

Total time:
2-4 hours



Difficulty Level: Beginner

Skill Points:

- Understanding when it's best to fill the frame and when it's best not to
- Discovering how filling the frame creates impact in a photo

FILL THE FRAME FOR IMPACT



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This is a common problem for new photographers. They don't "Fill The Frame". Get close either physically, or through your choice of lens, so that your viewers can see the important details of your subject. Don't drown your subject in a sea of background.

KEY LESSON: When people begin photography, they have this subconscious barrier that seems to prevent them from getting close to the subject. Tape a little message to the back of your camera that says, "GET CLOSE". Acquiring this one skill will make you a better photographer immediately.

Lupina flowers

Left: Part of understanding the concept of filling the frame is to always identify what truly is your subject. In this example, is the landscape the subject, or the flowers? The flowers offer a better photo opportunity.

Right: Filling the frame created a much more dramatic and satisfying image. This didn't even require a longer focal length lens. The camera was simply moved closer to the flowers.



Lion and Landscape

Left: There may be times where you physically cannot get the camera any closer to your subject. This is the advantage to telephoto lenses (review the Lens Focal Length Action Card). If it's impossible to fill the frame—look to other tools of composition to help create a compelling image.

Right: When you fill the frame with your subject, it increases interest. Telephoto lenses are great tool for filling the frame. They are also more difficult to handle. See the Reciprocal Rule Action Card.



Young Man

Left: If there is one area where you have complete control to get in close and fill the frame—, it's portraits. There is a place for the wide environmental shot. Don't start there. Concentrate on showing the features of your subject's face.

Right: You don't have to be right into their face. Even a half-length shot can include some storytelling background while also giving the details of the person's face. Filling the frame with a wide-angle lens will create distortion. Use it carefully to make sure it fits your subject.



ACTION ASSIGNMENT!

Organize two photo shoots:

First photo shoot: go out with a friend to use as your subject and practice filling the frame, also not filling the frame, and many options in between. Change lenses, and move the distance of the camera around.

Second photo shoot: go out on a photo walk. Look for interesting subjects, and photograph (keep the "fill the frame" lesson in mind). Remember, not every shot requires you to be super close. Spend a moment thinking about what you want to say "visually" about that subject, and don't include anything more than what's necessary to tell your story. Shoot the same subject with different lenses and different camera to subject distances.

HOW DID YOU DO?

- Did you create a number of interesting shots of your friend using various locations and filling the frame appropriately?
- Did you ALSO keep your technical considerations in mind? Were your pictures sharp and properly exposed?

Total time:
1-3 hours



Difficulty Level: Beginner

Skill Points:

- Exploring focal points
- Learning what visual elements create a focal point
- Developing an eye for placing focal points within a composition

FOCUSING ON THE FOCAL POINT



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A focal point is a location within an image that attracts immediate attention due to its size, shape, color, tone contrast, color contrast, or position. An image can have one, or several, focal points.

KEY LESSON: Begin by concentrating on using a single focal point. To effectively use multiple focal points, they must be properly arranged within the overall composition. The purpose of the focal point is to immediately catch the eye and then move a viewer's eyes toward the subject. A focal point can also be the subject.

Walking couple: This is a classic focal point photograph. The walking couple are a focal point due to their size, shape, contrast, and position within the composition. In this case, the focal point "is" the subject. What is the triangular sculpture? It's a frame.

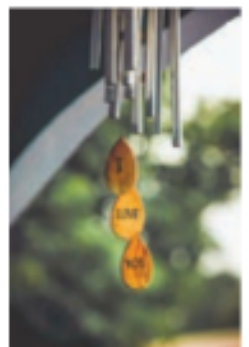
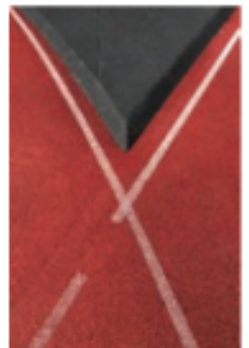
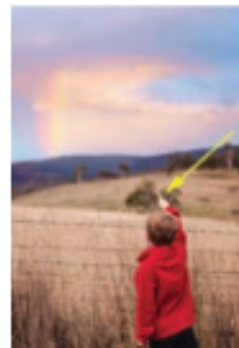
Girls and ocean: Do you see this shot as having a focal point? What is the subject, the girl or the waterscape? The visual weight between the girl and the background is too evenly balanced. The intent was for the "shape" of the rock to be a focal point, and then establish her as the subject. It's not visually strong enough to accomplish this.

Boy pointing: The intent was for the pointing finger to be a focal point, and to some extent it works. However, what is the subject? A focal point should draw attention *toward* the subject or *be* the subject. In this case, the focal point "literally" pushes the eyes away from the subject.

Road: A focal point can be created by what's "not" there. This abstract photograph relies on pattern [see Pattern Action Card]. The break in the pattern creates a focal point!

Bridge and River: Effective focal points don't have to be - "in your face". Put this picture in front of you and close your eyes. When you open your eyes, they go immediately to the right side of the bridge. The bright yellow highlights, on the bridge as well as the shape and contrast of the two protective piers, and their placement within the composition, create focal points. This is an example of multiple focal points.

Wind Chime: Close your eyes. Open them. What is the first thing you see? It's the word "Love". The wind chime is the subject, and the word "Love" is a focal point drawing your eyes to the wind chime. The color, tone contrast, and positioning, all create a strong visual focal point. Also note, that a strong graphic element, such as the typography of the word LOVE, can be a focal point under some circumstances.



ACTION ASSIGNMENT!

- 1- Spend a day out taking pictures specifically looking for focal points. The landscape, cityscape, and architecture genres lend themselves well to beginning photographers with this Action Assignment.
- 2- Remember what creates a focal point: size, shape, color, tonal contrast, color contrast, or position. Also, consider a break in a pattern as a possibility. (Study the sample photos.)
- 3- Pick your best shot from each scene photographed, and then print them. Give each print the eye closure test.

HOW DID YOU DO?

- Did you find different types of focal points: size, shape, color, tone/color contrast, or position?
- Do your focal points work well within the overall composition?
- When doing the eye closure test, do your eyes immediately go to your intended focal points?

Total time:
3-8 hours



ADDING DRAMA WITH A FRAME



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Skill Points:

- Identifying frames in a scene
- Using frames properly (frame/subject weight ratio)
- Identifying frames through color, contrast, light, and environment
- Experimenting with frames that help to tell a story

The art term “frame” means that the photographer places a visual boundary, within the composition, that helps to direct a viewer’s eyes toward the subject. A frame can be created through structural elements, environmental elements, or it can even be created by light, shadow, and color.

