



Steve Gandy Photography

Composition Basics & Tips

meetup.com/stevegandyphotography

The Basics:

- **Move Closer, fill the frame.** In wider shots this may mean you have to make sure there is a distinct subject closer to the viewer than the scene.
- **KISS**, can your subject be described in a simple sentence? Does it have a strong focal point/subject? If you find you are composing a paragraph in your head to describe the shot you may have included too much.
- **Rule of Thirds** can help you aim your camera. Dead center can be "deadly". Start aiming the camera around the third line power points but then pay attention to the specific shot. The best placement may be near but not on the power spot.
 - **Horizon placement.** This can work with the Rule of Thirds. Try at 1/3 and 2/3. It rarely works in the middle. Watch out for tilted horizons! Even a slight skew will feel awkward to the viewer.
- **Lines:** Diagonals are dynamic, horizontals are calm and static, verticals show permanence and stability. They can lead the eye into the image. S curves lead the eye calmly through the image.
- **Vertical formats** and **crops** can play a huge role. The saying goes, "The best time to take a vertical shot is right after you finish the horizontal shot." Think about printing crops, panoramas and square. They may all be useful depending upon the destination or use of the photo.
- **Space for movement**, a subject's gaze needs this too. If a gaze or a moving subject is too close to the edge it appears off balance and will usually bother a viewer.
- **Color contrast** or **monotone contrast.** This goes along with the strong focal point idea. If the subject does not stand off from the surrounding area with a strong contrast then it is just hard to discern and thus not a good subject. The eye goes first to the brightest part of an image and then to highest contrast.
- **Don't cut off limbs in photos of people.** (See the chart online from DigitalCameraWorld.com)
- **Framing and vignettes:** Framing the subject with tree branches or other items is a long standing device, though now it has been over-used. Vignettes are a darkening or lightening of the edge of the photo. It pulls the eye into the subject. Watch out for over doing them.

Some other considerations:

- **Posing humans for portraits** - this is a whole subject in itself. (see the links online)
- **Balance;** with objects, light and dark tones, colors...If there is a large or bright or dark object in the frame it helps to balance it with something else. Often on a diagonal

line. The balancing feature should be less eye-grabbing than the subject.

- **Depth**; is there a foreground, middle and background? Do you need all of those or only 2? Sometimes having the 3 makes the image seem complete. Sometimes only the foreground and background are necessary.
- **Rule of odds**...this is from the design world. 3 objects are more pleasantly arranged anywhere than 4 and so on.
- **Keep important things separate from other objects**. Don't let important features "merge together". This happens when you get tunnel vision and don't notice things in the background but also it is more pleasing if foreground objects don't touch sometimes.
- **The "decisive moment"** – Look up Henri Cartier-Bresson. There is often a split second that is just right. There is a saying in sports photography that if you (as the photographer) see the action then you missed the picture. This happens because as you press the shutter the mirror flips out of the way and your view is obscured as the photo is recorded.
- **Backgrounds** can make it or break it. A bad background will ruin an otherwise great photo. Always be looking back there too.
- **Work the angles** and **work the idea**: Angle is really important especially with small subjects. Get down on a child or animal's eye level. Shoot down at things you want to appear small and weak. Shoot up at things you want to look large and powerful. Just side stepping can make huge differences in backgrounds, merging, subject look etc.
- **What is the least interesting part of the image? And can you remove it?** These are powerful questions for making your image better. You can go through the process more than once. A good saying is, "A painter adds things to picture and a photographer removes things."

Rather than including a lot of URLs here go to my support page for this class and look for links to the examples and negative examples:

<http://www.stevegandy.com/techclasses/DigitalPhotography/index.html#COMPOSITION>