CHAPTER 4

Composing Images

This chapter looks at making images look their best by using techniques for optimum composition. Here's what you'll learn:

- *Start Out by Taking Well Composed Photos*: In this portion, we'll take a look at composing the image before the shutter is clicked.
- *Using the Rule of Thirds*: This part provides a basic guide to using the "rule of thirds".
- *Cropping*: In this tutorial, we'll learn to use the Crop tool effectively.
- *Straightening Crooked Images*: In this tutorial, we'll learn how to straighten crooked images using Pixlr Editor.
- *Correcting Perspective*: In this tutorial, we'll learn how to improve an image that suffer from distortion problems.
- *Standard Photo Print Sizes*: Discusses optimal resolution for achieving good print results and provides a guide for converting width and height measured in pixels to standard print sizes in inches.

Start Out by Taking Well Composed Photos

These days, just about everyone has a camera in some form—just think of the countless snapshots people capture using smart phones. Many people just point and shoot to capture an image on impulse (which can make for great photography, but sometimes that just requires good luck).

You can capture an otherwise great picture, but there may be unwanted objects or clutter in the background rendering your picture less than ideal. Pixlr Editor is a great tool for correcting such problems. However, capturing the image without the distractions and clutter will save you a lot of time and effort.

You'll notice the image on the left in Figure 4-1 has several objects in the background making it appear cluttered. Pixlr Editor is a great tool for digitally removing clutter, as shown in the image on the right. Of course, using a clutter-free background is always the best option when possible. We'll look at removing objects using Pixlr Editor in Chapter 8.

P. Whitt, *Beginning Pixlr Editor*, DOI 10.1007/978-1-4842-2698-8_4

Figure 4-1. *Pixlr Editor is a great tool for digital clutter removal*

In Figure 4-2, a different background location was chosen in front of the same house (not perfect, but the best available at the location). Because there's no clutter here, no digital cleanup is required, which is a huge time-saver.

Figure 4-2. *Using a clutter-free background eliminates the need for digital clutter removal*

Using the Rule of Thirds

The "rule of thirds" is a general rule of composition used in photography. It uses a grid composed of nine square or rectangular units. The points where the lines intersect are used for positioning the elements of main interest.

In Figure 4-3, the image of the lifeguard shack is positioned using the guides—placing it off-center creates greater visual interest than if it were placed dead center in the image.

Figure 4-3. *The intersecting points are used to help position elements of interest*

Using the rule of thirds as a guide is helpful when composing landscape or seascape images. Generally, the horizon line is placed either in the upper or lower third of the grid. As you can see in Figure 4-4, the horizon line is positioned near the upper third of the grid because the foreground is the primary area of interest. Notice also where the cloud meets the peak rests along the left vertical line.

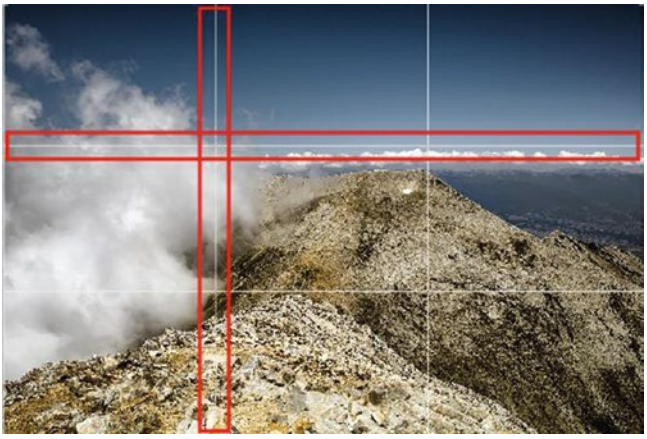

Figure 4-4. *The horizon line is placed near the upper horizontal third of the grid, and where the cloud meets the peak is near the left vertical third*

The rule of thirds is a useful guide for photographing people as well. In Figure 4-5, the man is positioned along the right vertical guideline, with his eyes along the upper horizontal guideline.

