

Composition

or

What goes where and why

Composition Techniques

Using the arrangement, placement, size, shape, and relationship of aspects of an image can greatly aid in making a picture more appealing. Usually, just a change in the photographer's position or point of view is all that is needed. Most of the time, the artist wants to lead the viewer's eye through or into the picture.

Here are a few of the most common techniques used for composing a photograph...

Repetitive Features

The eye loves to follow repeating patterns of the same or similar things. Picket fences, ripples in sand, rows of flowers, even a series of parked cars can catch our attention.

Repetitive Features



Converging Lines

Converging lines suggest distance and destination. They lead to the horizon or point to the end of the journey. Converging lines can be found almost anywhere. The water running parallel to the dune, a long winding road; a railroad track offers a combination of converging lines and repetitive features.

Converging Lines



Texture

Texture can evoke a mood, it can make us want to touch, or avoid something, and it can lead our eyes to a part of the picture.

Texture



Room to Move

Room to move is necessary in almost any off-center composition. If a subject is riding a bike, walking, running, or even just looking toward one side of the image, it should usually be aiming toward to open side instead of off the edge of the picture. The area behind the subject is negative space, the area in front of the subject is positive space. Allowing either to dominate the picture gives a like feeling to the image.

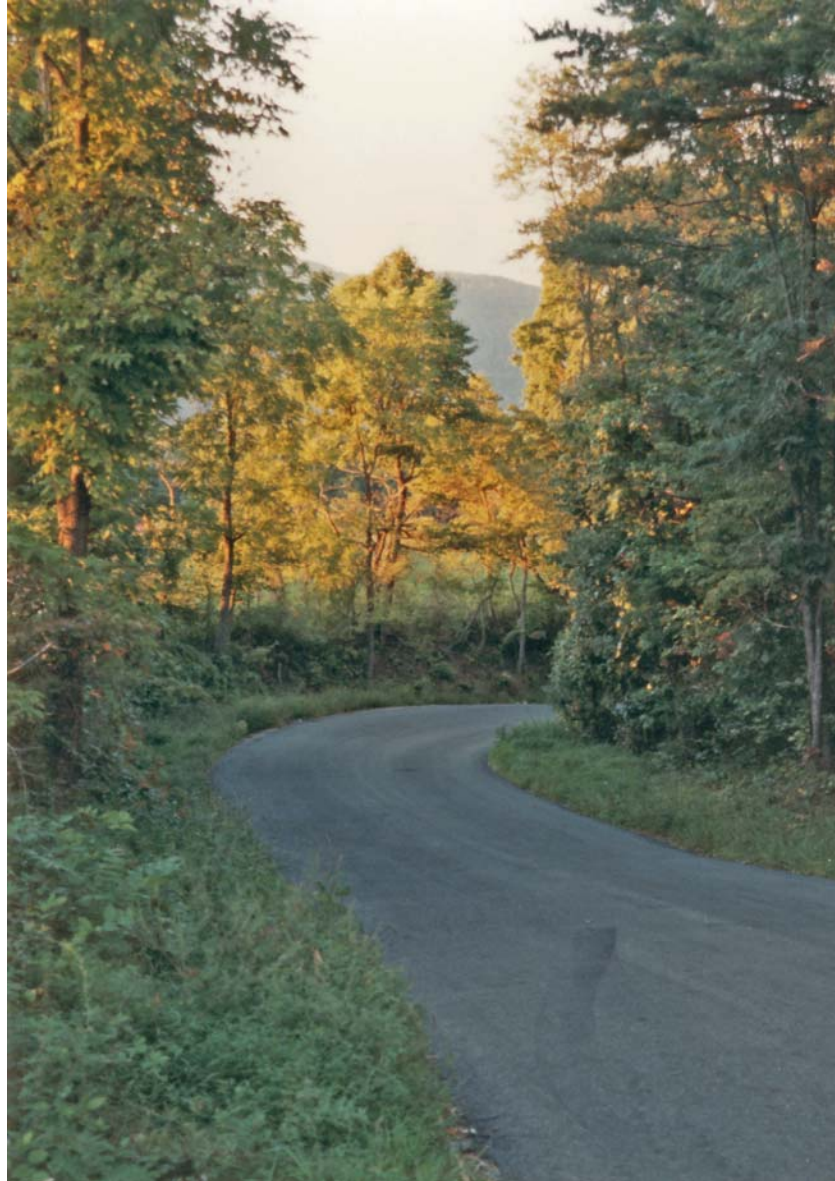
Room to Move



The “S” Curve

Another road trip for the eyes. If we haven't already been there, we are always intrigued by what may be around that curve...

The “S” Curve



Framing

Using foreground objects or features to create a frame around the subject highlights it and makes a picture into a presentation.

