



# COMPOSITION & CROPPING

## the rule of thirds

### Shutterbugs Tech Meeting

04 Sep 2015

Images: N.Meyer

Text borrowed and changed from: [photographymad.com](http://photographymad.com)

**Rules of thirds:** Imagine your viewfinder having a grid on it that looks like a tic-tac-toe game and arrange the elements of your shot so that the main element is not in the centre square. This is the rule of thirds in a nutshell and a good starting point for basic composition.

You may not realise it, but every time you bring your camera up to your eye you're making decisions about composition. It's everything from how you choose to frame the picture you're about to make to how far or close you are away from your subject.

No two people are likely to frame the same scene the same way, but there are some general guidelines that can help you improve your photos and make them more interesting and engaging. To start with, think about the different aspects of the picture.

Do you need all that background? Can you get

closer to your subject or zoom in? Would the picture look better as an upright or landscape? And can I apply the rule of thirds?

First you use composition to arrange the main elements of your photo in a pleasing manner. Then you use cropping to fine-tune the image by removing unwanted elements and further adjusting the composition.

The idea is that an off-centre composition is more pleasing to the eye and looks more natural than one where the subject is placed right in the middle of the frame. It also encourages you to make

creative use of negative space, the empty areas around your subject.

You can easily apply the rule of thirds to existing photos by cropping them. This allows you to reposition the important subjects in your image, moving them into more pleasing positions.



**Rules of thirds on people:**

It's a good idea to position people off to one side of the frame. This provides some "breathing space", shows the subject's environment, and stops the photo from looking like a mugshot.

We are naturally drawn to people's eyes. Place them at one of the intersections on the rule of thirds grid to give the shot a clear focal point.

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## breaking the rule

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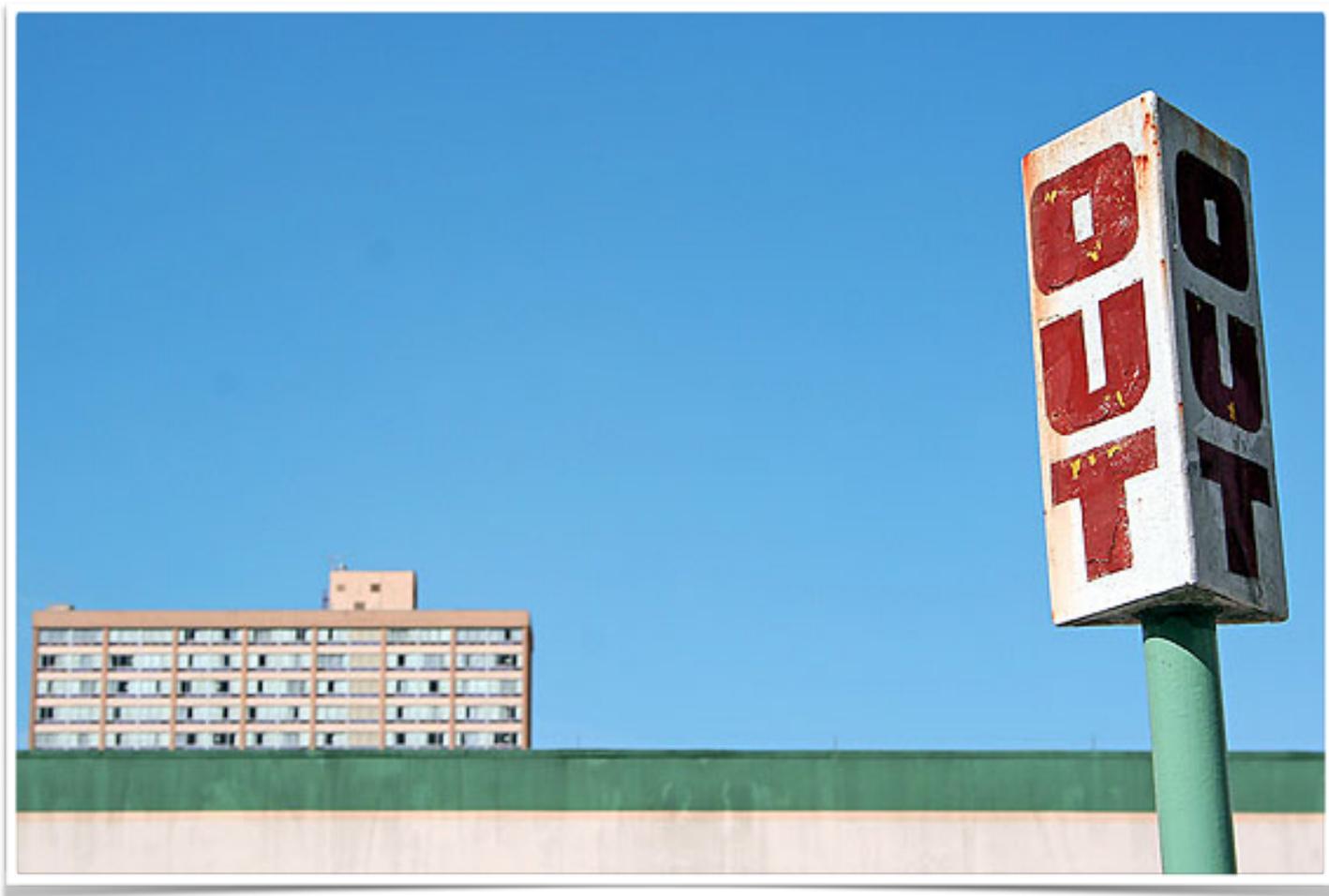
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As with all rules (at least in photography), the rule of thirds doesn't apply in every situation, and sometimes breaking it can result in a much more eye-catching, interesting photo.