KEY LESSON: Look for appropriate compositional elements to place around the subject. Try to pick a frame that is on the opposite tonal scale from the subject. Usually, you would want to place the focus on the subject and not the frame itself. If you think carefully about your frame, it can also add storytelling elements to your photograph.



Structural frames:

Man & Bike: This is the use of a frame at its most basic level. The doorway frames the man. Take note of these details. The frame, while clearly visible, does not overtake the subject. The frame also adds a sense of story and place, which is in opposition to the man’s modern clothing. This creates drama and interest.

Two Men: Frames can catch the eye, even if they are a very small portion of the overall image area. If you have a subject that you cannot get close to- try to boost their visual weight by using a frame!



Color as a framing tool:

Christmas Elves: Look for lighting contrasts and color contrasts to create frames. In this picture, the red brick provided a nice frame to the green, red, and white costumes, while the tree at the top contrasted the umbrellas, and thus framed the top of the shot ‘downward’ as well.

Subway Exit: The frame here is very reliant on the lighting to create contrast. A frame must ‘stand out’ to do its job. The contrast separates the subjects from the stairs, while also turning the doorway and the woman on the right (in the foreground) into successful frames.



Dimensional frames:

Green Pants: Frames work well in multiples. You can lead someone’s eyes through your picture with multiple frames. This woman is framed by the large door in the foreground, the door that she is facing, and finally by the dark window.

Tough Guy: Machinery in the foreground was used to frame the worker. The equipment was bright yellow and overpowered the subject. Using post-production, the frame was changed to a muted color scheme. It still frames the subject, but now attracts far less visual weight.



ACTION ASSIGNMENT!

- 1- Shoot a subject using a structural frame (i.e. Man & Bike and Two Men).
- 2- Shoot a subject using contrasting color as a frame (i.e. Christmas Elves).
- 3- Shoot a subject using light-shadow to create a frame (i.e. Subway Exit).
- 4- Shoot a subject using multiple frames (i.e. of Green Pants).
- 5- Alter a frame in post-production (i.e. Tough Guy).

HOW DID YOU DO?

- Did you frame a subject using some structural element?
- Do the frames carry less visual weight than the subjects?
- Is the focus on the subject and not the frame?

Total time:
1-3 hours



Difficulty Level:
Beginner

Skill Points:

- Using the horizon line in a composition
- Learning to keep the horizon straight in-camera
- Changing the mood of a picture with the horizon placement

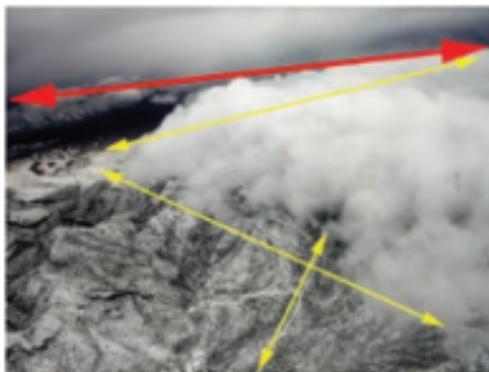
UNDERSTANDING THE HORIZON LINE



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A straight horizon line is one of the first 'Rules' of photography that most people learn. At times, an angled horizon line can make sense. On top of this, where you place the horizon line can have a significant impact to the picture. The horizon line is simply one part of the overall composition.

KEY LESSON: Be conscious of the horizon line in-camera. Keep it straight, if that makes sense to the composition. If an angled horizon line makes more sense, then by all means give it try. You can straighten the horizon line in post-production using a 'Crop Tool', if necessary. We will analyze where the placement of the horizon line, within the frame, can affect the mood and story of your image.



Mountain Road & Storm:

This horizon line is at an angle. (Also notice that the horizon line isn't always where the sky meets the Earth.) This horizon could be straightened, but doing so would delete some of the drama created by the compositional use of a 'Dynamic Angle' - while at the same time adding nothing to the shot. Use your sense of aesthetics to decide whether the horizon should be straight- or not!



Couple at sunset:

Left - crooked horizon: This horizon is slightly crooked, and it creates a sense of vertigo, as if the entire image could slide off the page to the right. This should be straightened. Also, in general, you would not place a horizon line directly in the center of an image, unless you're using the composition tools of symmetry and balance.

Middle - more sky: Leaving more image area to the upper third of the frame tends to create a mood of expansiveness. It subdues the foreground, while not eliminating it.

Right - more water: Leaving more image area to the lower third tends to shorten up the picture. It focuses attention to the area right in front of the camera. Look back and forth between the two examples. Notice how the couple holds more visual weight in this version than in the previous example.



ACTION ASSIGNMENT!

- 1- Organize a photo shoot similar in content to the example photos of the couple: Shoot at sunset - Have a clearly definable horizon line - Have enough room in your scene to move the horizon line around while shooting - Include a recognizable subject, such as the couple.
- 2- Place your subject in the scene, and then shoot a number of images moving the horizon line up and down- even try putting it an angle. Try placing it in the center for a more symmetrical break in the image area.
- 3- Print out your different versions, and examine them laid out together.

HOW DID YOU DO?

- Can you identify changes to the mood and story based upon horizon placement?
- Did an angled horizon line work for your shot or not?
- How about a centered horizon?
- Which horizon placement worked the best?

Total time:
2-3 hours



THE GREAT FUN IN JUXTAPOSITION



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Skill Points:

- Discovering how juxtaposition works and why
- Learning how to apply juxtaposition into your compositions

Juxtaposition means two things side-by-side. In artwork, juxtaposition is created with the intent of demonstrating a particular quality, or creating a subconscious effect. This is typically accomplished when the two elements are contrasting or opposing in nature.

KEY LESSON: If the two elements are physical objects, they must each have enough visual strength that a viewer's mind makes the connection and examines the contrast. If the juxtaposition is meant to create a concept, mood, or statement this is more difficult, as a viewer must identify the juxtaposition and also process where the contrast occurs.



Old & New: Juxtaposing something old and new is a classic photographer's tool. If you're just starting with juxtaposition, this is a great subject matter to explore, as it's a bit easier to find and compose for beginners.

Big & Small: Juxtaposing something big and small is also a classic photographer's tool. If you're just starting with juxtaposition, this is another great subject matter to explore, as it is also a bit easier to spot and compose for beginners.

Resting at the Gym: Irony is often used with juxtaposition in photography. The difficulty here is that not all individuals see irony the same way- just as we don't all find the same things funny. Develop your own style of irony and just go with it.

Land & Water: Juxtaposition does not have to be complicated. The technique lends itself well to Minimalism (see the Minimalism Action Card). The opposition captured in juxtaposition can be as simple as land and water.

