

A night-time photograph of the Golden Gate Bridge in San Francisco. The bridge's towers are illuminated with a warm orange glow, and the suspension cables are visible against the dark blue sky. The city lights of San Francisco are visible in the background, reflecting on the water. A circular inset on the right side of the image shows a closer view of the bridge's tower. The text "GUIDES FOR GREAT COMPOSITION" is overlaid in white, bold, sans-serif font at the bottom of the image.

GUIDES FOR GREAT
COMPOSITION

Photography Composition

- Photography is a broad subject that eventually boils down to a mixture of art and science.
- The Compose and Expose Rule

- Expose: This is the scientific and mechanical bit where you expose your digital camera to light through the lens and if you are lucky preserve the image for posterity. Camera will help you with the settings (auto, scene modes).
- Compose: This is the creative or artistic bit where you arrange all of the elements of your picture within the frame or viewfinder to produce what should hopefully be a pleasing composition. We can teach you some techniques but ultimately you're **ON YOUR OWN.**

The modern camera is capable of many things. It can focus for you; work out exposure for you; select a suitable shutter speed or aperture along with a multitude of other functions. However useful you may find these functions the one thing a camera can't do is **compose your picture for you**. It has no idea what it is pointing at and it has no idea what you are trying to achieve - **so you are on your own. You may have to take several pictures before you get a good one.**



There are 3 basic ways to arrange the elements within your composition.

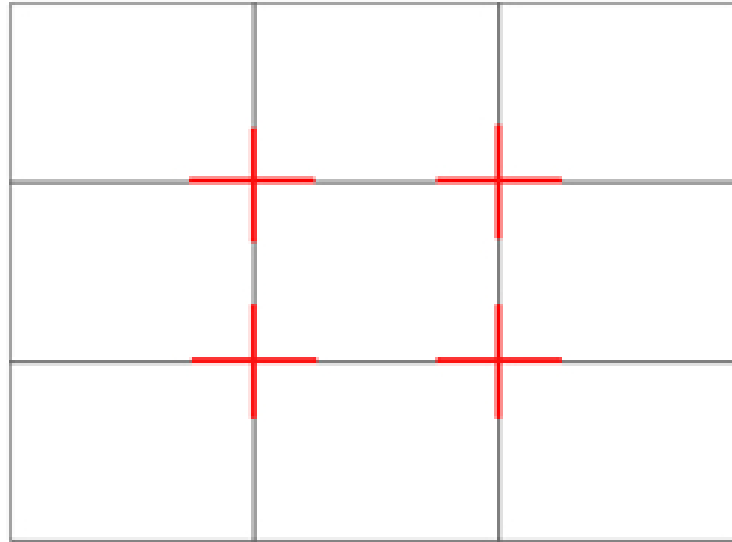
1. Physically move objects relative to each other. Only really works with still life photography.
2. Tell people to move relative to each other or other objects. Only works with people who can hear you and will cooperate with you.
3. Move ! Usually the most effective way to control your composition is to alter your viewpoint.

Photography Techniques

Rule of Thirds

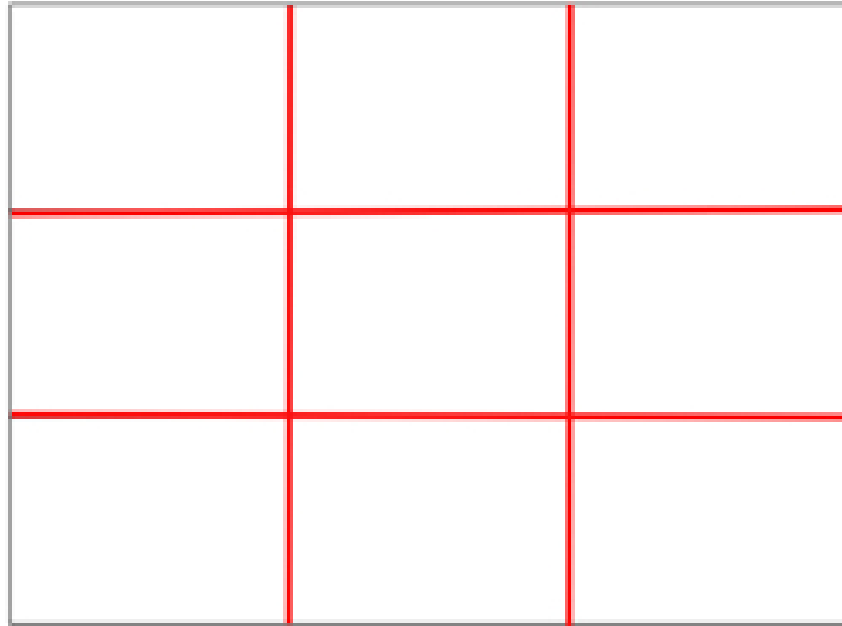
- The most well know principle of photographic composition is the '**Rule of Thirds**'.
○ The basic principle behind the rule of thirds is to imagine breaking an image down into thirds (both horizontally and vertically) so that you have 9 parts.

