

COMPOSITION - the vocabulary of photography

by Stuart A. Oring

COMPOSITION HAS TWO PURPOSES: To aid perception so that the *idea feeling* of the photographer can be evoked in the audience and to achieve a state of balance in the photograph so that diverse elements can be pulled together for the sake of unity.

Photography — a visual language — has a vocabulary consisting of shapes, lines, textures, patterns, colors, areas of light and dark, sharp images and blurred ones. Just as you must arrange words in coherent order if you want to make sense when you speak or write, so too must you put these visual elements together in a well-organized manner if your picture is to convey its meaning clearly and vividly.

Composition means arrangement — the orderly putting together of parts to make a unified whole. It's the basic structure of your picture that ties everything together. A good photograph needs a sound basic structure just as does any other organized expression of the human spirit.

A well-composed picture is more satisfying and interesting to look at than one that is confusing, disorganized. It satisfies our desire for order, balance, proportion and completeness. It gets its point across more quickly, too, because it guides the viewer's eye to important things and keeps his attention from straying outside the picture or getting lost among extraneous details.

And there's still another reason why composition is important: It can evoke an emotional response in the viewer. You can use these emotional effects to reinforce the ideas and feelings you want the picture to express. For example, certain shapes have a personality of their own — they seem light and feminine or ponderous and powerful. They can soothe, startle, amuse, or threaten us.

Lines, too, can have an emotional effect, appearing graceful or disturbing with abrupt and jagged movements. Tones of light and dark, and the contrasts between them, also have great power to affect us.

For all these reasons, composition is crucial to the success or failure of every picture you make — no matter what the subject.

There are no iron-clad rules you can mechanically apply to ensure good composition every time. Composing is a personal, intuitive act. There are, however, basic principles that govern the

way visual elements behave and interact when you put them together inside the four borders of a photograph. Once you sharpen your vision and grasp these basic ideas, you'll have the potential means for making your pictures more exciting and effective than ever.

BASIC TRAINING IN PHOTOGRAPHIC SEEING

An essential step in learning to compose photographs effectively is to train yourself to see in a keener, more perceptive way than you may be accustomed to doing. Most people go through life half-blind, not using their vision actively to observe their surroundings.

A photographer lives through his eyes. Seeing involves the mind as well as the eye. A good photographer is acutely aware of his surroundings, seeing things not only in terms of their customary applications and meaning but also in their purely visual aspects.

To master composition, you need to cultivate this ability to see shapes and tones as shapes and tones, not just recognizable objects. More than that, you must be able to visualize in your mind's eye how they will look when reproduced on a flat piece of paper.

The realism of photography sometimes makes this difficult to do. We tend to concentrate so much on what the visual elements *represent* that we fail to see how they interact from the standpoint of composition.

Learning to see the purely visual compositional aspects of a scene, and to imagine what it will look like as a photographic image, can be acquired only by practice and experience. At first, it may be necessary for you to make a conscious effort to see in this way, but eventually it should become an unconscious, automatic habit.

Your camera's groundglass or viewfinder is the most important aid you have in composing your photographs. It helps you pre-visualize the picture in a number of ways. First, of course, it shows you how much of the subject your camera is putting on film. The through-the-lens viewing of a single-lens reflex or a view camera is the most accurate in this respect. Other types of cameras may require some degree of aiming correction (parallax compensation) when you photograph close objects.

The frame lines or edges of the groundglass mark the boundaries inside which

you must arrange your picture — another important aid. Any camera with a groundglass or optical viewfinder gives you the effect of seeing an image of the subject projected onto a flat surface, thus helping you picture what things will look like in the print. Some people can compose more readily on a groundglass; others prefer an optical viewfinder. It's largely a matter of personal taste.

Some types of viewing systems show you very closely what will be sharp or unsharp in the picture. With others you may have to judge this effect yourself, based on previous experience with the different depth of field you get at different f-stops and focusing distances.

