

Composition

“What is the picture about?”

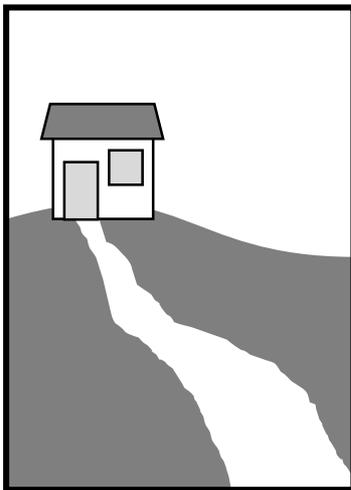
There’s always something that prompts you to lift your camera and take a picture in the first place. It might be a beautiful river scene, an impressive car, or of the people that you are with; whatever it is, when you take your picture you probably have a reason for recording the scene in mind. Generally, you should be trying to ensure that the subject of your photograph is in the foreground and in focus. Generally, your photograph should have an even balance of light and dark areas and should have the colours represented in their natural hues. And a photographer will generally try to separate the subject in the foreground from any distractions that could arise in the background.

I’m over-using the word ‘generally’ on purpose. These ‘rules’ can be broken to create an effect in the final image.

Psychology

There are certain aspects of an image that make it more pleasing to the eye. Composing your picture so that the subject complies with the “rule of thirds” is one example; using “leading lines” and balancing the symmetry of the image are other examples. It is also worth keeping in mind that, subconsciously, in the West observers tend to ‘read’ an image from left to right. Now, of course, you might not want your image to be pleasing. You might want to break these rules in order to suggest a sense of discord or to imply tension.

A Leading Line



A simple but very effective technique is to use a leading line in order to draw the eye to the main subject.

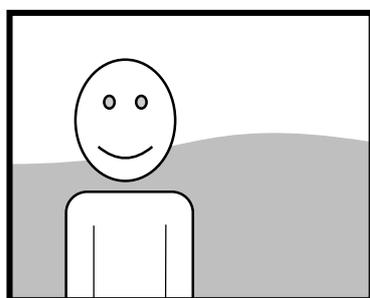
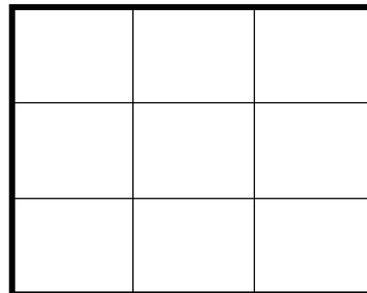
This is particularly useful if you want to emphasise a subject that isn’t in the immediate foreground. A leading line can be anything, from a winding road, a fence or even an outstretched arm. In the photo shown here it is the stacked lobster pots that form a leading line to the lighthouse.



The Rule of Thirds

If you imagine that a grid made of four lines, like the one shown here, is to be placed over your picture then those four lines will cross each other in four places in your image. By making the main subject of your picture fall in the area of one or more of these intersections then the eye of the observer is automatically drawn to it.

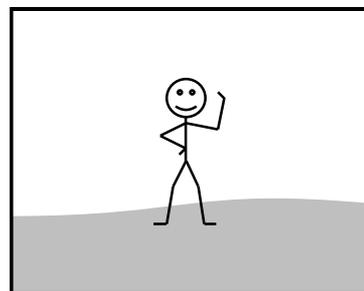
Many cameras will have a Rule of Thirds feature which will allow you to overlay a grid like this on whatever your camera is pointing at. Also, when using a crop tool on your image on a computer (or tablet or phone) you often see this grid appearing in order to help you to further improve the composition of your picture.



The composition shown here follows the Rule of Thirds. If a grid is placed over the image then the person's face will fall under one of the gridline intersections ... or in that area. This arrangement naturally draws the observer's eyes to the main subject of the photograph: the person's face. The background is breaking the rule though. The horizon, in this image is not on one of the gridlines, nor is it on an intersection.

The final image, shown to the right, has a background horizon that is very close to one of the imaginary gridlines. This would be great if the subject of the picture was a landscape, however the photograph is meant to be of the person waving in the middle.

I'm sure we all have albums of family snaps like this with an aunt or uncle standing awkwardly in the dead centre of the photograph.



You don't have to follow the Rule of Thirds but, if you are aware of it, then it helps you to take more pleasing, more attractive photographs of your subject.

Viewpoint



This photograph of Pembroke Castle was taken with a wide angle lens close to the base of the rocks on which it stands. By taking the picture from below, and close up, you get a sense of the dominating power of a subject.

Changing your point of view when taking a photograph can suggest an alternative consideration of a familiar subject.

Framing

It is possible to emphasise the main subject of your picture in an attractive way by using items in the scene to provide a simple frame. This could be trees in a landscape or buildings in a street scene. This has been done in a very obvious way in this picture by taking a picture of the sea cliffs through an old stone window (in St Govan's Chapel actually).

Not only does the framing focus the gaze onto the subject but it also gives the subject of the photograph a context.



Reading Left to Right



This is a snapshot that I took of a squirrel sitting in a tree. It's difficult to tell what the subject of the photograph is in this picture and you have to look hard to notice a squirrel there at all.

The branches of the tree are much more prominent than the squirrel and they dominate the picture.

I imported the image into Adobe Lightroom (but other graphics software could have been used).

The first thing that I did was to crop the image so that the squirrel was the main subject. I used the Rule of Thirds grid to make sure that the squirrel's eye was close to one of the intersections.

The other thing that I did was to flip the image horizontally. Subconsciously we read an image from left to right and having the squirrel facing in the opposite direction looks more attractive than in the original snap.

This picture is not perfect but it has been improved by cropping and flipping.

