

## Improve Your Photography – Composition 101

Next time you take your digital camera out and line it up for a shot pause before you press the shutter button and ask yourself:

### “What is the Focal Point in this Picture?”

Some other ways to ask the same question might include – What is the central point of interest? What will draw the eye of the viewers of this picture? What in this image will make it stand out from others? What is my subject?

The reason a focal point is important is that when you look at an image your eye will generally need a ‘resting place’ or something of interest to really hold it. Without it you’ll find people will simply glance at your shots and then move on to the next one.

Once you’ve identified a point of interest or focal point you then should ask yourself how you can enhance it.

### 6 Techniques to Enhance the Focal Point in an Image

A focal point can be virtually anything ranging from a person, to a building, to a mountain, to a flower etc. Obviously the more interesting the focal point the better – but there are other things you can do to enhance it’s power including:

- **Position** – Place it in a prominent position – you might want to start with the [rule of thirds](#) for some ideas.
- **Focus** – Learn to use Depth of Field to blur out other aspects in front or behind your focal point.
- **Blur** – If you really want to get tricky you might want to play with slower shutter speeds if your main subject is still and things around it are moving.
- **Size** – making your focal point large is not the only way to make it prominent – but it definitely can help.
- **Color** – using contrasting colors can also be a way of setting your point of interest apart from it’s surroundings.
- **Shape** – similarly contrasting shapes and textures can make a subject stand out – especially patterns that are repeated around a subject.

Keep in mind that a combination of above elements can work well together.

Lastly – don’t confuse the viewer with too many competing focal points which might overwhelm the main focal point. Secondary points of interest can be helpful to lead the eye but too many strong ones will just clutter and confuse.

# Improve Your Photography – Composition 101

## Simple Composition

The saying "less is more" is often true in **image composition**. The photo is often more beautiful and effective if unnecessary elements are left out of the frame. A common mistake is to try to include all possible things in one photo. It is often wise to include only one clear center of interest into the photo.

When you are taking a photo, you should check if there are any distracting elements on the edges of the frame. The photos on this page are examples of simple yet effective compositions. In fact one reason why they work is their simplicity.

## Cropping In Photography—An Element Of Composition

In an ideal world, every photo you take would be perfectly composed. However, in real life, many pictures could use some improvement. Often, thoughtful cropping can make the difference between a mediocre image and a better one. Cropping a picture just means eliminating or trimming off edges.

Some cameras can crop images before printing. Check your manual to see if your camera is one of these. The manual may use the word "trim" rather than "crop." Otherwise, crop pictures by using a photo-editing program.

The process is simple. First you select the area that you want to keep. Usually, you place the cursor or crop tool where you want one corner of this image to be. Then click and drag to select the area that will appear in the new image. That area will appear lighter or darker than the parts to be trimmed off. Most programs allow you to crop either to certain specific sizes or to a random size of your choice. If you like the cropped version, you then direct the program to complete the crop.

Do not crop your only version of a photo. Always crop on a duplicate or copy. In many programs, cropping destroys the original and replaces it with the cropped version. Depending on your skill, you may wish you had never altered the original.

However, successful cropping can serve many useful functions, including the following:

Eliminate distracting parts of the photo, change the composition by moving the subject out of dead center or change the orientation by making a horizontal image vertical

One final warning. Remember that when you crop, you are eliminating pixels. That means that your cropped version will have fewer pixels than your original. Therefore, depending on how much you cut off, you may not be able to make a crisp enlargement that is the same size as you could make from the uncropped image. However, if you are displaying your image online, that is seldom a problem.

# Improve Your Photography – Composition 101

## Improve Your Photography Through Selective Focus

Selective focus is a photography technique that can dramatically improve the beginning photographers images. Or any photographer for that matter. It is a technique by which only the subject of your photograph is in sharp focus.

The better you can isolate your subject in a photograph, the better your image will be received. We do this using several photo techniques. Using the rule of thirds, selective exposure, perspective control, leading lines, and selective focus just to name a few.

Selective focus is very easy to learn. It separates snap shots from a well made photo. Look at what you feel are some snap shots. Does the subject compete for attention with the background? Now look at what you feel are great photos. Is the background unobtrusive or out of focus? I'll bet it is.

## Get Close then Get Closer

There are simple things you can do to improve your photography. Things that professionals have learned to do instinctively.

