

Photography
Composition &
Design

A FUN APPROACH
FOR SERIOUS

ASSIGNMENTS



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Heightening a photo from snapshot to remarkable takes a great understanding of composition and design. As you know, knowledge is nothing without application, so none of the techniques found in this book will do you any good if you don't attempt to apply them to your photography. This is why I've made some fun, simple, and effective **assignments** to get your mind thinking like a master.

These are assignments you can work on, piece by piece. Take a month to get through them, or take a year. No one can become a Michelin star chef in a day, but they can probably learn how to make a killer grilled cheese sandwich. With excellent guidance, and plenty of application, anyone can take huge steps of improvement in their craft...the same applies to your photography. It all depends on your available time and dedication to your art.

These simple assignments will get you to a point where you are confident enough to think, "Ok, I know what that is. It's not a rule, it's a tool in my arsenal, and I'll use it when I need help communicating my photography with clarity."

1. Sort and Print 10 of your best photographs.

Make them 4 x 6 size. Print and cut them yourself if you have a printer. The paper doesn't matter as long as it represents your photo properly (if the paper is thin enough, you can keep them in the back of this book).

Once you have 10 of your best photos printed, write on the back at least **one word** that best describes the reason you chose it. So, if it is a picture of someone laughing you can write "expression." If the elements are beautifully organized within the frame, write "composition." If it's both, and you are starting to understand more about design techniques you might write multiple words like "expression, dominant diagonal, coincidence, aerial perspective."

Doing this will help you identify why you like your photo, plus it will help you analyze your work with new eyes. Be aware of writing words that describe the emotion you feel because this probably won't be equally felt by your viewer. Stick to visual descriptions, not emotional ones.

2. Know your camera settings. Practice your settings so much, that you can change them without looking. I explain how I did this below.

When I first started with the film cameras (which mostly focus manually and don't have auto settings) I would constantly check my settings. I knew what they had to be set on for my subject and lighting scenarios, so it was just a matter of learning to change them quickly when I needed.

My focus and aperture are all I really changed, so I would constantly turn them to get a feeling for the settings. The point was to be able to adjust them without looking. The aperture setting on the Leica R6.2 goes to $f/16$, so when I hold it and spin it counter-clockwise all the way, I'm at $f/16$. If I move it two clicks clockwise, I'm at my typical setting of $f/11$. When the clouds blow over, I can click it clockwise two more times to $f/8$. If I forget what setting I'm at, I can click all the way to $f/16$, then click it clockwise four times and I'll be at $f/8$. Doing this over and over developed my muscle memory, allowing me to change my settings quicker than looking down at them.

The same goes for my focus. If I'm always trying to shoot at the 7ft range, I spin the focus ring counter-clockwise all the way, then turn it clockwise. After about an inch of movement, I would be at the 7ft mark. I would do this back and forth, then visually check to see how close I got.

I also made a point to memorize what the focus was doing when I turned it. When I turned it counter-clockwise, or to the left, it would focus further away. So I think "Left is Longer" and it reminds me

which way to turn it without fiddling around. If I'm already focused at 7ft, then I only have to move it about 1/4 of an inch left to focus on a subject that is 10ft away. Little things like this will allow you to adjust your settings quickly when you need to the most.

3. Identify Your Artistic Style.

Artistic style usually comes over time as you develop your taste for certain subjects and scenarios, but perhaps you're already on your way to focusing your efforts and building your following. Either way, it's great to try and identify what your style is at the moment.

My included answers should give you some guidance when identifying your own.

Subject - What do you like photographing the most?

My Answer: tourists

Your Answer: _____

Intent - What are you trying to communicate to your viewer?

My Answer: humor

Your Answer: _____

Finishing Approach - What is the final look of your photo?

My Answer: film, natural lighting, emphasis on composition

Your Answer: _____

4. Adopt a Mentor: Name at least three artists that inspire you.

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

After you find three artists that inspire you, analyze at least three pieces of their work to learn why you like them.

5. Analyze an Old Photo, then Create Four New Ones.

First: Go through your collection of photos to find one photo that possesses a listed technique below.

You should take the time to analyze your previous work. This is an important step in measuring your progress thus far. Overlay a grid, find an arabesque...see where you stand after learning these new composition techniques. You have a new set of eyes now!

Second: Create four NEW photos with a listed technique below.

Focusing on one technique at a time will help tremendously and allow you to absorb each one without being overwhelmed. I like to call these "studies." Try to make available at least 4-8hrs total shooting time for each technique below. Baby steps to success! Once you get the hang of things, you can start combining techniques as you need. Sometimes you'll capture multiple techniques while you were focusing on one, and that's great!

Work your way down the entire list of techniques. Use the boxes to check off your completed assignments.

Note: it might also help to organize your new photos on the computer by each technique to easily keep track of your progress.