What a viewfinder can't do is show you how your subject will look in b/w. This is a skill you can acquire only by practice in seeing and shooting.

SELECT AND SIMPLIFY

A painter has total freedom to put anything he wants into his picture or to leave anything out. We use the camera to isolate a limited portion of reality that has beauty or meaning for us. The space fenced off by the four edges of the camera's groundglass or viewfinder is our picture area just as the canvas is the picture area for the painter.

One of the basic things you must decide about this picture area is *what to include in it and what to leave out*. The visual universe is chaotic. You must select and simplify so that the viewer clearly understands what you're telling him. You should eliminate everything that is not essential to your picture because these non-essentials distract from what you are trying to say.

The basic principle is this: *Show as much as you need but no more*. Select only those elements that are absolutely necessary to convey the meaning or emotion you want the picture to communicate. Be ruthless in eliminating unnecessary or distracting details.

Inexperienced photographers show too much in their pictures. In a futile attempt to get everything in they obscure the subject and confuse the picture's meaning. Or, they are timid about coming to grips with their subject, of moving in close enough to show important details large and clear. Sometimes showing very little will tell your story most effectively and will produce the most powerful result.

Remember, too, that the human eye sees selectively, noticing only things that are important or interesting to the person at the time he looks. But a camera's

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vision is impartial and objective; it records everything within its span of view. You must do the selecting.

Composing a photograph is partly a matter of compressing and condensing your meaning into as terse a statement as possible. This *economy of means* — conveying the most information or emotion with the least expenditure of words, visual forms, or other symbols — is a quality of most great art. It's a quality well worth cultivating in your photographs, too. It can lend strength and clarity to your statement — and make it easier to compose because there are fewer elements to work with.

This does not mean that every photograph you make should be starkly simple and contain only a few elements. Sometimes complexity and a profusion of details may be exactly the effect you want. But even with a complex subject, try to include *only the minimum number of elements you need to tell the story.*

METHODS OF CONTROL

You have a number of ways to control what goes into your picture area. These include:

(1) *Shooting Distance.* To get more in your picture, move away from your subject; to get less move closer.

(2) *Changing Lenses.* Use a wide-angle lens to include more of the subject without changing your shooting distance; use a long lens to get less.

(3) *Camera Angle.* By selecting your camera angle with care you often can eliminate distracting or extraneous elements. For example, shooting up from a low level might get rid of a too-busy background and replace it with bare sky. Moving slightly to the right or left may enable you to work around some foreground object that would be distracting if you left it in the picture.

(4) *Arranging the Subject.* If the subject is under your direct control — a still life, for instance — you can put things in, take them out and arrange them exactly as you like.

(5) *Timing.* This is an indirect but often important way to control what goes into your picture. You can wait to take the picture until moving objects are out of the picture area or they may be just right at a somewhat later time.

(6) *Cropping.* Cutting off portions of your picture when you make a print or have a slide duplicated offers still another means of control.

(7) *Lighting.* Because shadows can enhance or destroy the composition, lighting must be carefully controlled. Shadows can hide distracting objects, give form to the subject, help define texture, or change the shape of an object. Where they fall in the picture space, their shape, and intensity are important compositional elements.

Alone or in combination, these methods give you the power to select the most significant things and concentrate the viewer's attention on them.

MAKING THE LAWS OF PERCEPTION WORK FOR YOU

The photographer must be concerned with negative space or the shape between two objects. Sometimes, the shape of the negative space will suggest a third object. Painters and artists are well aware of negative space. In photography, it is rarely possible to use negative space deliberately. The photographer, however, needs to be aware of the shapes that negative space creates or his images may reveal things that everyone sees but himself.

When the figure-ground or negative-positive space are similar, perception is usually difficult. If this occurs, the photographer may find it necessary to change camera position, focus selectively, use filters, or otherwise change the tonal contrast.