Rule of Thirds



With this grid in mind the 'rule of thirds' now identifies four important parts of the image that you should consider placing points of interest in as you frame your image.

Rule of Thirds

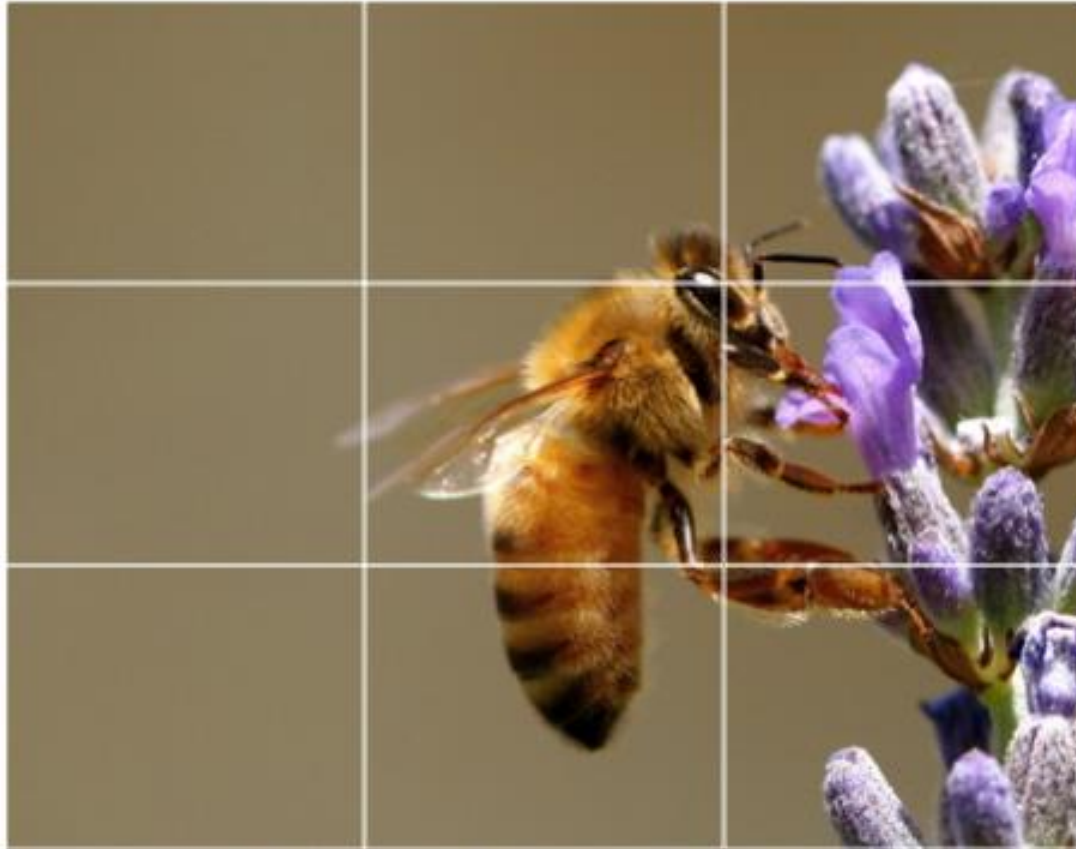


It also gives you four 'lines' that are also useful positions for elements in your photo.

Rule of Thirds

- ▶ The theory is that if you place points of interest in the intersections or along the lines that your photo becomes more balanced and will enable a viewer of the image to interact with it more naturally. Studies have shown that when viewing images that people's eyes usually go to one of the intersection points most naturally rather than the center of the shot - using the rule of thirds works with this natural way of viewing an image rather than working against it.

