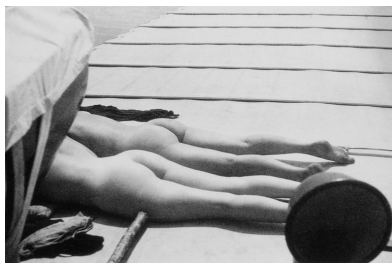


Once you have selected Manual Focus, you will need to turn the focus ring of your lens to focus your image.

Assignment:

Photo 1 Capture a line that brings the viewer's eye from point A to point B.

Photo 2 Capture a line that curves or forms an S shape.



Jacques-Henri Lartigue, 1894-1986

Line

Composition Skill - Shadow

In order for shadows to exist, you have to have light – and light is really the fundamental tool for photography.

Shadow can create dramatic value (the lightness and darkness of a color)

Find a composition where shadow is emphasized in an interesting way. Instead of attempting to capture only the shadow of something, try to see how a shadow makes the subject more interesting or how it can create mood or draw the viewer's eye around the frame.

Consider: *Shadows are everywhere. Try not to merely focus on the shadow of an object, but the shadows that exist within an object.*



CAMERA SKILL

Set your camera to Aperture Priority. This allows you to control your aperture (f-stop) while the camera chooses all other controls.



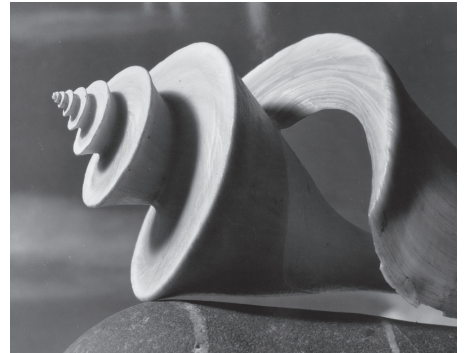
Aperture Priority



F-Stops are like the pupil of your eye. They dilate to allow for more or less light. The lower the #, the larger the opening.

Assignment:

For this photo emphasize shadow in a carefully composed photograph.



Andreas Feininger, *Shell*, 1948

SHADOW

Composition Skill - Texture

Evoking texture, or the way a surface feels is a powerful photographic tool. Texture is a simple way to add depth and detail to your photographs.

The way you light a subject plays a major role in conveying its texture. Side Lighting is a helpful technique to use for highlighting textured surfaces.

Consider: When you can't actually "feel" something when looking at a photograph, how does the visual texture affect the viewer?



CAMERA SKILL

Set your camera to Shutter Priority. This allows you to control your shutter speed, while the camera chooses all other functions.



Shutter Priority



The shutter controls the amount of time that light enters the camera. Use a tripod with anything slower than 1/30.

Assignment:

For this photo emphasize texture in a way that adds to the detail of a photograph.



Matthew Brady, Ruins of Railroad Bridge, 1862

TEXTURE

Composition Skill - Pattern and Repetition

When lines, shapes, forms, or textures are repeated over and over in more or less regular intervals, a pattern is created. Try to fill your entire frame with a pattern to add to the emphasis.

Consider: One often can get a sense of musical rhythm when looking at a photograph. Try to decide if your photograph has a beat, and if so, is it a satisfying one?



CAMERA SKILL

Set your camera to Manual Mode. You are now the Han Solo of your camera. You are controlling the entire ship. (including your ISO - go to your menu to set that as well)



Assignment:

For this photo choose subject matter that creates a sense of rhythm with pattern or repetition.



*Albert Renger-Patzsch,
1897-1966*

PATTERN

Composition Skill - Color and Value

Everything has color, but using it effectively can really add a lot to your photos.

Choose a composition that uses color in an interesting way. This may mean that you observe colors that are standing out due to their increased saturation compared to those around them or perhaps the colors are being used to emphasize something interesting about your subject matter. Don't forget about value - the value (or the lightness and darkness) is just as important in black and white imagery.