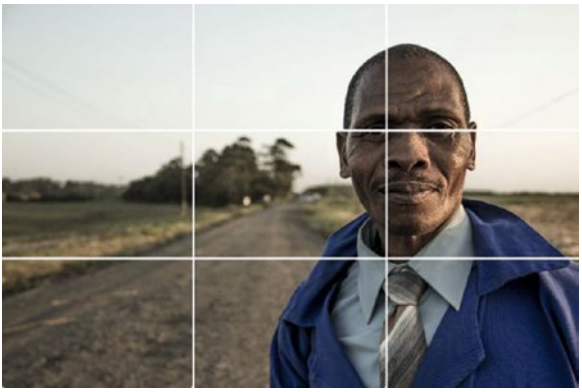

Figure 4-5. *The rule of thirds is helpful for composing interesting portraits of people*

You may be asking yourself if there are times you wouldn't use the rule of thirds. Like most rules, there are times when it's better to ignore it. In Figure 4-6, the image of the mountains and their reflections calls for symmetry and balance. In this case, using the horizontal axis as the guide results in a visually compelling image.

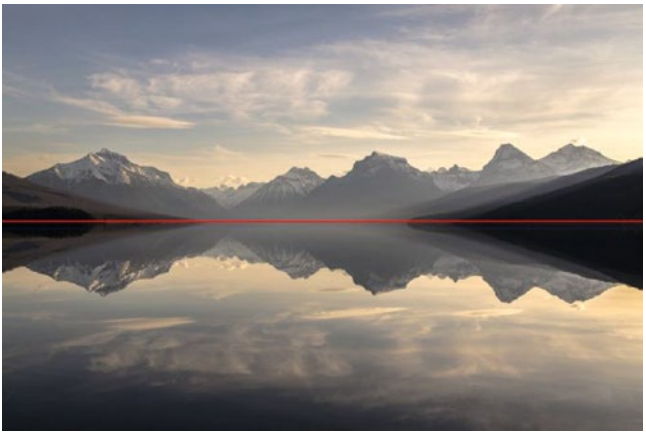

Figure 4-6. *In this image, symmetry trumps the rule of thirds*

■ **Note** Pixlr Editor displays a “rule of thirds” grid when using the Crop tool to help with better composition when trimming images.

TUTORIAL 1: CROPPING AN IMAGE

Trimming Away Excess Image Data

Sometimes, you just have to capture a good picture when the opportunity is there. Because you have to act quickly, the downside is you might capture unwanted objects or people along with it.

In this tutorial, you’ll use the Crop tool to better compose the image following the “rule of thirds”.

1. Open the image titled `Ch04_Little Girl.jpg` found in the `Ch04 Practice Images` folder.
2. Upon looking at the photo, it’s easy to see that there are feet and legs in the background (Figure 4-7).

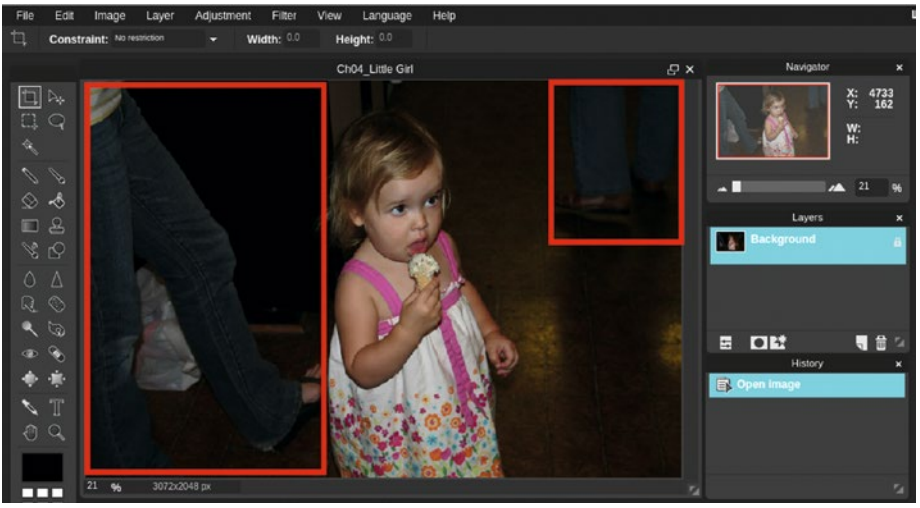

Figure 4-7. *Legs and feet in the background of the image*

3. Click the Crop tool or press C on your keyboard.
4. Click and drag to orient the picture in a portrait (vertical) format. Use the Crop tool’s grid to position as shown in Figure 4-8. The little girl should be off-center.