Israeli Men: Juxtaposition is an important tool for street photography (see Street Photography Action Card) and photojournalism. It can be used to make strong social and political statements. When trying to photograph this type of work- look for both sides of the story composed in a single shot.



ACTION ASSIGNMENT!

- 1- Organize a photo shoot where you will go in search of juxtaposition. Try to find a minimum of 10.
- 2- In each photograph that you create, incorporate two elements that are either in physical, emotional, or artistic contrast to each other.
- 3- Try different angles. Particularly look for the "Old & New" and the "Big & Small" juxtaposition photos.
- 4- Print your best of each shot and share them with others. Ask them if they understand your intent.

HOW DID YOU DO?

- Did you find 10 juxtapositions in your afternoon shoot?
- Were others able to discern your intent with your juxtaposition shots?
- In what ways do you believe that you could have made your results better?

Total time:
4-6 hours



FOCUSING ON LAYERING



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Skill Points:

- Identifying layers in a scene
- Understanding how layering functions
- Learning how camera POV affects layering
- Discovering how focal length changes the effect

Layering is a tool of composition that adds depth to a photograph. It can be particularly useful when there isn't much else to work with.

KEY LESSON: Simply think of your photo in layers. You have a foreground layer, mid-ground layers, and finally the background layer. Through the compression of a telephoto lens, the layers appear tightly stacked. Through the widening effect of a wide-angle lens: the layers look expansive. Layering works when you have 3 or more layers.



Mountain Range: This is a classic layering photo. There are three distinct layers. They have been compressed through the use of a telephoto lens. In this situation, there was little else in the way of composition tools, so layering becomes an obvious choice.

Woman Walking: There are 3 distinct layers: woman/foreground, sand dune/mid-ground, sky/background. This was shot with a telephoto lens. In this case, the layering doesn't provide a feeling of depth. Why? The lighting and contrast. Study the 2 examples to see how light and contrast can affect the layering outcome.

Umbrellas: When using layering, the layers should lead "into" the photo. Where are the layers in this shot? In the foreground and background layers, we have distinct easily defined individuals. Mid-ground layer, we have a multitude of undefined individuals under umbrellas. This layer creates the other two layers.

Busy Street: This photo is similar in content to the previous example. Does this photo use layering? No. Camera position, as well as lens focal length, plays a role in layering. Study the two examples. In the previous example, the camera POV looks "across" the street. In this example, the camera POV looks "down" onto the street. Remember, effective layering leads "into" the shot.

Waterscape: This layered photo was shot with a wide-angle lens. It has 7 distinct layers: foreground rocks, railing, mid-ground rocks, village, lighthouse, dark clouds, light clouds. Take notice how each layer has a strong presence from left to right (across) the shot rather than leading in. This is typical when using layers: each layer has a left/right visual movement.

Desert Mountains: This image was also shot with a wide-angle lens. An attempt was made to use layering, as no other tools of composition were readily available. This attempt did not work. With layering, your layers should generally be distinct, and easily definable, especially with a wide-angle lens!



ACTION ASSIGNMENT!

HOW DID YOU DO?

- 1- Organize a photo shoot where you will go in search of layers. Set a goal for how many you will find.
 - Use all of the different lenses that you have. If you have zoom lenses, try the different focal lengths.
 - Experiment with different camera points-of-view.
 - Try your hand at finding a great layered shot that utilizes 5 or more layers in the composition.
- 2- Print your photos, so that you can examine them as a group.

- Did you meet your goal for finding the number of layered images?
- Do you now understand how the camera POV affects the layering composition tool?

Total time:
2-3 hours



MAKING YOUR LENSES WORK FOR YOU



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Skill Points:

- Learning about lens focal lengths
- Discovering how lens perspective works
- Developing proper handling skills for lenses

The lens is key equipment to your imaging success. There is a lot of technique surrounding the lens that you should be aware of. In this Action Card, we are going to concentrate on angle of view and perspective.

KEY LESSON: A *normal* lens has an angle of view similar to your eyesight. A *wide-angle* lens has a wider angle of view. A *telephoto* lens has a narrower angle of view than your eyesight. A *zoom* lens has a variable angle of view. Don't confuse *telephoto* and *zoom*. A *zoom* lens is one that has the ability to change the focal length internally. However, it may not zoom into the telephoto range of focal length.



The normal view

Left: The 50mm lens is the *normal* focal length for 35mm film or a full sized camera sensor. It neither expands nor contracts the perspective based upon the field of view. As the camera sensor size decreases, so does the normal focal length. The normal lens, for some of the different sensor sizes, include: APS-C - 32mm and 4/3s - 25mm and 2/3s - 33mm.



The wider picture

Left: Any lens focal length lower than the normal lens, takes in a wider angle of view than the human eye. Some benefits include capturing a wider view when camera to subject distance is limited, and also creating the visual effect of expansiveness.

Right: The wide-angle lens can also create distortion. The wider the angle of view... the greater distortion. Placing the camera close to an object will also dramatically increase wide-angle distortion. This can be used creatively.



The narrow view

Left: Any lens focal length higher than the normal lens takes in a narrower angle of view than the human eye. You can capture a compressed view creating the visual effect of closeness. With telephoto lenses you need a faster shutter speed to eliminate camera shake due to magnification.

Right: The telephoto lens is perfect for bringing distant objects closer. The closer the lens is to the subject, the greater the visual effect of compression will be.



ACTION ASSIGNMENT!

Take pictures with all of your different lenses and zoom focal lengths

- Pick a subject, set a medium (5 meters) camera to subject distance, and photograph the subject with all of your different focal lengths.
- Use your widest-angle lens and try to create lens distortion.
- Use your longest focal length lens and practice composing with compression.
- Using your longest focal length lens and photograph a subject starting with a shutter speed of 1/500th, and then increase the shutter speed "one stop per shot" in the following manner: 1/250th, 1/125th, 1/60th, 1/30th, 1/15th, and 1/8th.
- Print your shots and examine them carefully for sharpness.

HOW DID YOU DO?

Do you now understand how shutter speed is especially important - when using longer focal length lenses? At what shutter speed, did your longer focal length shots become blurry from camera shake? See **Reciprocal Rule Action Card**.

Total time:
2-3 hours



THE IMPORTANCE OF LINES OF SIGHT



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Skill Points:

- Discovering how sight lines work and why
- Learning how to apply sight lines into your images

Sight lines or Line of Sight, incorrectly referred to as Eye-Lines, compels us to look in a direction. Sight lines are very important, and you should understand them, and look for them in your photography.

KEY LESSON: : When you look at someone, and you notice that they are staring intently in a different direction, what do you do immediately? You look to see what they are looking at! That's exactly why "Sight Lines" work in photography. They create a strong impulse to "look" in a direction within the frame.

