



CAPTURING A GOOD FILM/PHOTO SHOT

“Photography has nothing to do with cameras...Photography is all about the eye. Many people make the mistake of thinking that if only they had a fancy camera, then they would be a better photographer. Or they’ll think that if only they could take a trip to a more beautiful area, then they could take better pictures. I’m here to tell you that those sentiments are simply not true.”

— Lucas Gentry

PHOTOGRAPHS

There are no real “rules” in taking photographs; however, there are some important features of strong photography that are consistent throughout most great images. If you consider these features in your practice, then you will be able to achieve more consistently appealing and aesthetic images.

Composition

Composition refers to how the objects/subjects in a picture are arranged and ordered within the frame. Changing and choosing the composition of your picture greatly alters what the focus of the image is — where the viewer’s eye is drawn affects what they focus on and feels most strongly when looking at the image.



Confusing Composition

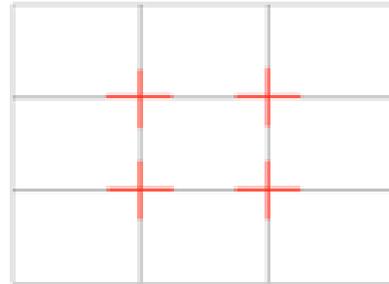
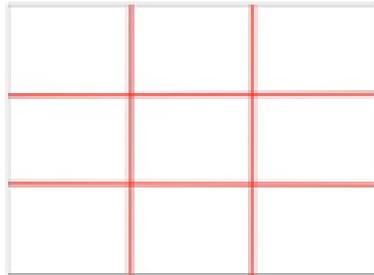


Clear Composition

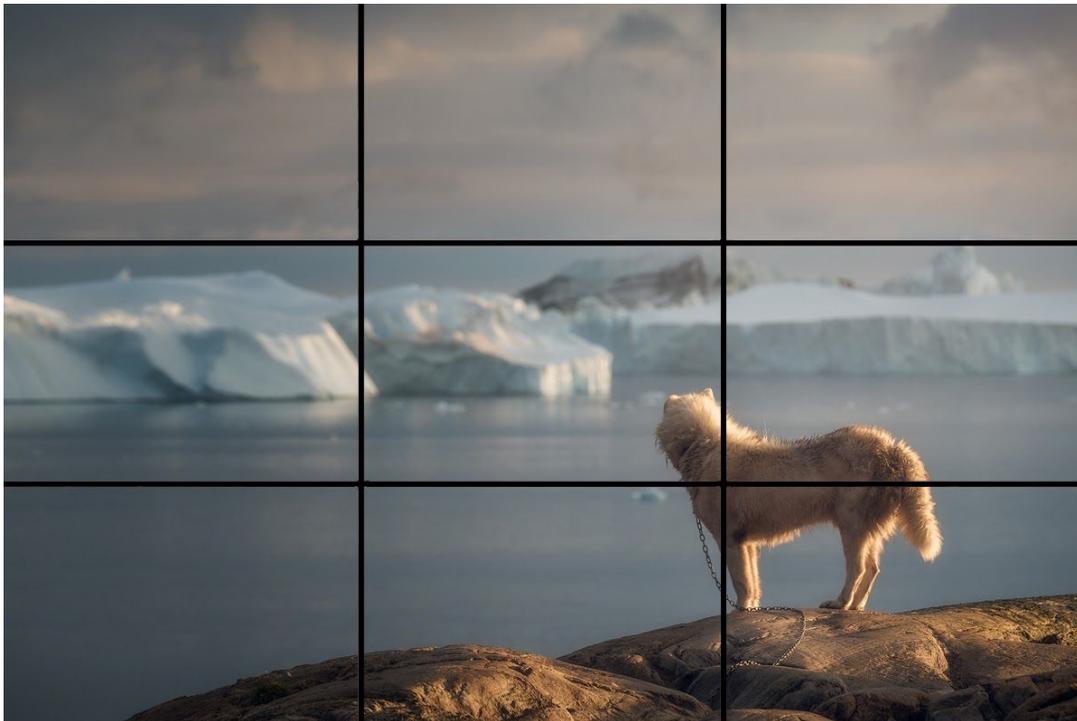


A strong photograph usually has balanced and striking composition, and a good way to ensure this is to follow the *rule of thirds*.

If you split your picture frame into a grid of 9 squares...



