



Australian Government
Australian Centre for
International Agricultural Research



Photographic composition tips + tricks

October
2021

It is possible to improve your photography by following some well-known composition rules.

These rules teach you to frame and compose your photo in different ways. By removing distracting elements, highlighting important elements or adjusting your composition you can create images that are more interesting to the viewer.



Photo by mahyar motebassem on Unsplash

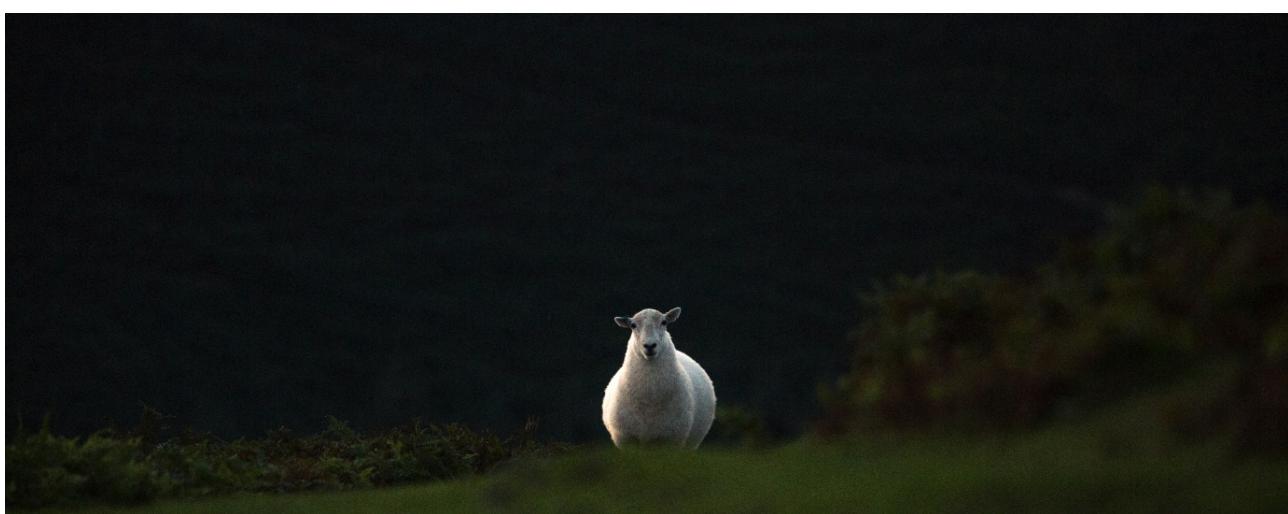


Photo by Mike Erskine on Unsplash

This guide is designed to help you consider different compositions. Each compositional rule is illustrated with examples that feature sheep. We didn't want to pull the wool over your eyes.

Tips + tricks

- Fill the frame
- Symmetry
- Repetition
- Leading lines
- Focal point
- Isolate colour
- Framing
- Layers
- Point of view

Fill the frame

Sometimes a photographer can include elements in the photograph that do not add any value. An image can appear busy if it has too many elements. The human eye does not know where to look.

When you ‘fill the frame’, you fill the photograph with the subject. By filling the frame with your subject, you remove the distracting elements, you focus your viewers’ attention on the subject. This can be useful if the image is likely to be viewed on a small device such as a smart phone.

How:

Fill the frame with your subject by getting closer to your subject or zooming in with your lens.

If you can’t do either of these, you can crop the image in post-production.

Examples:



Photo by Georgi Kalaydzhev on Unsplash



Photo by Mihai Pirlitu on Unsplash

Symmetry

Symmetry can be appealing to the human brain. It can appear in many places. By framing your photo to highlight symmetry, you can create an image that is more interesting to the viewer.

How:

Once you have found symmetry in a scene, position yourself exactly along the line of symmetry, so that one side mirrors the other.

The line of symmetry can be along either the vertical axis or the horizontal axis. You can make a symmetrical image more interesting by including a single element which breaks the symmetry.



Photo by Stefan Widua on [Unsplash](#)



Photo by Jørgen Håland on [Unsplash](#)

Repetition

Repetition of an item, colour or element creates a pattern and draws the attention of your viewer. Repeating patterns can be very appealing to the human eye.

You can create additional interest by breaking a pattern. In doing so, you give the viewers eye a place to rest. This is one way to draw focus in a photo.

How:

Look for repeating patterns and isolate them by zooming in or getting closer.