Buskers

Left: The photographer attempted to set up their composition so that the large foot and hat in the foreground attracts attention. The leg then was to be a leading line up to the man's face; the intended subject. However, the man's intense stare to camera left forces a viewer's eyes away from the subject.

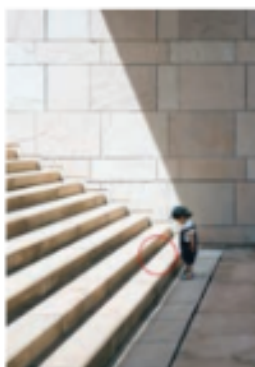
Right: Here, the *Line of Sight* helps the image, as it does not lead out of the picture, and it adds to the story through viewer direction.



Fighters

Left: Sight lines can make or break a shot. In this example, it's a compromise. The right fighter is looking past his opponent; however, the sight line for the Referee keeps the viewer centered in the picture. The key lesson is that you can have more than one line of sight in a picture, and each one will carry visual weight depending on the overall composition.

Right: Line of sight was critical here: it prevents the bright lights from overpowering the photo.



Boy and Steps

There are two lessons to be learned from this image. First of all, you don't need to see the eyes for "Line of Sight" to work. Secondly, sight lines are so powerful, that even when they are miniscule in a composition, such as this toddler's gaze, it STILL attracts immediate attention!



ACTION ASSIGNMENT!

- 1- Organize a photo shoot where you take a friend or two out for an afternoon to shoot pictures.
- 2- In each photograph that you create, incorporate sight lines as a key element in each composition.
- 3- Try different angles. Sometimes blatantly show the eyes, and then, barely show them or don't show them at all.
- 4- If you brought two friends, try setting up a shot where the "Line of Sight" on one friend overpowers the other, and then try again with both sight lines working together.

HOW DID YOU DO?

- Did you create strong compositions that utilized sight lines?
- Were you able to set up two "Lines of Sight" where one dominated over the other?
- Do you now have a complete understanding of how sight lines can help or break your composition?

Total time:
3-8 hours



Skill Points:

- Composing with a monochromatic color scheme
- Locating an existing monochromatic image
- Creating a monochromatic image through props
- Creating a specific mood for a photo using post-production

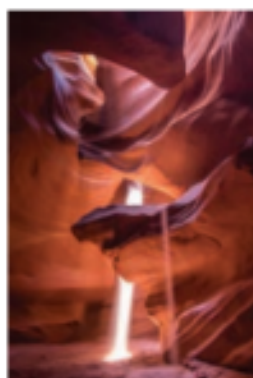
CREATING MONOCHROMATIC COLOR PHOTOGRAPHY THAT POPS



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Monochromatic color photography is when **the entire range of colors depicted in a photograph fall within the same range of colors**, as they appear on a color wheel. It's a great photographer's tool for setting a mood in their photographs.

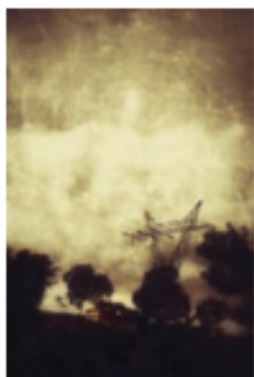
KEY LESSON: A basic division of colors is warm colors and cool colors. Warm colors are on one side of the wheel, and cool colors are on the other. This is a very simplified explanation. Warm colors create a mood of happiness, warmth, and energy. Cool colors create a mood of calmness, safety, and healing. Expand on your study of color theory.



Naturally Found:

Canyon and Rooftops: Here's a good example of 'found' monochromatic color. You can also use post-processing to enhance your effect.

Leaf: Cool colors are green, blue, and purple. Here we have greens and yellow. Even though they are opposites in the division of warm and cool, they are next to each other on the color wheel, so they still create a monochromatic color scheme.



Make it happen:

Model Portrait: You can create a mood for your photographs by carefully selecting what monochromatic colors you will include.

Moth & Stone: Try to create monochromatic color schemes. This moth was moved from the location where it was found... to a rock that created a monochromatic color scheme.

Power Tower: You can also experiment using post-production, as this shot demonstrates. The original image was simply varying tones of gray from white to black.



ACTION ASSIGNMENT!

- 1- Go out shooting and 'find' existing monochromatic color schemes. Think of the Rooftops, Canyon, and Leaf example photos. Don't forget to use other rules of composition!
- 2- For your second Action Assignment, create a monochromatic color scheme using props and a background to set a mood. Think of the Model and the Moth & Stone example photos.
- 3- To complete your third Action Assignment- take an existing photograph and then change the mood of the photo by changing it to a monochromatic color scheme in post-production. Think of the Power Tower example photo.
- 4- Share your photos with others and record their responses.

HOW DID YOU DO?

- Did you create a mood in your three Action Assignments? How did others react to your photos?
- Were you able to locate an existing monochromatic color image?
- Did you successfully alter the color scheme of an existing photo using post-production?

Total time:
4-7 hours



Skill Points:

- Exploring motion in still photography
- Working with shutter speed and camera movement
- Understanding these 4 techniques for capturing motion

HOW TO DEPICT MOTION

Photography is a still medium. How do you depict motion? There are a number of techniques that all involve the setting of the shutter speed and camera movement.



KEY LESSON: We will concentrate on four techniques: camera moving-subject still, panning, camera still-subject moving, frozen action.



Frozen action / Surfer: It's dependent on 4 things: shutter speed, speed of subject or camera, direction of movement, and lens focal length. A subject moving directly toward or away from the camera can use a slower shutter speed to freeze the action. A subject moving at an angled or perpendicular angle of view will require a faster shutter speed. The longer the lens focal length, the faster the needed shutter speed to freeze the action.

Panning / Woman Running: This involves a moving subject, a slower shutter speed, and moving the camera in-sync with the subject. Panning works best, when the subject passes laterally. Use shutter speeds ranging from 1/60th to 1/8th of a second. Hold the camera and tuck your elbows into your body. As the subject passes by, follow their motion by swiveling your body at the hips. Release the shutter when the subject is centered in the frame. Follow through in a full arc, even after releasing the shutter.

Subject moving - camera still / Carnival: For this technique the camera must be motionless. Use a tripod or a supporting surface. Use a shutter speed between 1/30th and 1/2 second. The shutter speed will depend upon the speed of the subject, the desired effect, and exposure considerations.

Camera moving - subject still / Skateboarders: The subject is still, because he is moving at the same rate as the camera. The landscape is blurred, because it is not moving at all. Start with shutter speeds ranging from 1/60th to 1/15th. The speed, at which the camera is moving, along with the desired effect, will determine the shutter speed.