...the grid highlights four points of intersection and four lines. Generally, to achieve more balanced and natural photos, you should position your subjects/objects/points of interest along these lines or at these intersecting points.





Clarity

The clarity of an image also affects how nice or easy it is for a viewer to engage with the photo. If your image is out of focus or focused on the wrong part of the picture, your viewer may be turned away from it.



Focused



Unfocused

Most cameras and phone cameras have an automatic focus that they are set on, which focus the image suitably, but you can still make the artistic choice to decide where that focus lands.

Depth of field refers to the differences in background/foreground focus in a picture. A shallow depth of field means that the background and foreground surrounding an object will be blurry, and only the main subject will be in focus.





A deep depth of field will keep almost all of the image in focus, so your background and foreground are as clear as your subject.



Again, changing the depths of field can be an intentional artistic choice, for it changes where and how your viewer focuses their eye on the photo. Most phone cameras and cameras set on auto-focus will keep the image in a deeper depth of field, so most objects in the frame remain in focus — if you want to play around with this on an iPhone/Samsung camera, you can tap on different places or objects in the frame, and the camera will adjust so that they are the main focus.

**one last little tip is to always make sure the lens on your camera is clean! (Breathing on the lens and then wiping it with the soft, cloth tip of a shirt or rag should do the trick.)*

Lighting

Lighting also greatly affects the mood and quality of a photograph. If your lighting is not set up properly, then some of the objects in your photo may be obscured and out of focus, pushing the viewer's eye to all the wrong places.

Like composition, lighting a photo is always an artistic choice (there are many great photos that break these “rules” of the technique); however, there are certain qualities and guidelines that can help ensure a more naturally balanced and aesthetic image.



CONTEXTOS Create With ConTextos: Photo and Video Tips

a) Try to find natural light sources (i.e. windows letting in sunlight or simply being outdoors). Usually, natural light is softer and more even, so it gives the image a brighter and clearer tone.



Natural Lighting ✓



Artificial Lighting ✗

b) If you don't have access to strong enough natural light, and you are using artificial light (lamps, bulbs, etc), make sure your light source is close to your subject, so that the light falls on them evenly and smoothly.





c) Whether you are using natural lighting or artificial lighting, it is important to remember that having one, broad, overhead light source (the sun or a ceiling light) can make your image look flat and uninteresting, so try to add another light source (pull in a lamp) or find some shadows to alter the shape of the light (stand near/under a tree)

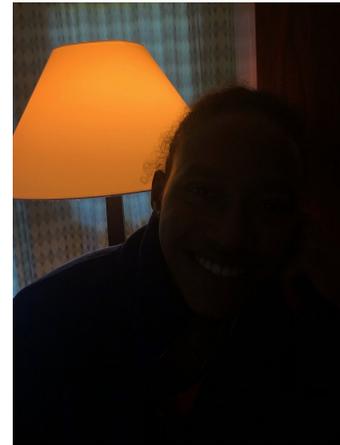
d) Use front or side lighting before backlighting. If your brightest light source is behind your subject, then your subject becomes shadowy and obscured, so it is best to place your strongest light source (whether light coming in from a window or light from a lamp) in front of your subject, facing them, or to the side of them.



Front Lighting



Side Lighting



Back Lighting

**Side lighting can create cool and dramatic shadows on your subject, but if you choose to use side lighting, make sure that your side lighting is intentional and clear, so that the right areas of the photograph are highlighted.*

Colors/Patterns

It is often very hard to control what colors and patterns are in your photographs; however, if you can, try to be aware of the natural color palettes in your shooting space, and work with them. If you identify the main colors that pop out in your frame, then you can pull in more colors that compliment it (i.e. change the color of the shirt you're wearing so that it pairs nicely with the wall color behind you.)

This does not necessarily mean matching, but rather understanding what colors correlate with the overall tone and hues in the frame (warm tones, cool tones, neon



tones, etc). You can also play with the tones and colors of an image in editing apps and softwares (many free on the app store).

Here is a great website that matches and identifies colors with their palettes.

<https://www.colorcombos.com/combolibrary.html>

The same can be said for patterns. Identify areas in your frame that are heavily patterned/colored and try to even out/disperse them according to the composition of your photograph (i.e. move a patterned pillow in or out of frame, change your shirt, move a potted plant into the foreground of the frame)



5) Play with Space, Symmetry, and Perspective

Get creative by using different and interesting forms of composition! Negative space can make your subject stand out more clearly and highlight strong composition, while symmetry can add quirk and whimsy to your photos while also highlighting strong composition.