Rule of Thirds



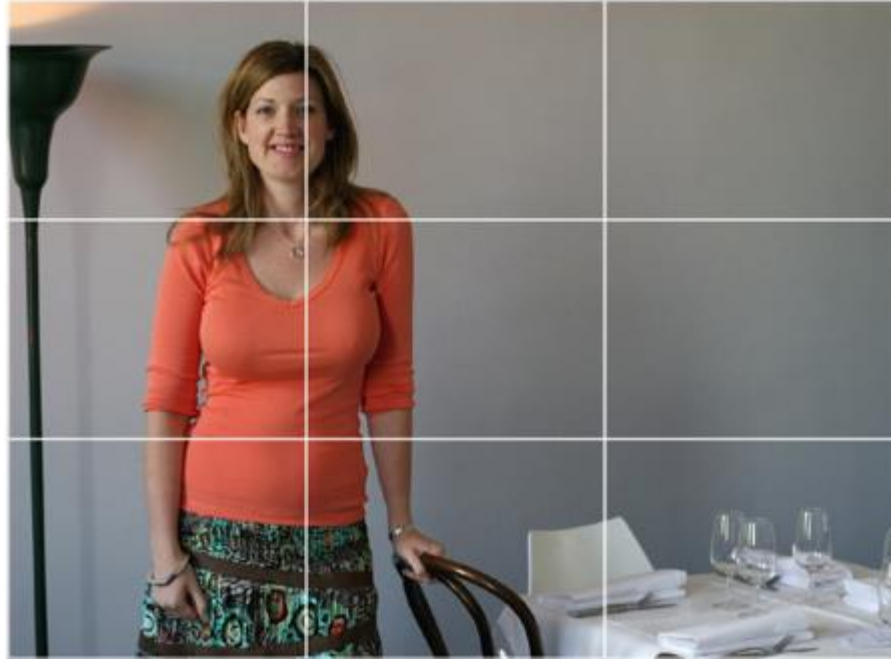
The above picture of the bee where the bee's eye is becomes the point of focus.

Rule of Thirds



The head of my subject on one of the intersecting points - especially his eyes which are a natural point of focus for a portrait. His tie and flower also take up a secondary point of interest.

Rule of Thirds



The subject is along a whole line which means she is considerably off center and therefore creating an additional point of interest. Placing her right in the center of the frame could have resulted in an 'awkward' shot.

Rule of Thirds



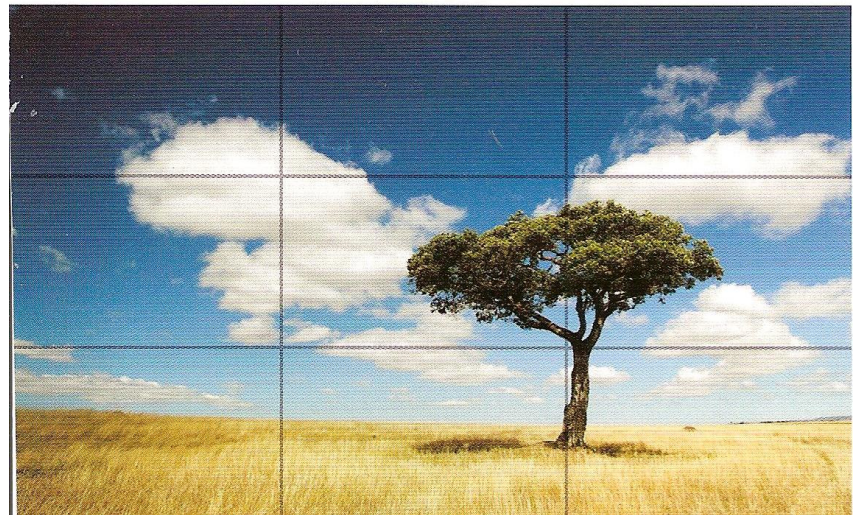
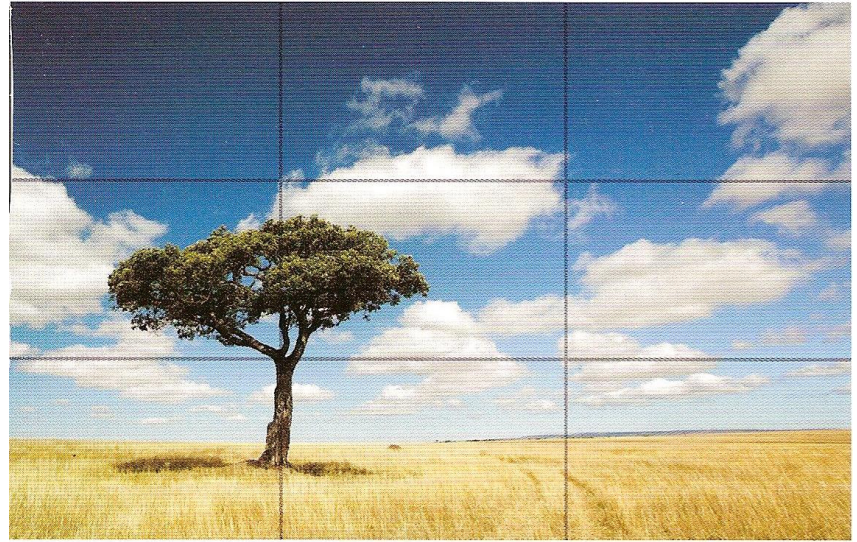
Place the horizon on one of the horizontal lines. The idea is that you could have $\frac{1}{3}$ sky and $\frac{2}{3}$ land or $\frac{1}{3}$ sky and $\frac{2}{3}$ land.