The first thing you can do to make your photos look better is to get closer to your subject. Too many photographs are taken too far from our subjects. Take a few steps closer, zoom in, whatever it takes. That is what professionals do, and it's easy.

The next time you're about to take a photograph, do me a favor. Once you've got your shot all lined up, take a couple steps closer to your subject. In most cases, you will notice an improvement.

## The Background

When taking pictures, we concentrate intently on our subjects - but what about the background? Upon later inspection of our photos, we often find the background detracting from an otherwise great shot.

Taking control of the background can help turn a snapshot into a beautiful photo.

The first step to improving the backgrounds in our photos is to be conscious of the background's importance to our photos. We must know that the right backgrounds can make our shots stand out. This often means simply paying attention to what is behind our subjects during our photography sessions.

Unfortunately, the complete solution is not nearly as simple. The normal goal is to keep the subject as the center of interest in a picture (not to be confused with the center of a picture). Your eye should be drawn to the subject in the final image, and the background must not be distracting from the subject. Shots must be setup to take advantage of a clean or pleasing background.

## Leading Lines in Photography

One of the tools you can use as a photographer to create a meaningful composition is to use leading lines. Leading lines are used to draw the viewer's eye through a photograph. They are intentional or unintentional, natural lines created in the space of the photograph and are used to create a visual narrative in the composition. Leading lines are also used to draw your eye to a focal point in the shot that you would like to highlight.

# Improve Your Photography – Composition 101

## Using Vertical Lines in Photography

Vertical lines have the ability to convey a variety of different moods in a photograph ranging from power and strength (think of skyscrapers) to growth (think of trees).

As horizontal lines can be accentuated by shooting in horizontal format vertical lines can be used very effectively by swapping the way you hold your camera into a vertical framing. This lengthens the vertical subject further which can emphasize it's height.

The other option is to break this rule and frame your vertical subject horizontally which will give it the sense that your image can't contain it (quite effective if the vertical lines are very strong).

Once again it's important to attempt to keep your vertical lines as much in line with the sides of your image as possible. This is not always possible if you're shooting looking up an image as the subject will taper off towards the top – but attempt to keep it's center as straight as possible and you should be ok.

Keep in mind the Rule of Thirds when you have strong vertical lines in a photograph. Placing a line directly in the middle of a shot will effectively cut your image in half. This can be used with dramatic impact but also can leave your image looking segmented.

Keep an eye out for vertical lines that are repeated in patterns in your images as they can be used to great impact – particularly if they are contrasted with other shapes and lines going in different directions.

## Using Horizontal Lines in Photography

There's something about a horizontal line in an image that conveys a message of 'stability' or even 'rest'. Horizons, fallen trees, oceans, sleeping people – all of these subjects have something about them that speaks either of permanency and timelessness or rest.

Horizons are the most common horizontal line to be found in photographs and they often act as a dividing point in a photograph – in effect an anchor that the rest of the image is formed around.

If you want to accentuate the calming stable impact of a horizon one effective technique to use is to shoot your images with horizontal framing (with the longest part of your cameras frame from left to right).

Alternatively if you want to reemphasize horizontal lines shoot with you camera in a vertical framing.

## Improve Your Photography – Composition 101

Keep in mind that unbroken horizons can often lead to a photograph feeling somewhat static or dull and a good strategy is to use other shapes in the landscape you're photograph to break things up and give a point of interest (mountains, trees, buildings etc).

Horizons should generally not be placed in the middle of your frame. This leaves an image feeling unsettled compositionally. A much more effective technique is to place them in the upper or lower third of your frame.

Layers of horizontal lines can create rhythm or patterns in an image that can become the focus of an image in and of itself.

Lastly work hard to keep your [Horizontal lines horizontal](#) and square with the edges of your images frame. There's nothing more frustrating than viewing a picture that is slightly off centre.

### Using Diagonal Lines in Photography

Diagonal lines generally work well to draw the eye of an image's viewer through the photograph. They create points of interest as they intersect with other lines and often give images depth by suggesting perspective.

They can also add a sense of action to an image and add a dynamic look and feel.

Consider how you might use diagonal lines to lead the eye to your photograph's main subject or point of interest.

Different studies have been done into how people view images and many of them say that a natural way into an image is by traveling left to right and so a diagonal line starting at the bottom left and moving to the top right of an image can be quite useful and natural.

