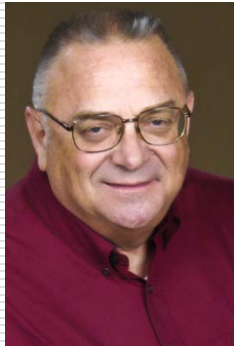# Digital Photography Composition

Kent Messamore

9/5/2011

Snapshot versus Photograph

- ☐ Snapshot is taken without much thought

- ☐ Photograph - composed by Photographer

  - ■ Photo – "Light"

  - ■ Graph – "to write or draw"

Composition

- ☐ Choosing a Subject
- ☐ Quality of Light
- ☐ Framing the Image
- ☐ Negative Space
- ☐ Depth of Field
- ☐ Backgrounds and Foregrounds
- ☐ Viewpoint
- ☐ Elements of Composition
- ☐ Seven Deadly Sins for beginners
- ☐ Picture Composition Summary
- ☐ Developing your Own Style

"…how you build a picture, what a picture consists of, how shapes are related to each other, how spaces are filled, how the whole thing must have a kind of unity." Paul Strand

# Choosing a Subject

All taken close to my house

Subjects are all around you if you can learn to see!!!

Quality of light

- Quality of Light is subjective
  - Light can have tone – dark or light
  - Light can be soft or hard – blurred or sharp
  - Light can have color – muted or saturated
  - Light can have contrast - dark tones very near to light tones

- Each of these are very much individual qualities that make the difference between a good photographer and a great photographer

- Great photographers take these Qualities together with a subject and weave them into a composition called a photograph
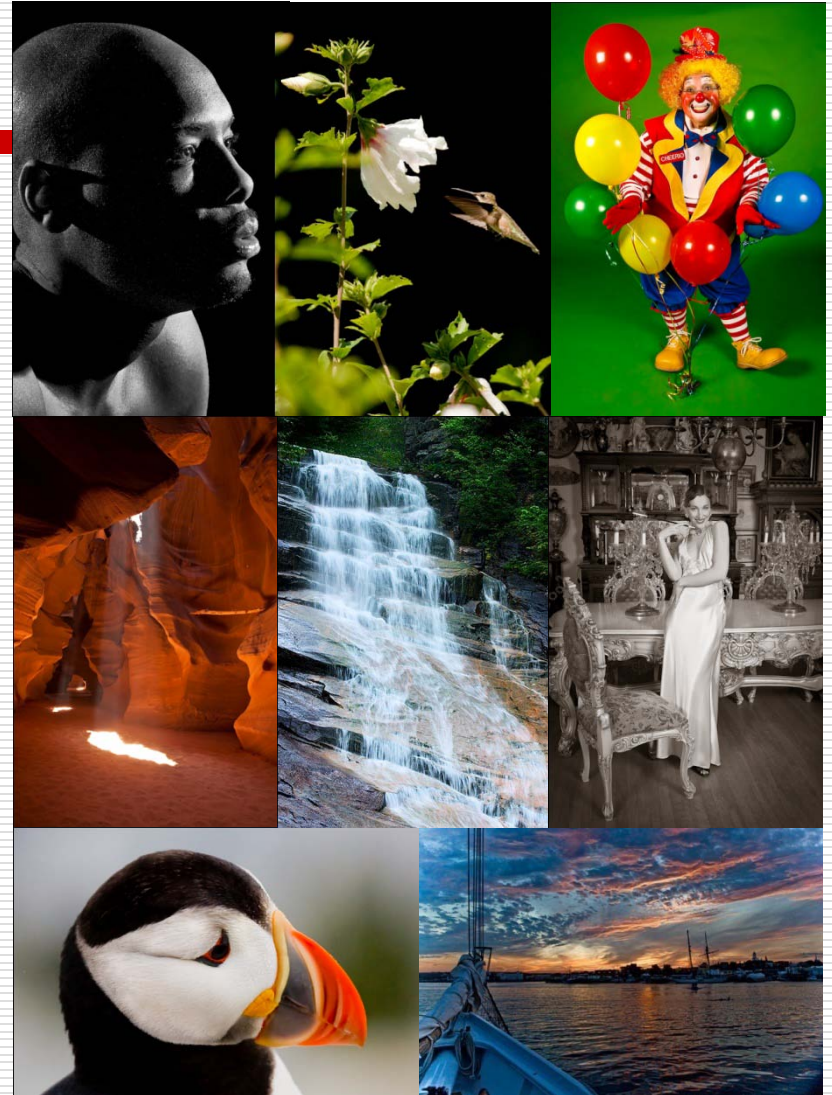
Framing the Image

- Aspect Ratio – size of the Frame
- Orientation – Portrait/Landscape?
- Square Frame?
- Cropping
- Filling the Frame
- Placing Objects within the Frame – Use all four corners
- Simplify, Simplify, Simplify

"A Painter includes objects; A Photographer excludes objects"

"The fewer the elements the stronger the image - Simplify!"

"Challenge the viewer to explore your photo!"

Aspect Ratio – Size of Frame

- Aspect Ratio is important when taking a photo. Think about how what you see in the Camera is going to fit on your chosen output
- You can achieve the chosen aspect ratio by cropping, however you may lose some of your image
- Your 4 x 6 image printed 8 x 10 loses 2 inches!

1.5 Aspect Ratio cropped for 8x10

2 in

$$\frac{4}{8}$$

media	size (width & height)	Aspect Ratio
Square	1 x 1	1
35 mm slide film	36 x 24 mm	1.5
Computer Display	1024 x 768 pixels	1.33
APS-C Sensor	2816 x 2112 pixels	1.33
computer Display	4368 x 2912 pixels	1.5
Photo Paper	4 x 6 inches	1.5
Printing Paper	8.5 x 11	1.29
Photo Paper	8 x 10	1.25
Standard TV	4 x3	1.33
HDTV	16 x 9	1.8

6 = 12

Orientation

- Human eyes are arranged to naturally view Landscapes

- Most Cameras are designed to hold for a Landscape

- Holding Camera in Portrait Orientation is uncomfortable

- Go outside the box and take Portraits when scene calls for it.