Experimenting with perspective can also add depth to and change the mood of your photo; however, when creating simple, portrait photos, it is often best to keep your perspective simple, focusing on the face of your subject.





SELFIES

All the same rules and theories apply to selfie shots! Selfie shots are a little simpler, since your subject will of course be yourself, so they are not always good times to play too much with perspective and light angles since the main focus should be on your face.

Composition is still important; however, since selfies are portraits, it is best to line your face up either right in the middle of the frame or along one of the two side columns of the rule of thirds grid.

Examples of good selfie composition

Always pay attention to what is in the background of your selfie shot — you don't want clutter, mess, or other people to distract from your face.



⊘ Mess

Lighting a selfie follows the same principles. Try to find good natural light, but whether you are using natural or artificial light, make sure your face is front lit! If you are outside, you should face the direction of the sun, and if you are inside, you should make sure your lamp or window is in front of you.



Good Light



Bad Light (Back lit)



VIDEOS

Again, the same rules apply to setting up a good video shot. Moving images should have strong composition, lighting, and focus as well; however, it is not as easy to maintain the same consistency in film since your subjects are moving, so you shouldn't prioritize composition over capturing the subject matter — i.e. capturing what your subject is doing/saying is often more important than maintaining perfect composition.

Here are some extra things to think about when shooting video (particularly on your phone).

Steady Camera Work

If you are moving the camera around as you film, try to prevent as much shaking as possible. You can steady your camera by simply using two hands, steadying one hand with another, or just making sure you move slowly and carefully as you walk along with the camera.

Examples of good and bad steadicam

Shoot Videos Horizontally

Generally, videos can be best edited and compiled when they have all been shot on the same plane — the best plane for this is horizontal because it is the more standard format for films and it allows you to capture more in your frame. If you shoot a video vertically, then you will be getting too much sky and ceiling in your frame and too little of the world around you!

Examples of horizontal and vertical shots

Use Still Shots and Tripods

If you are shooting one subject for a long time, it is best to stabilize the camera in one place, so that it is still and steady. This is especially true when you are shooting a video of yourself.



While a lot of people record themselves by simply holding the camera in the selfie position, this can cause a lot more shakiness and inconsistency in the quality of the shot. It is best to set your camera/phone on a surface or on a homemade tripod. You can set up the composition, lighting, and focus of a shot before you start filming, and then you don't have to worry about any of that changing during your filming.

Videos of tripod selfie shooting

There are many videos online with easy instructions on how to make a tripod out of household items, but it can really be as simple as balancing your phone against some books or a picture frame!

DIY Tripods:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NCF-uPQ4zzo>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TTtJovKtujo>

Audio Clarity

One of the most important aspects of good, quality video footage is having strong audio. To ensure good, quality audio, try to find a quiet space before you start shooting (especially if you're shooting interview style footage).

Inside spaces are usually best for interviews, but if you're shooting outside, try to stay away from extreme street traffic and wind.

Videos of good noise and bad noise quality

If you are speaking into the camera (self-interview style), make sure to speak steadily and clearly — don't rush through your words and ideas. Leaving pauses between new thoughts and sentences makes it much easier to edit videos together and allows your viewers to follow your words while also taking in the images on the screen.

Trusting Your Instincts

When you are directing footage, you have to follow your gut instincts on what you want to capture and how you want to capture it. You know better than anybody else what the



world looks like through your eyes, and that is the most valuable perspective anyone can offer.

Find what makes you laugh, what moves you, what peaks your curiosity, what is beautiful around you and in you, and fill your images with those things.

Using these guidelines should only help enhance what is already there — they should never interrupt your artistic flow. If you feel the urge to zoom in — zoom in! If you laugh in the middle of a take — don't delete it! Film and photography are about finding an equilibrium between spontaneity, intention, aesthetic, and abstraction, so don't let rules distract or disrupt your process.

There is great artistic value in even the shakiest and blurriest images, so never trash something just because it may not be “compositionally perfect.” The camera should be treated like the human eye: blinking, flitting around, pausing, refocusing. Let these eyes rest on a scene in which nature, light, and our weird human quirks find balance between perfection and imperfection — that's your shot.