Of course you wouldn't want to split your image into two with a harsh line from corner to corner – rather look for patterns and curves between shapes that might do this naturally.

Also rather than making a line go from the very corner to the opposite corner it's often good to make them off centre and go to either side of corners.

Keep in mind that numerous diagonal lines leading in different directions and intersecting with one another can add a sense of action to your photo but adding too many diagonal lines might make it chaotic and confusing.

As with both horizontal and vertical lines – diagonal lines that are repeated through out an image can create very effective patterns that can easily become the subject of a photograph themselves. A recently plowed field or the ridges on a sand dune might be good examples of this.

# Improve Your Photography – Composition 101

## Using the S-Curve in Photography

The S-curve can lead into or out of a scene, start at the bottom or side, but fundamentally it will roughly shape the letter S and either define the photograph or split the composition into two sections.

## How to Use Converging Lines to Enhance Your Photography

When framing a landscape shot one of the types of environmental features that many photographers look for and like to incorporate in their shots is converging lines.

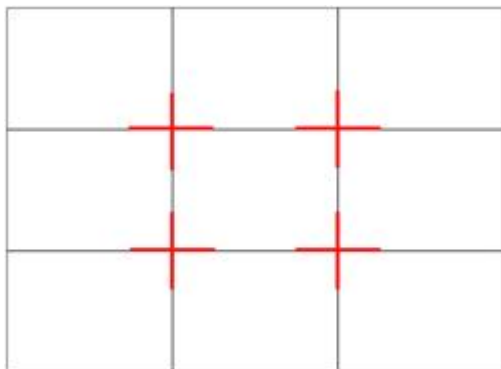
We've talked previously about how lines have the potential to add interest to an image – but multiple lines that converge together (or come close to one another) can be a great technique to lead your viewers eye into a shot.

Perhaps the classic example (and one that's probably been overdone) of converging lines are railway tracks. The natural reaction for those looking at the scene will be for them to follow the lines off into the distance. In a sense the two lines act like a funnel which directs the gaze of those entering them in a certain direction.

The same effect can be achieved with roads or pathways, converging fence lines, a set of stairs, power lines or virtually any other lines that run parallel into the distance or that actually converge at some point.

## What is the Rule of Thirds?

The basic principle behind the rule of thirds is to imagine breaking an image down into thirds (both horizontally and vertically) so that you have 9 parts. As follows.



As you're taking an image you would have done this in your mind through your viewfinder or in the LCD display that you use to frame your shot.

## Improve Your Photography – Composition 101

With this grid in mind the ‘rule of thirds’ now identifies four important parts of the image that you should consider placing points of interest in as you frame your image.

Not only this – but it also gives you four ‘lines’ that are also useful positions for elements in your photo.

The theory is that if you place points of interest in the intersections or along the lines that your photo becomes more balanced and will enable a viewer of the image to interact with it more naturally. Studies have shown that when viewing images that people’s eyes usually go to one of the intersection points most naturally rather than the center of the shot – using the rule of thirds works with this natural way of viewing an image rather than working against it.

Using the Rule of Thirds comes naturally to some photographers but for many of us takes a little time and practice for it to become second nature.

In learning how to use the rule of thirds (and then to break it) the most important questions to be asking of yourself are:

- What are the points of interest in this shot?
- Where am I intentionally placing them?

Once again – remember that breaking the rule can result in some striking shots – so once you’ve learnt it experiment with purposely breaking it to see what you discover.

Lastly – keep the rule of thirds in mind as you edit your photos later on. Post production editing tools today have good tools for cropping and reframing images so that they fit within the rules. Experiment with some of your old shots to see what impact it might have on your photos.

### **How can you achieve a good balance in your images?**

Good balance in photography requires the correct combination of colors, shapes, and areas of light and dark that complement each another. It is easier than it appears and a lot of practice will help. By looking at your subject and capture it from different viewpoints, angles or even at different lighting, you can composed a balanced image. Rearranging the elements can also make the wanted effect.

### **Important balancing techniques in photography**

- Light against dark.  
Black against white has a much stronger contrast than gray against white. To balance gray against white you need a larger gray area to compensate compared to if you used black.

