

Teaching Photography: Learning to take pictures

First, you need to **teach the basics**. There are typically 7 main **rules of composition**:

- 1. Rule of thirds.** Think of a tic-tac-toe board. The points where the lines overlap are suggestive of where you want your subject placed. Basically, you don't want your focal point dead center.
- 2. Leading lines.** These are lines- anything from a road to a fence line to a shadow line- that draw your eye to follow them into, out of, or through a picture. They involve you and create interest.
- 3. Triangles.** Shapes can be found throughout photos if you think outside the box. Triangles are an eye-catcher because of the 3 points. (Uneven numbers are always more interesting to the eye.) These are formed from things like two eyes and a nose on a person's face. Flowers are great for triangles, as the petals can offer several. Even different subjects can create triangles. Think of a person on a bike. The head and the two tires, the head and handlebars, or the pedals, head and handlebars. The possibilities are endless!
- 4. Horizon line.** The horizon line is typically where the land meets the sky. You want to keep this off-center. If it cuts right across the middle of your photo, that's precisely the effect it has on the viewer- chopping your picture in half. The **rule of thirds** applies well here, also. Having your horizon line at one of those thirds makes the photo much more appealing.
- 5. Get close.** Simply said. Use your camera to crop the image before you take it, and there's less work for later. A cow in the middle of a large field gets lost. The front- (or back-) half of the cow is a much more interesting subject.
- 6. K.I.S.S. (Keep It Simple, Silly!)** If you have a cluttered background or too much subject matter, the focus of the picture can get lost. The observer doesn't know where to look if there's too much involved in the photograph. That can not only make for bad photos, but uninteresting ones because we don't want to spend the time searching for the point of the image.
- 7. Framing.** Using a doorway or arch in a tree to "frame" your subject can make it more interesting. Keep the frame in the foreground or next to your subject.

These rules can make the difference between a photograph and a snapshot, between art and just snapping a picture, between taking pictures and being a photographer. Once the basics have been explained, make sure your students understand them so they can **put them into practice**. You could:

- Show them a photo and have them tell you what rule(s) are represented.
- Give them a rule and have them show you a photo example.
- Give them a rule and have them take pictures using only that rule.