ACTION ASSIGNMENT!

- 1- Spend a few hours out taking photographs that depict motion. Photograph moving vehicles using different shutter speeds, different subject speeds, different angles of path, and different focal length lenses.
- 2- Set up a photo shoot with a friend where you will practice panning. Try different subject speeds - walk slowly, walk fast, and run. Change the angle of motion relative to the camera so you can learn how it affects the pan - Have them cross laterally, and then have them pass by at different angles to the camera.
- 3- Set up a still camera - subject motion shot (study the Carnival example and follow directions).
- 4- Set up a camera moving - still subject - shoot at sunset. Have someone drive a vehicle while you ride and photograph. Use different shutter speeds. Point the camera directly ahead (not to the side).

HOW DID YOU DO?

- Do you have a better understanding of the effect of shutter speed - on depicting motion?
- Do you now understand the technique of panning? Did you capture all of the 4 different motion techniques?

Total time:
2-4 hours



Skill Points:

- Identifying real or perceived motion in a scene
- Understanding how position & motion function together
- How to dissect and utilize multiple motion
- When to break a motion / position rule

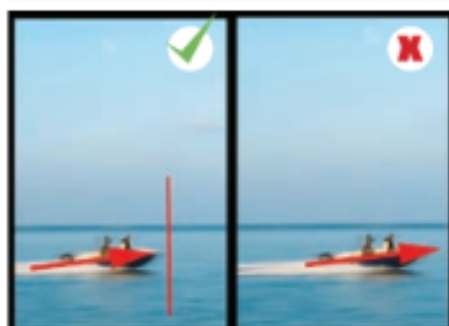
SUBJECT MOVEMENT & POSITIONING

Where you place the subject within the frame is important. What's even more important is if the shot contains any movement - either real or implied.

KEY LESSON: Movement is one of the four key elements that attract the human eye: shape, contrast, position, and motion. How you perceive, and place, your subject and/or any motion can make or break your image.



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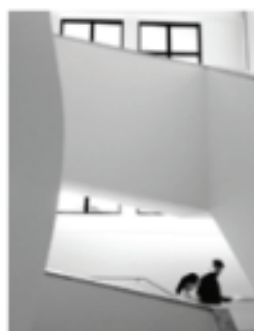
This is a basic motion/subject rule that every beginning photographer learns. **Don't have a subject, in motion, exiting the frame.** If a subject is in motion you want them positioned like the example photo on the left, and not like the one on the right.



Photography can **capture actual motion and create implied motion.** The boarder was captured with a fast shutter speed and direct angle of view to the camera - making him appear *still*. The snow is moving to the left, and it *appears* moving. In this case, placing the subject on the edge of the lower right frame works: the movement and his line-of-sight are to the left from his position.



Left: The subject wasn't moving at all. However, the *implied movement* is to the right and immediately off-frame. It comes from her body language, the extended leg, and her line-of-sight. **Right:** The photographer can make adjustments to keep the movement within the frame. This is an great example of implied movement.



In composition, every element within the frame is important, and has the potential to change the flow and meaning of a photograph. Here, the subject is exiting the frame with implied motion. In this case, it works perfectly. Breaking this rule create a visual tension, because all of the other elements in the shot create a balance that "pulls" the subject back into the frame (visually). If the couple had been placed anywhere else in this frame- the shot wouldn't work. The balance would be broken.



ACTION ASSIGNMENT!

- 1- Organize a photo shoot with several models. Go to a location with lots of different possibilities for architecture and landscape. Some suggestions would be a local university campus, library, or a museum.
- 2- Photograph your models using actual and implied motion.
 - Change the models location to different positions within the frame. Try capturing all of your models in motion together. Be sure to place one "as the subject" through positioning in the frame.
 - Play around with breaking the rules (think of the couple on the stairs)
 - Get creative with your compositions. Review other Composition Action Cards to get some ideas.
- 4- Print out your results and review them as a group. What were your favorite shots?

HOW DID YOU DO?

- Did you find a good location to great real and implied motion?
- Were you able to create an interesting shot with all of the models together in motion or in implied motion?

READY! SET! GO! **ACTION CARDS**
COMPOSITION: MOVEMENT & POSITIONING

Total time:
2-5 hours



LEARN THE POSITIVE OF THE NEGATIVE



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Skill Points:

- Learning what negative space is
- Discovering why negative space is so effective
- A tip for judging the effectiveness of negative space in a photograph

Negative space is the empty, or unoccupied, space surrounding the subject in a photo that helps to define it. It is one of the least understood art concepts with photographers. Simple empty space does not signify the proper use of negative space.

KEY LESSON: The true use of negative space should support and add content value to the subject. This content value can be compositional, storytelling, or mood setting. Negative space can also be thought of as 'breathing room'. When composing with negative space ask yourself, "Is this empty space contributing to my shot, or is it simply just there?"



Negative storytelling: - *Man on mountaintop*

This is about as wonderful an example of 'negative space' used in a photo as you will ever come across. The man is the subject. However, the negative space tells the story of the man. We see the tops of the clouds in the negative space, and we then realize that the man is up high and a large expanse exists below him. The negative space tells us- he is on top of the world.



Isolating the positive: - *Girl and landscape*

Painters, Illustrators, & Graphic Designers often use negative space to separate a subject from its surroundings. This gives the subject breathing room. When a viewer 'feels' this breathing room, it causes them to relax, and they then tend to spend more time staring at the composition. This is a well-documented trick, and you should use it.

The thin line between excellent and poor use:

The flower photo creates a graphic isolation of the subject; it provides a compositional boost. The second photo doesn't provide any compositional, storytelling, or mood setting advantages. Here is a trick to judge the value of negative space. Look at the image through squinted eyes. Does the subject, and the negative space, stand out separately and yet together? If so, it's a good use of negative space. The 'Couple' shot (on the right) doesn't pass the test.



ACTION ASSIGNMENT!

- 1- Go out on a photo shoot and search for interesting locations with negative space- typical places to look would be landscapes and architecture. Try to compose some photographs where the negative space is essential to the subject's story. (Think of man on mountaintop.)
- 2- Go out on a photo shoot and located a strong negative space frame. Use it to create some interesting photos. (Think of girl and landscape.)
- 3- Create a strong graphic shot using a simple subject and a white, black, or solid colored background as negative space. (Think of the flower.) Don't let the negative space overwhelm the subject!

HOW DID YOU DO?

- Did you create some solid storytelling shots using negative space as a key component?
- Did you try the squint test with your results?
- Do you now have a better understanding of negative space and how it works?