Experiment and test out different compositions even if they go against any "rules" you've learned.

However, learn to use the rule of thirds effectively before you try to break it -

that way you can be sure you're doing so in order to get a better composition, rather than just for the sake of it.



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## balancing elements

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Image by Shannon Kokoska.

Images don't need to be the same on each side - but sometimes images can be improved greatly by having a secondary point of interest counter balancing the main focal point of an image and providing those 'empty' spots with a little weight.

Achieving Balance in shots is something that photographers learn over time. The best way to learn it is to scan through some of your older images, looking for those that could be more balanced.



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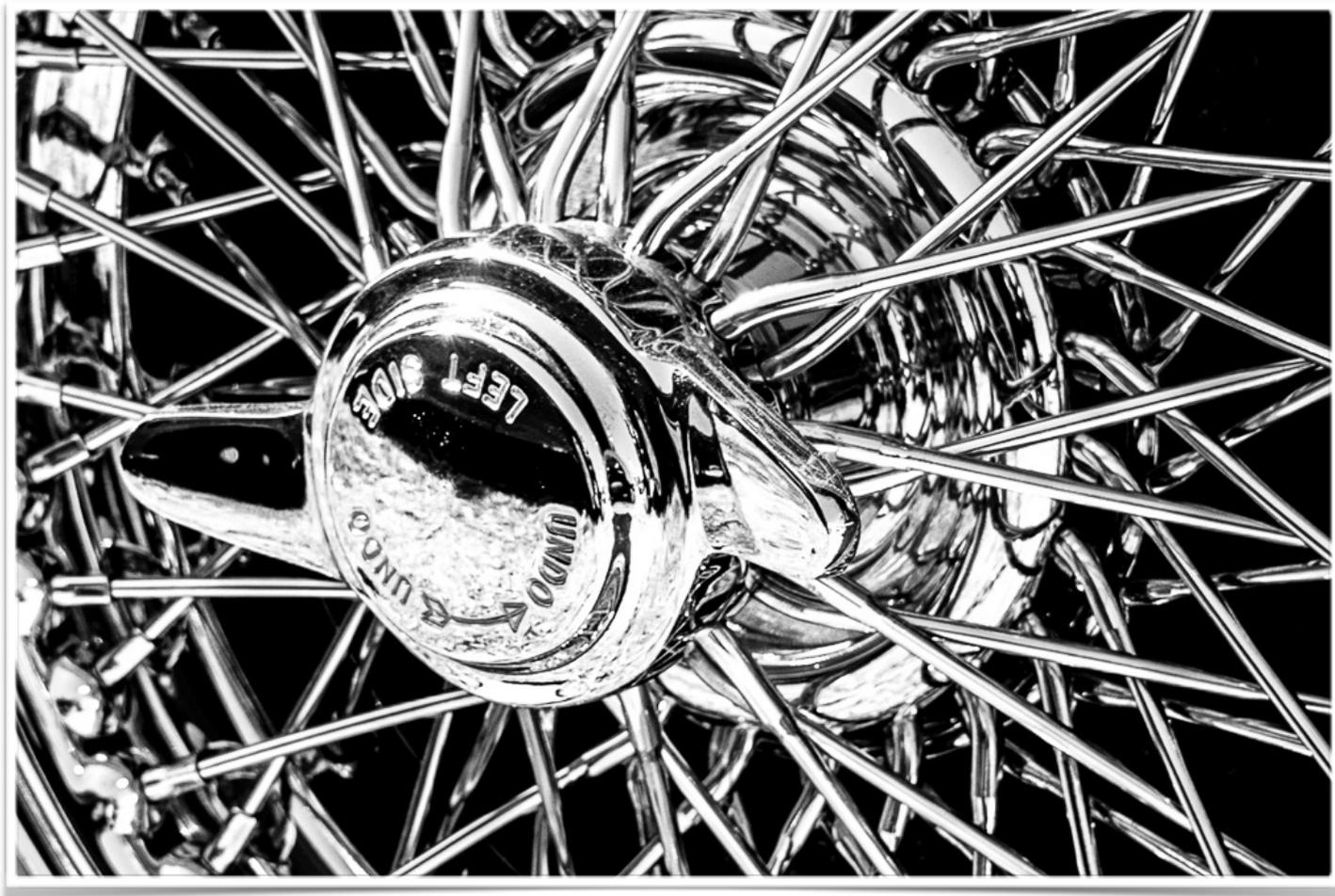
## leading lines

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When we look at a photo our eye is naturally drawn along lines. By thinking about how you place lines in your composition, you can affect the way we view the image, pulling us into the picture, towards the subject, or on a journey "through" the scene.

There are many different types of line - straight, diagonal, curvy, zigzag, radial etc - and each can be used to enhance our photo's composition.



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## symmetry and patterns

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We are surrounded by symmetry and patterns, both natural and man-made. They can make for very eye-catching compositions, particularly in situations where they are not expected. Another great way to use them is to break the

symmetry or pattern in some way, introducing tension and a focal point to the scene.



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## viewpoint

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Before photographing your subject, take time to think about where you will shoot it from. Our viewpoint has a massive impact on the composition of our photo, 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.





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## background

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How many times have you taken what you thought would be a great shot, only to find that the final image lacks impact because the subject blends into a busy background? The human eye is excellent at distinguishing between different elements

in a scene, whereas a camera has a tendency to flatten the foreground and background, and this can often ruin an otherwise great photo. Thankfully this problem is usually easy to overcome at the time of shooting - look around for a plain and

unobtrusive background and compose your shot so that it doesn't distract or detract from the subject.