## Improve Your Photography – Composition 101

- Colors  
Small areas of vibrant color can be balanced to larger areas of more neutral colors
- Space  
Open space can be balanced on one side with the primary subject on the other side of the image
- Large against small  
Sometimes larger elements on one side of the image can be balanced by a smaller element that is positioned by itself at the far end of the other side of the image.
- Shape  
Large flat areas without much detail can be balanced by smaller irregularly shaped objects since the eye is led towards the more intricate shape. This is a very tricky type of asymmetrical balance that often ends up looking out of balance.
- Texture  
Smaller areas with interesting textures (variegated light and dark, or random fluctuations) can balance larger areas with smoother, untextured looks
- Eye direction  
Your eye can be led to a certain point in a picture by using elements like triangles or arrows or as simple as the eye is led in the direction the people in a picture is looking.

### **Texture**

Texture helps to emphasize the features and details in a photograph. By capturing "texture" of objects being photographed, you can create form.

When people observe a soft, furry object or a smooth, shining surface, they have a strong urge to touch it. You can provide much of the pleasure people get from the feel of touching such objects by rendering texture in your pictures. Texture can be used to give realism and character to a picture and may in itself be the subject of a photograph. When texture is used as a subordinate element within the picture, it lends strength to the main idea in the photograph. It usually takes just a little different lighting or a slight change in camera position to improve the rendering of texture in a picture. When an area in a photograph shows rich texture, the textured area usually creates a form or shape; therefore, it should be considered in planning the photograph

### **Lighting**

Lighting is also an important creative element of composition. By controlling the light and directing it where you want it, you can subdue objects or distracting elements in the scene to give more emphasis to the main point of interest.

For good picture composition, you must develop an awareness of how changes in lighting can affect the appearance of things around you. Light and shadows can be used in composition to

## Improve Your Photography – Composition 101

create mood, to draw attention to an area, to modify or distort shape, or to bring out form and texture in the subject.

Shadows are a key to apparent form in photographs. Without shadows, the subject records without form, curvature, or texture, appearing flat and lifeless. This does not mean that shadows must be harsh and black to achieve the effects of form, curvature, and texture. They may be soft, yet of sufficient density to show the most delicate roundness and form. Generally, harsh, black shadows are undesirable in a photograph due to the loss of detail in them. From a compositional standpoint, black shadows can be very useful in balancing a scene and directing attention to the point of interest. Harsh shadows can also be excellent for emphasizing texture and form, for creating interesting patterns, and for directing attention to the main point of interest; however, the same elements can also obscure detail and reduce form. When the lighting is harsh, such as on a clear, sunny day, shadows have sharply defined edges and are probably very dark, sometimes to the point that they appear stronger than the primary subject and attract attention to themselves.

### Color Wheel

[http://www.luminous-landscape.com/tutorials/colour\\_theory.shtml](http://www.luminous-landscape.com/tutorials/colour_theory.shtml)

Colour theory is usually taught to student painters in the first-year of art school. It makes sense for them to learn it because painters *create* their colour environments, while photographers for the most part *find* them. Nevertheless, photographers are well served understanding the basics so that they can appreciate why some colour images "*work*" and others don't. *Taste* after all *does* have its roots in objective reality.

To quote from the **Encyclopedia Britannica**; "*Artists and designers have been studying the effects of colours for centuries and have developed a multitude of theories on the uses of colour. The number and variety of these theories demonstrates that no universally accepted rules apply; the perception of colour depends on individual experience.*"

### Framing Your Shots

We often put the photos we take into frames as a way of displaying and drawing attention to our favorite photos – but there is another type of framing that you can do as you're taking your shots that can be just as effective doing just the same thing!

**Framing** is the technique of drawing attention to the subject of your image by blocking other parts of the image with something in the scene. The benefits of framing pictures include:

- 1. giving the photo context** (for example framing a scene with an archway can tell you something about the place you are by the architecture of the archway or including some foliage in the foreground of a shot can convey a sense of being out in nature).
- 2. giving images a sense of depth and layers** (in essence framing a shot generally puts something in the foreground which adds an extra dimension to the shot).

## Improve Your Photography – Composition 101

**3. leading the eye towards your main focal point** (some ‘frames’ can draw your photo’s viewer into the picture just by their shape). Some also believe that a frame can not only draw the eye into a picture but that it keeps it there longer – giving a barrier between your subject and the outside of the shot.