Sometimes two objects that are important to the picture are similar in tone or color. The edges of one object may blend in with the other object and so they are not perceived as separate forms. This is a common problem in photography and leads to confusion. It should be avoided by watching separation carefully. Generally, light objects placed in front of light backgrounds, medium tones in front of other medium tones, or dark objects placed in front of other dark objects should be avoided.

Lighting may be used to achieve separation of objects. Giving one object more light than another will make it shift up the tonal scale and appear lighter in the print. An edge light on the back of a medium tone or dark object will separate it from the background. If two objects are light, and they overlap, it is often possible to light one object less than the other or to shield light from one of the objects.

A filter can be used to lighten or darken one tone or the other. For example, green and red might photograph similarly in b/w photography, but a green filter could be used to lighten green or a red filter could be used to lighten red.

The smaller an area of space, the greater is the probability that it will be seen as figure. The larger an area of space, the greater is the probability that it will be seen as ground. Contrast is important because it can make it easier to see visual patterns as "figure" against "ground."

The proximity or nearness of objects facilitates grouping. Sometimes, it is useful to arrange objects close together or to place an object in front of another to unify the composition and to relate objects to one another. If you do this, be

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careful that the lines of one object do not conflict with those of another. For example, people photographed with objects behind them frequently look as though the objects are coming out of their head.

Close cropping or the proximity of lines and objects can be disturbing. Particularly, when the photograph has two objects which lack breathing space between them or when cropped parts of the body are only slightly cut off.

Visual elements that are similar in shape, size, color, etc., tend to be seen as related. Photographers and artists sometimes use symbolic associations to provide similarity and grouping. Visual elements that require the fewest number of interruptions will be grouped to form continuous straight or curved lines. Nearly complete familiar lines and shapes are more readily seen as complete (closed) than incomplete. Sometimes a good arrangement makes a geometric form such as a triangular structure.

HOW TO ARRANGE SHAPES

Composition is the art of *using space effectively*, not just filling it, but arranging shapes and tones within it so that they help convey the picture's meaning and reinforce its emotional effect.

For a photographer, the space to be utilized is the area on his groundglass or inside the frame lines of his viewfinder. Every time you make a photograph, you must decide how to use this space to best advantage. What should you include in it and what should you leave out? How big should you make things? Where should you place them in relation to each other and to the edges of the picture?

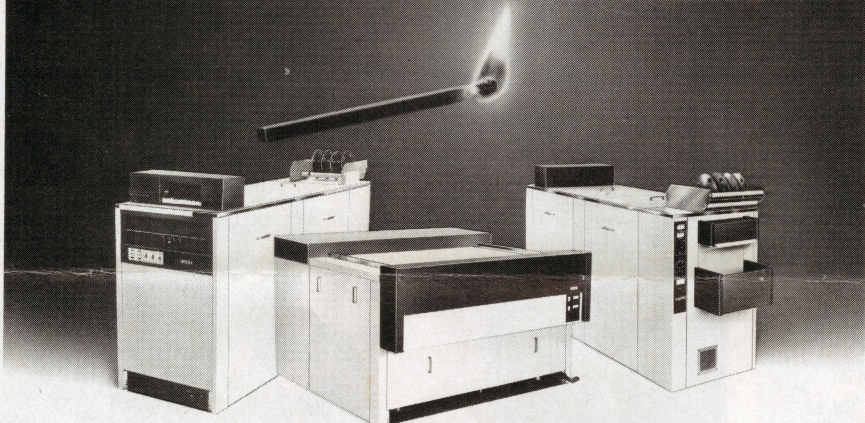
Sometimes — with a still life or studio subject under your direct control — you have time to ask yourself consciously these questions and then change the camera position and rearrange the subject until things look right.

Other times — with a dynamic, uncontrolled subject — you'll need to respond swiftly and intuitively to the shifting pattern of shapes you see in your viewfinder. When you see something you like, you shoot.

