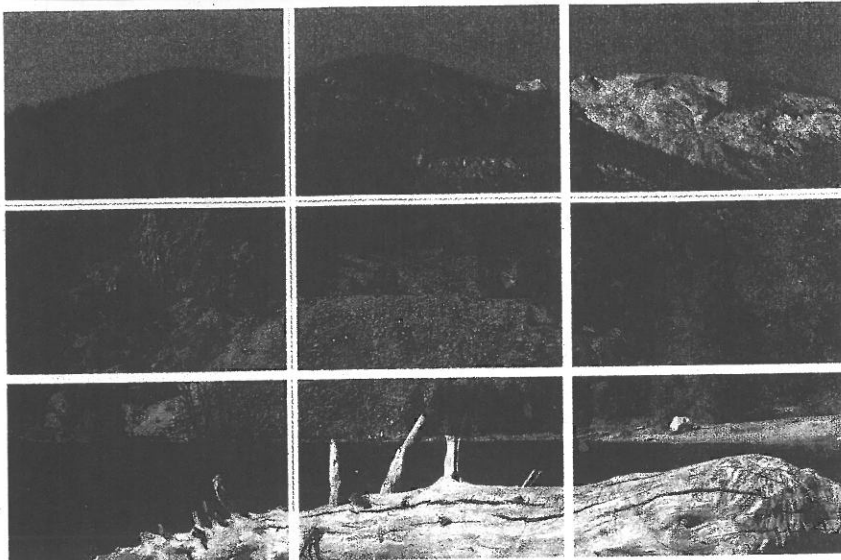


Take Engaging Photos Using the Rule of Thirds

BY DAVE JOHNSON



Photographers often talk about framing a photo when they compose a shot in the viewfinder, and for good reason.

Think of the act of taking a photo this way: You're hanging an empty picture frame in the air to capture a slice of reality. The decisions you make about what to include in the frame add up to the difference between a memorable photo and a throwaway snapshot.

Want to improve your photos? With a little practice, you can easily take advantage of some of the established rules of composition that photographers have relied on for well over a century.

The Rule of Thirds is simply this: For a more interesting image, put the subject of your photo almost anywhere except in dead center.

Get Familiar With the Rules

Even if you don't know it by name, I am willing to bet that you are at least a little familiar with photography's most basic and well-known rule: the Rule of Thirds. After all, most photos (and paintings) rely on it. Virtually every movie and TV show uses it repeatedly over the course of a story. The Rule of Thirds is simply this: Put the subject of your photo almost anywhere except dead center in the image.

But here's a more precise definition:

Take any photo and draw four lines through it, each one a third of the way from one of the edges. You'll end up with something that looks like a photographic tic-tac-toe board.

The Rule of Thirds suggests that you'll get the most interesting photos when you align the subject along one of these lines. If you're shooting in landscape orientation, for example, try putting the horizon on the bottom third line.

If you're shooting a portrait, arrange the person on one of the vertical third lines, on either the left or the right.

Did you notice that the four lines intersect, creating four points in the

scene? These are often called "sweet spots" and represent points in the photo so visually compelling that they're almost magical. In portraits, for example, photographers will typically position the subject's head squarely on the sweet-spot intersection of two of the three lines.

The Rule of Thirds can lead you to some interesting compositions. For example, suppose you encounter a line of birds sitting in the water. One way to shoot them is to compose the shot so that

Rule of Thirds Superimpose a large tic-tac-toe board over your image and look for the focus of the composition—somewhere off center.

the birds are arranged along a third line.

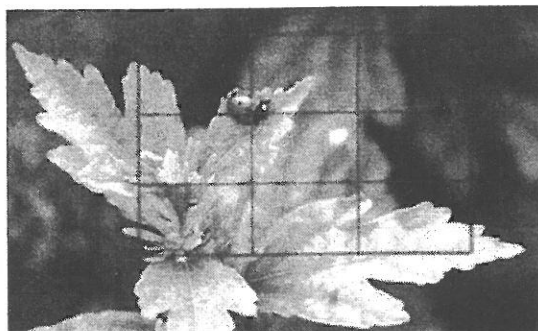
You can also apply the rule to photos in which you've zoomed in too far—or the subject is too big—to place it along a sweet spot or a line of thirds. You could choose a single element in the subject—someone's eye in a facial close-up, for example—and put that at the sweet spot.

Keep Things in Focus

You might be used to putting the subject in the center because that's where the camera focuses. If you're offsetting your subject, keep it in focus. Many cameras are now smart enough to find off-center subjects and focus on them; if in doubt, center the subject, press the shutter release halfway (to activate the auto-focus) and then compose the shot while keeping a little pressure on the shutter release to lock in the focus.

Break the Rules

You certainly don't always have to follow the Rule of Thirds to the letter. You might want to mix things up sometimes. Indeed, at times you may want to deliberately ignore the rules of composition and try something on your own. Go for it! As they say, you just need to understand the rules before you can break them.



La règle des tiers est une règle de composition de photographie. Elle consiste à placer le ou les éléments principaux de votre photo sur les lignes verticales et/ou horizontales. L'intérêt est que vous guidiez l'œil du spectateur.

Vous devez diviser votre image en trois parties, pour imaginer ces lignes. Il faut ainsi "remplir" votre image au tiers avec votre sujet, et aux deux tiers avec son environnement.