"Photo Composition: Taking Photos like a Pro; The 2 Hour Guide" by Jonas Fagerberg -

"Taking a photo is like learning a language; the design elements, points, lines, planes and solids are the words, and the way they are placed in the scene is the grammar."

A point is the smallest part of a photograph and is called a pixel. Groups of adjacent pixels form shades of gray or colours. A line always begins with a point and ends with one.

Lines can be used to lead the viewer's eyes in and around the photo to the desired focal points.

A vertical line expresses strength, power and stability, being tall, firm, balanced and solid, like a tree, stretching towards the sky and at the same time being pushed on by earth's gravity.

A vertical line can travel into the scene, for instance a road stretching towards the horizon.

Horizontal lines There is a reason for why looking at a horizon where the Earth meets the sky is perceived as peaceful, tranquil and soothing, and that is because horizontal lines are static and, thus, peaceful.

Centering the horizon, in the middle 3rd, is often viewed as too symmetrical and lacking excitement.

(Thirds) Placing objects closer to the horizon makes them look farther away, and conversely placing an object farther from the horizon makes it look closer.

Diagonal lines To add action and motion to a picture you can use diagonal lines; because diagonal lines are active, they create tension, being dynamic. They also create perspective in the scene.

You can use diagonal lines to force the viewer to look in a certain direction in the photo.

You can also discover diagonals from the direction someone is looking, following the eye direction and extending it out to where the gaze is landing; this point can be outside the scene, which creates a mystery as to what is in the field of vision.

A zigzag line which starts, stops and changes direction is filled with energy that can evoke a sense of restlessness.

Curved lines A curved line is more graceful that its cousin, the diagonal line, suggesting a slower motion. Examples are the curve in a tree branch or a bay.

S-curves are graceful like their curved line cousin, also suggesting a slow and gentle motion. Examples are a cost line, or a winding road or river.

A cross composition where the horizontal and vertical lines intersect is often perceived as static. This type of composition contains tension, a battle between the horizontal and vertical. Using a cross composition can make it easier to compose the photo because of a natural segmentation of the scene into left and right, and upper and lower. These segments can vary in size or be of equal size.

With its pointy structure, a triangle has a distinct direction. The resting triangle is resting firmly and securely on its base, giving an impression of safety. The balancing triangle rests on one of its points and is perceived as more dramatic. The unbalanced triangle adds tension and excitement to the scene by almost tipping over; this type of arrangement in a scene can be used when combining three different motifs in a single composition.

Balance and opposites

Using polarity when composing a scene is important; this means using opposites to heighten the impact of the message you are conveying with the photo. You can use different kinds of polarity; it can take the form of pain and pleasure, heat and cold, life and death, round versus edgy, soft and sharp, sturdy and fragile, heavy and light, slow and fast, dark and light, calm and busy, sky and ground, man and woman. These are just some examples of polarity.

We perceive diagonals in a scene differently depending on if they are traveling from the left upper corner or towards the right upper corner. Objects entering the scene have a greater dynamic that objects fully displayed in the scene.

Planes (Surfaces) We have previously talked about a pixel being a point in geometry, a line that is created by connecting two points with a line (real or imaginary). A plane in geometry is a 2D area that can go on forever in both directions. The plane does not have a thickness; it is flat, like a sheet of paper.

In photography a plane is an area that is made up of at least 3 points that are not on a single line; for example a wall on a building or a table top.

If you group together planes to form a 3D object you get a solid.

With a solid object you can play around with light and shadows in a different way than you can with a plane.

Just as a plane can stretch out into infinity, so can a solid.

Using light and shadows, solids can be used to convey scale, mass and size in a photo.

The texture of the solid can give clues to what it is made of.

When working with solids you do not have to show the whole object for the viewer to recognize what it is. If you, for instance, depict part of a sphere in your photo the brain can "connect the dots" and fill in the rest.

Colours Apart from arranging the scene, or framing it in a way that is appealing, keep in mind that a shift in colour or light can enhance the expression of your photo. It can draw the viewer’s eyes to where you want them to look. Use the available colours in the scene and arrange them to make the photo more interesting.

If you can find contrasting colours, use it to your advantage. It could be a red leaf in a pile of yellow leaves; the red leaf will stand out among the rest and draw the viewer's eyes to that spot in the photo.

Arranging the elements

To create exciting and living scenes in your photo you need to apply your knowledge about the elements and arrange them in a way that is pleasing to look at

Things to take into consideration before taking a photo are orientation, what focal point to use, if any, if the scene should be symmetrical or asymmetrical, and if you wish to convey harmony or disharmony.

Remember that everything within the frame should have reason to be there; if it doesn't, then remove it or recompose the shot. Also remember to position the main subject off center, as this creates a more interesting end result.

Focal point

Focal point is a fancier term for center of interest, or where you want the viewer's eyes to be drawn when looking at the photo.

Symmetrical vs. Asymmetrical A symmetrical composition works best if the object has inherent symmetrical features. A symmetrical object is the same on the left and right side of its center line; in other words, if you split the object in half along its center, both halves should be identical.

Asymmetrical designs do not have mirrored patterns or forms; this makes them more flexible and thus more frequently photographed. Because these types of designs are more active, they tend to be more interesting to watch.

Mixing things that don't relate, or lack structure in a scene, is disharmonious and chaotic. You can use this type of expression if you want to emphasize the message you are conveying with the photo; disharmony is often the result when presented with an already chaotic scene.

Interpreting a message When placing objects or persons in a scene, it is important how they are placed in relation to other objects. Take for instance a person sitting on a bench when you arrange the scene; where that person is seated will have an impact on the message you are conveying.

The rule of thirds

The rule of thirds divides the scene into nine segments of equal size; you do this by placing a grid of two equally spaced horizontal lines and two equally spaced vertical lines over the scene.

When using the Rule of thirds, you instead place the object of interest on, or as close to, one of the points (green circles) where the vertical and horizontal lines intersect; you can also use the lines themselves, placing the object of interest along the line. You do this to pique the viewer's interest and to add energy and tension to the scene.

You often place the real or imagined horizon along one of the horizontal lines. Aligning the horizon with the top line will emphasize what's below the horizon. Aligning the horizon with the lower horizontal line will emphasize the sky itself. You can also take advantage of how the intended audience will scan the image with their eyes subconsciously.

If your audience reads from left to right, you could place the object of interest on the left vertical line, and conversely, if they read from right to left, you could place the object of interest on the right vertical line. Doing so will help the viewer hone in faster on the point of interest in your photo.

A moving subject matter When photographing a moving subject matter, make sure that you don't have it moving out of the frame. For example, if you are taking a photo of a jogger, be sure to place more space in front of the jogger than behind; if you don't, it will appear as though the jogger is running out of the scene. It will look more natural to the viewer if the person jogging is running "into" the scene.

The golden rectangle

The golden rectangle is a rectangle that adheres to the mathematical golden ratio, or divine proportion as it was called by Leonardo Da Vinci and other Renaissance scholars. It was the ancient Greeks that first explored this concept, which has been used in very diverse areas, such as mathematics, music, architecture, biology and even psychology.

PERSPECTIVE

If the scene isn't coming together as you envision it, then try another perspective. Lie down or sit on the ground when taking the photo. If that does not do your mental image justice, then stand on something when taking the shot.

Take your time to compose the scene before taking a single photo, don't rush.

Frog's eye view and Bird's eye view.

When taking a photo and you find that the scene isn't coming together as you hoped, it might be that you need to change perspective and either stand on something to get a bird's eye perspective (top angle view), or sit or lie down to get a frog's eye perspective (low angle view).