

Twelve Steps to better composition

Below we will talk about 12 concepts that will help you with your compositions. It should be known that these are not the only twelve steps to better composition, but there are more than twelve.

1. ***Tell a Story:*** Every photograph tells a story. It may be as simple as what my child looks like, or it may be a profound statement of high art, but every story tells a story. Ask yourself what your subject is and see if everything in the viewfinder is contributing to the story that you want to tell. If there is something that does not belong in the story remove it from view. This can be accomplished by moving the frame, using smaller depth of field or other techniques to eliminate those things that take away from the story that you want to tell.
2. ***See as the Camera Sees:*** Your eyes tend to see what they want to see as your minds selects what it wants to concentrate on and ignore the rest. The camera sees everything equally. Remember that when you are looking through the lens you are seeing the scene with the least amount of depth of field. While looking through the lens, the background seems out of focus, if the F-Stop is set for a smaller aperture, then the resulting photograph will have more depth of field and the background that you thought to be out of focus is sharper than you think. Become friends with your Depth of Field Preview button on your camera. Pay attention to how different focal lengths affect the foreground-background perspective.
3. ***Find a Different Point of View:*** Of the hundreds of thousands of photographs produced each year, 85 to 90 percent of them are taken from eye level. Try to find different points of view for your pictures. Change how people look at your subject and people will find them more interesting.
4. ***See the Photograph before you take the photograph:*** Before you take a photograph think about what the scene would look like as a photograph. Then do all the necessary adjustments to make the image come out as you saw it in your mind's eye. Ansel Adams called this pre-visualizing your photograph.
5. ***Use the roll of film (memory card) as a sketch pad:*** When you come to something that interests you, do not just take one photograph. Shoot to get different points of view, try different things, experiment. Take the first photograph the same way as you always had, try different things. Take a visual risk, do something off beat. Ask your self how can I make this photograph differently.

6. ***Know Something of Your Subject:*** To make the best pictures know something about what you are shooting. Understanding something of the subject will allow you to say something with your photography about the subject. If you are traveling somewhere, spend some time to learn about the history and culture of where you are going. You will enjoy your trip more and come back with better pictures. The advice for writers to know their subjects is good advice for photographers as well.
7. ***Look at Other People's Photographs:*** No one acquires greatness in a vacuum. Be inspired by looking at great photography in books, and magazines and best of all in galleries. Look at the master's work with a questioning eye. Looking at great work will give you a sense of quality that you can bring to your own photographs.
8. ***Create Depth in Your Photographs:*** The photograph is a two dimensional object, depth and dimension has to be created.
9. ***Use a Tripod Whenever Possible:*** Any photograph will be sharper using a tripod, but the use of a tripod will force you to slow down and consider your compositions more. However, do not let the tripod dictate your compositions. Rather make the decisions of point of view before your set up your tripod.
10. ***Look Around the Frame:*** Most mistakes made in photography are made because the photographer did not pay attention to what was behind the subject that the photographer did not see. Look for very strong bright areas in the skies in the background. Remember that the eye goes to the area of greatest contrast.
11. ***Know the Rules of Composition and then Forget Them:*** The rules of composition are very important to learn and to apply. But once you learn about why the rules make sense most of the times do not be afraid to step away from the rules. Breaking the rules with purpose will make the viewer look at your photographs in a new way. But remember, all decisions, either following the rules or breaking the rules must serve the best interest of the photograph. Breaking the rules, just to break them does not make you a great photographer.
12. ***Keep It Simple:*** In composition, less is really more. Visual editing is the cornerstone to good composition.