# Effectively Composing An Image

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**Composition**



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There are two key things you need to know about composing an impactful image. (1) It's easier when you know the "rules" of composition. (2) When you're comfortable with these

rules, never be afraid to break them – experimentation can sometimes create the most eye-catching results. So use these guidelines to get started, and then let your imagination run riot…

### Straight horizons

This sounds obvious, but it's not always easy to get the horizon straight when your attention is focused on foreground interest or you're shooting a sweeping landscape. If it's an option on your Nikon DSLR, switch on the built-in virtual horizon in the viewfinder display. You can also fit a spirit level into the hotshoe to help you out.

### The rule of thirds

Imagine a noughts-and-crosses grid over the scene, or use the viewfinder grid option if your DSLR has it, then position your subject on or close to where two of the lines intersect. For a more dynamic image, place horizons above or below the middle of the frame (again using your rule of thirds lines).

An important exception is with reflections, where a central horizon tends to create a more pleasing visual symmetry.

### Leading lines

Train your eyes to look for lines and shapes. Leading lines, whether straight or curved, draw the eye into an image and straight to the subject. These could be paths, drystone walls, a river or stream, a row of trees or shrubs, a staircase or driveway. Converging lines – two or more lines coming from different parts of an image to a single point – can also be very helpful.

- Find out more about leading lines here.

### Repetitive patterns

Subjects with repetitive patterns can make for interesting images. For instance, cropping in tight on a crate full of apples creates a graphic, repeating pattern of colour and shape. Also look for deviations in patterns – what if those apples were all red except for one yellow apple?

Now you've got a break in the pattern that creates a strong point of focus on the yellow apple. Texture can also work to your advantage. Get in close to emphasise it, either by zooming in or by using a macro lens; you don't need to capture the entire subject, just a portion of it. Textures can be soft, like the feathers on a bird, or harsh, such as peeling paint or wood grain.



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**Keep it simple**

Try to pare down the shot to the most important details to focus the viewer's attention. Walk around and explore the scene from different angles and distances; this might meant shooting from a kneeling position, or cropping right in, or blurring the background with a wide aperture/low f-number such as f/2.8 (choose aperture priority or manual to do this).

**Positioning your main subject**

Think about how much of the frame your main subject is taking up. If it's too small, with too much space around it, the end result can be underwhelming, so get in closer – whether you're

zooming or moving your own position. Including foreground interest, whether that's an object or a striking splash of colour, creates a sense of depth to lead the eye in. With people and animals, it's often best to have them looking into the frame, so if they're looking to the right, position them on the left-hand side of the frame and vice versa.

However…

**Centre of attention**

… centre composition can be rather striking if your subject is strong enough to command the frame. You'll also need to keep the rest of your frame as clean as possible – if there are additional elements competing for the viewer's intention, the overall effect will be a messy turn-off rather than a compelling image. With portraits, choose a very shallow depth of field (e.g. f/2.8) to ensure your subject really stands out.

**Quick tips**

• Use a natural frame such as foliage, a tree branch, arches in walls, or window frames.

• To minimise a distracting background, position yourself so your subject has a clean backdrop.

• Check the edges of the image to make sure you've not inadvertently lopped off a key part of the scene, such as the top of a building or hill.

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