

# Composition Introduction

## What is Composition

Photographic composition is the arrangement of a subject or subjects within the scene you are trying to capture.

When it comes to composition there are no rules just guidelines. However, one of these guidelines is called the “Rule of Thirds”

There are a number of guidelines and following some or all of them will help you take more compelling photographs.

They will have a more natural balance, draw attention to the important parts of the scene, or lead the viewer’s eye through the image.

## Rule Of Thirds

If you 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 the scene along these lines, or at the point that the lines intersect.



Doing so adds balance and interest to your photo. Some modern cameras even offer an option to superimpose a rule of thirds grid over the LCD screen making it even easier to compose your shot.

If your camera does not have this facility it is a case of composing with your eye and perhaps cropping the image on your computer.

Note that the rule of thirds is only a guideline and that the subject does not have to be perfectly lined up as long as they’re close.

To get the rule of thirds shot you may need to change your view point to get the best composition. The benefit of this is that it forces you to think more carefully about the shot and is a good habit to get into.

The rule doesn't apply in every situation, and sometimes breaking it can result in a much more eye-catching, interesting photo. Experiment and test out different compositions even if they go against any "rules" you've learned

However, learn to use the rule of thirds effectively before you try to break.

## 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. This is highlighted in the image below with too much “dead space” to the left of the main subject i.e. the oil tanker.



You should balance the "weight" of your subject by including another object of lesser importance to fill the space. This was achieved by zooming out of the scene which brought in the north pier and lighthouse and also added some foreground interest in the form of an early morning surfer.



## Leading Lines

When we look at a photo our eye is naturally drawn along lines

“Lines” pull us into the picture, towards the subject, or on a journey "through" the scene

Lines can be straight, diagonal, curvy, zigzag, radial etc - and each can be used to enhance our photo's composition

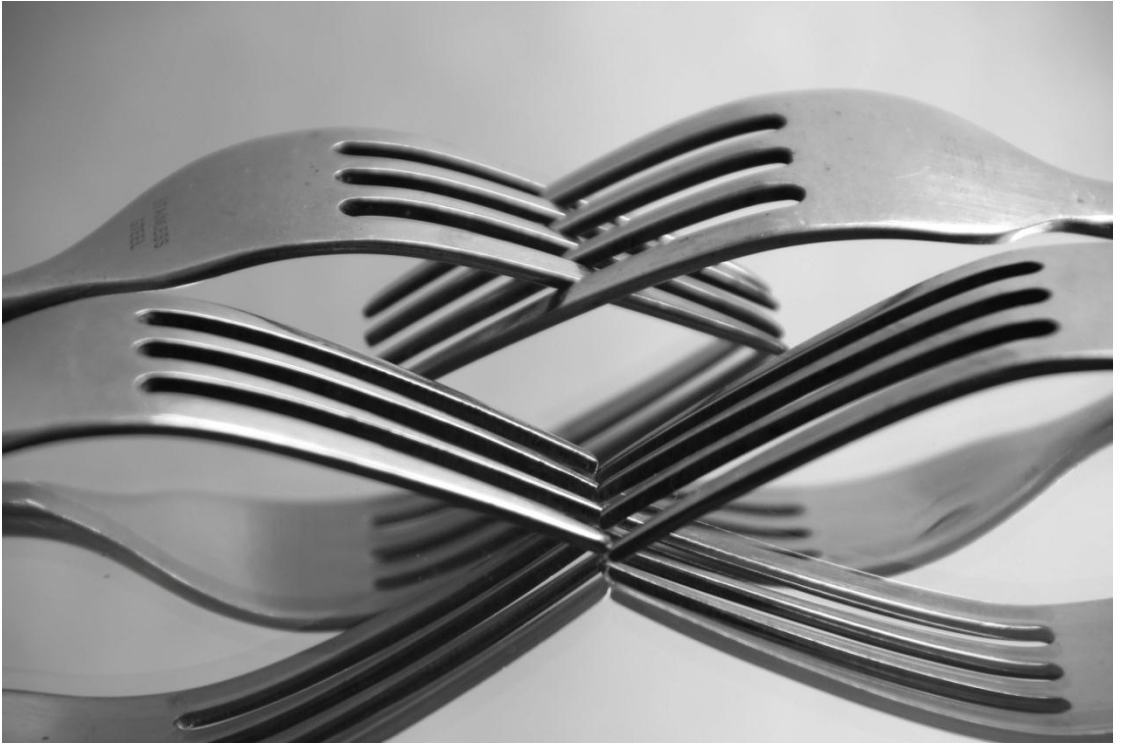
Where possible try and get leading lines close to a corner. The image below is Tynemouth pier which with the right viewpoint means the railings, rail track and pier edge draws the viewer into the image to the main subject in the distance.