- Some scenes lend themselves to both horizontal and vertical. Try both.

Square Frame

- ☐ Square Frame is difficult to work with as sides impose formal rigidity on the image

- ☐ Eye will always be directed back towards the center of the image

- ☐ It will, however, work with some images

Cropping with your Camera

Filling the Frame

- ☐ If you don't seem to be getting good photos, maybe you are not close enough.
  - ■ Fill the Frame
  - ■ Get in Close
  - ■ Use your feet
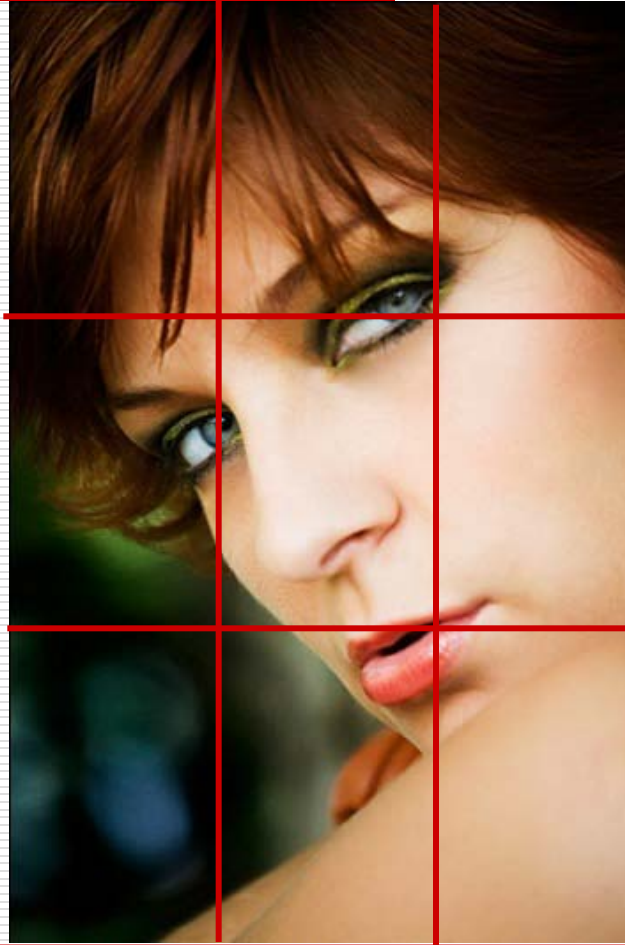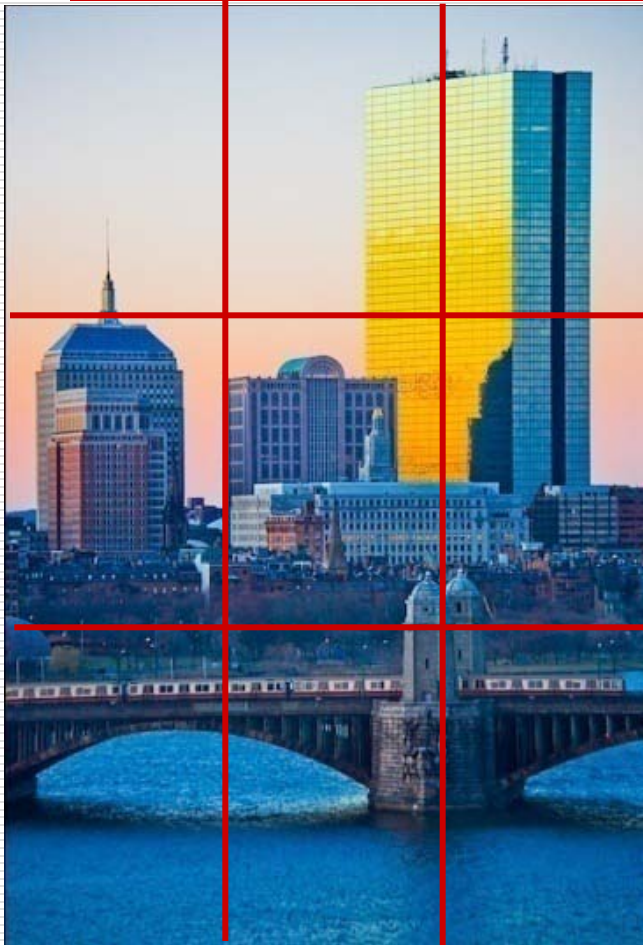 - ■ Use your zoom

Subject Placement in the Frame

- [ ] The human eye naturally goes to the center of a photograph.

- [ ] We are trained by nature to find things in front of our eyes less interesting.

- [ ] Our eyes look for danger in our peripheral vision.

- [ ] We find subjects in our peripheral vision much more interesting than in the center
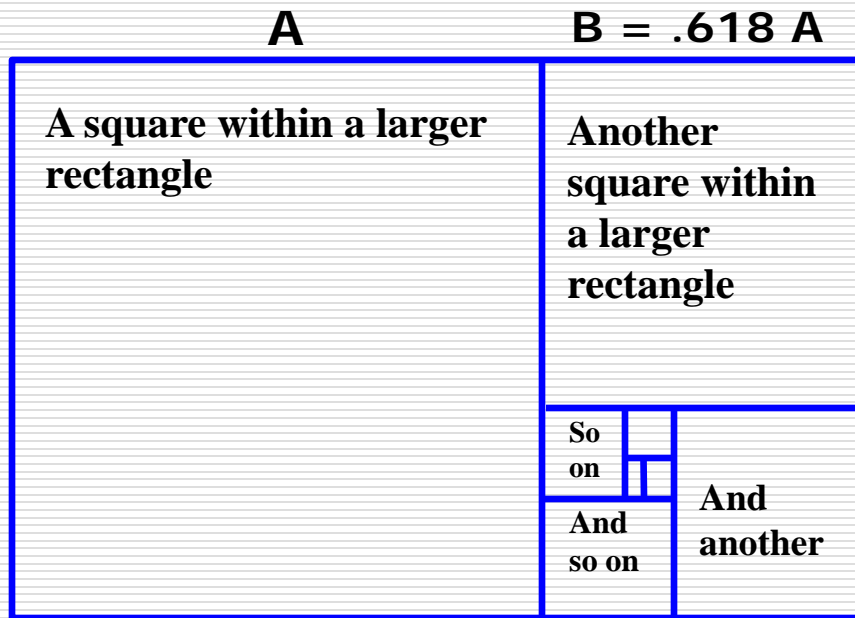
Frame

Frame Placement — "The Rule of Thirds"

- Draw a grid dividing Frame into thirds.

