

# Vocabulary

2024-2025 Cultural Arts and Heritage  
KEHA State Supported Lesson

Photographs have many purposes. We take photographs while celebrating occasions, to help us remember a significant event, or just because we like what we see. Photographs are evidence of a moment in time. When we make the effort to view a photograph, whether that is holding a physical photograph in our hand, flipping through pages in a photo album, staring at a photograph hung on the wall, or “swiping” the screen on our phones, we have the freedom to look anywhere on the photograph. But often our eyes (unknowingly) tend to concentrate on certain areas of the photograph. This occurs because the **elements and principles of art** naturally guide our focus. The elements and principles of art are listed below; these were defined in our Year One emphasis. *Refer to “Elements and Principles of Art Vocabulary,” HSC-EPA.900 for details.*

## Elements of art

**Line, shape, form, space, texture, value, and color** are the physical or visual components with which an artist creates a work of art.

## Principles of art

**Unity, variety, proportion, balance, contrast, emphasis, movement, rhythm, and pattern** are the effects or results that are created based on the use of the elements of art noted above.



## Concepts for photography composition

If a person's goal is to make a photograph that others will *want to look at* and *react to*, then incorporating the elements and principles of art in the composition is the way to accomplish this. Here, **composition** refers to how the objects in a photograph are arranged in relation to each other and appear to the viewer. And the concepts of a well-composed, “visually pleasing” photograph are based on the Elements and Principles of Art listed on the previous page. Examples of successful composition in photography begin below.

## Light and photography

No matter how well-composed a photograph is, if the subject is not in focus, is blurred, or is poorly lit, it is difficult to appreciate the composition. Fortunately,

you can easily set many cameras to focus on the intended subject and adjust to the existing lighting so the resulting photographic image looks as good as it can. And by experimenting with the **aperture**, **shutter speed**, and **ISO sensitivity** settings on a camera, photographs can make the captured moment look even more amazing than the way it appeared when the moment actually happened. Take a basic photography class to learn more about how these camera settings relate to light and movement of the subject matter. Understanding how to control these is a part of successful composition.

- **Aperture:** size of the lens opening that allows light to pass through to the film or image sensor
- **Shutter speed:** length of time the lens is open; controls how much light makes it through to the film or image sensor
- **ISO sensitivity:** standard numeric value indicating how sensitive the film or image sensor is to light

## Composition examples

### Rule of thirds

By dividing a photo into thirds, vertically and horizontally (with imaginary lines), the points of intersection can be natural focal points.

Create interest in your photo by positioning objects near these intersecting lines.

In this photo, we are naturally drawn to the donkey's eye, the person's profile, the donkey being fed, and the smaller donkey in the lower left area.

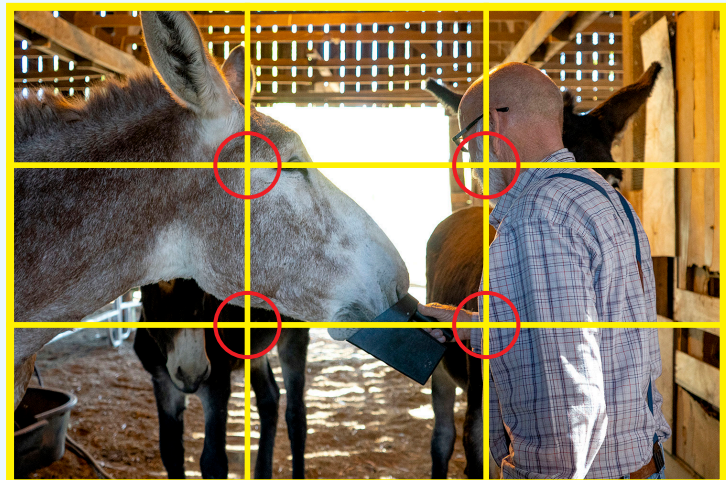


Photo Credit: Brooklyn Walters, [https://picturekentucky.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/20221008\\_bwalters\\_JoePenn002.jpg](https://picturekentucky.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/20221008_bwalters_JoePenn002.jpg)



## Framing

Position your camera so that objects in your view create a “frame” or emphasis for your intended focal point; having objects in the foreground and background create depth.

Here, the fencing and position of the person “frame” the horse’s head.

Does your eye go to the horse first? Or the person first?



Photo Credit: Michael Smallwood, [https://picturekentucky.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/20221006\\_msmallwood\\_00922.jpg](https://picturekentucky.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/20221006_msmallwood_00922.jpg)

## Leading lines

Because photographs are two-dimensional, they only have height and width (no true depth).

Use strong lines to guide the viewer’s eye. These “leading lines” can pull us “IN” and tell our eyes where to go.

Here, the headers that span over the stall doors form the “lines” that emphasize this perspective and draw our eyes through to the other end of the barn.



Photo Credit: Jack Weaver, <https://picturekentucky.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/Jack04.jpg>

## Balance

The positioning of a subject in a photograph may create a “visual weight” — pulling our eyes to it. In a balanced photograph, our eyes will keep moving around because the “weight” of the main subject is balanced by other things in the photograph.

Here, the three wall hangings in the upper left corner of this photograph balance the “visual weight” of the person at the bottom right of the photograph.