Of course, you may decide later to modify the picture area by cropping when you make a print. But there are esthetic and technical reasons why you should compose as tightly and precisely as possible at the instant of exposure. In the first place, this is a good discipline that sharpens your eye and tends to discourage sloppy, aimless shooting. Second, you'll get sharper, finer-grained prints if you utilize the full negative area. Enlarging a small portion of a negative — especially 35mm — is bound to result in some loss of technical quality.

(Continued next month.)

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(Continued from last month)

If the basic structure works, the photograph will work. Diverse elements can be put into the same area and pulled together, if a photograph balances.

VISUAL WEIGHT

Visual "weight" — the tendency of a picture element to seem heavy — is much more subtle and complex than the physical weight of an object. It depends on such things as size, tone, shape, location in the picture area, texture, and "human interest." These visual elements must be judged subjectively. You must experiment with different viewpoints or trip your shutter at just the right instant when everything feels in balance.

However, psychological experiments have come up with some guidance — some things to look for and consider. We've listed some of these things in chart form. On the left-hand side of the chart are qualities that generally make a picture element seem heavier; on the right-hand side are contrasting qualities that generally seem to make it lighter.

Qualities that tend to ADD visual weight	Qualities that tend to REDUCE visual weight
large size	small size
dark tone	bright tone
dark color	light color
irregular shape	smooth, regular shape
human interest — a recognizable object of human use, an animal, a human being or part of a human being (especially the face)	abstract shape or form, not directly related to human beings
location close to center of the picture area	location away from central picture area
location in the upper part of picture area	location in the lower part of picture area
location on right side	location on left side
isolated by space	crowded close to other shapes

TIMING AND BALANCE

In any situation where people or ob-

jects move, timing becomes a direct tool of composition. You need to be alert to catch the instant when all the elements of your picture come into balance. With a moving subject, a good arrangement may form and come apart very quickly. Therefore, you should be thoroughly at home with your camera — able to handle its controls quickly and surely. And you need to sharpen your awareness so you can quickly recognize and capture the decisive moment when it comes.

LINES

When you look into your viewfinder to take a picture, be aware of lines too. You can use lines to guide a viewer's eyes to the heart of your picture.

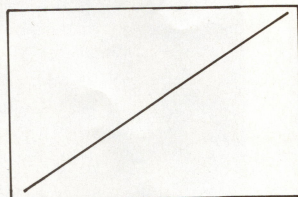
Sometimes they are lines you can actually see in the object. Sometimes they are invisible — but they can be powerful even if unseen. For example, the shape or motion of an object or the direction of a glance can command our eyes to move in a certain direction.

The types of lines are important because they suggest movement and direction; they set up paths that lead a viewer's eye through your pictures.

Look for strong, interesting lines that guide the viewer's eye to what you want to emphasize. Use lines to connect different shapes or objects, thus knitting the picture together into a more unified composition.

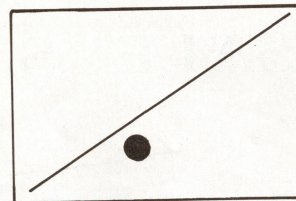
Whenever possible, try to arrange things so that no strong lines lead to unimportant details or carry the eye right out of the picture.

The directional quality of a line may be somewhat ambiguous if we see it by itself. In the left half of the diagram below, does the line run uphill to the right or downhill to the left?



If we add a circle to the line (as in the right half of the diagram), our eye tends to move uphill, to the right.

The general principle is this: Everything else equal, our eye tends to move along a line in a direction from the area of lesser



visual and psychological interest to the area of greater interest.

The corner of a picture is a particularly powerful area. If a strong line runs through it, this tends to pull our eye right out of the picture. Avoid this effect if you can.

Lines have an emotional quality, too. Curved lines tend to be soothing and pleasing, jagged lines have an explosive quality; verticals are dignified, horizontals often seem restful and serene; diagonals are lively, restless, and active.