The Rule of Thirds



Poor composition ↑

Better composition





Balance

- Balance is a compositional technique that places elements within a frame so that the objects are of equal visual weight.
- When different parts of a photo command your attention equally, perfect balance is achieved.
- Balance can be achieved using:
 - Colour
 - Tone
 - Shapes/forms
 - Context



Point of View - Vary Your Camera Position

The variety of perspectives that you can shoot images from is only limited by your imagination. Changing the camera viewpoint is a simple technique but the difference it can make can be dramatic. In other words, your feet are an important composition tool.

Taking a step to one side, moving forward, looking up or down, kneeling, lying down, climbing up can breathe new life into an ordinary subject and may create a cleaner background or provide a better view of the subject.



Simplicity

- The easiest way to do this is to close in on your subject, excluding as much of the surroundings as possible. Try and include only the elements that make your image stronger.
- The more technical method of achieving simplicity involves focusing on the subject while ensuring the background is unfocused.

Simplicity





Framing a Subject

Framing is the technique of drawing attention to the subject of your image by blocking other parts of the image with something in the scene.

The benefits of framing pictures include:

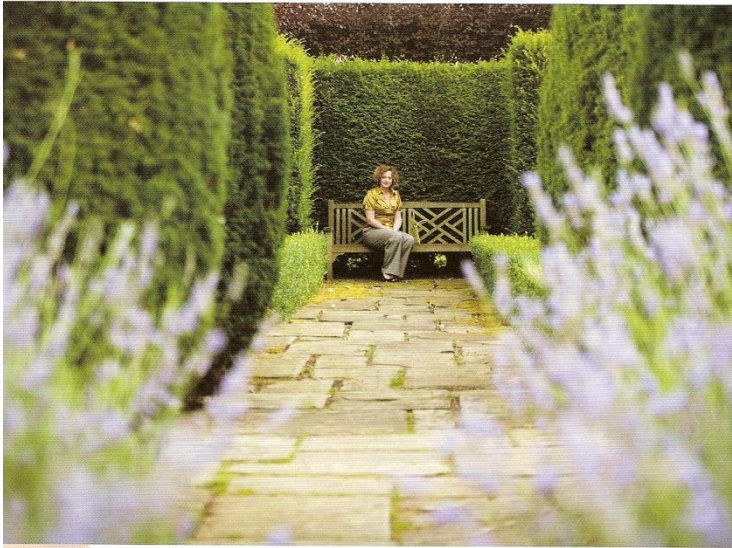
- 1. giving the photo context** (for example framing a scene with an archway can tell you something about the place you are by the architecture of the archway or including some foliage in the foreground of a shot can convey a sense of being out in nature).