## Symmetry and Patterns

We are surrounded by symmetry and patterns, both natural and man-made which can make for eye catching compositions. The image below was my attempts at trying to make forks symmetrical and interesting.

Obviously, I failed - but you try making forks interesting :-D



Another great way to use symmetry or patterns is to break them in some small way.



The symmetry of the chapel is broken by the bucket in the bottom right corner.

## Viewpoint

Before photographing your subject, take time to think about where you will shoot it from

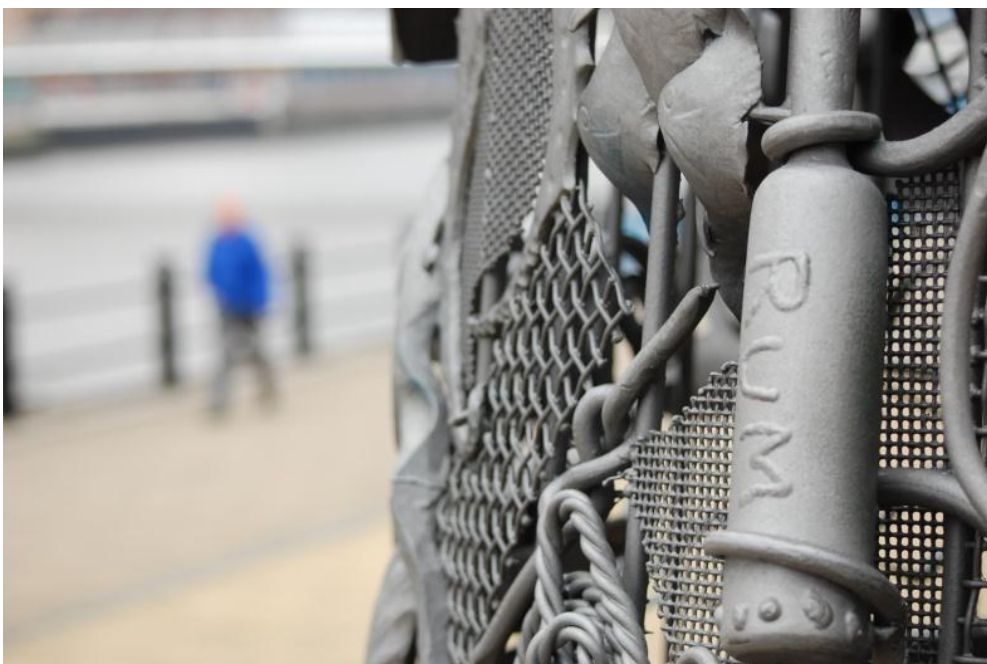
Our viewpoint has a massive impact on the composition of our photo

Instead of shooting from eye level, consider from high above, at ground level, the side, the back, from a long way away, from very close up, and so on

## Background

What you see is not what the camera sees because the camera has the tendency to “flatten” an image

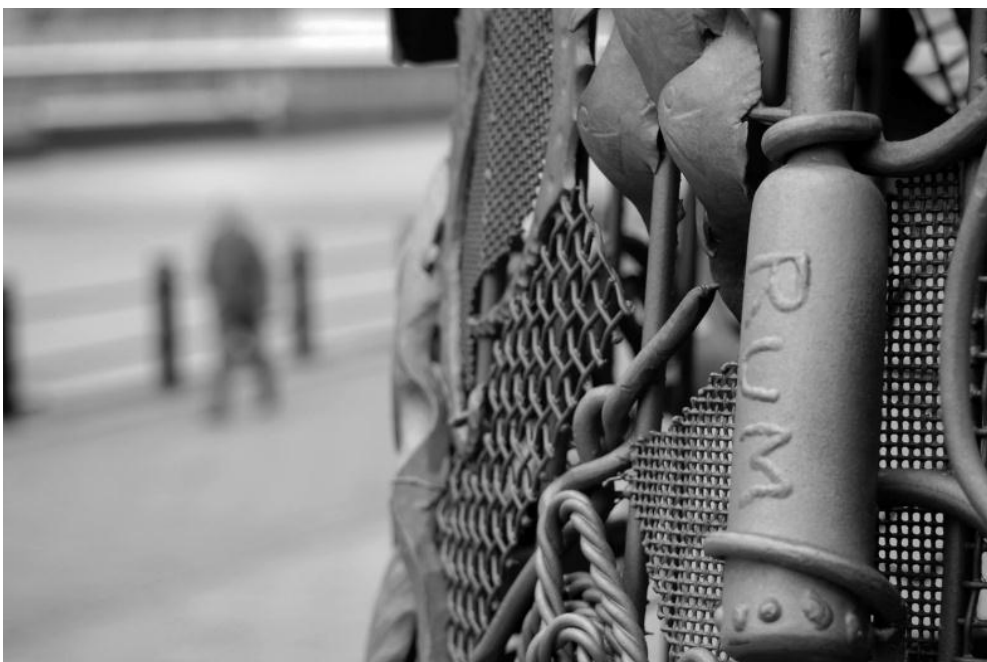
The way around this is to make the background out of focus or choose a background that does not distract or detract from the main subject