LIGHT AND DARK TONES

One of photography's unique powers is its ability to record a wide, subtle range of tones from sparkling whites through the various shades of gray to rich blacks. Tones are a vital part of a photograph's composition and worth your careful study in every picture-taking situation you encounter.

To begin with, let's define a few words often used in connection with this important subject. The lightness or darkness of a particular tone or shade of gray sometimes is called its value or tonal value. A dark value simply means a dark tone, and a light value means a light one.

EMOTIONAL EFFECTS OF VALUE

The tonal distribution within a photograph has an emotional effect upon the spectator. Tones may augment the statement, soften or tone down the statement, or produce a second statement. Contrast, for example, makes the photograph more dynamic. Low contrast makes it more passive.

The dark tones seem gloomy, morbid, heavy, or suggest heavy oppression, night, weight, death, desolation, and the unknown. They may also seem mysterious, dignified, powerful, or masculine. On the other hand, light values — whites and bright grays — tend to be associated with sunlight, gaiety, youth, and frivolity. Light tones suggest another worldly type of feeling. They are used a great deal in fashion photography, and have an ethereal, floating quality. They often seem delicate and feminine in quality. These tones are exciting, but they are sometimes associated with artificiality. The middle grays suggest reality,

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but are not necessarily uninteresting.

The specific emotional response we get from a value or group of similar values *largely depends on the context in which we see it*. For example, a low-key (predominantly dark) picture of a beautiful girl can evoke a mood of mystery and sexuality. But the same values in a photograph of a lonely old woman can create an atmosphere of melancholy.

CONCEPTS ABOUT VALUE PATTERNS

Light, middle and dark value patterns will not always conform to the shape of the objects. They may set up a somewhat different pattern and consequently the effect will be different. This does not occur frequently, but when it does occur a hidden source of evocation may erupt.

The shape of the dark pattern can sometimes be controlled by exposure. The shape of the light pattern can often be controlled by altering the development time. The middle value pattern can rarely be controlled. It is important to be aware of the fact, that sometimes the value patterns of the subject cannot be altered by exposure and development. Sometimes they can be altered only by changes in the camera viewpoint, changes in lighting, or the use of filters.

The photographer should be aware of the various value patterns in the object, because they will be present in the image and have a subtle evocative power. What the value patterns of a photograph evoke in the spectator, may or may not be the same as what the subject evokes.

VALUE CONTRAST

Value contrast can bring forth an emotional response, too. The clash of light against dark (characteristic of back-lighted pictures and silhouettes) has a bold, exciting, dramatic quality. On the other hand, closely related tones of gray tend to create a gentle, soothing, peaceful effect. It's up to you to recognize and try to emphasize the values and degree of contrast that best help express what you have to say.

Value contrast has another useful application. In b/w photography, it is a key means for defining clearly the shape of an object. Also, it's an important way to emphasize things.

Let's consider a simple example. Take a black object and place it against a black background — you can't see the outline of the object. Next, put the same object against a gray background. The contrast in values now makes the object stand out clearly. To define it even more boldly, you could place it against a pure white background. Now the black object really "pops out."

The use of value for emphasis and definition is based on this simple principle: *the greater the value contrast, the more*

distinct the definition — and the greater the emphasis. The intelligent application of this one basic principle can give you greater clarity and impact in all your pictures.

RHYTHM, PATTERN AND TEXTURE

Visual rhythm is one of the most potent aspects of composition. The essence of any rhythm, including the visual kind we are concerned with here, is repetition at more or less regular intervals. Repeated shapes can create a strongly rhythmic effect.

However, identical shapes repeated at even intervals tend to seem mechanical and monotonous. In composing visual elements, you get a more lively, interesting effect by repetition with *variations* — of size, shape, tonal value, or the spacing between objects.

Of course, if you make things too varied, the underlying sense of rhythm will be obscured or even lost. So in using rhythm in your compositions, try to hold to some unifying motif yet provide enough variety to make the composition interesting.

