



Free on-line tutorial #2 Composition - The Rule of Thirds

Photography On-line Tutorial #2: Composition - The Rule of Thirds

Overview:

The second key secret in your photography is composition. Unlock one of its fundamental secrets.

Video

Welcome back! Two very important factors in turning your photographs into quality images are composition and lighting.

So we've started to get an understanding of light and photography - they go hand in hand without one you don't have the other. Light makes images.

However there's an awesome tool you can use in your image making that takes no turn of the dials or understanding of 'f' numbers or speeds and can be used with all cameras from i-phones to fancy DSLR's and it's called composition.

Composition is the arrangement of subjects in a picture. It is the visual weight given to elements within the picture. The main subject should occupy a strong position. I believe a minimum of 10% and yet in most of my images it would be up to 90%. It means the eye is directed immediately to the important aspects of the photograph.

Good composition, takes the viewer's eye through and around the image area, incorporating the important elements without effort. It holds the viewers attention.

Bad or untidy composition does the opposite. The eye doesn't know where to go and it fails to hold the viewers attention.

Some say composition is for those that have a 'natural eye', however I believe composition can be learnt, applied and with practice (or as we prefer to call it, here at Bluedog, 'play': play is a much nicer term than practice). Learn by your mistakes and study others work: never delete an image on camera. You'll learn more from your bad shots than your good! Look at why you like that image and ask yourself what compositional elements have been used. We'll be looking at more composition elements through other on-line tutorials.

Composition is a whole subject alone that has heaps of areas, and here in Australia it is a good part of your degree but today we are looking at one aspect: the rule of thirds and when to use it and when, as rules are meant to be, to break it.

What we are trying to do is make our image look 3D not 2D. One trusted formula for emphasising the main point of interest is the **RULE OF THIRDS**. It's done by simply dividing your scene into thirds, horizontally and vertically (nine equal-sized sections). The four intersecting points are all areas of strength within the frame (we refer to it as the sweet spot), and placing the subject a third of the

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way across the frame balances the image – the human eye likes it.

Elements situated at diagonally opposed intersections seem balanced, or when elements are located at three of the junctures they form a dynamic triangular composition. Another alternative when there is a single point of interest with symmetry is to place it directly in the centre of the image and try using the Rule of Thirds for this as well.

The rule of thirds is useful for positioning the horizon. In the middle it usually creates a static and lifeless image and splits the scene in half. The human eye rarely likes an image split in half. By placing the horizon on one third you can achieve emphasis to the sky or landscape/seascape.

Ask yourself when composing a landscape for example what is more important: is it the sky or ground/sea.

If it's the sky, place the horizon along the bottom third line, as example in Image #1 and #2

If you can place your focal point where two of the thirds intersect, then you have usually got a cracker of a shot. That's the sweet spot!

In Image 1 the first rainbow from the left falls close on the intersecting line of 2 thirds. All rainbows are actually two rainbows - it's called Alexander's Dark Belt in physics - it just depends on our position to the rainbow (made up of reflected light through water particles) if we can see the second one.

If we had placed the rainbow on the right on the horizontal third from the left of the image area, the rainbow on the left would have come into the middle hence splitting the image in half and not as visually pleasing to the human eye.



Image #1



Image #2

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Image #3

If it's the land/sea place the horizon along the top third line.

As in example **image #3 to the left.**

Close enough can be good enough and it's all about to do with weight of tonal elements too. Take this image from outback Australia. The horizon is well below the third line but look at the cloud line - it's on a third as is the windmill blades facing into the image and the windmill itself on the right third.



Image #4

Top tip: Squint your eyes. Change your view to tonal. Work out where the weight is in the image.

As with all rules there is always an exception. Rules are meant to be broken!

An exception to this rule is when you are doing reflections. When it's a perfect reflection, the horizon can be placed in the middle. A great example of this is snow capped peaks in front of a lake and village. A top tip here is to allow something to remind the viewer which way is up. Most won't even notice it but it allows the 'Where's Wally' syndrome to fade and we all hate to be confused :)

In image #5 I used twigs from a red river gum in the foreground - many do not even see them till I point it out, yet their minds have registered that this is already the right way up because of the position of the twigs.

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Image #5

In image 6 I have broken many of the rules but with silhouettes that have a dramatic outline it may work very well. It's that word composition.



Image #6

An overview of Tutorial #2

Composition - The Rule of Thirds

- The two important factors in capturing quality images are composition and lighting.
- Composition is the arrangement of subjects in a picture.
- Good composition takes the viewer's eye through and around the image area and holds the viewer's attention.
- Bad or untidy composition does the opposite. The eye doesn't know where to go and it fails to hold the viewer's attention.
- Composition can be learnt!
- What we are trying to do is make our image look 3D not 2D.
- Divide your scene into thirds: 9 equal-sized sections. The 4 intersecting points are areas of strength. Placing the subject a third of the way across the frame balances the image. Subjects placed on or near where these lines intersect are considered to be 'the sweet spot'.

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- Elements situated at diagonally opposed intersections seem balanced, or when elements are located at three of the junctures they form a dynamic triangular composition.
- Use the rule for positioning the horizon. Ask yourself when composing a landscape 'what is more important: is it the sky or ground/sea'?
- When can you break it? When there is a true reflection. Don't forget the 'Where's Wally Rule'.

We hope you enjoy and continue to grow in your photography!