- Place key elements at the intersections (as much as possible)

- Or place objects along the lines

Frame Placement — The Golden Rectangle

$$\frac{A+B}{A} = \frac{A}{B} = \varphi \text{ (Phi)} = 1.618$$

A   **B = .618 A**

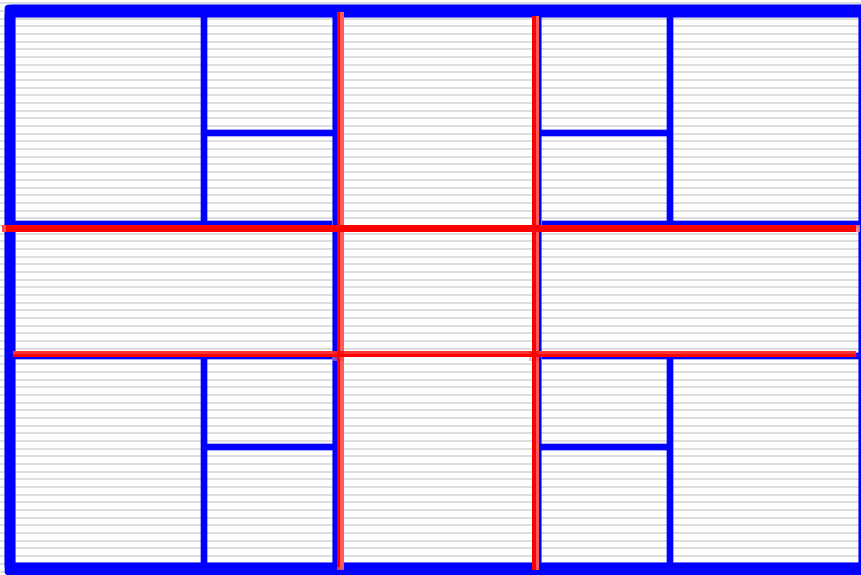| A square within a larger rectangle	Another square within a larger rectangle
	So on / And so on / And another

- There is an irrational number that appears many places in nature (other than Pi – 1.414).
- It is Phi (φ) or 1.618.
- With it you can create the "Golden Rectangle" (Left)

Fibonacci number Series
, 1, 1, 2, 3, 5, 8, 13, 21, 34, …

Frame Placement – The Golden Rectangle

- If you flip the Rectangle horizontally and vertically you will get a Tic Tac Toe within the rectangle.

- This is the origin of the so called "Rule of Thirds"

- **The rule of Thirds is an approximation of the "Golden Rectangle"**

- A photographic Subject or Object placed in the center of the frame seems stilted and boring

- An Object placed on one of the four intersecting lines in the frame seems natural to us.

Frame Placement – The Golden Spiral
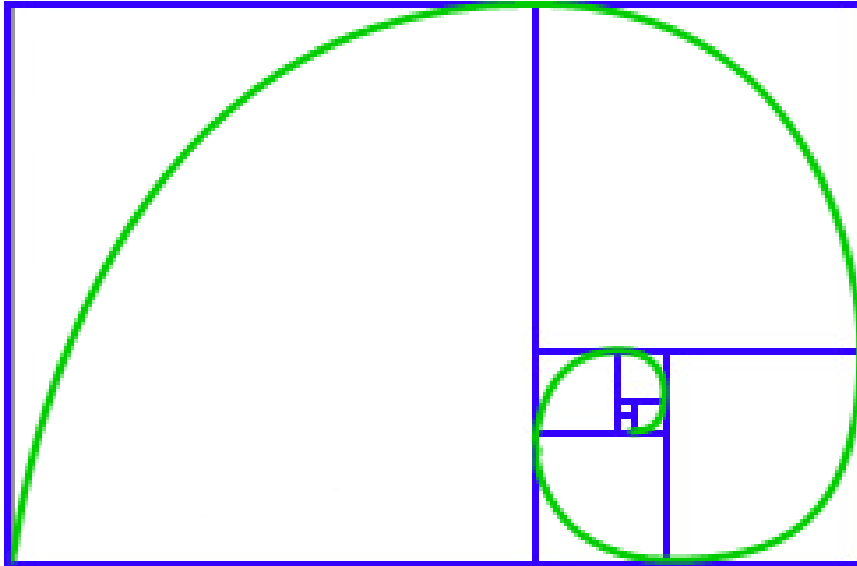
- Connect the key points with a smooth curve and you get the Golden Spiral which you might recognize in a Chambered Nautilus

- Many believe this spiral appears in nature everywhere, however usually the spiral is **only an approximate fit**.

