

* 7 Tips for Composition *

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1) Imply tension.

Ever wonder why we find an off-center subject appealing? Or why an odd number is (*usually*) more engaging than an even one? One theory is that such compositions imply a story in progress. As meaning-makers, humans subconsciously create tales from the photos we look at. We're also wired to release tension, so when what we see strikes us as "unfinished" or "unresolved" it piques our interest.

2) Do it diagonally.

Imagine the scene you're shooting has a line from one of the bottom corners up to the opposite top corner. Work the diagonal by placing your key subjects along this imaginary line (*keep in mind the Rule of Thirds as you do*). Diagonals add tension & imply movement, qualities that make images dynamic. Also look for other ways to add diagonals using colors, patterns, & shapes.

3) Determine distractions.

Too many shots aren't keepers thanks to distractions that can't be cloned or cropped out. Before you shoot take a moment to glance around. Do your eyes fixate on something that isn't supposed to be the star of your shot? Are they distracted by bits of bright matter, an unsightly or super-pronounced shadow, trash, power lines, a reflection, etc.? Try a step or two—or ten—in either direction or even kneel in place, then reevaluate the scene.

4) Play with patterns.

Human beings are naturally drawn to patterns & repeating shapes because they lend order to our world. In our images, the harmony they provide gives the eyes a place for momentary rest. Patterns work especially well when a photograph features tons of tension.

5) Engage the eye.

When doing landscapes & choosing your foreground element of interest, think in terms of leading the viewer's eyes into the scene. But don't stop there! After you draw them plan to keep them in. Leading lines, diagonals, patterns, color, tension, juxtaposed subjects—these are all ways to keep those eyes engaged.

6) Compose with color.

Color is a mighty strong attractant. In fact, it might be what attracted you to what you're photographing in the first place! With smaller scenes try giving your subject a background of complimentary color. Complimentary colors are those straight across from one another on the color wheel (*i.e., blue & orange, red & green, yellow & purple*). For example, when photographing a yellow flower position yourself so that a purple one fills the space behind it.

7) Compare & contrast.

Feature your subjects in a way that captures how they compare & contrast. And, when it comes to where to place them in the frame, think beyond side-by-side. Consider putting them above & below one another, or even at an angle. Use an odd number of subjects & your image will pack more punch.

Award-winning nature & wildlife photographer, Jeff Parker leads photo tours & workshops for the naturally curious throughout North, Central & South America -- & now parts of Europe, too!

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