

# SHAW ACADEMY

Lesson 4 Course Notes

**Diploma in Photography**



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# Composition

Composition is one of the most fundamental elements in a photograph. Composition refers to the placement and relationship of elements within a picture. The arrangement of elements in a scene, the angle they are shot at, the height we shoot from and the distance the photo is taken from, can completely change the final outcome of the photograph. Composition can ultimately determine the difference between a good and a bad picture.

We all shoot for different reasons, and we all like to shoot and capture different things. However what makes us take pictures is that we usually see something, it sparks an interest in us and we usually try to capture this and communicate this to the viewer. You capture images within a rectangular frame and everything outside of that frame that might have lead you to capture that image, or makes the subject important to capture for you, are irrelevant to the viewer. The viewer reads the contents within that frame to try to recognize and understand what it is you are showing them.

Strong images and good communication rely on how you compose the image. What you choose to put in the frame, or choose to exclude from the frame, determines what the viewer learns or reads from your image. Good composition thus relies on you to arrange the visual elements in your image in a way that guides the viewer's eye and brings attention to your subject. In a well composed picture the subject will be apparent and clear. In a bad composition your eye will wander, searching to understand what the subject of the image is. A classic sign of bad composition is when you find yourself thinking "what am I suppose to be seeing here".

## Exploring the subject/scene

Capturing that thing that caught your attention and sparked an interest isn't always as simple as just pointing the camera and taking a snap from where you are. There may be some occasions when you are in exactly the right position, distance, height etc. from the subject and you do get the best shot. That is rare enough and how do you know it's the best shot unless you explore the subject and look at all the possibilities. It is so important to explore the scene or subject for different shots. This means getting in closer, or stepping back, getting higher or getting lower, taking a straight on shot or a totally crazy angle, changing lenses, switching the camera from vertical to horizontal, and trying different compositional techniques.

## Compositional Techniques – Rule of Thirds

The rule of thirds is a basic guideline which applies to the composing photographs. The concept is that an image should be imagined as divided into nine equal parts by two equally spaced horizontal lines and two equally spaced vertical lines and that important compositional elements should be placed along these lines or their intersections points.



## **Compositional Techniques – Balance**

Every element in your image carries a compositional weight. This is not a physical weight but visual weight. If we have a strong visual element on one side of our image and nothing on the other this can throw the image out of balance and create sense that something is wrong or missing in the composition. Visual weight can be created by an object, or a tone or colour. Creating balance in your images means that you compose your images with this visual weight in mind and compose scenes where objects/subjects of similar visual weight are distributed equally around the scene. This allows the viewers eye to travel around the entire frame with ease and take in whole picture. You will easily notice imbalance in a photograph as you eye will constantly be pulled towards on subject and settles there.

## **Point of View**

Different points of view can show the world from totally new perspectives and create new experiences for the viewer. Not every composition works when we shoot from our own height and eye level. Breaking out of this habit will really expand your creative potential.

Tips for different points of view:

- Getting down really low

- Getting up high above the subject

- Looking up/looking down

- Trying unusual angles

- Shooting people from below can give a sense that subject is in a powerful position

- Shooting people from above can create a sense that the viewer is in a position of power

- Shooting at your subject's eye level can create an accurate sense of perspective and greater engagement with the viewer

## **Simplicity**

Sometimes we shoot images because the subject/scene is just visually interesting and we want to create a nice simple visual experience for our viewers. We are not trying to change the world, tell an elaborate story, or make a huge statement. Simplicity is all about recognising the reason we are taking a particular shot and minimising the content of our compositions so that the viewer can give their attention to main subject and are not distracted by unnecessary information. This allows them to enjoy it for what it is , a nice simple visual experience.

Thank you



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