List of Composition and Design Techniques to Master - Capture a photo with:

- Hierarchy of Shapes (large, medium, small)
- Morning Light (sunrise - 9am)
- Evening Light (4pm - sunset)
- Directional Lighting
- Horizontal Lighting
- A Subject on the Shadow's Edge
- The subject as the GAC, or capture them near it
- Clean edges, no Edge Flicker
- A Dominant Diagonal
- A Reciprocal
- Filling the Grid - Identify What Interested You

- Layers** (Foreground, Middle, Background)
- Area Divisions** (work with the square)
- A Straight Horizon Line** (unless it's spontaneous)
- A View from a High Elevation**
- A View from a Low Elevation**
- Nice Figure-Ground Relationship**
- FGR Reversal**
- An Aspective View**
- Separated Shapes**
- Organic Frames within the Frame**
- Inorganic Frames within the Frame**
- A Coincidence**
- An Arabesque**
- An Ellipse**
- Proper Gazing Direction**
- Proper Breathing Room**
- Patterns**
- Gamut** (Repeating Diagonals)
- Echoing Shapes** (Repeating Objects, Subjects, or Gestures)
- The Law of Closure** (where the mind fills the gaps)
- The Law of Proximity** (unite two different objects/subjects)
- Forced Perspective** (create an illusion)
- A Juxtaposition** (use signs/objects to create a contrasting story)
- Pointing Devices** (with the subject or graphic elements)
- Aerial Perspective**
- Clouds, Fog, or Smoke** (must be near the subject)
- A Lens Flare** (must wrap around the subject)
- Reflections** (can be mirrors, puddles, or sunglasses)
- Fleeting Moments** (must use the decisive moment)
- Added Life** (Anticipate Gestures)
- Expressions**
- A Long Exposure**
- A Sequence** (around 3-7 photos per sequence, no more)
- A Mousetrap**
- A Random Act of Weird**

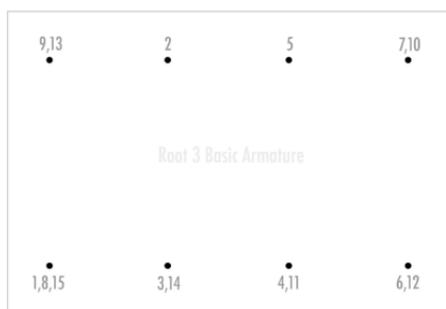
- A Permission Portrait (remember to compliment and smile)
- The Colors Red, Yellow, Blue & Green (try for a hierarchy)
- Repeating Colors amongst subjects

6. Start a Project: List Two Reoccurring Themes in Your NEW Photos:

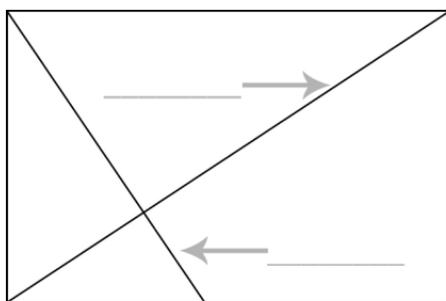
1. _____
2. _____

7. Teach a technique to a friend. This is the best way to remember the techniques and help others that are struggling with composition.

8. Complete the dot to dot diagram. Easily create your first root rectangle. Dynamic symmetry should be fun, and not frightening.



9. Identify the diagonals below. These were the same two diagonals Bresson would consistently use in his photography.



10. Have a ton of fun. This is an absolute must...take care!

FIELD NOTES



FIELD NOTES





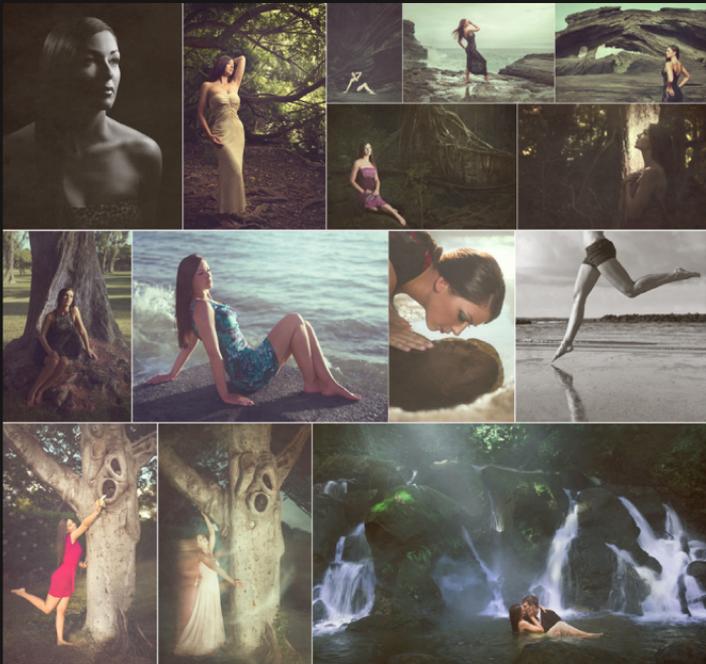
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THIRSTY FOR MORE KNOWLEDGE?

An exciting **blog**, **books**, and **videos** are also available, which teach you composition, design, and Gestalt psychology techniques!

WITHOUT COMPOSITION ART CANNOT FLOURISH!





#photography

#composition

#techniques

#waikiki

#hawaii

#beach

#design

#humor

#funny

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#streetphotography

#dynamicsymmetry