One thing that photography can do very well is point up the visual similarity between different things. For example, how the curves of one object repeat the curves of another, or how an object echoes the shape of another. Look for surprising or interesting visual likenesses between things and work them into your composition in a meaningful way.

When shapes are rhythmically repeated to form an overall design, you have a pattern. Patterns, too, exist all around us, waiting for a sensitive eye to discern them. To emphasize pattern, use the techniques for controlling depth covered in the following section. Flatten out space and focus the viewer's attention on the surface of your picture. He may miss your point or become confused if the illusion of depth is too strong.

Texture is closely related to rhythm and pattern as an element of composition. It actually is a small-scale pattern that reveals the surface qualities of an object.

Photography is unsurpassed in its ability to render texture in detail. Be aware of textures — the roughness of tree bark or rocks, the softness of silk, the sheen of metal, the smoothness of flesh. Show them in your pictures to emphasize the unique quality of different things, and for the powerful emotional effects they can evoke.

COMPOSING IN THREE DIMENSIONS

A photograph, a two-dimensional reality, can vividly create the *illusion* of depth. When we look at a photograph, we often have a feeling of looking through a window into a scene that *tends in space behind the frame of the*

picture. Things seem to be arranged at different distances from us, and to have height, weight, and thickness, just as they do in reality. They appear to be solid forms that we can reach out and touch, rather than flat shapes on a piece of paper.

This illusion of depth, of space existing behind the flat surface of the picture, is one of the qualities that can make a photograph convincing and realistic. It also gives you another dimension to work with in composing your pictures: the arrangement of objects *in space*, at various distances from your camera.

Composing your picture in three dimensions can be a good way to make it more varied and interesting — and to emphasize important things. We sense that objects are in front of other objects because they overlap, blocking off parts of objects from sight. Overlapping also helps unify the composition by tying the objects together.

When you're composing a picture, think of its space in terms of a *foreground, middleground, and background*. The foreground is the part of the scene that's in front of you and very close to the camera. The background includes the more distant parts of the scene such as the sky, a wall, portions of buildings, foliage, etc., *against which we see the subject*. In a studio, the background might be a sheet of seamless white paper or cloth, or a white-painted wall. The *middleground* is the part of the picture that lies between these two extremes of foreground and background.

An effective way to achieve a strong feeling of depth in a photograph is to include something interesting in all three of these zones. However, don't think that you *always* need a feeling of deep space or a strong three-dimensional quality in your photographs. Sometimes limited space may be more appropriate to the subject matter.

Be sure to define clearly your subject against its background. Avoid having details or tonal values blend. Often a good method for achieving "separation" between a subject and its background is to focus selectively on the subject and throw the background out of focus.

CONCEPTS ABOUT SPACE

A photograph can give the illusion of flattened out picture space or the illusion of depth. Although the sense of three dimensional space, which we sense in a photograph, is an illusion; nevertheless, photographic space affects us emotionally and we respond to it.

Limited Space creates the feeling of intimacy or confinement; sometimes, a mixture of both. It can suggest closeness, comfort, intimacy, tightness, imprisonment, or a feeling of claustrophobia.



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Sometimes, however, the feelings of limited space that are experienced in a photograph come more from other elements present in the picture than from sensations of space.

Moderately Deep Space or Medium Space creates a feeling of comfort. Space seems to expand somewhat within the photograph.

Deep Space or Far Space suggests distance, remoteness, loneliness, wonder, or a nostalgic feeling about space. It can be achieved by: (1) using both near and far objects within the photograph, (2) the use of the ground plane seen from near to far, and (3) the use of the inclined plane of both ground and sky.

Planometric Space and Recessional Space accomplish movement into space within the photograph. When the planes in the photograph are parallel to the picture plane, the situation is called Planometric. When the planes in the picture are diagonal to the picture plane, the situation is called Recessional.

