

Just for **Beginners!**

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The first in a series of short instructional articles for beginning photographers, the following is intended to help those that want to go beyond snapshots. Watch for the series each month.

Composition Planning

Composition is the arrangement of the elements in the picture. Composition serves the purpose of leading the viewer's eye to the primary subject and then to items of supporting interest. The composition also affects the viewer's emotional response to the image.

Beginners tend to place the primary subject in the center of the picture without considering the subject's shape, size, or relationship to other objects. Perhaps, the photographer has chosen the center on purpose. More likely, the beginner has not formulated a plan.

The first part of the plan is to understand why the subject is appealing to him or her. The second part is to experiment with the various compositions to find the best one to achieve the objective of getting that message across to the viewer.

Changing the composition in the viewfinder (or LCD monitor) is as easy as moving the body left or right, up or down, and forwards or backwards. Tilting and leaning can place the primary subject matter in a different area of the frame. Various lens focal lengths also change the composition.

A reason to change the composition can be to eliminate distractions. Beginners need to be careful to avoid anything that reduces the importance of the main subject. A careful examination of everything in the picture may reveal telephone poles growing out of a person's head, a crooked horizon, bright sunlit spots in the background, or other telltale signs of beginning photographers!

The goal is to have the viewer notice the primary subject first. The other items in the image will either support or detract from the primary subject. The conscious choice of a composition is based on this interaction between the most important subject and all the other items in the image.

Although there are known techniques of composition that help lead the viewer's eye to the main subject, these so-called rules are based on considering the form of the subject itself and on eliminating distractions. A beginning photographer can improve by careful evaluation of the layout and appearance of all elements in the image. 📷