

COMPOSITIONAL CHALLENGES

RULE OF THIRDS

Imagine that your image is divided into 9 equal segments by 2 vertical and 2 horizontal lines. The [rule of thirds](#) says that you should position the most important elements in your scene along these lines, or at the points where they intersect.

Doing so will add balance and interest to your photo. Some cameras even offer an option to superimpose a rule of thirds grid over the LCD screen, making it even easier to use.



BALANCING ELEMENTS

Placing your main subject off-centre, as with the rule of thirds, creates a more interesting photo, but it can leave a void in the scene which can make it feel empty. You should balance the "weight" of your subject by including another object of lesser importance to fill the space.



LEADING LINES

When we look at a photo our eye is naturally drawn along lines. By thinking about how you place lines in your composition, you can affect the way we view the image, pulling us into the picture, towards the subject, or on a journey "through" the scene. There are many different types of line - straight, diagonal, curvy, zigzag, radial Serpentine, etc- and each can be used to enhance our photo's composition.



Colour is one of the most obvious elements of composition. Everyone knows that intense colours make people take notice of your images. Ever wonder why there are so many sunset and flower shots? Colour is the reason.

Color has a couple of functions in photographs. First, color grabs the attention of the viewer. Perhaps, because this function of color is so palpable, many photographers miss the more sophisticated, and in some cases far more powerful, function of color: color sets the mood of an image. Since color is such an important compositional ingredient, the experienced photographer will want to use color to its fullest extent — incorporating both functions of color into images.

GRABBING THE VIEWER'S ATTENTION

Utilizing color to grab attention is often rather straight forward. Generally, what is required is a saturated or intense color. This type of color tends to grab the viewer's attention and focus it on the area of color. Furthermore, the color tends to keep the viewer's attention for an extended period of time. When the viewer's eyes do wander, the color tends to bring the attention back.



Photo by Miguel Virkkunen Carvalho.

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Photo by Stanley Zimney; ISO 64, f/4.5, 1/170-second exposure.

There are a couple of primary ways to use color to grab a viewer's attention. The first way is to use very saturated, bold colors. An example of this approach would be a dramatic sunset. The second way of using color to grab a viewer's attention is to use a mix of contrasting colors. An example of this approach would be an image of fall colors where there is a combination of red, orange, and yellow leaves.

MOOD

Setting the mood through the use of color tends to be a more subtle application of color than when color is used to grab the attention. However, that does not mean that it is any less powerful. Different colors elicit different moods. Since there are a huge number of colors, it is not possible to cover all of the colors and their impacts on viewers' moods in an article such as this one. Instead, a few colors will be reviewed in an effort to convey how colors affect viewers' feelings.

BLUE

Blue tends to bring forth feelings of calm or cold depending on how the color is used. This is a reflection of how we perceive the color in nature: the deep calm ocean is blue, peaceful cloudless skies are blue, and large amounts of ice have a blue tint. Therefore, a photographer that wishes to create a feeling of calm in an image should include blue objects in the image such as a peaceful blue stream or a blue lake.



Photo by Jim Denham; ISO 1600, f/8.0, 8-second exposure.

GREEN

Green often communicates a feeling of lushness and freshness. Again, our feelings about this color are tied up with how we frequently experience that color in nature. We tend to associate green with spring and new growth. Green is frequently used in landscape photography. Green meadows, plants, and fields can be used to convey the mood of a flourishing scene.

YELLOW, ORANGE, AND RED

The last colors to be evaluated are the warm tones: yellow, orange, and red. These colors are associated with feelings of warmth and comfort (again the colors are tied to how we experience them in nature). Sunsets are a perfect example of how these warm colors create a comfortable feeling. Photographers that wish to take advantage of these colors can include, in their photographs, objects such as flowers, plants, food, and rocks that contain these colors.

LIGHT

So far, we have looked at using color to create mood in photographs by means of including objects, with the appropriate colors, in an image. However, there is another way to use color to create mood in an image – the use of light. Early morning and evening provide a photographer with colored light which can be used to powerful effect in images. Before sunrise and about twenty minutes after sunset, everything is bathed in a soft blue light. This light can be used to create a calm mood such as an early morning shot of a beach bathed in the cool, blue light.



Photo by J J; ISO 100, f/4.0, 1/60-second exposure.

Just after sunrise and before sunset, the light is often very warm with red, orange, or yellow hues. This light can be used to create feelings of comfort such as a beautiful mountain peak bathed in a soft, warm, golden light.

SUMMARY

When properly utilized, color can be one of the most effective methods of conveying mood in an image.

Introduction to Triangles

Triangles are present, in one way or another, in almost everything we see – it's just a case of distinguishing them and knowing what to do with them. They make great compositional tools as they're easy to make and manipulate and are remarkably common.

Triangles are a great way of combining different compositional techniques, such as lines and paths, using them to create a more interesting aspect of a photograph.

The best thing about using triangles is their ability to make a photo feel stable... or unstable.

Why use Triangles

It's not really a case of *why* you should be using triangles in your composition; you'll come to realise that the inclusion of triangles is inevitable. It's more about why you should be using them *properly*.

Triangles are a great way of grouping together three points of a photograph and organising them to portray a certain feeling such as stability, aggression, instability, etc.

When you understand this, you can use them as invisible features of a photo to evoke strong feelings in the viewer.

How to Create a Triangle

So long as you have three vague points of interest in a photo that don't exist on the same line, you can easily create a triangle. It's not about having three clear lines joining up in the photo – that would be too obvious – but about grouping points of interest.

If you take a look back through some of your photos, you'll probably realise that a lot of them contain triangles. Whether you've used them to their potential is another thing. Have a look at the photo below as a slightly less stable triangle – notice how I used the submerged breakwater as one of the edges of the triangle.

