

## How Do I Compose A Photograph?

By Andrew Hudson

**Composition is the key to an interesting photograph.** Despite all the technical jargon, photography is essentially an art form, and its most important aspect is composition. To improve your art skills, find photos you like and study them, asking yourself: 'Why exactly do I like this picture?'

**Subject.** When you take a photograph, identify what the subject is. Answering 'a person' or 'a building' is not good enough. You need to go deeper and specify 'the curves of the body' or 'the crumbling stonework' -- something that activates your senses, that you can touch, feel, smell, or taste. This process is the most overlooked step in photography. Although it may be tempting to simply snap your photos and rush on, I urge you to take time to visually explore the subject and see what appeals to you. Ask yourself: 'What is the purpose of this photograph?' and 'What is the reaction I want a viewer to have?'

**Context.** Next find a 'context' -- a simple backdrop which adds relevance, contrast, and/or location to the 'subject.' You can add depth by finding a 'context' in a different spatial plane than the 'subject.' For example, if the subject is a building in the background, make the context a flower or person in the foreground.

Now combine the two in a simple way. I like to say that a good photograph is a subject, a context, and nothing else. Remove any clutter that detracts from your message. Get closer -- zoom in -- and crop as tightly as possible.

**Subject Placement.** The placement of your subject in the frame denotes its relevance to the context. The center of the frame is the weakest place -- it's static, dull, and gives no value to the context. The more you move the subject away from the center, the more relevance you give to the context; so juggle until you get the right balance. Each item has a 'weight' and, like a waiter filling up a tray, you need to balance the weights within the frame.

**Lines and Paths.** Create impact by using real or inferred lines that lead the viewer's eye into and around the picture. Railway tracks, rivers, and fences are obvious choices, but there are also inferred lines from the subject to the context. Lines have subtle effects. Horizontal lines are peaceful; diagonals are dynamic or tense; and curves are active and sensuous. You can also connect lines in a path or shape, such as a triangle.

A picture is a playground for the eyes to explore, so provide a path of movement, and some space for the eye to rest.