Total time:
3-5 hours



THE REASONING BEHIND OFF-CENTER SUBJECTS



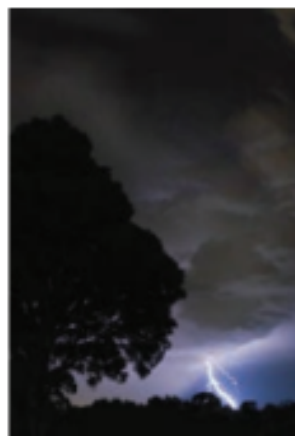
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Skill Points:

- Using an off-center subject to create drama
- Changing the mood of a photograph by cropping to an off-center subject
- Creating dramatic perspective with an off-center subject

First, let's define that 'off-center', in this case, doesn't include *slightly off-center* – such as the 'Rule of Thirds'. No. These are the subjects that are placed way onto the edge of the frame. Normally this is considered a completely wrong maneuver. However, in some cases it's the perfect one! That's the nature of art.

KEY LESSON: The three main reasons that you would have an off-center subject are... when capturing a spur of the moment photograph- you may not have a choice. Secondly, placing the subject close to the frame creates a dramatic tension for the viewer- that would be missing if it were more centered. Finally, it can help provide a better sense of distance and perspective.



Lightning: The simplest reason you may have an off-center subject is... that may be just how it happened, as in this example. Does this work in the overall composition? If not, can you crop the image to make it better?

Friends at the Waterfall: Here's a perfect example of an off-center subject creating size and perspective. If you cover up the people with your thumb, the image loses all of its impact. The people

provide perspective and drama as an off-center subject! Camera POV plays a part. If the camera POV had been looking down onto the people and the waterfall, the off-center subject placement would not work.

Woman: This example is a more sophisticated use of the technique. Is it the woman the subject? No. Specifically, it's her left eye. Every aspect of the composition pushes you to look at that eye. A primary reason that the eye is so dominate is its placement near the edge of the frame creating a dramatic POV!



Musician: This is an interesting example. What is the subject here? There is a visual balance between the only three objects shown. The intention was for the man to be the subject- through his off-center placement- along with a couple of other composition tools. In this case, the success of the technique is up in the air. The eyes really fight between the musician and the microphone.



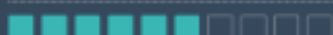
ACTION ASSIGNMENT!

- 1- Create a photograph where subject placement establishes size and perspective (think of the waterfall shot).
- 2- Create a photograph where the definitive subject is right on the edge of the frame (think of the woman), and try to establish a dramatic mood.
- 3- Either create, or select, an existing photograph that you will improve by cropping the subject close to the edge of frame (think of the lightning shot).
- 4- Beware that none of your shots create a visual paradox where the subject is uncertain (think of the musician).

HOW DID YOU DO?

- Did you establish size and perspective? Show your image to others. Ask for opinions.
- Did you create a dramatic image with an off-center subject, such as the shot of the woman? Get some opinions.

Total time:
4-6 hours



Difficulty Level: Advanced
beginner to intermediate

Skill Points:

- Identifying patterns
- Learning the difference between patterns and repetition
- Using interrupts within a pattern and identifying emerging patterns

THE SECRET OF PATTERNS



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There is confusion among photographers regarding the art definition of pattern and repetition. Here are the definitions...

Repetition refers to similar objects, or shapes, that appear repeatedly in a composition. **Pattern** is a combination of similar objects, or shapes, repeated in a **regular arrangement** within a composition. It's a very fine line between the two.

KEY LESSON: Pattern is important because it touches upon another key function of the human mind, and that is rhythm. An irregular pattern can have an irregular rhythm. A visually regular pattern, with an interrupt, is the musical equivalent to a crescendo. It garners immediate attention.



Birds in Flight: Is this pattern or repetition? Re-read the definitions. This is repetition. The image does not match the definition of pattern.

Green House: This is pattern. Pattern is a combination of objects, or shapes, repeated in a regular arrangement within a composition. What is the difference between this image and the birds? The birds do not have a regular arrangement.

Biker Hands : This is a use of pattern. The represented objects aren't exactly the same, but similar. The rings are regularly arranged within the composition. The tattoos are mirrored on both sides. This image definitely has a rhythm through pattern. The thumbs in the pockets break the rhythm, creating a pseudo-crescendo.

Peeling Paint: Does this represent a pattern? It does. We have similar shapes in an organized arrangement. It's important to note that a pattern doesn't need to have a lot of objects. Three objects can establish a pattern.



South Korea stairs: Learning to anticipate patterns, as they develop, is a key skill to your growth as a photographer. Practice watching multiple elements in motion, and then seeing the pattern develop before it actually forms.



ACTION ASSIGNMENT!

- 1- Organize a photo shoot where you will go in search of patterns. Set a goal as to how many you will find and photograph.
 - Find and photograph a pattern that has only three elements (think of peeling paint).
 - Find and photograph several patterns that have multiple elements. Make sure they appear in a regular arrangement, or you are creating a repetition.
 - Try watching a pattern develop, and then creating the shot just as it does... (think of South Korea stairs).
- 2- Print your photos, so that you can examine them as a group.

HOW DID YOU DO?

- Did you meet your goal for finding the number of patterns? Did you use different subjects and objects?
- After reviewing your results in print, do you think that all of your attempts meet the definition of a pattern and not simply repetition?

Total time:
3-5 hours



Skill Points:

- Establishing size and distance in photographs
- Changing a scene to include size perspective
- Becoming visually aware of size comparisons

THE SECRET POTENTIAL BEHIND RELATIVE SIZE



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This is a powerful tool in photographic composition. Relative size works, because of the way the human mind is trained from birth. It can establish how big, small, distant, or close something is through size comparison. It's a perfect tool for enhancing your images with visual perspective.

KEY LESSON: If we know that a building is large, and yet in a photograph it appears small compared to a bicycle that sits in the foreground- our brain calculates that as meaning the building is far away. If we see a baby bird in a photograph, and it's head appears large compared to the trees behind it- our brain calculates that as meaning that the bird is very close.



Turtle:

Cover the image on the right with a piece of paper. Looking at the turtle on the left, there is no way to discern the size or distance of this turtle. It could be large. It could also be small. Now, look at the image on the right. The inclusion of the child in the foreground, and the second turtle in the background, establishes size and distance.



Child & Wall: In this example, two forms of perspective are achieved. Because we know that children are small, this wall appears massive, and the tiny perspective of the child tells us that the distance from the camera to the scene is greater than it would have appeared without the child.

Bird: You can also establish how close something is through relative size. We know this bird is very close- due to its size relative to the grass.

Rollercoaster: Putting the people into this shot reveals the size of the rollercoaster. If you, as a photographer, saw this you might be tempted to photograph it immediately, because it looks cool. However, waiting for someone to enter the scene, or sending someone into the scene, makes it a much better picture through relative size comparison!