- It does make us realize however that we expect what we see to resemble the things we see in nature. And nature approximates the Golden Rectangle

- **Keep in mind that it is only an approximation and exact placement is not important**

Simplify, Simplify, Simplify

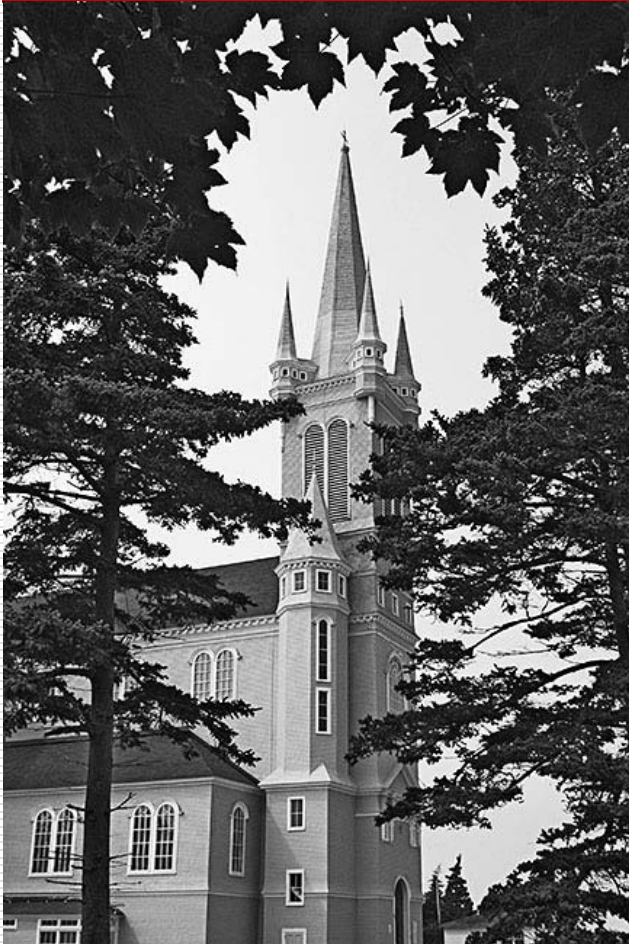If an object doesn't add to a photograph it detracts from it.
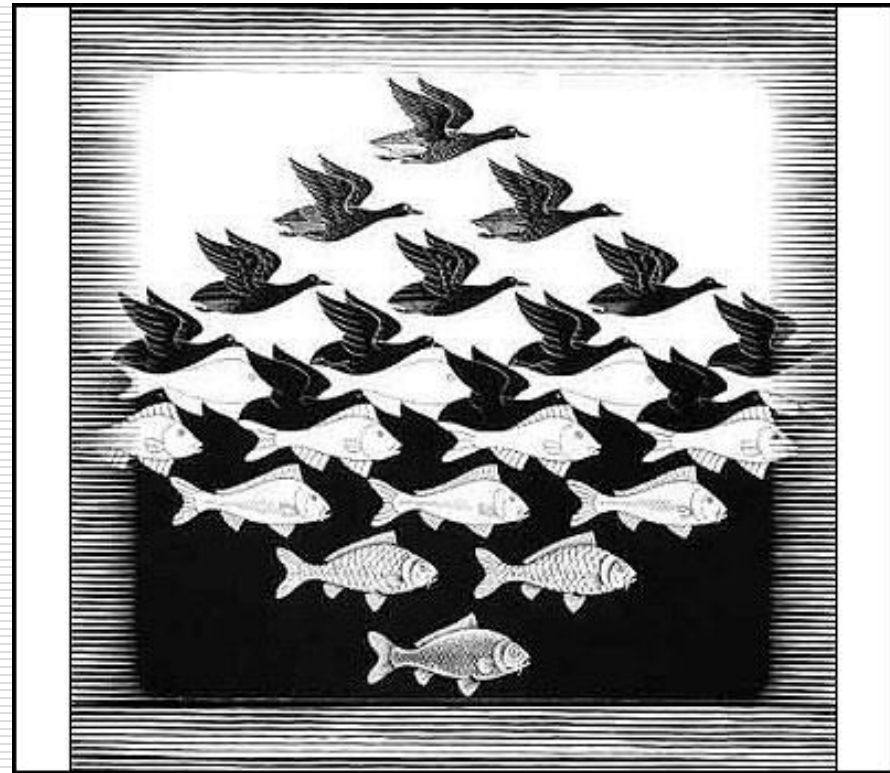

People In?

People Out?

Frame within the Frame

Use nearby objects to frame the subject of the photo

Positive and Negative Space

☐ Positive space is where shapes and forms exist

☐ Negative space is the empty space around shapes and forms

  ■ It is where "what isn't there" is as important as "what is"

  ■ It can create depth and emotion in a photo

Positive and Negative Space

Foreground, Middle ground, Background creates depth

Background

Middle ground

Foreground

Backgrounds

- ☐ Check background prior to pressing the shutter
    - ☐ Distracting elements
    - ☐ Protruding objects from subjects heads
    - ☐ Competing lines

Backgrounds

Check the background prior to pressing the shutter

Pay attention to Background

☐ Using soft focus (Depth of Field) to remove a distracting background

Foreground

Kent Messamore

- Also Check Foreground objects

- Can you bring them into focus?

- Blurred foreground prevents the eye from entering the picture.

Foreground

- Check Foreground
  - Distracting elements
  - Can you reach out and move them?
  - Can you move left or right and get a better view?

Foreground

- ☐ Also Check Foreground
  - ▪ I moved left and got a much better shot

View Point

- ☐ Change background by moving to another angle

- ☐ Shoot from above
- ☐ Shoot from below

© Melissa Soper

- ☐ Shoot small animals or children from their own level

Elements of Composition

- ☐ Pattern
- ☐ Texture
- ☐ Scale
- ☐ Lines
- ☐ Color
- ☐ Light
- ☐ Impact
- ☐ Symmetry
- ☐ Shapes
- ☐ Dimension
- ☐ Sense of Depth
- ☐ Perspective