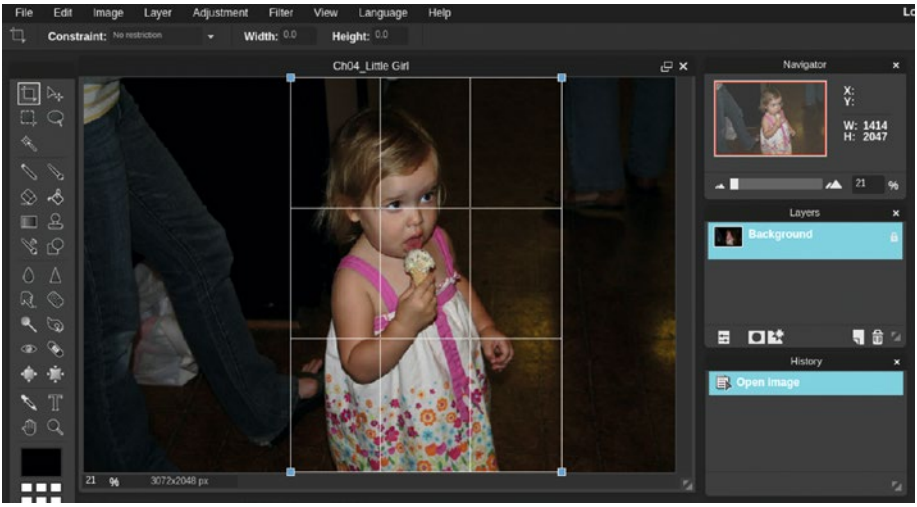

Figure 4-8. *Use the Crop tool's grid to position as shown*

5. Once in position, activate the Crop tool by double-clicking in the image or pressing Enter on your keyboard.

6. Create a new layer (Layer ➤ New Layer) and rename it `Clone`. This is done by double-clicking in the layer thumbnail's textbox (Figure 4-9).

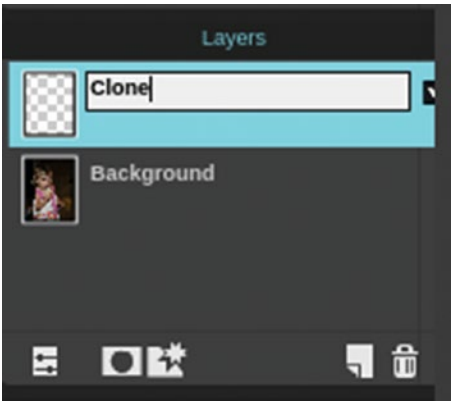

Figure 4-9. *Double-click in the layer's textbox to rename it*

7. Click the Clone Stamp tool icon or press the letter S on your keyboard. Choose a soft brush between 50-70 pixels in diameter.

8. Click the Sample All Layers checkbox in the Tool options bar. This allows you to clone image data on this separate layer rather than directly on the background layer.

9. Click the Clone layer to make sure it is active and use the Clone Stamp tool to remove the leg, foot, and shadow (Figure 4-10).