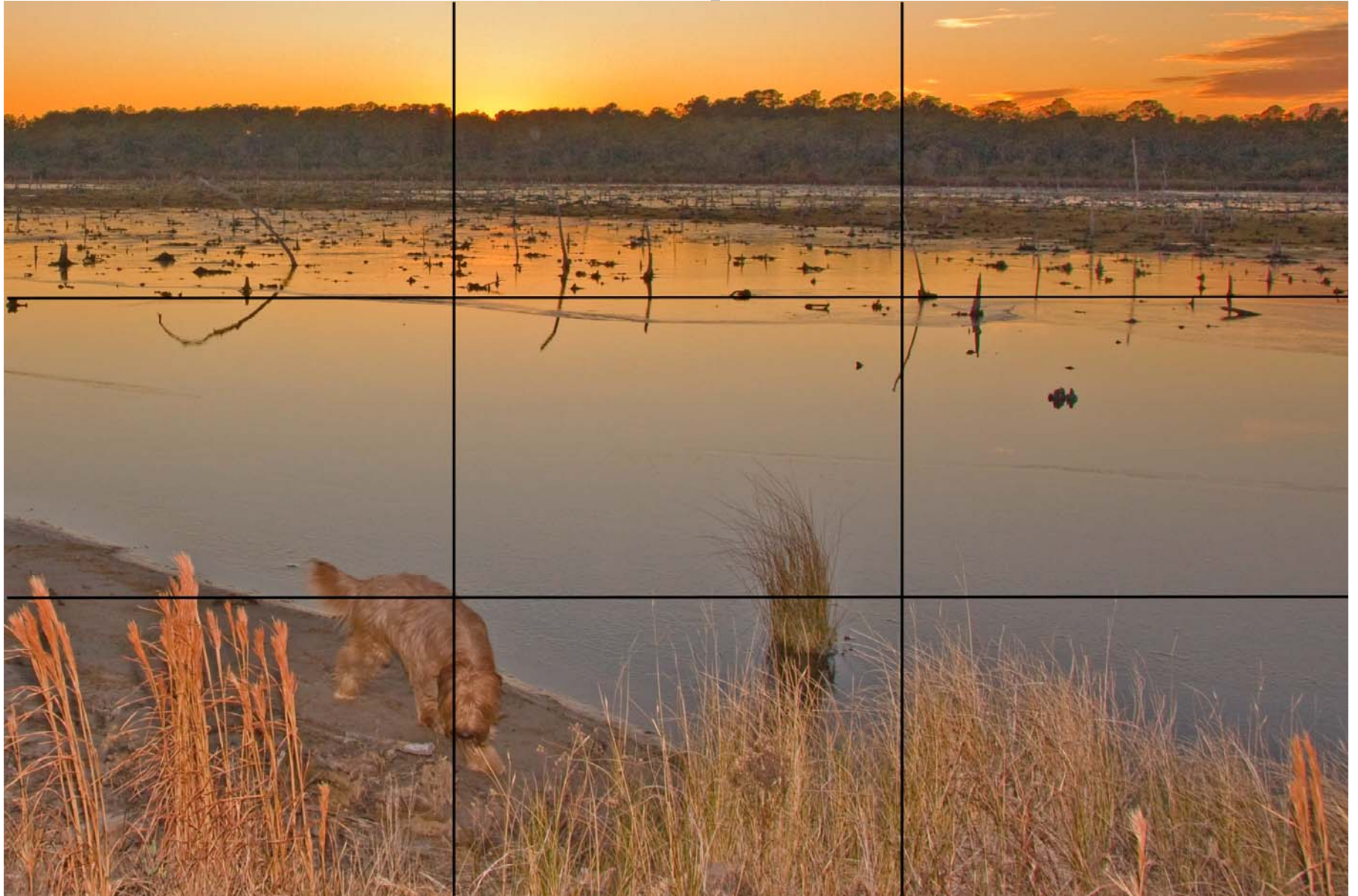
Framing



The Rule of Thirds

Any artist working on a flat surface is subject to the Rule of Thirds. The Rule of Thirds says that compositional features should be placed in a position that is utilizing two thirds of the frame or positioned one third from the edge. Imagine a tic-tac-toe board over the scene. Use one of the four corners of the center block as the positioning point for your subject.

The Rule of Thirds



Aspect Ratio

Aspect ratio is the mathematical relationship of the height to the width of a rectangle. A square has a 1/1 aspect ratio because its height is equal to its width. Most DSLR's have an aspect ratio of 2/3 because for every two units of height there are three units of width. Olympus DSLR's and a number of other cameras, now, have a 4/3 aspect ratio. So do old fashioned televisions and standard computer monitors.

Aspect Ratio

Different sized prints have different aspect ratios; and they don't always match your camera's aspect ratio. If a print that has a different aspect ratio from the original image is made, it will crop part of the image. If you weren't prepared for this when you composed the picture, you may lose an important part of the image in the printing process.

Aspect Ratios vs. Print Size

2:3

4x6

6x9

8x12

11x17.5

12x18

16x24

20x30

24x36

4:3

3x4

4.5x6

6x8

9x12

11x14

12x16

20x24 (5:6)

4:5

4x5

5x7 (3.5x5)