Patterns in an image

The Viewer's eye is attracted to a broken pattern
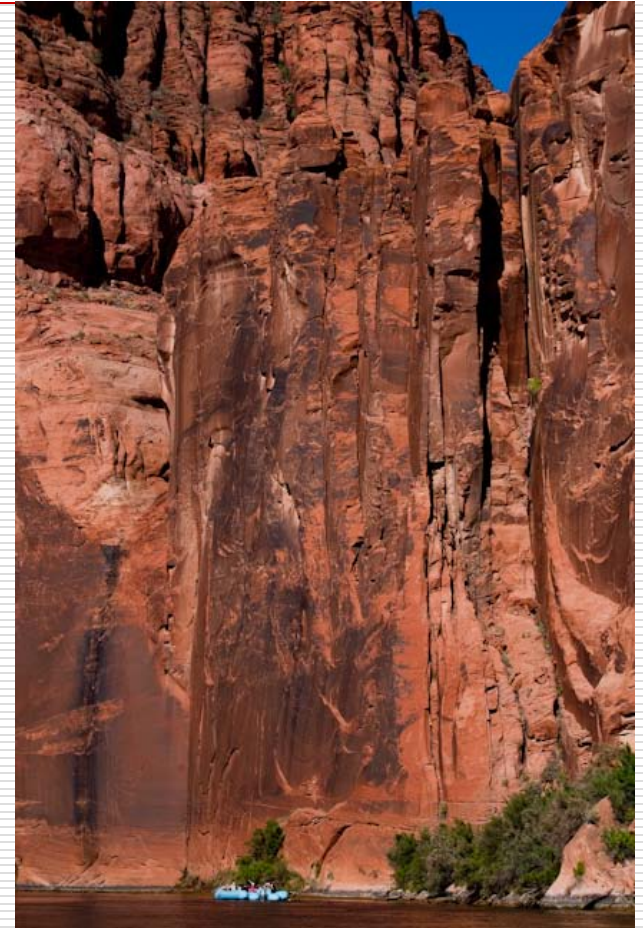
Texture

scale

Large objects do not appear so large unless there is a familiar object to show scale.

Leading Lines

- [] To draw or lead the viewer's eye to your subject

- [] To create illusion of depth in your image

- [] Horizontal give a sense of stability, rest, or tranquility (think horizon)

- [] Vertical lines are generally associated with power, strength, and growth (Think trees)

- [] Diagonal Lines create interest and action

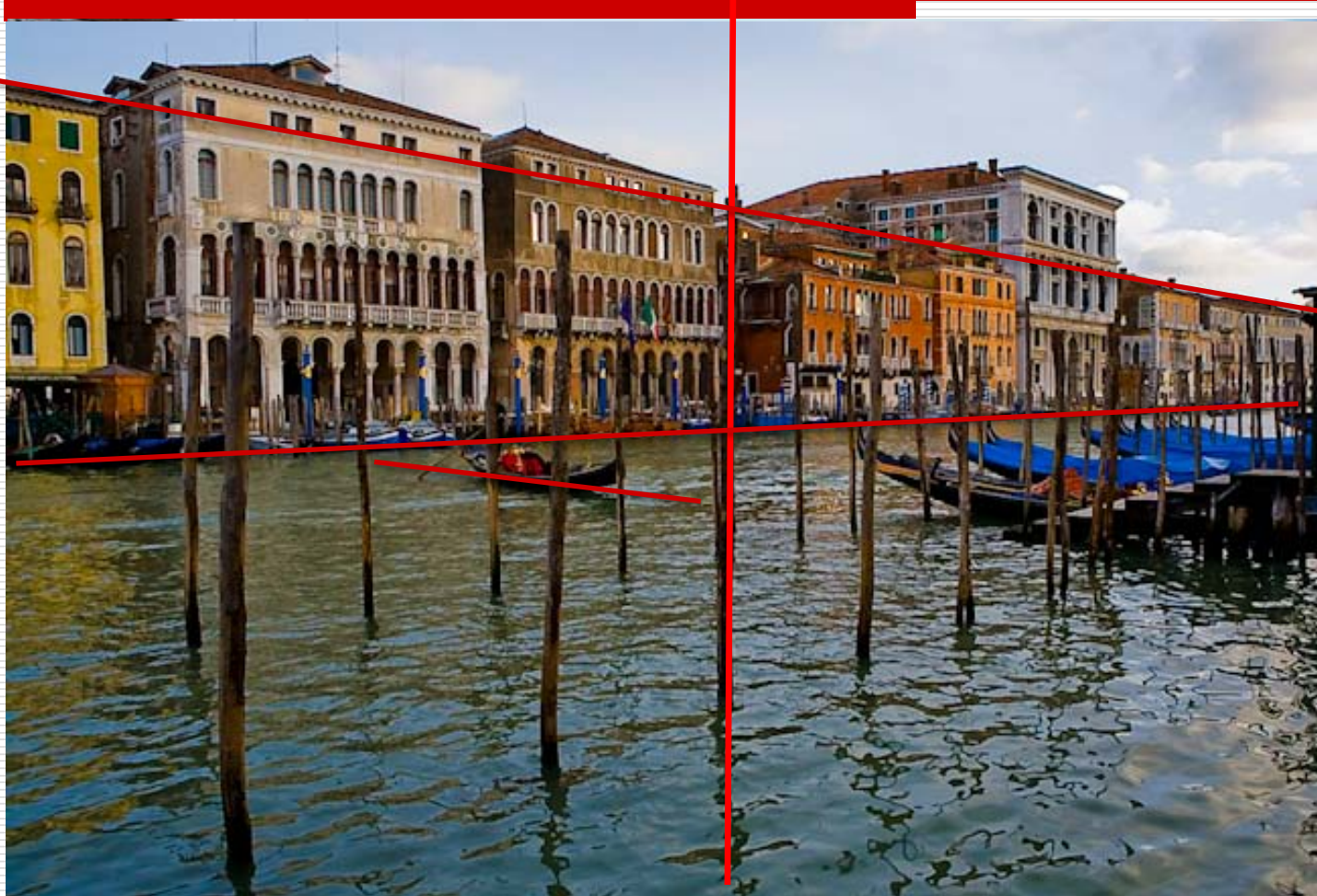- [] Intersecting Lines create tension, chaotic