ACTION ASSIGNMENT!

HOW DID YOU DO?

- 1- Create a photograph where several objects establish size and distance (think of the turtle shot).
- 2- Create a photograph where you establish the size of a structure by including an object of known size (think of the rollercoaster).
- 3- Create a photograph that establishes how small something is (think of the child & the wall).
- 4- Create a shot where you establish how close something is (think of the bird photo).

- Did you establish size and perspective?
- Are your images properly composed overall?
- Did you complete all 4 Action Assignments?
- How could you have improved your efforts?

Total time:
4-6 hours



Difficulty Level:

Beginner to intermediate

Skill Points:

- Learning what repetition is
- Spotting repetition in a scene
- Experimenting with breaking repetition

REPETITION IS NOT PATTERN

Review this Action Card along with the Pattern Action Card. **Repetition** refers to similar objects, or shapes, that appear repeatedly in a composition.

KEY LESSON: Repetition is a strong visual cue to the viewers of your photographs. Humans like what they know, and repetition creates a feeling of knowing what's coming. Providing a break in repetition can also work really well, just as it does in "pattern". The break provides a focal point (see the Focal Point Action Card).



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Apartment Facade: This photograph had the keyword "repetition". This is not repetition. This is pattern. Study the definitions. Learn to recognize the difference. These similar shapes appear in a regular arrangement, which is the definition of pattern.

Grass & Bokeh Highlights: The repetition here is in the bokeh highlights. Consider this: in composition, when you include a very strong visual element, such as repetition, it can dominate the composition instead of the subject. Is the bokeh the subject? No. The grass was the intended subject. However, it has been visually overwhelmed by the use of repetition. Always combine intent and technique.

Stacked Chairs: This is an exquisite example of repetition. We have similar objects (the chairs) that appear repeatedly in the composition, and they are not in a regular arrangement. It's a very fine line between pattern and repetition.

Honey Jars: Is this pattern or repetition? Sometimes, it can be very difficult to decide. It's important is to recognize how you're going to use it. Your goals as a photographer should include not only being proficient technically and creatively, but also accuracy. Be accurate in your knowledge of what you are depicting.

Foliage: One last example, pattern or repetition? This is definitely repetition!



ACTION ASSIGNMENT!

- 1- Organize two photo shoots. For your first photo shoot, select a subject that you have numerous copies of. (Think of the honey jars or chairs.) It can be something very simple like metal nuts and bolts, a jar of walnuts, or marbles. Photograph your subject using repetition, and then using pattern. Keep the definitions in mind. Don't forget your technical considerations!
- 2- For your second photo shoot, go out on a photo walk. Look for interesting repeated subjects. This could be flowers, architecture, or virtually anything. Photograph your subjects where the repetition completes the composition. (Think of foliage and stacked chairs.) Don't let the repetition overwhelm a subject! (Think of grass & bokeh highlights.) Look for ways to create a focal point by breaking the repetition.

HOW DID YOU DO?

- Did you create a number of interesting shots with repetitive objects?
- Do you now have a knowledge base as to the difference between repetition and pattern?
- Did you practice breaking the repetition by creating a focal point?

Total time:
3-5 hours



Skill Points:

- Creating interest through the use of odds
- Analyzing the potential of the Rule of Odds
- Becoming visually aware of the odd number of subjects or supporting elements

THE LIMITATIONS OF THE RULE OF ODDS



The Rule of Odds goes back long before photographers discovered it. It is an art concept dating back to the earliest painters. The Rule of Odds states that artwork is more visually appealing when there are an odd number of objects.

KEY LESSON: Rule of Odds is highly effective at the number 3. As the odd number increases, the effect diminishes, and can even have a negative impact. The Rule of Odds works, because it keeps the eyes moving across the composition. If there is an even number of subjects in the composition, the brain tends to pair them up and stop moving.



Three Women: The Rule of Odds will not work under all circumstances. The photo of the three women on the left does not work, because the central woman far outweighs the other two in visual weight. The photograph on the right works much better.

Three on the Die: When working with the Rule of Odds try to think outside the box. Here, we have a single die from a pair of dice. The subject is a single die. By placing the 'three' as the visible number the photographer took advantage of the Rule of Odds. The odd number in the composition doesn't necessarily have to be the subject. It can also be supporting elements.

Three Swimmers: This is a perfect example of crafting the Rule of Odds into an overall composition. This is a very important point. Never focus too hard on one composition tool. Successful composition typically requires at least three tools of composition to be successful.

Bowls: Creating simple compositions is a great way to begin experimenting with the Rule of Odds.



ACTION ASSIGNMENT!

- 1- Setup a photo shoot where you experiment with different ways to use the same three subjects. Try different angles, framing, lighting, etc. (think of the three women).
- 2- Create a photograph where the Rule of Odds is utilized, but the odd number of objects- is NOT the subject of the photo (think of the die).
- 3- Create a photograph using the Rule of Odds that also uses two other clearly identifiable rules of composition (think of the swimmers).
- 4- Create a still life photo with kitchen items using the Rule of Odds. Start with three objects, and then move to five objects, and finally seven objects.

HOW DID YOU DO?

- Decide what photo from Action Assignment #1 was the most successful and why?
- Were you able to utilize the Rule of Odds with a single subject?
- Which still life worked best with the Rule of Odds: 3, 5, or 7?

Total time:
3-5 hours



Skill Points:

- Creating visual tension through subject placement
- Analyzing the potential for the Rule of Thirds
- Becoming proficient at knowing when not to use the rule

USE IT & LOSE IT: RULE OF THIRDS



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The Rule of Thirds is the most recognized composition rule out there for photographers. Divide the area of the frame into equal sections – do this by mentally drawing two lines vertically and two lines horizontally at 1/3 increments, leaving an imaginary grid with nine blocks and four intersections.

KEY LESSON: This rule states that when the subject is placed upon one of the intersections, created by the Rule of Thirds grid, it creates a visual tension that makes the photograph more interesting. Don't absorb this as a firm rule. Learn to use it, and then learn when your image is more interesting without it.



Woman & Landscape:

This image is a typical use of the Rule of Thirds. The subject is placed near an intersection of two lines. The woman is placed in that position, which helps to establish her as the subject. It would be typical to place the horizon line on one of the two horizontal lines, which divides the shot using the 1/3 – 2/3 Rule (See Action Card). In this case, the photographer did not.



Diver & Sharks - Left: This is a pretty interesting photographic opportunity. However, the shot lacks impact due to the placement of the diver. The Rule of Thirds can definitely help this image.