CAMERA SKILL

Light Meter

If you look into your viewfinder, you may notice the way that the camera meters your exposure. Typically, for proper exposure, you want your meter to be balanced.



Exposure

Aperture

Exposure Level Indicator

ISO

Assignment:

For this photo emphasize color or value in your photograph.



Sandy Skoglund, 1979

COLOR

Composition Skill - Camera angle

A simple adjustment to the angle of your view can give you countless varieties for composition. Take a photograph showing the subject at a completely different vantage point. Move your camera around to decide which angle creates the most visually compelling image.

Consider: *What details do we notice when we change the angle of view? If you were to take a photo of a dog at the eye level of his nose, would his face change shape?*



CAMERA SKILL

Depth of Field

The lens on your camera can only be focused at one distance at a time. But there's an area that extends outwards from the point of focus, both towards the background and towards the camera, in which objects still look relatively sharp. This is referred to as the depth of field.

Large apertures produce a narrower depth of field, letting you sandwich a sharp subject between a blurred foreground and background.

The closer you are to the foreground, and the more distance there is between the subject and the background, the more pronounced the effect.

Assignment:

Photograph your subject matter from a unique angle. Consider your vantage point and shoot from different points of view (worm's, bird's, etc)



Man Ray, Tears, 1930

ANGLE

Composition Skill - Balance

Symmetrical Balance

Although there are several different types of symmetry, in photography the most common method of achieving symmetry is by creating an image which can be divided into two equal parts which are mirror images of each other. The line that splits a symmetrical object is called the Line of Symmetry. Symmetry can be either vertical (left and right halves being symmetrical) or horizontal (top and bottom halves being symmetrical).

In photography composition, symmetrical can be effectively used to create a sense of harmony, balance and proportion. It soothes the eyes and mind of the viewer.

Asymmetrical Balance

Instead of mirror images or an equal weight on each side of the photograph, the image is balanced by the creative use of size, tone, and form of the subjects within the composition. Each side of the photograph, in turn, becomes equally weighted regardless of their differences.

When considering tones within your image, begin to think of highlights as weighing very little, with shadows weighing much more. In order for asymmetrical balance to be achieved, you need to have a perfect balance between both light and heavy. Consider this: since shadows 'weigh' more, a photograph would need to have more highlights than shadows in order to be considered balanced. Asymmetrical balance is also commonly achieved when one main subject (commonly located in the foreground) is balanced out by another, less important subject (commonly located in the background).

Assignment:

Photo 1

Capture Symmetrical Balance

Photo 2

Capture Asymmetrical Balance



An example of asymmetrical balance

BALANCE

Composition Skill - Lighting

Indirect lighting is light that has been obstructed by clouds, fog, heavy rain, snow, smoke, mist, and other atmospheric particles. This light is usually soft and diffused, minimizing or completely eliminating dark shadows

Direct Lighting

When a light source shines directly on a subject, it evokes a specific mood and creates a more dramatic composition.



CAMERA SKILL

Practice creating shallow depth of field. Remember, start with a wide aperture. Sometimes, if you are using a zoom lens, the lowest f-stop will vary depending on your focal length.

Photo geek vocab: **BOKEH**: the visual quality of the out-of-focus areas of a photographic image, especially as rendered by a particular lens.

Assignment:

Create a composition that emphasizes interesting lighting. It can be small, large, direct, indirect, etc.



Willy Ronis, *My Paris*



Hal Morey, 1930

LIGHTING

Composition Skill - Camera angle

Good composition often includes use of foreground, middle-ground and background. Pay attention to the way that shapes may frame a composition by focusing through them in the foreground. Framing an image limits the field of view and calls attention to the subject.

Consider: Frames do not necessarily have to be complete shapes. You can have tree branches framing a landscape without seeing the entire tree.



CAMERA SKILL

Flash

If there is not enough light in a given situation, an external flash may be used. To pop up the flash that comes with your camera, press the mini button on top nearest your flash.