Leading Lines

Horizontal lines create a sense of rest

Diagonal Lines

Diagonal Lines create interest
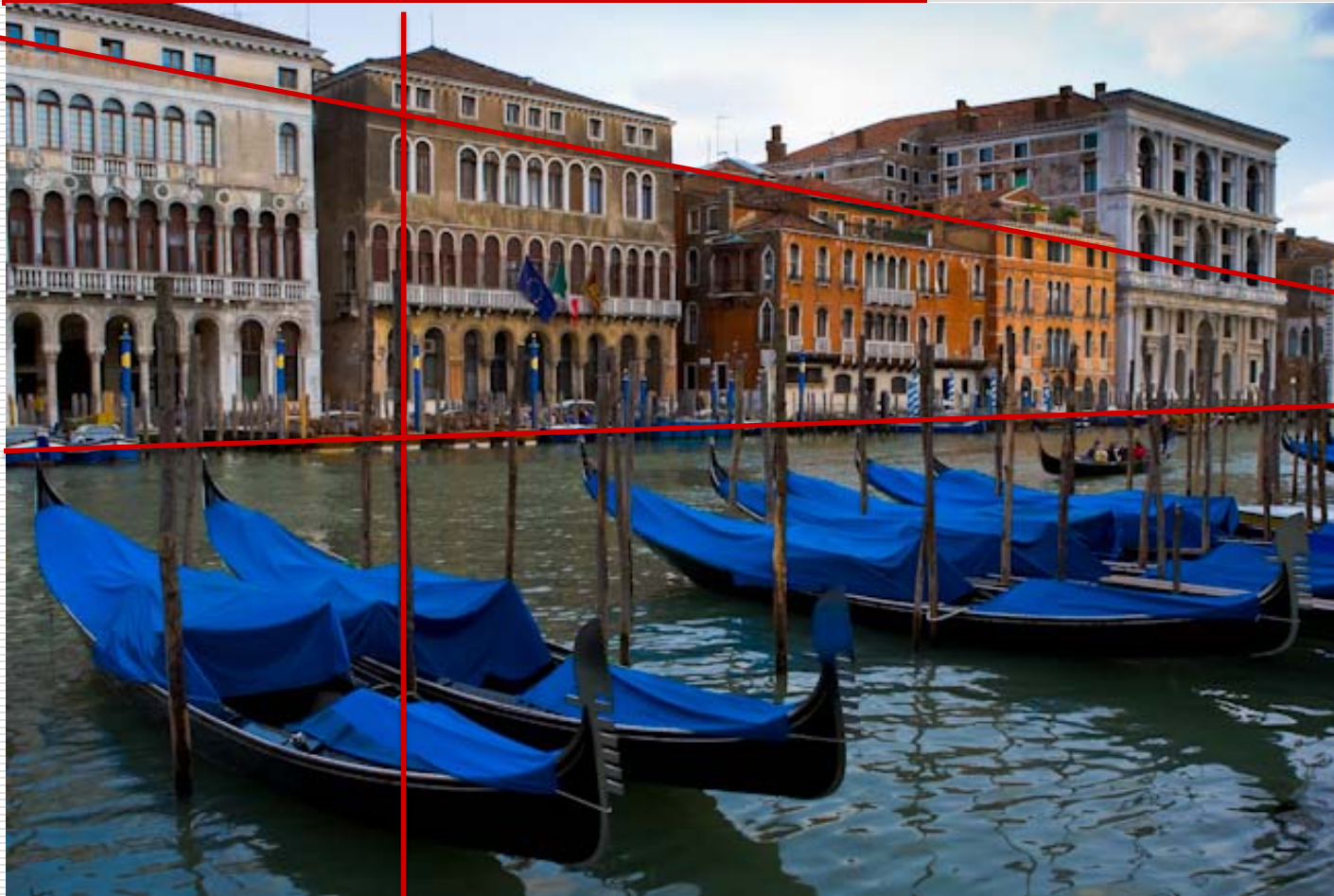
Leading Lines

Vertical Lines show strength

Converging Lines lead eye through image; Shows depth

Intersecting lines create tension
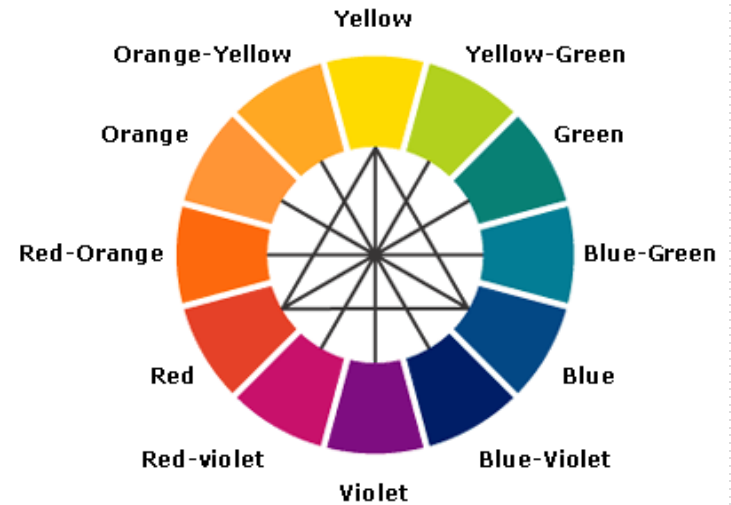
Intersecting Lines - Tension
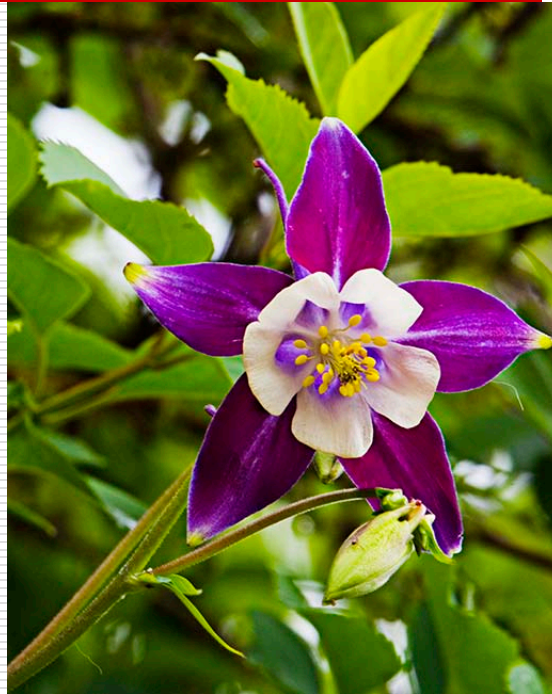