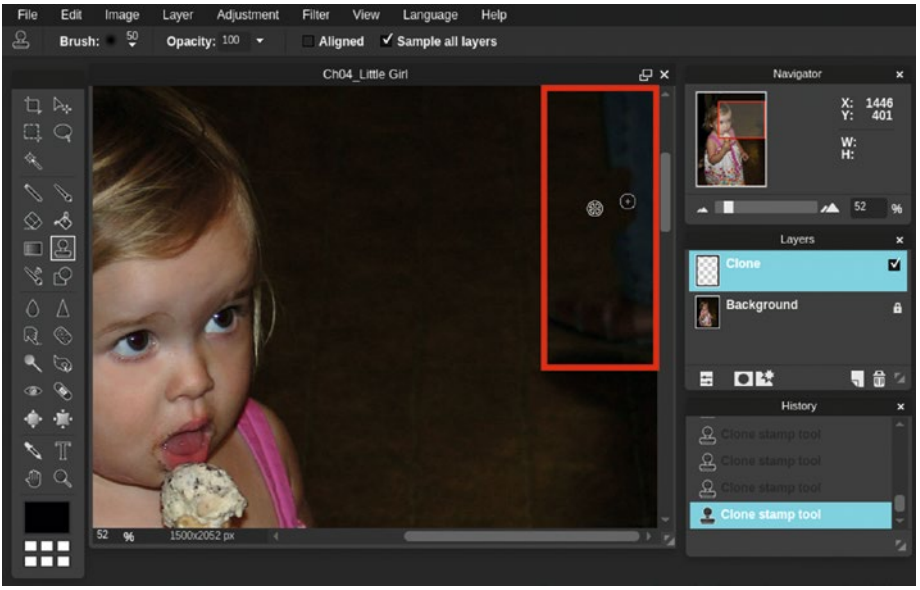

Figure 4-10. *Use the Clone Stamp tool to remove the legs and feet in the background*

10. Clone on the left side to remove the foot next to the little girl.

11. Figure 4-11 shows the before and after comparison. When finished, either close the image without saving or save it as a PXD file for future reference. *If you are a student, your teacher may instruct you to save the image by a certain name and in a certain location (such as a flash drive).*

Figure 4-11. *Before and after comparison*

TUTORIAL 2: STRAIGHTENING AN IMAGE

Use Free Transform to Correct a Crooked Image

The Free Transform function is very useful for straightening images with a tilt. In this tutorial, we'll correct an image of an old church.

1. Open the image titled `Ch04_Church.jpg` found in the `Ch04 Practice Images` folder.
2. Duplicate the background layer (Layer ➤ Duplicate Layer).
3. Activate the Free Transform function (Edit ➤ Free transform, or press Control+T) and position the cursor around the upper-right corner of the image until a curved arrow icon appears.
4. Click and drag, moving the duplicate layer slightly clockwise until the eave of the roof is level (Figure 4-12).

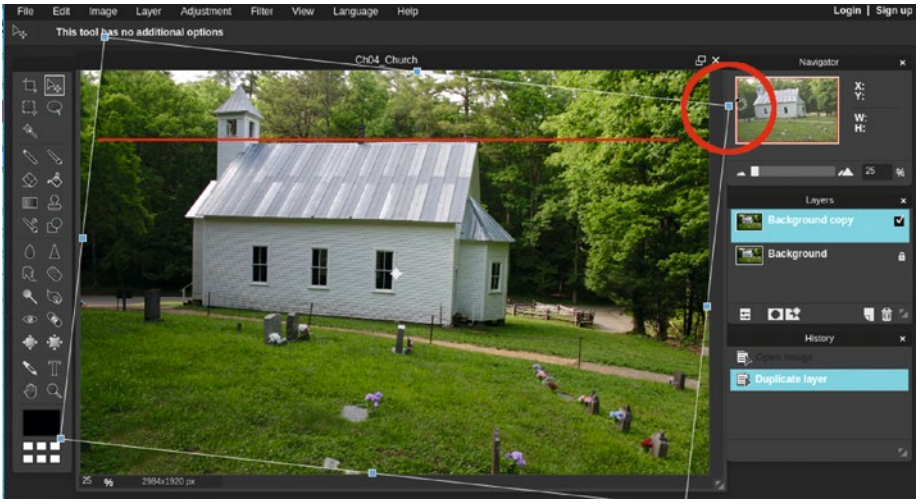

Figure 4-12. *Rotate the layer slightly until level*

5. Create a new layer (Layer ➤ New Layer) and rename it `Clone` using the layer thumbnail's textbox.
6. Click the Clone Stamp tool icon or press the letter S on your keyboard. Check the Sample All Layers option.
7. Choose a soft brush between 50-70 pixels in diameter.
8. When the layer was straightened, some of the background layer became visible and is noticeable (like a seam).
9. Clone the areas indicated in the upper left and right to make a smooth transition, as well as the partial image of the car (left side) and the area in the lower-left corner (Figure 4-13).