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## depth

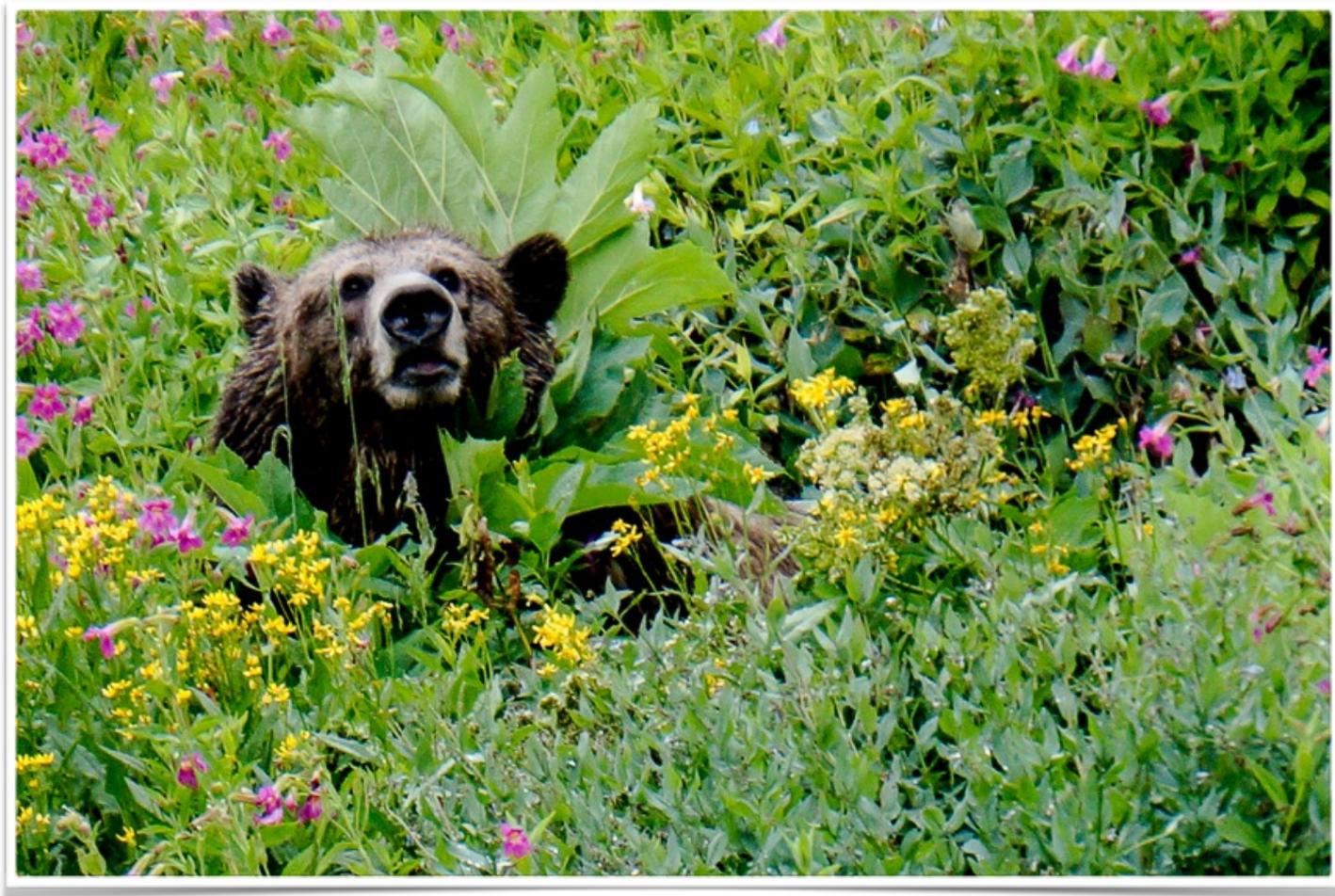
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Because photography is a two-dimensional medium, we have to choose our composition carefully to convey the sense of depth that was present in the actual scene. You can create depth in a photo by including

objects in the foreground, middle ground and background. Another useful composition technique is overlapping, where you deliberately partially obscure one object with another. The human eye naturally

recognises these layers and mentally separates them out, creating an image with more depth.



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## framing

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The world is full of objects which make perfect natural frames, such as trees, archways and holes. By placing these around the edge of the composition you help to isolate the main subject from the outside world.

The result is a more focused image which draws your eye naturally to the main point of interest.



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## cropping

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Often a photo will lack impact because the main subject is so small it becomes lost among the clutter of its surroundings. By cropping tight around the subject you eliminate the background "noise", ensuring the subject gets the viewer's undivided attention.