Reduced Tension

Curved Lines

Curved Lines add interest and depth to your photos
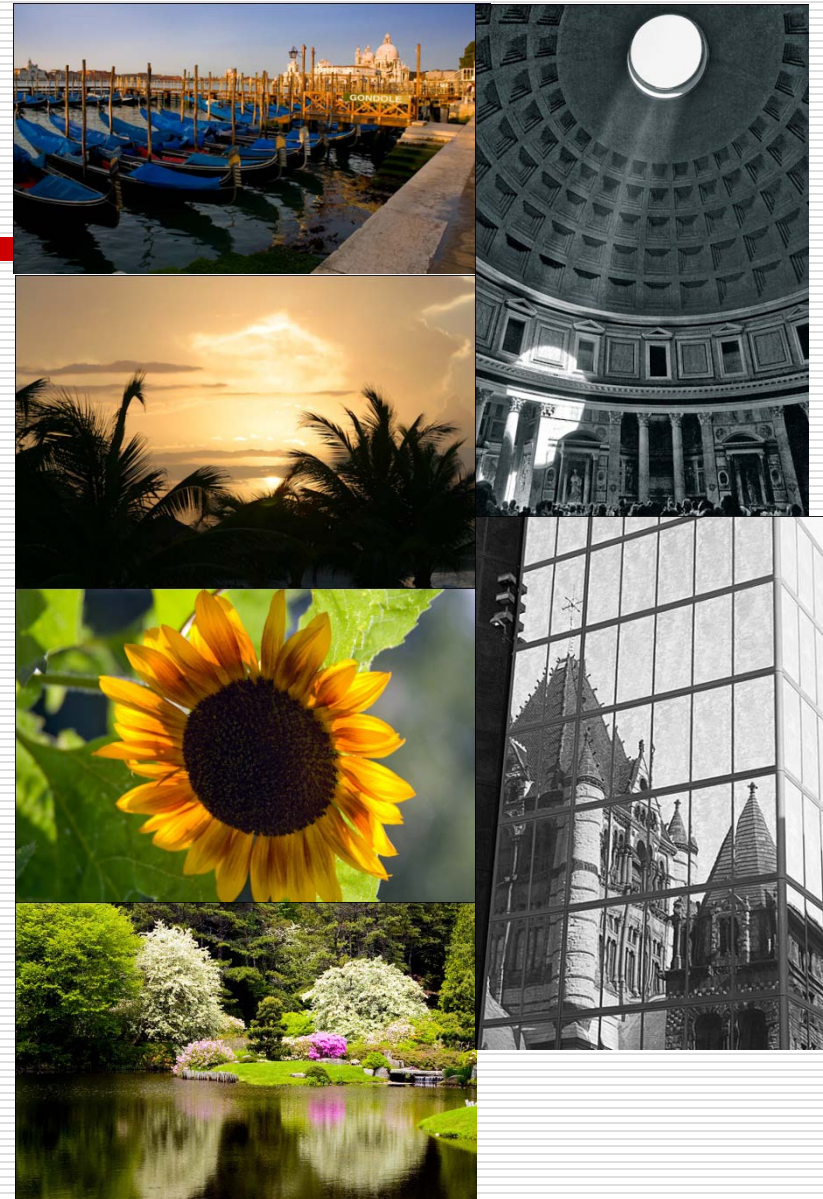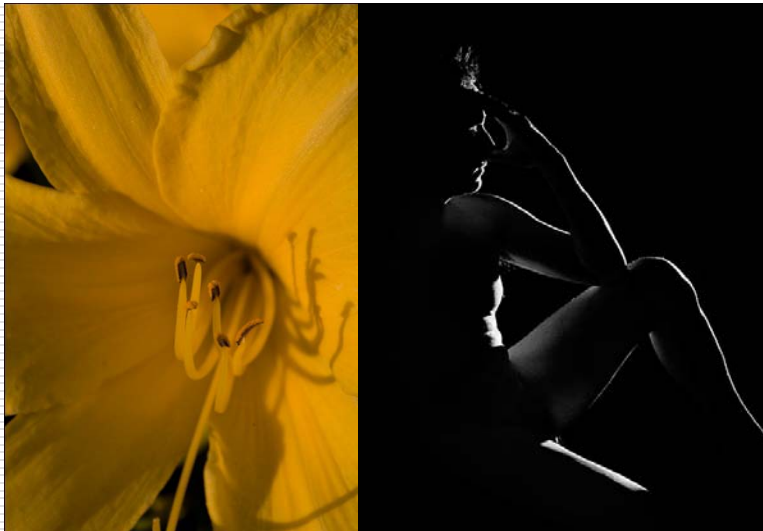
Enhanced Images

© Andre Kertesz

Contrasting Colors

Colors directly across the Color wheel are contrasting and go very well together

Light

- ☐ Light direction
  - ■ Front Light – Flat, few shadows
  - ■ Back Light – Rim Light, translucent, Silhouette
  - ■ Spot Light – Gap that light comes through
  - ■ Side Light – Generates Texture
  - ■ Reflected Light – Lakes, Mirrors

What creates Impact in a Photo

- ☐ Contrasts – Eye is immediately attracted to (what is in **Blue)**
    - ■ Dark versus **Light**
    - ■ Black & White versus **Color**
    - ■ No detail versus **Lots of Detail**
    - ■ Blurred versus **Sharp**
    - ■ Still versus **Moving**
    - ■ Contrasting Colors – Green, Blue, Purple versus **Yellow, Orange, Red**
    - ■ Cool versus **Warm Colors**
    - ■ Repeating pattern versus **Break in the Pattern**
    - ■ Seen every day versus **very unusual**

Dark versus **Light**

Black & White versus **Color**

No detail versus **Lots of Detail**

Blurred versus **Sharp**

Seen every day versus **very unusual**

Seven Deadly Sins of Composition for beginners

1. Confusing Subject or no subject
2. Subject in the Center of the Photograph
3. Horizon down the middle of the Photograph; Tilted horizon
4. Camera movement or inappropriate focus (particularly blur in foreground due to focusing too close)
5. Distracting elements; Bright white on edge of frame
6. Harsh contrasty light
7. Lack of emotional impact

Before taking a shot, ask yourself:

- ☐ What is the story I am telling?