- 
- 2. giving images a sense of depth and layers** (in essence framing a shot generally puts something in the foreground which adds an extra dimension to the shot).
 - 3. leading the eye towards your main focal point** (some 'frames' can draw your photo's viewer into the picture just by their shape). Some also believe that a frame can not only draw the eye into a picture but that it keeps it there longer - giving a barrier between your subject and the outside of the shot.



4. intriguing your viewer. Sometimes it's what you can't see in an image that draws you into it as much as (if not more than) what you can see in the picture. Clever framing that leaves those viewing your image wondering a little or imagining what is behind your frame can be quite effective (get it wrong and it can also be quite annoying!).

FRAMES



Frames, whether natural or man-made, are great devices for making compositions stronger. A pathway, arch, doorway, overhanging branches can be utilized as frames to lead the viewer into the picture.

Lines

The lines that can be found in images are very powerful elements that with a little practice can add dynamic impact to a photograph in terms of **mood** as well as how they **lead an image's viewer into a photo.**

Four types of lines are:

- Horizontal
- Vertical
- Diagonal
- Leading Lines

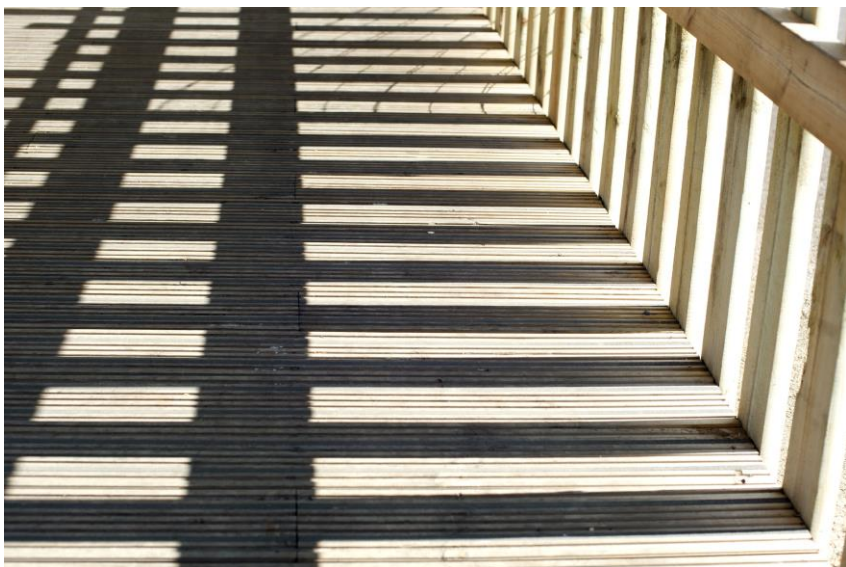
Horizontal Lines

- ▶ There's something about a **horizontal line** in an image that conveys a message of '**stability**' or even '**rest**'. Horizons, fallen trees, oceans, sleeping people - all of these subjects have something about them that speaks either of **permanency** and **timelessness, rest or calm**.



- ▶ Horizons should generally not be placed in the middle of your frame. This leaves an image feeling unsettled compositionally. A much more effective technique is to place them in the upper or lower third of your frame.