Flash button

Consider investing in an external flash such as a Speedlight to enable larger light that can be controlled easier.

Assignment:

Find or create a composition where your subject matter is framed within a frame.



Rémy Perthuisot, stock photo

FRAME *within a*
FRAME

Composition Skill - Abstract Elements in nature or landscape

You can photograph landscape details that eliminate the clues that tell us what the context is. Abstract elements are images composed of lines, shapes, values, and textures. Tree bark patterns or lichen on a boulder can become abstract images. Try getting really close to something within an ordinary scene and photograph only a small part of it.

Consider: “This is then: to photograph a rock, have it look like a rock, but be more than a rock.” – Edward Weston



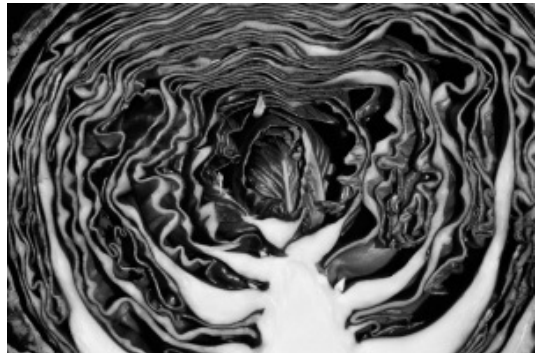
CAMERA SKILL

Bouncing Light

If using an external flash, consider bouncing your light. Think about a pool table. Once you hit a ball, it bounces off the walls to get to your desired target. Doing so with light enables a larger, less intense light which will especially help with portraits.

Assignment:

Capture an abstract composition created from a real object from nature.



Edward Weston 1886-1958

ABSTRACT

Composition Skill - Silhouetting the Subject

Anytime you have a strong light source (such as the sun) and you photograph a subject in front of it, you are most likely going to get a silhouetted or blacked out image. Use this to your advantage by creating a composition that emphasizes the shape of your subject set apart from the background. Smart phones tend to overcompensate from back-lit photos, so you may need to play with your settings and make sure your auto flash is turned off.

Back-lighting can be used to create dramatic and beautiful images. It is however one of those pesky lighting situations that happen just as you are trying to capture a loved one in front of a beautiful sunrise. Anytime you have light behind your subject, you are going to run into a challenge. One way to work around this is to use a raised flash to shine some light onto your subject.

Consider: *When you lose definition in a shape, can the shape still look interesting or tell a story? Be careful of shapes becoming too "blob-like".*

Assignment:

Capture an image that shows a subject matter being back-lighted, or silhouetted.



BACK-LIGHTING

Composition Skill - Response

Photography enables us to visually share our ideas and give voice to our thoughts. Artists respond to ideas and situations with their art and use their methods and materials to share their reactions. Art can show response and reaction by expressing mood through line, shape, color, etc., or by illustrating the story of the response with a scene or environment.

Consider: **Not everyone has to “get” your response. Having to explain your photograph to the viewer is OK.**



CAMERA SKILL

Processing your images

When it comes time to upload, organize and edit your photos, don't be too heavy-handed. Amateur photographers are easily pointed out by the many levels of filters they apply to their photos. Let the photo speak for itself.

Assignment:

Respond to the following quote: “The Camera works both ways. In expressing your subject, you also express yourself.”

- Freeman Patterson

Create a visual response to this quote with a single photograph.

RESPONSE

Composition Skill - Response

Storytelling is timeless. Humans have been telling stories for a very long time. We tell stories to share memories, to preserve our history, to promote ideas, and to be entertained.

Photojournalism is a particular form of journalism (the collecting, editing, and presenting of news material for publication or broadcast) that employs images in order to tell a news story.

Consider: Do photographs tell a completely true story just by their mere nature? How does the “real” medium of photography affect our perceptions of stories?



