

## Photographic Composition

Composition is an important part of photography. When you compose a shot, you are taking into consideration how you are conveying your subject or object to your audience. Use shot size, shot angle, and other techniques to set mood and give you own interpretation.

### Shot Sizes

Shot sizes refer to the how much the viewer can see in the frame. Be aware of how much you include in your shot as this can help inform audiences of what is going on and can help with projects where you want to build a narrative.



Figure 1 – Wide

**Wide Shot:** A wide shot will reveal subjects and objects along with their surroundings. This is a good shot to start with if you're doing a narrative project like a photo essay since it can help establish the setting for the audience.

**Medium Shot:** Closer than a wide shot, a medium shot is going to appear more personal without getting too close. Medium shot are a good shot when you want the audience to focus on the subject or object and not their surroundings.



Figure 2 – Medium



Figure 3 – Close Up

**Close Up Shot:** Close Up shots focus on particular details about the subject or object in the frame. This is a great shot for showing details like needle working the process of cooking or emotions on a person's face.

## Shot Angles

While shot sizes can focus where the audience looks in the frame. Angle can affect how the audience views the subject or object giving it an emotional edge.

**Eye-Level:** The most neutral, the subject or object will be eye-level with the camera and thus eye-level with the audience. This is the shot you want to use when you want to give the audience least amount of emotional manipulation.



Figure 4 – Eye Level



Figure 5 – High Angle

**High Angle:** The camera will be above the subject or object looking down. This makes the subject or object appear smaller in size and more vulnerable.

**Low Angle:** The camera will be below the subject or object looking up. This makes the subject or object appear taller and more powerful to the audience.



Figure 6 – Low Angle

## Rule of Thirds



Figure 7 – Rule of Third

Rule of thirds is a compositional tool that helps you create a pleasing and balanced image. Drawing two lines equally spaced horizontally and vertically, the points of intersection become hot spots. Lining your subject or object on these line and at the intersection help to create a sense of movement in a still image by encouraging the viewer's eye to move around the image naturally.



Figure 8 – Object in the Center

**Objects in the Center:** While the rule of thirds encourages placing subjects and objects off center, you can place them in the center while continuing to use the rule of thirds. Rule of thirds does not just apply to subjects and objects, but color and line as well. You can place objects of similar color on the intersecting hot spots and use lines in the image to move the viewer's eye.

**Headroom in Portraits:** Make sure that when you are taking pictures of people to give them enough room in the frame. Especially with medium and close up shots, pay attention to the space above a person's head. You want to give adequate headroom in order to help give an accurate perception of size.



Figure 9 – Headroom



Figure 10 – Lower Third



Figure 11 – Upper Third

**Lower Third Landscapes:** When shooting landscapes, consider placing your horizon line on the lower horizontal third line. This gives a more accurate perception of the landscape and gives more space for what's above the horizon line like the sky and mountains.

**Upper Third Landscapes:** For a different effect, moving the horizon line to the upper horizontal third line gives more focus to the ground. This works well when you have interesting shadows, objects, etc. on the ground and are shooting from a high point into a valley.

## Quality of Light

Make sure you pay attention to quality of light. This can affect composition in a subtle way allowing shadows to work as shapes and changing the mood of an image.



Figure 12 – Hard Light



Figure 13 – Soft Light

**Hard Light:** Hard light happens when you have a single small light source. Think about turning on a flashlight in a dark room. This creates stark shadows that can obscure facial features. Hard light when used correctly can create a more dramatic mood.

**Soft Light:** Soft light occurs when the light is scattered or diffused and appears larger or to come from multiple directions. To refer to our dark room analogy from before, instead of a flashlight this would be turning on multiple table lamps with lamp shades. Soft light creates more gradual shadows and helps add dimension. Use soft light for more general-purpose photography playing with the amount of shadow you include in the image.

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