

Welcome to
Imber Court Photo Training
Online Diploma Course
Module 8



Understanding Your DSLR

Composition of an image

Have you ever looked at a photograph and wondered why it's such a good image? There are three key elements to what makes a great image, it must be:

- Technically Correct
- Well Composed
- Contain Emotion

Firstly the shot needs to be technically correct which is what we have been concentrating on so far in the course. This means the image must be captured with the correct shutter speed and aperture, be well exposed and sharp.

Secondly the image needs to be well composed, Wikipedia gives the definition of photographic composition as 'the placement or arrangement of visual elements or ingredients in a work of art'. We will look at composition in this module.

Lastly the image should contain an element of emotion! This is something that no one can teach you, it's all about being in the right place at the right time to capture an event or scene in the correct lighting conditions. We normally tell photographers that this is when you look at an image and say wow! or ahhh!



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Composition of an image

Lighting

Light is more than just how bright or dark it is; it's also the key to the look, mood and atmosphere of your images. The direction of the light will affect how the shape and texture of your subject appears, while the colour and how soft or harsh the light is can totally change a shot's appearance. There are three basic characteristics of light that determine how your shot will look: how harsh or soft it is, the direction and the colour. It's easiest to tell the quality of the light by looking at the shadows, rather than the areas in the light. Harsh, direct light creates strong, well-defined shadows, while the shadows created by more diffused lighting are much softer. The location of the shadows tells you where the light is coming from, as they appear on the opposite side to the light. How hard or soft the light appears is due to the apparent size of the light source from the subject's position. A small light source produces hard, directional light, while a very large light source produces much softer light. Remember it isn't the actual size of the light that matters; it's how it appears to the subject that you are shooting. For example, the sun is huge, but because it is so far from the subject it acts like a tiny light source. The direction of a light source, and the shadows it creates, will affect how the texture and form of the subject will appear. Light from the camera position (or behind it) will produce flat light on the subject, and also create shadows directly behind the subject. This is good for capturing fine detail, but won't reveal much of the texture or shape in the subject. You'll get much more interesting results when the light is coming from one side of the subject. This effect, known as side lighting, produces shadows on the opposite side to the position of the light, revealing texture and contours in the subject. A common photography lighting situation you'll encounter shooting outside during the middle of the day is when the light is falling from above the subject. This can create unflattering results, especially when shooting portraits, as the eyes will be dark, and there will be shadows under the nose and chin.

How white balance affects the quality of photography lighting

Along with the quality and direction of the light, the colour of different light sources can have an effect on the appearance and mood of your images. This variation in light is known as the colour temperature, and it's why your camera has a white balance setting to correct the colours from these different coloured light sources. The colour temperature of light is measured using the Kelvin scale. The lower the colour temperature, the more red the light will be, while the higher it is the bluer. Normally you'd set a white balance to get neutral coloured results, either by using the automatic setting, or a pre-set white balance such as Tungsten, Sunny or Cloudy. But by setting the 'wrong' white balance you can also use these pre-sets to give warmer or cooler results.

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Viewpoint

Before photographing your subject, take time to think about your position in relation to your subject. Our viewpoint has a massive impact on the composition of our image, and as a result it can greatly affect the message that the shot conveys. Rather than just shooting from eye level, consider photographing from high above, down at ground level, from the side, from the back, from a long way away, from very close up, and so on. We tend to see subjects from somewhere between 5 and 6 feet high, once you alter your position everyday subjects start to become much more interesting in our images.

When starting to compose your image in the viewfinder explore the scene and make sure that there is nothing in the background to distract the viewer.



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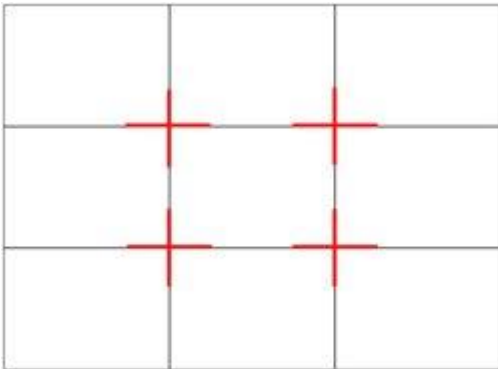
The Rule of Thirds

The **Rule of Thirds** is perhaps the most important principle of photographic composition.

The “Rule of Thirds” is one of the most important things that photographers need to learn as it is the basis for well balanced and interesting shots.

What is the Rule of Thirds?

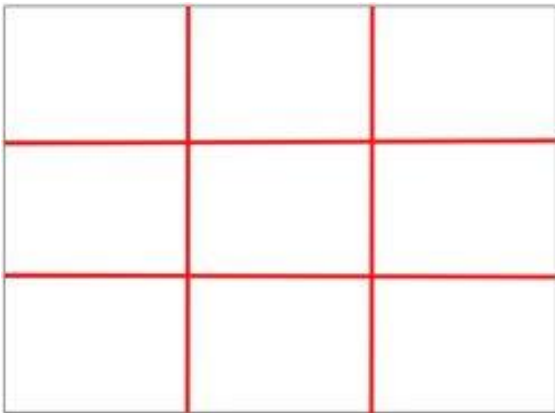
The basic principle behind the rule of thirds is to imagine breaking an image down into thirds (both horizontally and vertically) so that you have 9 parts. As follows. With this grid in mind the ‘rule of thirds’ now identifies four important parts of the image that you should consider placing points of interest in as you frame your image.



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The Rule of Thirds

Not only this – but it also gives you four ‘lines’ that are also useful positions for elements in your photo.



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 centre of the shot – using the rule of thirds works with this natural way of viewing an image rather than working against it.

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Using the Rule of Thirds comes naturally to some photographers but for many of us takes a little time and practice for it to become second nature. In learning how to use the rule of thirds the most important questions to be asking yourself are:

- What are the points of interest in this shot?
- Where am I intentionally placing them?

Remember, rules are there to be broken, but only when we understand how to use them correctly in the first place!

Lastly – keep the rule of thirds in mind as you edit your photos later on in the course. Post production editing tools today have good tools for cropping and reframing images so that they fit within the rules. Experiment with some of your old shots to see what impact it might have on your photos.