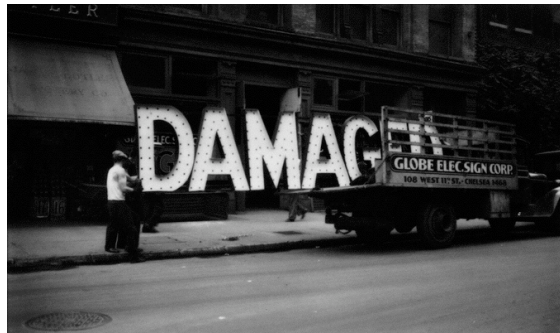
CAMERA SKILL

Editing Software

Trying to decide what type of editing software to use? Depending on if you have a mac or pc, there are many options ranging from free to pricey. Photos on a mac is a decent option. Adobe Lightroom is a subscription based application that is very useful and available on mac and pcs.

Assignment:

Capture a scene that can tell a story in a single frame. The story of your photo does not have to be linear. It can be conceptual, poetic, or elliptical.



Walker Evans, Truck and Sign, (1928-30).

STORY

EXPOSURE RESOURCES

The following is a quick guide to making the most of your DSLR camera.

ISO - Film Speed

This is the camera sensor's sensitivity to light.

A lower ISO (200) would be used in situation where you have a lot of light available - outside in the sun.

A higher ISO (3200) would be used in a situation where not a lot of light is available. Con: the higher the ISO the grainier the image)

Tip: Start with a lower ISO (400) You should increase the ISO when there is not enough light for the camera to be able to quickly capture an image.



To adjust your ISO, enter your camera's menu

Aperture - A hole within the lens through which light travels. The pupil of your eye is essentially what we refer to as aperture in photography. The amount of light that enters the retina (which works just like the camera sensor), is limited to the size of the pupil – the larger the pupil, the more light enters the retina. In photography, aperture is expressed in f-numbers (for example f/5.6). These f-numbers that are known as “f-stops” are a way of describing the size of the aperture, or how open or closed the aperture is. A smaller f-stop means a larger aperture, while a larger f-stop means a smaller aperture. Most people find this awkward, since we are used to having larger numbers represent larger values, but not in this case. For example, f/1.4 is larger than f/2.0 and much larger than f/8.0.

One important thing to remember here, the size of the aperture has a direct impact on the depth of field, which is the area of the image that appears sharp. A large f-number such as $f/32$, (which means a smaller aperture) will bring all foreground and background objects in focus, while a small f-number such as $f/1.4$ will isolate the foreground from the background by making the foreground objects sharp and the background blurry.

High Depth of Field (More in Focus)



f22



f16



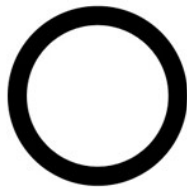
f11



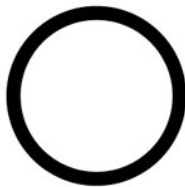
f8



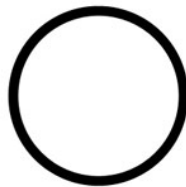
f5.6



f4



f2.8



f2

Low Depth of Field (Less in Focus)

Shutter

Shutter speed is responsible for creating dramatic effects by either freezing action or blurring motion.

Shutter speed, also known as “exposure time”, stands for the length of time a camera shutter is open to expose light into the camera sensor.

If the shutter speed is fast, it can help to freeze action completely, as seen in the above photo of the dolphin.

If the shutter speed is slow, it can create an effect called “motion blur”, where moving objects appear blurred along the direction of the motion.

Shutter speeds are typically measured in fractions of a second, when they are under a second. For example $1/4$ means a quarter of a second, while $1/250$ means one two-hundred-and-fiftieth of a second or four milliseconds.

Most modern DSLRs can handle shutter speeds of up to $1/4000$ th of a second, while some can handle much higher speeds of $1/8000$ th of a second and faster. The longest shutter speed on most DSLRs is typically 30 seconds (without using external remote triggers).



This chart shows how Aperture, Shutter Speed, and ISO affect your photos

References

Learning to See Creatively, Bryan Peterson,
Digital Photography Masterclass, Tom Ang