Photographic Composition

Rule of Thirds
The rule of thirds is the most commonly used principle in photographic composition. Imagine a grid resembling a tic-tac-toe board placed over the scene you are about to photograph. Good composition places subjects of interest along the lines or at any of the points where lines intersect.

The photograph below shows the main subject of interest to be the tree which has been placed near the intersection of lines on the bottom left.

The main point of interest here is the cabin found along interesting lines at bottom right.
**Triangulation**

Studying the works of the master painters can be of great benefit to the photographer. In “Lady and Gentleman in Black” by Rembrandt, triangulation is used to highlight and to isolate two primary points of interest, the faces, and something secondary and as ordinary as a chair.

The concept is to set two primary points of interest along with a secondary point.

![Image of Rembrandt's painting]

In this scene two areas have been set as primary points of interest — the cabin and the fence line — while the hay bales lead the eye back from the primary points of interest.

![Image of a landscape with hay bales and a cabin]

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Leading Lines
The eye is drawn though a photograph when naturally occurring lines are incorporated. Many innovative line types are available such as fences, roads, rivers and so on. In the photo below a fence line is used to guide the eye past the horses and through the scene.

The next two photographs use roads as leading lines.
Balance Through Symmetry

The balance of identical or near identical elements on either side of a vertical or horizontal plane provides symmetry to a photograph.

In this scenic image, a symmetrical balance is achieved between the breakwaters and the two similar mountain vistas to the left and right of the vertical plane.

Balance is achieved by the shape of the curio shop window and by the natural vertical plane formed by the centre window frame.
Balance
A balanced photograph finds a principal object placed on one side of the composition with a secondary object on the other side. Each photograph below uses balance as a compositional method.
Minimalism
Simplicity in a photograph follows the adage that “less is more.” A minimalistic arrangement can be attractive in its presentation by providing nominal, yet adequate amount of detail.

The two horses are emphasized as the main subjects by presenting them with little else.

The old farm wagon is defined in heavy fog with little other detail.
Backgrounds

Often a great photograph can be marred by a distracting background where the subject of interest unintentionally blends into the setting. Images of people and animals especially need unobtrusive and non distracting locales to emphasize the main subject. As much as possible settings should be plain and simple.

The principal subject is the horse which is emphasized by a clean background.

The main subject in this misty photograph is the old tree.
**Depth**

Photographs are essentially two dimensional yet can be created to appear three dimensional by including a foreground, middle ground and background.

This photograph includes three distinct areas: the dwelling at bottom left, the expansive middle ground followed by distant mountains and sky.

Three less expansive areas are used below: the horses on the bottom layer, the old building near the middle followed by forested hills and sky.
Point of View
An interesting and often compelling photograph can be created by breaking from an eye level viewpoint to a more unusual angle. Consider your images from above or below, from the side or even the back.

A fisherman brings in his gill net while stationed on a rock in the Fraser River

![A fisherman bringing in his gill net](image)

Two fishermen captured directly below a bridge.

![Two fishermen below a bridge](image)
Diagonal Lines
Diagonal lines both natural and man-made take many forms and their use can add a dynamic feel to a photograph. Diagonals add a balance and help draw the eye through the image.

Here a natural line created by a rainbow leads the eye across the photograph to rest finally near a distant building.

A fence line runs diagonally across this image to separate a sparse snowy landscape into two parts.
Framing
In considering the composition of a photograph, the technique of framing can be important. Framing here refers to the central object of interest being “framed” by other parts of the image. Framing can add scale, dimension and depth.

In this photograph the lake and distant mountains are framed on one side by a fir tree and on the other by a boardwalk.

A misty fence is set out on either side by trees