Photo Credit:  
Nyah  
Leveretter,  
[https://picturekentucky.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/20221008\\_nleveretter\\_Honduran003.jpg](https://picturekentucky.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/20221008_nleveretter_Honduran003.jpg)

## Perspective / Viewpoint

Positioning the camera at an unusual angle, an unexpected distance, or not at eye level can create visual interest.

Here, we may feel like we are in the same space as the person in the photograph.

Do you feel the need to check your surroundings to make sure there are no cars coming down this road?



Photo Credit:  
Gordon Parks,  
Invisible Man,  
Harlem, NY, 1952  
(printed 2016),  
gelatin silver print.  
Collection of the  
UK Art Museum,  
purchase: Robert C.  
May Photography  
Fund.

## Depth of field

Give a sense of depth to photographs and make the viewer feel like they are part of the physical space by capturing objects in the foreground, middle ground, and background.

Here, we pay attention to the subject on the right because he is in focus (in addition to being recognizable); and his positioning on the right side leaves room for his gaze.



Photo Credit:  
C. Thomas Hardin,  
Photograph of  
Muhammed Ali,  
undated, color  
photograph  
on KODAK paper  
with matte finish.  
Collection of the  
UK Art Museum,  
purchase: Art  
Museum Funds.

## Background

Pay attention to what is in the background as you're looking through the camera. Items in the background may distract from your main subject, or the background may provide the right amount of contrast.

Remember to look beyond your subject before you "snap the photo" to make sure you're pleased with what you see. Experiment by changing your angle or physically moving an object out of view.

Here, the contrast (against the background) provided by the subject's orange hat and shoelaces draw our eyes to the lower half of the photograph, but the other object that is cresting the hill may also capture our interest and make us wonder what is back there.



Photo Credit:  
Eric Comley,  
Garrard  
County  
KY 4-H Agent



## Capturing a moment

In reality, all photographs “capture moments,” but in this case, we’re referring to a “moment” that is part of a bigger story.

Here, the photographer has captured a special moment (of hugs and excitement) between subjects.

We may subconsciously “fill in the blanks” about what has just happened, or what will happen next.



Photo Credit:  
Bryce Towle,  
<https://picturekentucky.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/Bryce2.jpg>

## Motion

Experiment with shutter speed, the movement of the main subject, or use a tripod to make intentional motion a focal point.

For this image, the photographer noted that (the subject) is the “calm in the shop as the action happens all around him.”



Photo Credit:  
Brooklyn  
Walters,  
[https://picturekentucky.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/20221008\\_bwalters\\_broadwayclay002.jpg](https://picturekentucky.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/20221008_bwalters_broadwayclay002.jpg)

## Repetition

Look for strong, graphic shapes or colors that are repeated. Elements that are opposite of, or in contrast to, the repeated shape or color, will become the focal point.

Here, we may be mesmerized by the black and white checkered floor or the identical set up of each booth. We notice the person sitting on the stool because their positioning breaks up the repetitive pattern of the round, red stool tops.



Photo Credit: Austin Collier, [https://picturekentucky.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/20221006\\_acollier\\_cliffside001-1300x867.jpg](https://picturekentucky.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/20221006_acollier_cliffside001-1300x867.jpg)

## Silhouette

When subjects are lit from behind, we may see a dark shape outline and interesting contrast.

In this photo, we see the dome of the Kentucky Capitol and, in silhouette form, the scaffolding for maintenance work is prominent.

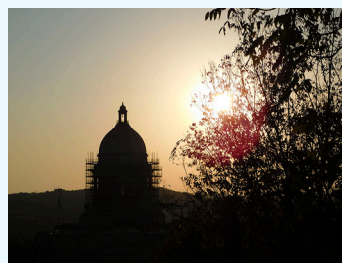


Photo Credit:  
Austin Collier,  
[https://picturekentucky.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/20221007\\_acollier\\_02009.jpg](https://picturekentucky.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/20221007_acollier_02009.jpg)

## Is it a good photograph?

Photographs that are “visually pleasing” because of their composition and incorporation of the elements and principles of art are usually the ones that win ribbons and awards. But **there is nothing wrong with a photograph** that is blurry, poorly lit, or poorly composed **if it’s of a special person, place, or thing you love!**



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## Photograph examples used with permission from:

- Eric Comley, Garrard County 4-H Agent
- Picture Kentucky: <https://picturekentucky.org>
- David Stephenson, Associate Professor, School of Journalism and Media
- University of Kentucky Art Museum

## Resources:

Quinn, S. (n.d.). Making photographs. The Poynter Institute, [poynter.org](http://poynter.org).

University of Minnesota Extension. (2023). Photography lessons and resource guide. Retrieved March 27, 2024, from [https://docs.google.com/document/d/1oe45tGmujjLS5Mp\\_uun8HzH4y5QteQGBJw-5mCZISnI8](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1oe45tGmujjLS5Mp_uun8HzH4y5QteQGBJw-5mCZISnI8)

Way, C. (2006). Focus on photography: A curriculum guide. International Center of Photography. Retrieved March 27, 2024, from [https://www.icp.org/sites/default/files/icp\\_curriculum\\_guide\\_part1\\_0.pdf](https://www.icp.org/sites/default/files/icp_curriculum_guide_part1_0.pdf)

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