

Composition & Design

Gestalt theory of visual psychology: The widely accepted idea that the viewer is looking for some sort of organization in the composition of an image, giving it visual interest.

Balance: Imagine that you are trying to balance different sized objects within your scene by balancing them on a see-saw, or that you place a large object near the pivot point and smaller objects further away on the opposite side to achieve balance. Both vertical and horizontal directions matter, but horizontal balance is usually more important.

Visual Flow (Movement): Most successful photographs take your eye through and around the image, not out of the image. One of the most common forms of visual flow involves a circular movement within the image.

Leading Lines: Line or suggestions of lines that take your eye through the image, often from "front" to "back." The most common is the classic "S" curve.

Weight or Dominance of Objects: Size and isolation of objects pulls your eye towards them. This can be a good thing when it brings emphasis to your subject, or a bad thing when it pulls your eye away from the subject or disturbs the eye's movement around the image.

Convergence or Perspective Recession: Lines that converge and draw you into the image. They can be straight or curved.

Repetition: When forms are repeated, the mind can quickly group them as a whole and our minds tend to find that pleasing. It is based on our brain's preference for order over chaos.

Symmetry: A similar phenomenon to repetition, where you have an image split into identical or nearly identical halves.

Framing or Cropping: A very broad term, but generally used when discussing how close we come to our subject when we are photographing and printing it, and what exists near the edges and corners of our final print.

Contrast: The existence of strong blacks and whites within the image. Good contrast produces what Gestalt refers to as a strong figure-ground relationship.

Reflection: Reflections often form symmetry or repetition, but not always. They can also be interesting because of the distortion they often cause.

Viewpoint (Strong Angle or Unusual Perspective): A vantage point in a photograph that gives a view of the subject that we normally do not see.

Unexpected Combination: Whenever you put two things together that normally don't belong together, an interesting image may result.

Human Emotion: The stronger the emotion, the less it matters what the composition is of the image for it to have impact. When you combine strong emotion with good composition, it can make for an even more powerful image.

Motion: Producing a feeling of motion within a still image usually produces interest in the viewer.

Depth: Creating a third dimension on a two dimensional surface.

Quality of Light: The "softness" or "hardness" of the light source. It can also refer to the way light is interacting with the subject or the way light is refracting in the atmosphere.

Texture: The surface quality of objects, appealing to our sense of touch, even if only in memory. In photographs the impression of texture is purely visual, only suggested to our eyes but very appealing.

Rule of Thirds: An image divided into nine equal parts by two equally-spaced horizontal lines and two equally-spaced vertical lines, with important compositional elements placed along these lines or their intersections. This creates more tension, energy and interest in the composition than simply centering the subject.