

Composition.

A rough guide for practicing composition in photography.

Photographers only really 'see' their compositions *after* they have taken the shot in the print or on the screen which they learn from.

This builds a sort of 'muscle memory' like learning a musical instrument. Eventually you begin to compose naturally - in your own style.

No composition is also composition.

THERE ARE NO RULES

All photographs are an alteration of reality.

The act of taking a photograph is a manipulation of reality.

(What is reality? - Your immediate experience of "now")

A photograph is an object which is just an object

(like a flat abstract painting eg)

or a transparent surface through which we perceive a representation of reality.

That reality is different for every viewer.*

Any and all of the following apply:

LIGHT

- the most important element in composition.

Notice direction, hardness or softness (size of light)

Shadows, length of shadows, hard or soft.

Avoid multiple lights where possible.

Avoid direct sun, time of day from 10 am to 4pm

at equinox, earlier or later for summer or winter,

especially in landscape.

(Avoid sun from over your shoulder at all costs unless there's a really good reason for it such as for the narrative, fashion, rawness for example.)

Light relates to atmosphere, activity, emotion and narrative: coarse or gentle etc.

Balance - equal balance or unequal balance.

Lines and vectors

Shape

Weight

Fullness

Sparseness

Minimalist vs chaotic**

Golden Mean - (sometimes erroneously called the "rule of thirds"

- a lazy approach to what is a delicate natural construct.)

Foreground

Background - show space, depth - *context*.

Horizon Line

Perspective

Direction

Lead around

Lead into

Lead out of

Look into the frame

Look out of the frame

Texture

Subject

(may be the only reason for the picture eg. news shot; however it can still have intrinsic composition such as lighting, texture, angle, etc.).

Obviousness:

If it 'looks' out a bit it looks awkward - that may be the intent; being subtly "out" needs to be a clever incorporation..

If it is out - a Long way out can work, being obviously out looks purposeful.

Care and delicacy - an evidential attribute when present

Movement

Blur

Points of Focus

Depth of Field

Focal points of the image vs pattern

Symmetry

Out of focus - depth of field - point of focus

Combinations

Pairs - triples - fours - fives etc....mandalas.

Colour

Mono-colour

Lack of colour

Surfeit of colour

Sensitivity

Delicatness

Boldness

Hard Line

Soft line

**** Simplicity vs Complexity**

Avoid unwanted objects - artifacts such as bits of sky or a light piece against a generally dark picture unless they are there for a reason - creating tension - balancing an otherwise unbalanced image.

PRACTICE:

USE THE FRAME - compose in the frame, compose in the camera. Avoid cropping if possible.

USE ONE LENS LENGTH for a two week period, and then another...avoiding zoom.

NOTICE THE LIGHT!! The most important element of any photograph.

*(Camera Lucida by Roland Barthes: the punctum, the studium and stigmatum

The *punctum* is defined by Barthes as poignant semiotic elements that rise incidentally from a photograph, intensifying its attractive value relating only to the viewer

the *studium* relating to everyone who sees the image, the collective recognition, human understanding and the

stigmatum being the odd link which an image can have between the viewer and the object being photographed, a shared physical viscera)

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* The Golden Rectangle is a ratio which has been used by artists and designers for thousands of years. Photographic judges have reduced this to "Thirds" which is in fact

wholly inaccurate.

Golden Mean or Golden Rectangle