Diver & Sharks - Middle: In some situations, (like this one), you may not have options with the framing in-camera. Something happens, and you take the shot. In post-production, you can improve the image by applying the Rule of Thirds using the Crop Tool. This crop places the diver onto the one of the intersections. It also places one of the sharks on the upper left intersection, which also happens to be the direction of the diver's gaze (See the Eye Movement Action Card). All of these changes strengthen the shot.

Final shot - Right: Here is the cropped 'final' version after applying the Rule of Thirds. Compare it to the first version.



ACTION ASSIGNMENT!

- 1- Spend 1.5 hours out taking pictures, consciously apply the Rule of Thirds (in-camera) while taking your shots. (Think of the woman & landscape.)
- 2- Spend 1.5 hours out taking pictures, create two versions of each shot: one applying the Rule of Thirds and one breaking the rule.
- 3- Go through your existing photos and select 5 that you believe could be improved by cropping to the Rule of Thirds (think of the diver & sharks). Crop the photos and print out both versions to compare them.

HOW DID YOU DO?

- Were you able to pre-visualize, and compose, using the Rule of Thirds in-camera? Check your composition with a Rule of Thirds crop tool overlay (in your post-production software). Was your placement correct?
- Were you able to create successful images that broke the Rule of Thirds effectively?
- Were you able to improve your 5 photos by cropping to the Rule of Thirds?

Total time:
2-5 hours



THE NATURE OF: S AND Z CURVES



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Skill Points:

- Recognizing traditional uses of the S and Z curve
- Learning new ways to use the S and Z curve
- Creating an S or Z curve situation

The S Curve is a traditional art concept. It originates from ancient Greek and Roman sculpture - that depicted a figure's body in a serpentine "S" position. The Z curve is a variation of the S curve. Curved lines can signify liveliness and activity, and they subconsciously excite a viewer.

KEY LESSON: The S and Z curves, as leading lines, are pretty basic compositional tools. Most of us have heard of it and have used it. Try to think of ways to use these curves outside of that singular box.



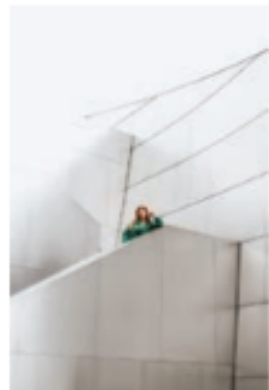
Man & Road: This is the traditional use of the S curve. Is this a correct use? -check 'Leading Lines' Action Card- What is the subject: the man, the road, or the landscape? The intent was for the man to be the subject. Yet, the S curve leads the eyes away from the man and ends up nowhere important!



Bride & Maids: This S curve follows the original intent as established by the Greeks and the Romans. The bride and her maids are positioned in a serpentine S shape. Think outside the norm when using S and Z curves. The curves don't need to be drastic to be effective.



Boy Running: This is an excellent example of thinking outside the box with an S and Z curve. This curve leads into the picture, but it takes a trained eye to spot this opportunity. The curve ends at the boy's parents giving it meaning to the composition.



Girl on Stairs: Here is another 'less literal' example. Can you spot the Z curve? The mind can, and will, spot S and Z curves subconsciously. S and Z curves incorporated into your photos do not need to be blatant. These curves can also be effective backwards. (S - 2)



Couple & Desert: The Z curve is simply a variation of the S curve. The lines have been straightened out. All the same principles apply.



ACTION ASSIGNMENT!

- 1- Set up a photo shoot where you go out and seek existing S curves that you can incorporate into a composition.
- 2- Create an S curve situation, using the traditional intent, and photograph it. (Think of the bride and maids.)
- 3- Set up a photo shoot where you will only seek out and photograph Z curves.
- 4- Either find, or create, an S or Z curve situation where the curve is far less literal. (Think of the girl on stairs and the boy running.)

HOW DID YOU DO?

- Did you locate and utilize some existing S and Z curves? Did you create a traditional intent S curve photo?
- How did your less literal S or Z curve shots turn out? Share them with others. Ask them - first - how their eyes travel through the shot? Secondly - ask them if they see the curve?

READY! SET! GO! ACTION CARDS - COMPOSITION: S AND Z CURVES

Total time:
2-5 hours



Skill Points:

- Identifying the difference between a shadow and a silhouette
- Learning the different attributes of shadows
- Creating photographs that effectively use shadows in a composition

THE IMPORTANCE OF SHADOWS



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Shadows, (and highlights), are essential to creating "Form" in a photograph. Without shadows, (and highlights), the brain interprets everything presented in a photograph as being flat. Just like "light", there are different types of shadows, and they have different effects in a photograph.

KEY LESSON: There is much confusion among photographers about the shadow and the silhouette. Let's define both. A shadow is a dark area, or shape, produced by a body coming between the rays of a light source and a surface. A silhouette is the dark shape, and outline, of something visible against a lighter background.

The thin confusing line:

Left: This is not a shadow. This is a silhouette.

A silhouette is a dark shape, and outline, of something visible against a lighter background.

Middle: Is this a shadow or a silhouette? Here... it's both! The couple are in silhouette. The shadow is cast across the cement walkway. This shot is a great illustration for learning the difference.

Right: Is this a shadow or a silhouette? This is a pretty complex picture. The lighting, coming from the right, is definitely casting shadows. Is the man's a face a shadow? No. It's "shadowed". There's a difference. Is the man a silhouette? Parts of him certainly fit that definition. This photo would be defined as a "semi-silhouette".



Seeing in the shadows:

Left: The frame of the sunglasses is casting a dark traditional shadow. Are the lenses casting a shadow? Yes. Shadows can vary in density. They can also pick up color based upon a number of factors. The frame creates an opaque shadow. The lenses create a translucent shadow.

Middle: When the light source has hard light, and/or, the object blocking the light waves is close to the subject- it creates "hard edged shadows", as we see here. The edge quality of a shadow can help to set the mood for a photograph.

Right: When the light source is producing soft light, and/or, the object blocking the light waves is further away from the subject- it creates "soft edged shadows". Knowing this can be very important for certain genres of photography, including portraiture. Learn to identify hard and soft edged shadows.



ACTION ASSIGNMENT!

- 1- Review the sample photographs to see how the shadows help to establish "form" in a photo.
- 2- Organize a photo shoot where you will use hard-edged shadows and soft-edged shadows to create a mood.
- 3- Organize a photo shoot, late in the day, on a sunny day, where you will use opaque shadows and translucent shadows in your compositions.
- 4- Create a shot where you include a silhouette and a shadow in the same photograph. Make it as complex as you can.

HOW DID YOU DO?

- Did you see how shadows help to establish form?
- Were you able to create both hard and soft edged shadows, and use them in a composition that seemed appropriate?
- Did you effectively create a shot with translucent shadows?