**4. intriguing your viewer.** Sometimes it’s what you can’t see in an image that draws you into it as much as (if not more than) what you can see in the picture. Clever framing that leaves those viewing your image wondering a little or imagining what is behind your frame can be quite effective (get it wrong and it can also be quite annoying!).

### Shooting from Below

When you shoot a photo from below a subject can make the viewer feel as though the subject is in control of a situation. The simple act of looking up at a subject/object can impart a loss of control or the idea that the object is unobtainable. This has been used in real world situations throughout history. For example, thrones are set higher than other chairs, judges sit on a podium, and executive desks are just a bit taller than normal desks. The low shooting angle can also give the illusion of being inside the frame if the angle is severe enough.

### Shooting from Above

Shooting from above a subject allows the viewer to feel superior to the subject or feel protective of the subject. It can also give the viewer the impression that they are the object of the attention of the subject in the photo, as though it was the viewer placed on a stage (like in the example photo below). If the stage or "place on a pedestal" effect is achieved, the viewer will often feel adversarial towards the subject. Like almost everything in photography, this goes back to our instinctual reactions to situations. In a forest of tall trees we feel small looking up. As a child we must obey our larger parents. Shooting with an upwards angle allows us to tap into this instinctive response.

### Rule for Moving Subjects

Another rule of composition is creating active space for moving subjects to move into.

The idea is that if you are photographing a subject that is moving you should place more empty space in front of it than behind it. This gives the viewer of the image a sense of where the subject is moving and creates a sense of anticipation.

While following this rule can produce some excellent results, breaking it can add a little tension and intrigue to your images.

It can also convey a sense of speed and/or give the viewer a sense of where the subject has been rather than where they are headed.

### Silhouettes

## Improve Your Photography – Composition 101

I normally talk about the importance of using a flash when taking shots into the sun to give sufficient light to add features to your subject **but** there are also times when making your subject featureless apart from their outline against a bright background can be most effective – or when in other words **silhouette** is a worth exploring.

**Silhouettes** are a wonderful way to convey drama, mystery, emotion and mood to the viewers of your photos and often stand out in an album because of the combination of their simplicity but also the story that they convey. I love them because they don't give the viewer of a clear picture of everything but leave part of the image up to their imagination to wonder about.

The basic strategy you'll need to employ in taking silhouette shots is to place your subject (the shape you want to be blacked out) in front of some source of light and to force your camera to set its exposure based upon the brightest part of your picture (the background) and not the subject of your image.

In doing this your subject will be under exposed (and very dark, if not black).

### 1. Choose a Strong Subject

Almost any object can be made into a silhouette, however some are better than others. Choose something with a strong and recognizable shape that will be interesting enough in its two dimensional form to hold the interest of those viewing your image. Silhouettes can't draw on the colors, textures and tones of subjects to make them appealing – so the shape needs to be distinct.

### 2. Turn off your Flash

If you have your camera in automatic mode your camera will probably want to use its flash which will ruin the silhouette. Basically you want as little light on the front of your subject as possible – so the flash has to go (basic – but I've seen a few attempted silhouette shots with the flash firing).

### 3. Get Your Light Right

When it comes to lighting your subject you'll need to throw out a lot of what you've learnt about normal photography and think a little backwards. Instead of lighting the front of your subject, in silhouettes you need to ensure that there is more light shining from the background than the foreground of your shot – or to put it another way – you want to light the back of your subject rather than the front. The perfect light for this is placing your subject in front of a sunset or sunrise – but really any bright light will be able to do the trick.

### 4. Frame your image

Frame your shot so you are shooting with your subject in front of a nice plain, but bright background. Usually the best backgrounds will be a bright cloudless sky with the sun setting.

## Improve Your Photography – Composition 101

You want to position the brightest light source behind your subject (either so that they hide it or so that its in the background somewhere).

### 5. Make silhouetted shapes distinct and uncluttered

If there is more than one shape or object in the image that you're attempting to silhouette, try to keep them separated. ie if you are silhouetting a tree and a person don't have the person stand in front of the tree or even leaning on it as it will merge them into one shape and as a result your viewers could be confused about what the shape is.

Also when framing you'll probably want to photograph silhouetted people as profiles rather than looking straight on. This means that more of their features (nose, mouth, eyes) are outlined and they are more likely to be recognized.