Recessional Space is more dynamic and has a feeling of faster movement than Planometric Space. Recessional Space seems to lead us into the picture; Planometric Space seems to block us out of the picture. It slows up eye movement and restricts.

(To be continued next month)

PHOTOGRAPHERS MAKING NEWS

(Continued from page 40)

the medium of photography. Pollack was editor of facsimile books for Amphoto Press and was working on a book featuring 50 great photographs. Articles and photographs by Pollack have appeared in *Life* and *Look*. He wrote the biography of Edward Steichen for the Encyclopedia Britannica as well as articles for art and photography magazines.

*ORDO V. TURNER, 66, Aurora, Colo. May 15. He operated a photography studio in Mankato, Kans., until World War II when he entered the Army Air Corp. He was in charge of the photo lab and was a photo instructor at Lowry Air Force Base until he retired from the service in 1962. He then operated a portrait studio on the base for 15 years.

*KEVIN SHEA, 28, Chicago, Ill., May 22. Shea, a free-fall photographer, died in an accident near Griffith, Ind.

*GLENN STINNETT, 67, Metairie, La., June 1. Stinnett served four years as a ground and aerial photographer in the U.S. Navy during World War II and attended the Pensacola School of Photography. He later operated a photography school and was chief photographer for Higgins Shipyards. He was also a writer.

COMPOSITION

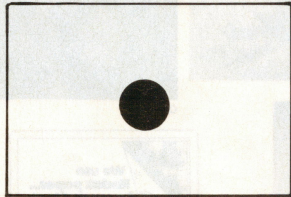
- the vocabulary of photography

by Stuart A. Oring

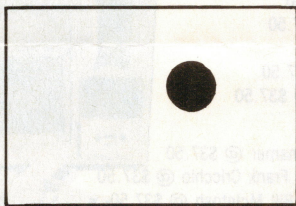
(Continued from last month)

Let's take a close look at the nature of this flat surface bounded on four sides — the area within which you compose your picture. Let's see what happens when we place a shape in it, then several shapes, and then move them around. From these simple visual experiments we can derive some basic principles that can help you compose more effectively when you have a loaded camera in your hands.

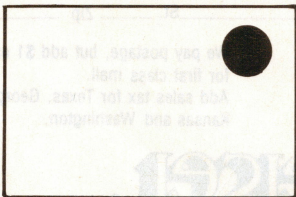
Picture space is not "dead." It is alive and dynamic, charged with invisible fields of force. They tug and pull, attract and repel any shape we place inside the four borders of the picture area.



For example, let's start with the simplest of compositions — a black circle exactly in the center of a rectangle. The effect is one of stability and rest. The forces working on the dot cancel out. We feel no tendency for it to be pushed or pulled out of its central position. This kind of composition tends to be monotonous because it's too static and obvious.

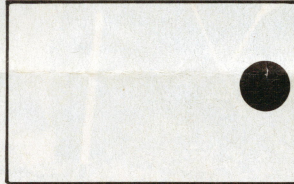


Things get more interesting if we move the circle just a little off center. We've upset the static balance of forces. We sense that the circle is not at rest; it seems to be pulling toward the center and away from the upper-right corner.



Now, let's move the circle closer to the upper-right corner than it is to the cen-

ter. In this position it seems to be trying to move away from the center and toward the corner. Even though it's not actually in motion, we have a feeling that the circle is soaring out of the picture area.

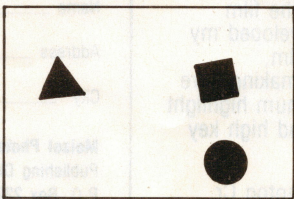


But look what happens when we place the circle even closer to an edge — so it almost bumps into it. The circle seems to want to bounce back — it is repelled as well as attracted. There's a strong feeling of tension set up. The effect is disturbing, leaving us in a state of suspense and incompleteness.