8x10

12x15

16x20

20x25

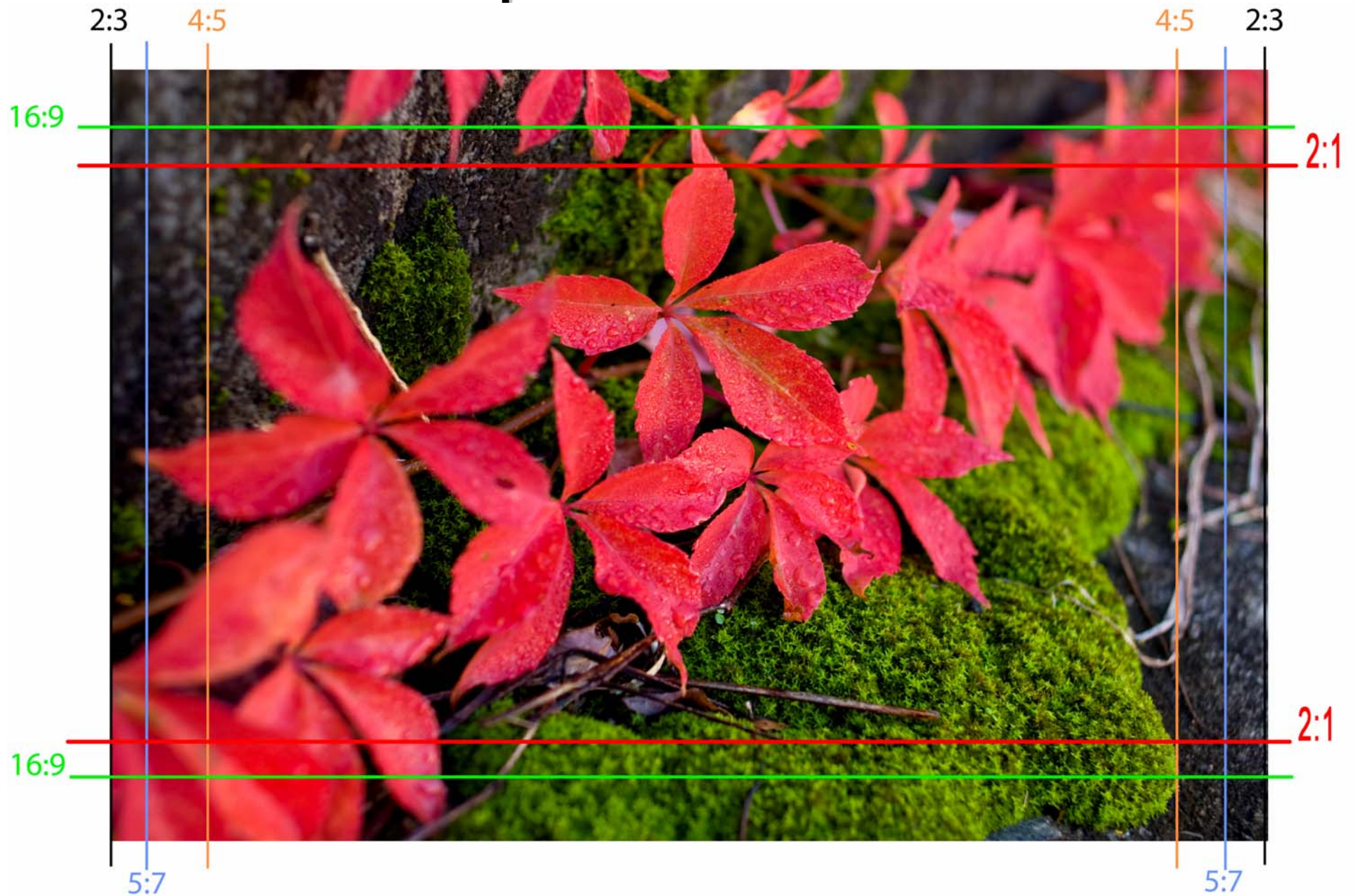
24x30

5:7 2.5x3.5 3.5x5 5x7 10x14(13)