### 6. In Auto Mode

Most modern digital cameras have automatic metering which are pretty good at sensing how to expose a photograph so that everything is well lit. The problem with this is that most cameras are so smart that they will light up your subject instead of underexposing it to get a silhouette so you need to trick it. Most cameras work out the exposure levels in auto mode when you push your shutter half way down (at the same time that they focus). So point your camera at the brightest part of your picture and then press the shutter halfway down (don't let go). Then move your camera back to frame your shot with the subject where you want it and then finish taking the shot. With most digital cameras this will result in a silhouetted subject. In effect what you're doing is tricking your camera into thinking that the bright part of the image is the mid tone of it so that anything darker than it will be exposed as a nice dark shadow.

Some digital cameras also have 'spot' or 'centered' metering modes that you can switch on which helps with the above technique as they will set the metering on the central spot of your frame rather than multiple spots. This means you can accurately tell your camera exactly which bit of the bright background you want it to set the exposure on.

### 7. Manual Mode

If this technique doesn't work and your camera has controls to allow manual exposure or exposure compensation you might like to try some of your own settings. The beauty of digital is that you can experiment to your hearts content until you get the result you're after.

A simple way to start using manual mode is to look at the shutter speed and aperture that it suggests in automatic mode and to start from there. If in auto mode your subject is too light (ie you need to make it darker) stop down the shutter speed a stop or two and see what impact that has. Use the 'bracketing' technique that I described in my previous tip on [sunrises and sunsets](#) to get a variety of shots at slightly different exposures.

# Improve Your Photography – Composition 101

## 8. Focusing

In most cases you'll want the subject which is silhouetted to be the thing that is in focus most crisply. This can mean that the process described in point 4 can be a little tricky as pushing your shutter half way down to get the metering right also means that you'll focus on that spot in the background. To get around this you can use two strategies. Firstly if your camera has manual focusing you might want to try that. Pre focus your shot before you meter your shot.

The other strategy is to use Aperture to maximize your depth of field (the amount of your image that is in focus). Set a small aperture (ie a larger number) to increase the depth of field – this means you're more likely to have a sharper foreground and background in your shots.

## Reflections

Using **reflections** in photography can lead to some amazing effects and beautiful images. Using water, windows, mirrors or any sort of reflective surface can change an image into a work of art. The wonderful thing about using reflections when taking photos is that they can completely alter the image from something fairly straightforward to something richer or abstract or otherwise more artistic. Sometimes reflections can be annoying and certainly not artistic. But creativity and good-quality photos depend on the photographer being able to see things differently, rather than seeing only one part of a larger whole.

## Space

There can be a fine line between [filling your frame](#) with your subject (and creating a nice sense of intimacy and connection) and also giving your subject space to breath. Either technique can be effective – so experiment with moving in close and personal and moving out to capture a subject in its context. Sometimes it is what you leave out of an image that makes it special.

## Balance

The positioning with elements in a frame can leave an image feeling balanced or unbalanced. Too many points of interest in one section of your image can leave it feeling too 'heavy' or complicated in that section of the shot and other parts feeling 'empty'.

## Color

The colors in an image and how they are arranged can make or break a shot. Bright colors can add vibrancy, energy and interest – however in the wrong position they can also distract viewers of an image away from focal points. Colors also greatly impact 'mood'. Blues and Greens can have a calming soothing impact, Reds and Yellows can convey vibrancy and energy etc.

# Improve Your Photography – Composition 101

## Landscape Tips

### 1. Maximize your Depth of Field

While there may be times that you want to get a little more creative and experiment with narrow depth of fields in your Landscape Photography – the normal approach is to ensure that as much of your scene is in focus as possible. The simplest way to do this is to choose a small [Aperture setting](#) (a large number) as the smaller your aperture the greater the depth of field in your shots.

Do keep in mind that smaller apertures mean less light is hitting your image sensor at any point in time so they will mean you need to compensate either by increasing your ISO or lengthening your shutter speed (or both).

**PS:** of course there are times when you can get some great results with a very shallow DOF in a landscape setting.

### 2. Use a Tripod

As a result of the longer shutter speed that you may need to select to compensate for a small aperture you will need to find a way of ensuring your camera is completely still during the exposure. In fact even if you're able to shoot at a fast shutter speed the practice of using a tripod can be beneficial to you. Also consider a cable or wireless shutter release mechanism for extra camera stillness.