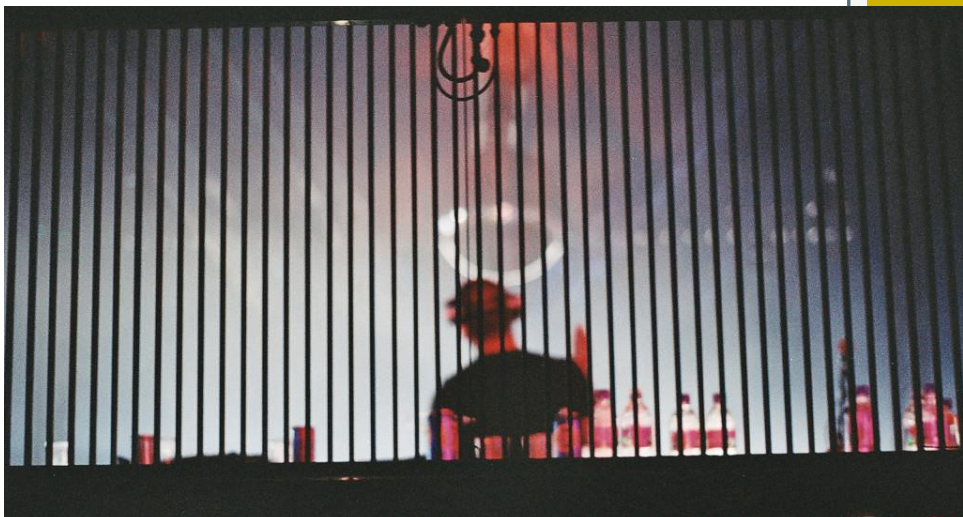
Lines – Vertical Lines

- **Vertical lines** have the ability to convey a variety of different moods in a photograph ranging from **power** and **strength** (think of skyscrapers) to **growth** (think of trees).
- As horizontal lines can be accentuated by shooting in horizontal format vertical lines can be used very effectively by swapping the way you hold your camera into a **vertical framing**. This **lengthens the vertical subject** further which can emphasize it's **height**.



- Keep in mind the ***Rule of Thirds*** when you have strong vertical lines in a photograph. Placing a line directly in the middle of a shot will effectively cut your image in half. This can be used with dramatic impact but also can leave your image looking segmented.





Lines – Diagonal Lines

- **Diagonal lines** generally work well to **draw the eye of an image's viewer** through the photograph. They create **points of interest** as they intersect with other lines and often give images depth by suggesting perspective.
- They can also add a **sense of action** to an image and add a **dynamic look and feel**.



Consider how you might use diagonal lines to lead the eye to your photograph's main subject or point of interest. You may have to change the point of view/angle of your camera.





Leading Lines

Leading lines is a composition where the viewer of your photos attention is **drawn to lines that lead to the main subject of the image**. A leading line paves an **easy path for the eye to follow** through different parts of your photo. It can be a **road, wall, fence, or row of trees** that is used to **attract a viewer into the picture**. The lines often point so far inwards that they reach a vanishing point.



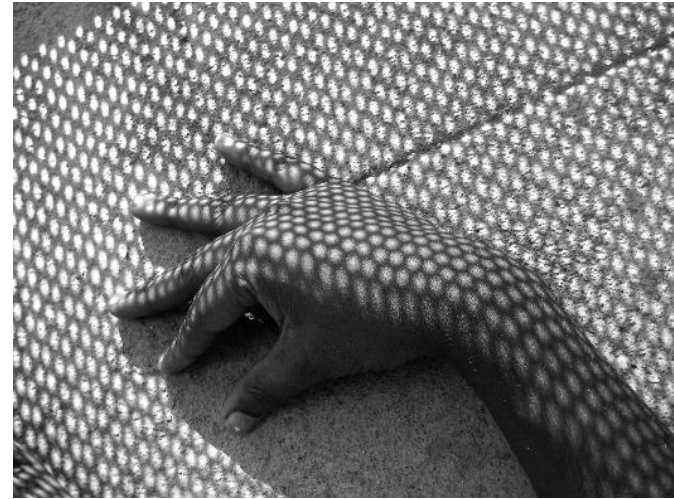


Patterns

- Life is filled with patterns - many of which we overlook due to the business of our days - however once you get an eye for spotting them (and it takes being intentional and some practice) you'll be amazed by what you see and you'll wonder why you didn't incorporate them into your photography before.

Patterns

- While repetition in the humdrum of daily life can at times be a little boring - capturing it in your photography can create an image with real impact.
- When it comes to capturing repetition in photography a couple of techniques come to mind - you can either **emphasize it** or **break it**.



Emphasize the Pattern

- Filling your frame with a repetitive pattern can give the **impression of size and large numbers**. The key to this is to attempt to zoom in close enough to the pattern that it fills the frame and makes the repetition seem as though it's bursting out (even if the repetition stops just outside of your framing).
- Examples: faces in a crowd, bricks on a wall, a line of bicycle wheels all on the same angle etc. Almost any repeated appearance of objects could work.

Emphasizing a Pattern

The picture of bottles gives the sense that there could be hundreds or thousands of them - even though there could be as few as 20-30.



Breaking a Pattern

- The other common use of repetition in photography is to capture the **interruption of the flow of a pattern.** For example you might photograph hundreds of red M&Ms with one blue one.