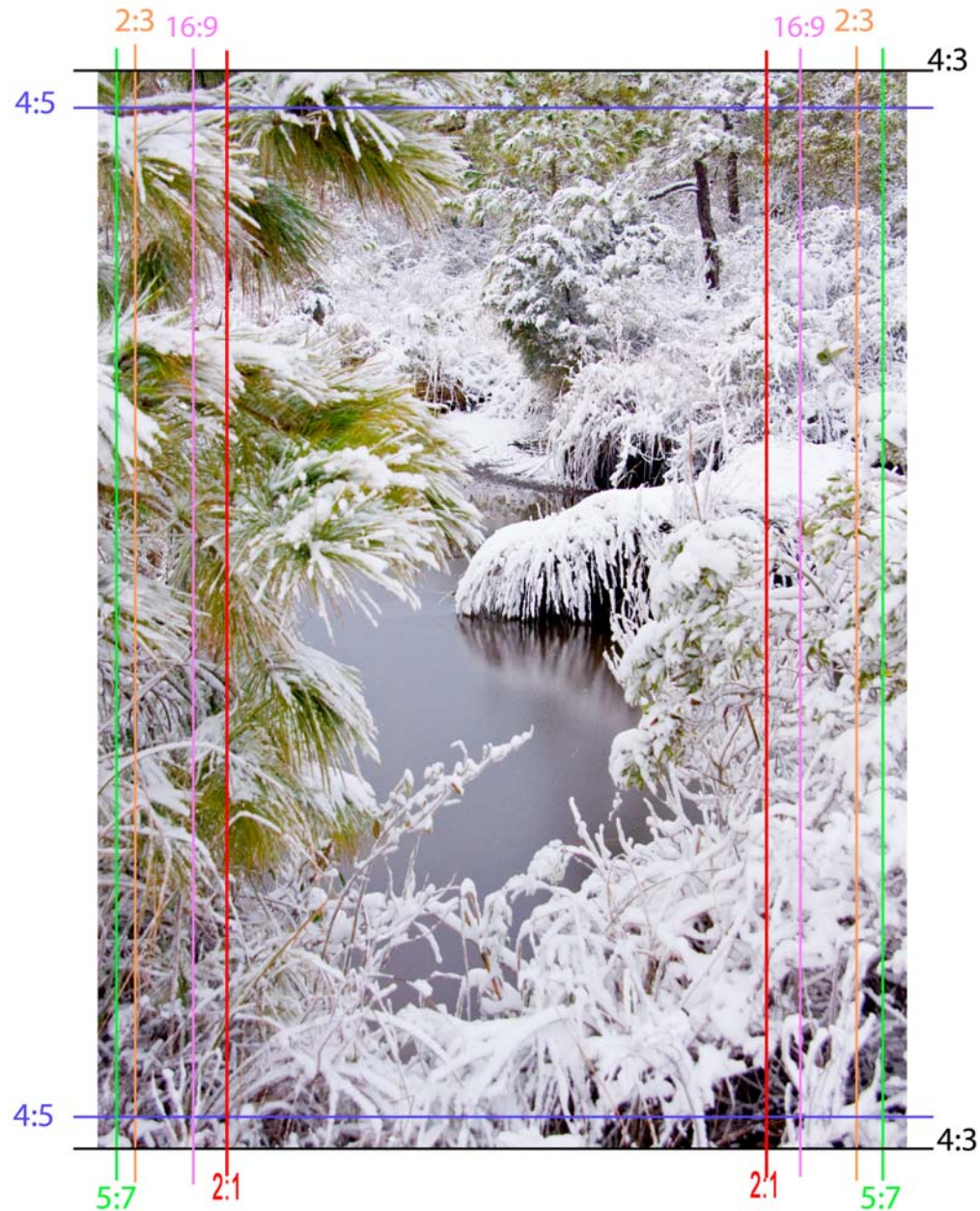
16:9 4.5x8 8.5x14 9x16 18x34 20x38

2:1 4x8 6x12 8x16 10x20 12x24 16x32 20x40 24x48

Aspect Ratio 2:3



Aspect Ratio 4:3



Viewfinder Ratio

Very few cameras have a viewfinder that accurately represents to your eye what your sensor will capture. Some, but very few, DSLR's have a viewfinder that shows you 100% of what the sensor sees. This results in having more image than you saw when you composed your picture. This presents two problems:

1. Objects close to the edge of the image that you wanted to exclude, may sneak back into the picture.
2. In order to correct this, you will have to crop the perimeter of the image to get rid of the unwanted feature. That means you lose pixels.

Viewfinder Percentage (95)



Viewfinder Ratio

Autofocus compact cameras that have optical viewfinders suffer from an effect called “parallax.” The viewfinder and the lens are two different optics with slightly different points of view. When working close to the subject, this can create a noticeable difference between what you intended to shoot and what you shot.

PARALLAX



What the viewfinder sees...



What
the lens
captures.



Parallax

What the
viewfinder sees...



What the lens
captures.



To Fix Parallax

Many rangefinder style viewfinders have parallax compensation lines in the viewfinder, they can be used to frame up the picture. The easiest solution, when the situation permits, is to use the LCD finder on the back of the camera for critical composition of an image.

...and finally...

When composing an image, when the situation permits, allow your eye to take a little walk through the scene in the viewfinder or on the LCD screen, just to make sure everything in the scene is as it should be...

Check out the scene!

1. What is behind, above and beside each person's head?
2. What's happening between people in the background?
3. Where are their feet, and what's near them?
4. What's at the top and bottom of the frame?
5. What's at each side of the frame?
6. Will the subject fit different aspect ratios?
7. If it matters, is the horizon level?
8. What's approaching from either side?

Compose Yourself!

Use the tools of composition.

1. Rule of Thirds
2. Repetitive Features
3. S-Curves
4. Converging Lines
5. Texture
6. Room to Move

Shoot vertically and horizontally. Try unusual angles.

If you have questions, call or email me.

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