### 3. Look for a Focal Point

All shots need some sort of focal point to them and landscapes are no different – in fact landscape photographs without them end up looking rather empty and will leave your viewers eye wondering through the image with nowhere to rest (and they'll generally move on quickly).

Focal points can take many forms in landscapes and could range from a building or structure, a striking tree, a boulder or rock formation, a silhouette etc.

Think not only about **what** the focal point is but **where** you place it. The [rule of thirds](#) might be useful here.

### 4. Think Foregrounds

One element that can set apart your landscape shots is to think carefully about the foreground of your shots and by placing points of interest in them. When you do this you give those viewing the shot a way into the image as well as creating a sense of depth in your shot.

# Improve Your Photography – Composition 101

## 5. Consider the Sky

Another element to consider is the sky in your landscape.

Most landscapes will either have a dominant foreground or sky – unless you have one or the other your shot can end up being fairly boring.

If you have a bland, boring sky – don't let it dominate your shot and place the horizon in the upper third of your shot (however you'll want to make sure your foreground is interesting). However if the sky is filled with drama and interesting cloud formations and colors – let it shine by placing the horizon lower.

Consider enhancing skies either in post production or with the use of filters (for example a polarizing filter can add color and contrast).

## 6. Lines

One of the questions to ask yourself as you take Landscape shots is 'how am I leading the eye of those viewing this shot'? There are a number of ways of doing this (foregrounds is one) but one of the best ways into a shot is to provide viewers with lines that lead them into an image.

Lines give an image depth, scale and can be a point of interest in and of themselves by creating patterns in your shot.

## 7. Capture the Movement

When most people think about landscapes they think of calm, serene and passive environments – however landscapes are rarely completely still and to convey this movement in an image will add drama, mood and create a point of interest.

Examples – wind in trees, waves on a beach, water flowing over a waterfall, birds flying over head, moving clouds.

Capturing this movement generally means you need to look at a longer shutter speed (sometimes quite a few seconds). Of course this means more light hitting your sensor which will mean you need to either go for a small Aperture, use some sort of a filter or even shoot at the start or end of the day when there is less light.

## 8. Work with the Weather

A scene can change dramatically depending upon the weather at any given moment. As a result, choosing the right time to shoot is of real importance.

## Improve Your Photography – Composition 101

Many beginner photographers see a sunny day and think that it's the best time to go out with their camera – however an overcast day that is threatening to rain might present you with a much better opportunity to create an image with real mood and ominous overtones. Look for storms, wind, mist, dramatic clouds, sun shining through dark skies, rainbows, sunsets and sunrises etc and work with these variations in the weather rather than just waiting for the next sunny blue sky day.

### 9. Work the Golden Hours

I chatted with one photographer recently who told me that he never shoots during the day – his only shooting times are around dawn and dusk – because that's when the light is best and he finds that landscapes come alive.

These 'golden' hours are great for landscapes for a number of reasons – none the least of which is the 'golden' light that it often presents us with. The other reason that I love these times is the angle of the light and how it can impact a scene – creating interesting patterns, dimensions and textures.

### 10. Think about Horizons

It's an old tip but a good one – before you take a landscape shot always consider the horizon on two fronts.

- **Is it straight?** – while you can always straighten images later in post production it's easier if you get it right in camera.
- **Where is it compositionally?** - a compositionally natural spot for a horizon is on one of the thirds lines in an image (either the top third or the bottom one) rather than completely in the middle. Of course rules are meant to be broken – but I find that unless it's a very striking image that the [rule of thirds](#) usually works here.

### 11. Change your Point of View

You drive up to the scenic lookout, get out of the car, grab your camera, turn it on, walk up to the barrier, raise the camera to your eye, rotate left and right a little, zoom a little and take your shot before getting back in the car to go to the next scenic lookout.

We've all done it – however this process doesn't generally lead to the 'wow' shot that many of us are looking for.

Take a little more time with your shots – particularly in finding a more interesting point of view to shoot from. This might start with finding a different spot to shoot from than the scenic lookout (wander down paths, look for new angles etc), could mean getting down onto the ground to shoot from down low or finding a higher up vantage point to shoot from.

Explore the environment and experiment with different view points and you could find something truly unique.

# Improve Your Photography – Composition 101

## 12. Breaking the Rules

Experiment – Try something new and different.

Reference websites: <http://www.digital-photography-school.com/digital-photography-composition-tips>