



Composition

Dawn Wilson

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What is composition?



The pleasing selection and arrangement of visual elements within the picture area.

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What is composition?



- Use design elements as a guide
 - Dominant feature
 - Balance
 - Proportion
 - Rhythm

What is composition?



What makes a successful composition?



"There are no rules for good photographs,
there are only good photographs."
- *Ansel Adams*

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So what are good photographs?



- There are no rules, only guidelines
- Be creative
- Basic guidelines include:
 - Keep it simple
 - Use rule of thirds
 - Look for lines
 - Vary perspective
 - Avoid mergers
 - Look for framing
 - Leave some crop space
 - Use the light to your advantage
 - Control the background

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Keep It Simple



- Highlight the main subject – one dominant feature
- Put main subject slightly off center
- Move in closer
- Use uncluttered background
 - Change your depth of field
 - Clean it up

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Keep It Simple



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Keep It Simple



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Use Rule of Thirds



- Think tic-tac-toe
- Use the grid on your camera if available
- Helps to place the dominant feature

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Rule of Thirds



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Rule of Thirds



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Look for Lines



- Creates rhythm
- Draws the eye into the image
- Leading lines will engage viewer by giving 'movement' to the image
- Examples of lines
 - Diagonals
 - S-curves
- For wildlife, use the eyes
- For landscapes, use streams, fences
- For portraits, use lines in backgrounds that draw to the subject

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Look for Lines



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Vary Perspective



- Be creative – find that different angle
- Shoot from low angle, high angle, close up, vertical

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Vary Perspective



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Avoid Mergers



- Photography is no place for mergers and acquisitions
- Gives impression of cutting off a head or removing limbs
- Results from the importance of lines in photos for movement
- Use a plain background or shallow depth of field

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Avoid Mergers



Horizon 'cuts' through their necks



Poor photo: darker shapes at top 'swallow' the crane's head



Better photo: crane stands alone from background

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Look for Framing



- Use foreground objects
- Assistants can hold 'frames'
- Use something to surround the object (branch, window, door frame)
- Gives perspective

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Look for Framing



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Leave Some Crop Space



- Compose the picture with a space
 - For cropping
 - For framing
- Give your subject some breathing room

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Leave Some Crop Space



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Use the Light to Your Advantage



- Photography is all about light
- Light can change a mood
- Light can help accentuate the subject
- Side lighting on subject is a nice effect

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Use the Light to Your Advantage



Back lit subject causes subject to be dark and lacking of detail.



Front lit subject better to bring out detail and activity.

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Control the Background



- Don't allow your background to become the dominant feature
- Eye travels to the lightest spot in a photo
 - Make sure darker spots are in background
 - Lighter spots should be on subject or pointing to subject
- Techniques and post-processing can help
 - Shallow depth of field
 - Blur in post-processing
 - Darken the brighter spots

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Control the Background



Background can be softened in post processing, as in this photo...



...or blurred using shallow depth of field (wide open aperture) as in this photo.

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What Your Mother Always Said



Practice, practice, practice...

... until the use of guidelines becomes
second nature.

Practice is as much about taking pictures as it
is about studying pictures.