- ☐ What do you want viewers eyes to see?

- ☐ Are there any distracting objects that I should exclude from the image.

- ☐ Is anything in the scene moving?

- ☐ What is in the background of the shot?

- ☐ Are you close enough?

- ☐ What is the main source of light?

- ☐ Should I move to another position?

- ☐ Should I shoot Portrait or Landscape?

- ☐ How will the eye travel through this image?

Picture Composition Summary – 6 Rules

1. Keep it simple – What is the subject of your picture? Get close.

2. Rule of thirds – Draw a simple grid and place subject at one of the 4 intersections.

3. Balance – Balance subject with some object on opposite side of picture. Unbalance gives impression of movement.

4. Framing – subject in foreground with background to give depth. Placing people in image to show scale.

5. Lines – Place lines in photo that lead to subject. Horizontal & vertical lines give sense of stillness. Diagonal lines add interest. Intersecting lines create tension.

6. Rules are made to be broken.
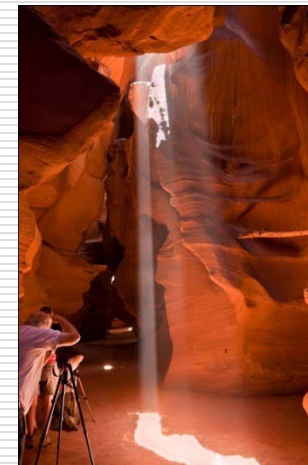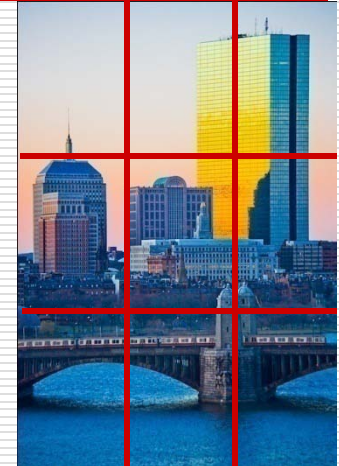
Composition

☐ **More links about composition**

http://photoinf.com/General/Geoff_Lawrence/Composition.html

http://digital-photography-school.com/fill-your-frame

http://digital-photography-school.com/getting-backgrounds-right

Don't miss these next 2 they are a bit more advanced and very well done.

http://knol.google.com/k/yanik-chauvin/photography-composition-an-introduction/

2rcdarvscszjb/2#

http://www.luminous-landscape.com/columns/jp-composition-intro.shtml

http://www.mediacollege.com/photography/composition/frame.html

☐ **Recommended Book for further study – "The Photographer's Eye by Michael Freeman, The** *Ilex Press, ISBN-13: 978-0=240-80934-2*

Shooting - Auto Mode - All P&S Cameras have Auto Mode that sets focus & Exposure Automatically. User has no control. Select Auto Mode on your camera.

- ☐ Hold Camera as if you were a tripod – minimize camera shake

- ☐ **Frame** the Image – **Compose** in view finder

- ☐ **Zoom** the Lens – Zoom in and out to bring subject closer or further away

- ☐ Auto-**focus** – press **shutter button halfway** down

  - ■ Are you too close?

  - ■ Is it too dark to focus

- ☐ Auto-**exposure** – Camera adjusts aperture & shutter for correct amount of light onto the sensor

- ☐ Auto-**flash** – Flash will automatically fire in low light situations. What is the indication that Flash will fire? Red Eye Reduction?

- ☐ Auto-**White balance** – adjusts for color of light, e.g. sunny day, cloudy day, florescent lamp, tungsten lamp

- ☐ Press **shutter button fully down** to take photo

Shooting - Program Mode

☐ For Point & Shoot Cameras, this is the most common setting.

☐ Most P&S Cameras have a Program Mode that allows user some ability to control image.

☐ Camera still makes most of the decisions but usually allows:

- Setting ISO, i.e. the Sensitivity of the sensor to light, allowing shoots in low light situations

- White Balance - adjusts for color of light, e.g. sunny day, cloudy day, florescent lamp, tungsten lamp

- Control of Flash

Scene Modes – Most P&S Cameras have a Scene Modes that allows user some ability to control image. What Scene modes do you have?

- [ ] Portrait – Blurs background to bring out subject.

- [ ] Infinity or Landscape – Shows detail in foreground & background

- [ ] Night – Take pictures in low light

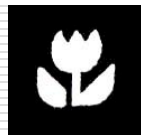- [ ] Sports or Kids & Pets – increased shutter speed to freeze action

- [ ] Macro – for close ups

Portrait - Blur background

Night shots - Open Aperture Slow Shutter Speed

Sports, kids moving around - Fast Shutter Speed

Other Scene Modes

- ☐ Sunsets
- ☐ Foliage
- ☐ Snow
- ☐ Beach
- ☐ Fireworks
- ☐ Aquarium
- ☐ Indoors

Aperture Priority

- **Aperture-priority autoexposure:**
  - You specify aperture, or f-stop; camera selects the shutter speed needed to produce a good exposure.
  - Control over aperture is important as setting affects *depth of field,* or distance over which objects in scene appear in sharp focus.
  - If you're shooting portrait, for example, you can select an aperture that keeps the subject sharp while blurring the background.

- This mode typically is Av

Does your Camera have Aperture Priority?

Shutter Priority

- **Shutter-priority autoexposure:**
  - you select shutter speed; camera selects aperture needed to expose the picture properly.
  - Since shutter speed determines whether moving objects appear blurry or "frozen" in place, gaining control over this exposure setting is especially important if you shoot action pictures.

- Shutter-priority mode is usually labeled S or Tv *(time value)* on the camera's exposure dial.

Does your Camera have Shutter Priority?