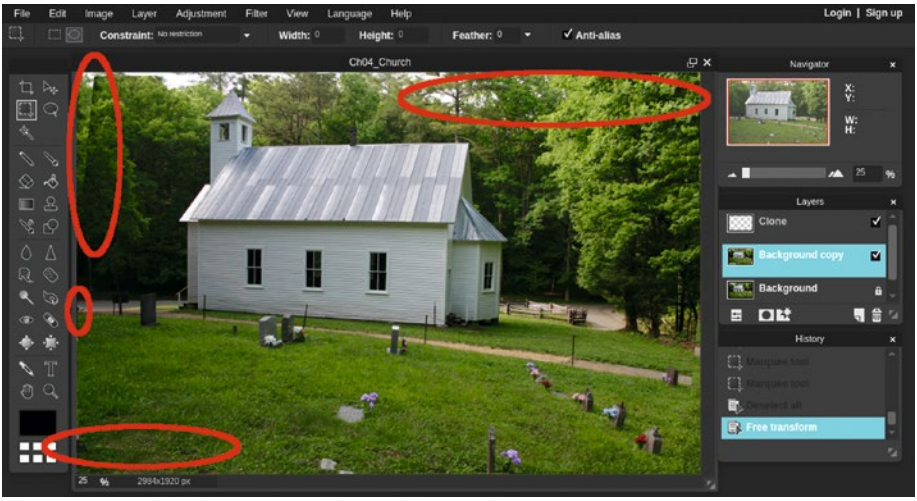

Figure 4-13. *Use the Clone Stamp tool to cover the noticeable areas of the underlying layer*

10. Figure 4-14 shows the before and after comparison. When finished, either close the image without saving or save it as a PXD file for future reference. *If you are a student, your teacher may instruct you to save the image with a certain name and in a certain location (such as a flash drive).*

Figure 4-14. *Before and after comparison*

TUTORIAL 3: CORRECTING PERSPECTIVE

Use Free Distort to Correct an Image with Perspective Problems

The Free Distort function can be useful for correcting images that suffer from camera lens distortion or perspective issues.

1. Open the image titled `Ch04_Perspective Correction.jpg` found in the `Ch04 Practice Images` folder.
2. Duplicate the background layer (Layer ➤ Duplicate Layer).
3. Activate the Free Distort function (Edit ➤ Free Distort).
4. Drag the upper corners of the bounding box to the positions shown in Figure 4-15.

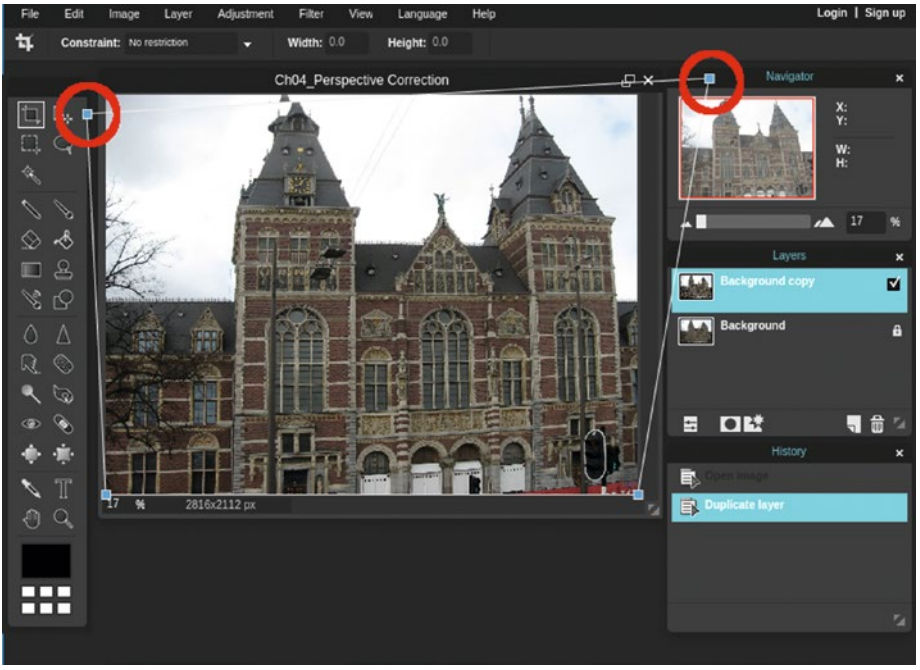

Figure 4-15. *Drag the upper corners of the bounding box into position as shown*

5. Nudge the lower-right corner of the bounding box down very slightly (Figure 4-16).

Figure 4-16. *Drag the right corner of the bounding box to the position shown*

6. Create a new layer (Layer ➤ New Layer) and rename it `Clone` using the layer thumbnail's textbox.
7. Click the Lasso tool icon or press the letter L on your keyboard. Click the Polygonal Lasso option checkbox.
8. Make a triangular selection above the left peak (Figure 4-17). The Clone Stamp tool will be used to fill it in. Zoom in as necessary.