An alternative is to make the photo monochrome. The image below was taken by Paul Trickett on a Camera Club outing to Newcastle quayside.

The image on the left is the original in colour.

Though the background is out of focus the person in the blue jacket draws the eye away from the foreground subject as it is grey.



Making the image monochrome lessens this distraction substantially without detracting from the overall photograph.

## Depth

Photography is a 2D medium, so choose your composition carefully to convey the sense of depth that was present in the actual scene.



present in the actual scene.

Try overlapping, where you deliberately partially obscure one object with another.

The human eye naturally recognises these layers and mentally separates them out, creating an image with more depth

Emphasise your scene's depth by including interesting subjects at varying distances from the camera.

## Framing

The world is full of objects which make perfect natural frames, such as trees, archways and holes.

By placing these around the edge of the composition you help to isolate the main subject from the outside world

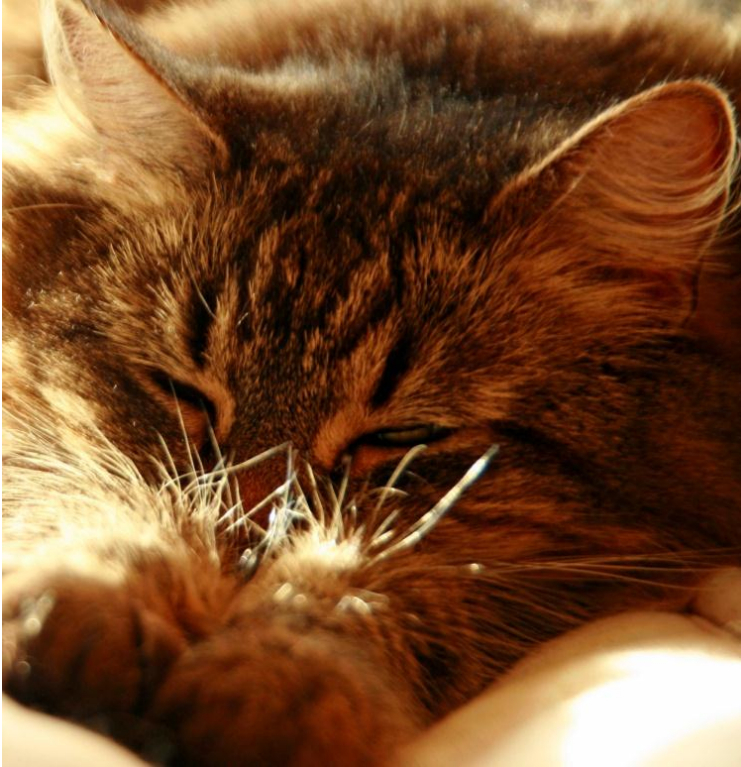
The result is a more focused image which draws your eye naturally to the main point of interest.



The trees provide the frame, the lines draw you in and depth is achieved by objects at different distances.

## Cropping

Often a photo will lack impact because the main subject is so small it becomes lost among the clutter of its surroundings.



By cropping tight around the subject you eliminate the background "noise", ensuring the subject gets the viewer's undivided attention

The original image had lots of foreground and background distractions so a close crop with the legs in the corner leading the viewer into the image eliminated these distractions and focussed all attention onto Lucy.

## Breaking The Rules

As with all rules (at least in photography), the rule of thirds doesn't apply in every situation, and sometimes breaking it can result in a much more eye-catching, interesting photo.

Experiment and test out different compositions even if they go against any "rules" you've learned.

Unlike traditional photography, digital photography does not incur the cost of film processing costs or running out of shots.

Take advantage of this fact and experiment with your composition - you never know whether an idea will work until you try it.