Patterns

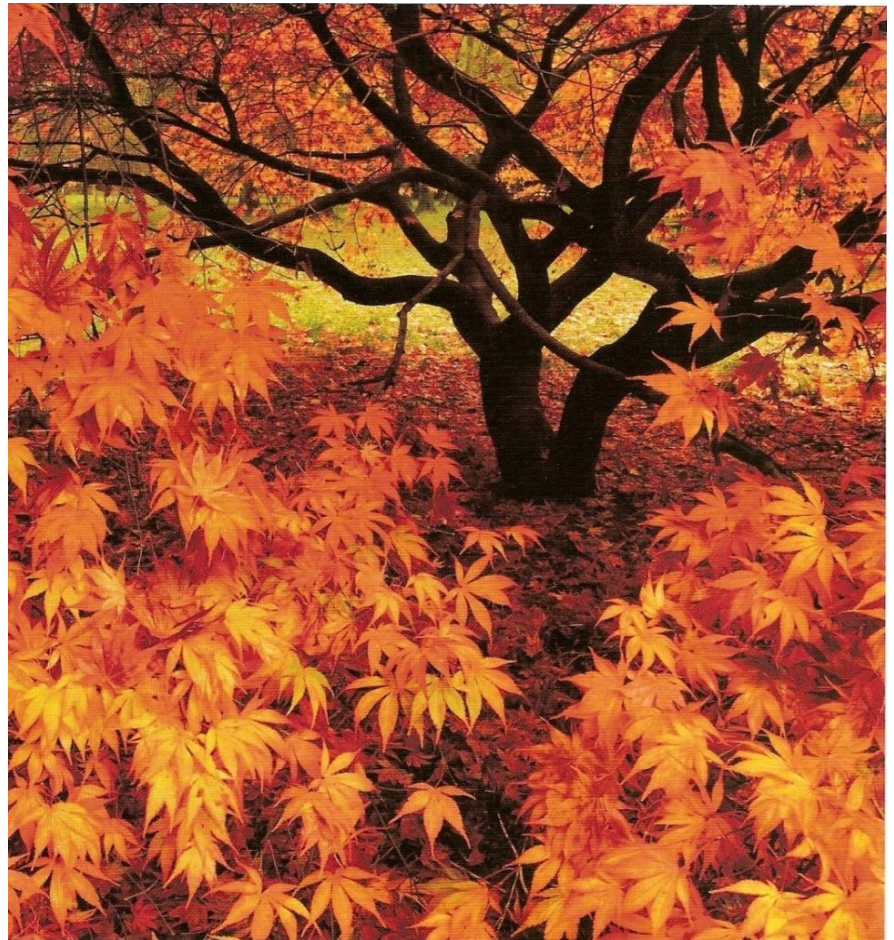
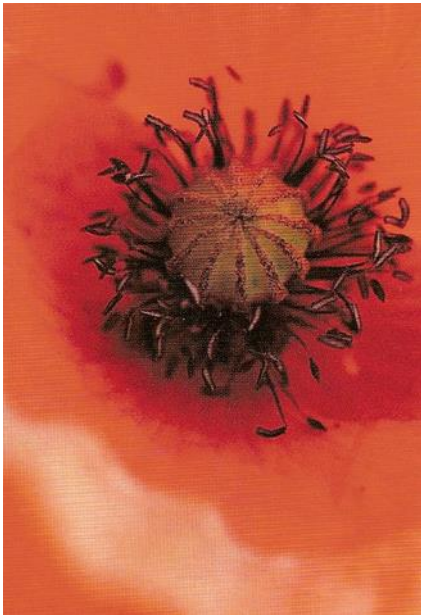
- Sometimes you'll find these broken patterns naturally appearing around you and on other occasions you might need to manipulate the situation a little and interrupt a pattern yourself.
- Broken repetition might include adding a contrasting object (color, shape, texture) or removing one of the repeating objects.



- ▶ Pay particular attention to where in your frame to place the break in the pattern. It might be that the *rule of thirds* comes in to play here.