Examples



Photo by Andrea Lightfoot on [Unsplash](#)



Photo by davide ragusa on [Unsplash](#)

Leading lines

Leading lines are lines in the image, from the corner of the frame towards the subject.

They help guide the human eye to the subject.

How:

You can find leading lines everywhere, especially in landscapes. Compose your image so the leading lines start in the corners of your image, and lead towards the primary subject of your photo.

Examples



Photo by Steven Lasry on Unsplash



Photo by Pablo Heimplatz on Unsplash

Focal point

The focal point is the part of the image that draws the viewers' attention. This could be the subject or a point of interest. Images without a focal point can be unappealing to the eye. When the viewer has no focal point, they don't know where to look. A focal point adds structure to your image.

How:

Look for objects that could be used as a focal point. If you have an image with no focal point, recompose by change your position, or the framing.

This could be a face, an animal, or an area of high contrast.

Examples



Photo by Emilie CR22RD on Unsplash



Photo by Luke Stackpoole on Unsplash

Isolate colour

Colour is one of the most important aspects of photography. Colours can affect the way we feel and where our eyes go first in the photo. By framing your image to include different colours, or a single colour, you can have a significant impact on how the viewer interprets your image.

Images with many colours can be distracting and busy. Reducing the number of colours in the image simplifies it and makes it more striking.

How:

Pay attention to the colours around you. If you see a striking colour, reframe your image so that the colour is isolated.

A single object surrounded by a single colour can have a similarly striking effect. This is a compositional rule that goes hand-in-hand with 'focal point'.

If your image has many colours and looks busy, try converting it to black & white. This can simplify the image and make it more impactful.

Examples



Photo by [Felix](#) on [Unsplash](#)



Photo by [Mauricio Fanfa](#) on [Unsplash](#)

Framing

Framing your subject with any objects can help contain the viewer's eye within an image. This helps focus the viewer on the subject.

How:

Look for objects that can form a frame around your subject. Frames occur naturally in many places. They can be formed by walls, windows, trees and other man-made or natural objects.

Examples



Photo by Jose Francisco Morales on [Unsplash](#)



Photo by Ian Taylor on [Unsplash](#)

Layers

Layers add dimension and depth to your image. Including many layers in your image can help create a 3-dimensional effect in your 2-dimensional image. You can also use layers to include multiple elements of a story, by placing different subjects on different layers.

How:

When you're taking a photo, look for elements to include in the foreground, medium ground and background. Compose your image so that there is balance between them.

You may need to reposition yourself getting higher or lower to make this work well.

Examples



Photo by Patrick Schneider on [Unsplash](#)



Photo by Illiya Vjestica on [Unsplash](#)

Point of view

By changing your point of view, you can create a different perspective of your subject. Doing so creatively can create unique images which will catch your viewer's attention.

How:

Think creatively about unique points of view. Try taking photos in unusual ways. Do this by taking your image from new positions:

- Position your camera down low
- Find overhead positions for an aerial view
- Use speciality cameras like a drone or a waterproof camera

You can also do this by capturing unconventional compositions. Although compositional rules can be useful, rules are made to be broken.

Examples



Photo by Mike Dudin on [Unsplash](#)

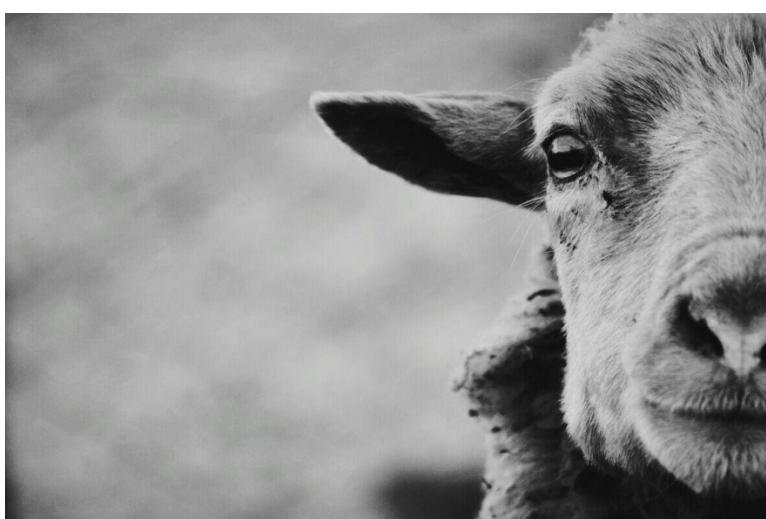


Photo by Adalia Botha on [Unsplash](#)