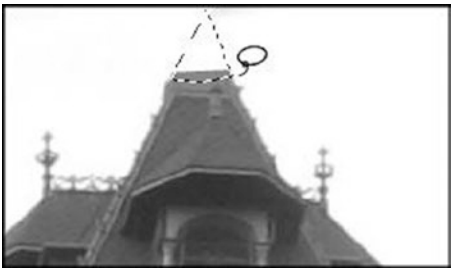

Figure 4-17. *The triangular area will be filled in to complete the peak*

9. Click the Clone Stamp tool icon or press the letter S on your keyboard. Check the Sample All Layers option.
10. Choose a soft brush 20 pixels in diameter.
11. Sample the peak from the underlying layer and use the Clone Stamp tool to fill in the selection on the layer named `Clone`.
12. When finished, press Control+D to deactivate the selection.
13. Use the Clone Stamp tool to fill in the peak (Figure 4-18).

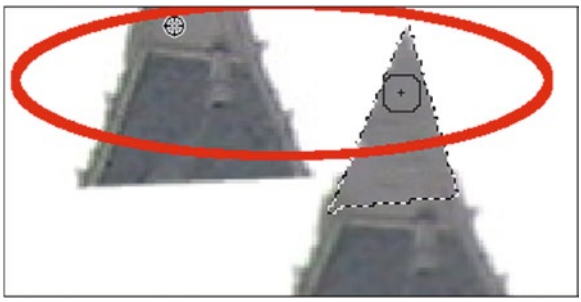

Figure 4-18. *Use the Clone Stamp tool to fill in the selection*

14. Use the Clone Stamp tool to finish by removing the seam (Figure 4-19).

Figure 4-19. *Use the Clone Stamp tool to remove the appearance of the peak and seam from underlying layer*

15. Figure 4-20 shows the before and after comparison. When finished, either close the image without saving or save it as a PXD file for future reference. *If you are a student, your teacher may want you to save the image with a certain name and in a certain location (such as a flash drive).*

Figure 4-20. *Before and after comparison*

Printing Standard Photo Sizes

Pixlr Editor was designed to output images for digital display, but it is possible to output them to your inkjet printer or have your local photo lab print them.

However, it's important to work with an image of sufficient resolution. How much is enough? An image opened from a URL will likely be too small to obtain a good print from. If you scan photos with a flatbed scanner, scan at least at a setting of 300 PPI (pixels per inch). If you're starting with a small original and plan to print it larger, use your scanner's software to enlarge it to the desired target size.

Generally, transparencies such as slides and negatives must be scanned at higher resolutions than photographs when they are to be printed.

Most modern digital cameras capture 16 megapixels at least, providing enough data for good prints (when using the highest quality setting).

■ **Note** When outputting images as JPEG files using Pixlr Editor, it's a good idea to set the quality at 100% before saving.

Because an image opened in Pixlr Editor is measured in pixels, I've provided a guide to help convert from pixels to inches (Table 4-1).

Table 4-1. *Conversion of Image Size from Pixels to Print Size in Inches*

Image Size (Pixels)	Print Size (Inches)
1050 X 1500	3.5 X 5
1200 X 1200	4 X 4
1200 X 1500	4 X 5
1200 X 1800	4 X 6
1500 X 2100	5 X 7
2400 X 3000	8 X 10

Summary

This chapter covered several basic techniques for achieving good image composition. Paying attention to the background while composing the image can eliminate clutter that might have to be digitally removed later. The "rule of thirds" is a widely accepted guide for making images more interesting.

The tutorials showed how to crop an image to make it look its best, use Free Transform to correct a crooked image, and use Free Distort to correct an image with perspective distortion.

This chapter also touched on the fact that to print an image, it's important to make sure it has sufficient resolution. A guide converting dimensions from pixels to several standard print sizes is provided.

The next chapter covers using a variety of ways to correct image tonality.