The Power of Colour

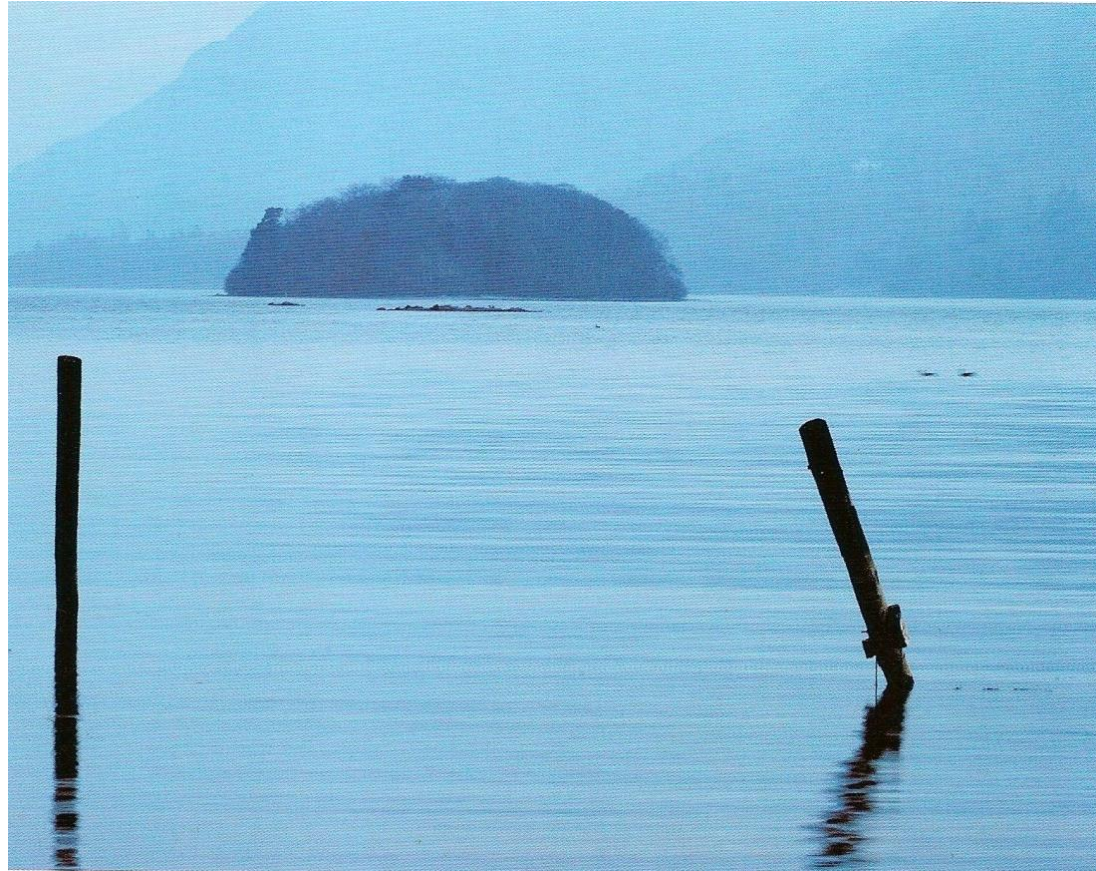
The world is a colorful place. Understanding **how colors can work** will help you take pictures with maximum impact and emotion.



Colour

- ▶ You can use different colours to create very different feelings and emotions in the photo itself.
- ▶ **Colours such as blues, greens, mauves, etc are introverted colours** and can often give your photo different feel to reds and yellows. For example think of a field of green with a tree that has purple flowers. It tends to represent, and even induce, feelings of **tranquility and calm.** These, in digital photography, are regarded as introverted colours.

Calm Colours



calming, peaceful, tranquility

Bright Colours

- ▶ Colour such as yellows, red, oranges and pinks can often instill an energetic feeling.



vibrant, energetic, fun

Colour Conclusion

- In a very simple sense if you want to create a sense of **stillness** and **calm** in your digital photography then aim for subjects that have these colours (**blue, pastels**). The same goes the other way too. If you want to have a bright **energetic** feeling, then go for colours that are bright (**yellows, red, orange**).
- Being aware of the effects of color, and using it consciously, can be a great tool in photography.

Creativity - Think Outside the Box

There are some rules of composition that are made to be broken. Some of the best pictures don't follow any of the composition rules. Consider them as guidelines rather than rules, and use them to fall back on or where you feel they will improve the photograph.