You can use these effects in many ways in your photographs. For instance, placing an important shape or shapes close to the center of the picture tends to create a stable, restful effect. But if you want a restless, dynamic effect — to suggest flight or motion, you might place your subject closer to an edge or corner than to the center.

Whenever you place a shape with a clearly defined edge so that it almost touches the edge of the picture (or another shape), you set up tension between the two. This can be a good way to call attention to something. But if it occurs unintentionally, it can attract the viewer's eyes to the wrong places.

The eye tends to group things. We tend to see things as simple, stable arrangements. Let's see how this principle applies to the arrangement of shapes inside the picture area, and how it can be applied to photographic composition.

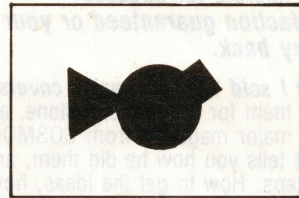


These three different shapes seem to have little attraction for each other. The arrangement is haphazard; it seems scattered and falling apart — an effect you're likely to get if you shoot at random, with-

out attempting to organize your picture.



Here the three objects have been moved closer together and put into a more meaningful relationship to each other. The eye tends to group them as a unit. The exact distance this "pulling together" effect takes place depends on a number of things — the size and shape of the objects, the size of the picture area, and the location of objects within it. When composing a picture, it's a matter you'll have to judge with your eyes.



By placing them so they touch or actually overlap, they are even more tightly welded together. Now we see them as one complex shape. If you overlap objects, have them overlap decisively and not just slightly — it makes a more forceful composition.

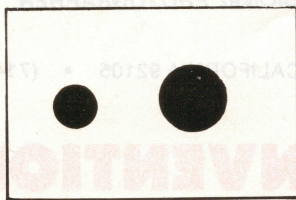
By grouping objects, we can tie them together in a meaningful way and get a stronger, more unified composition. If your picture looks too scattered, try to find another camera position that brings the important shapes closer together or makes them touch or overlap. Sometimes just a slight change can make a big difference.

BALANCE

Balance is a quality of every good composition. It gives a picture a feeling of wholeness, of being complete. When looking at a well-balanced composition, you sense that all the elements are necessary and that you couldn't remove or reposition any of the parts without having the picture fall apart.

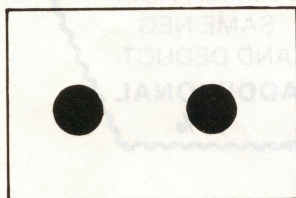
However, balance does not necessarily mean a formal, static arrangement with the picture split in half, or everything neatly lined up as if being weighed on a scale. There's a dynamic or asymmetrical balance, too, that tends to be more interesting.

To sharpen your eye for balance, let's look at some simple diagrams to establish a few basic principles, and then see how these principles work out in the more complex form of a photograph.



First, let's take an obviously unbalanced composition — a large circle and a small circle placed at equal distances from the center of a rectangle. To most people, this composition will appear lopsided with the right-hand side seeming to be "heavier."

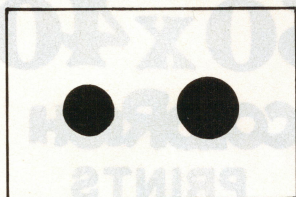
This effect is based on our familiar experiences with the world of physical reality. The composition is like an adult and child on opposite ends of a see-saw. The pull of gravity pulls the heavier adult down. The large circle seems visually "heavier" than the small one because of its greater size. All other things being equal, size lends weight to any visual element.



Here's one way to bring the composition into balance — replace the big circle with one that's the same size as the smaller one on the left. No longer do we feel that one side is heavier than the other, because both sides have equal compositional weight.

This is "formal" symmetrical balance — one half of the picture area matching the other half. It tends to be static and dull in its effect — it's a little too pat and obvious. Formal balance can be put to good use when you want to emphasize the formality, dignity, or conventionality of your subject and with slight variations between halves, it can give interesting effects.

Another way to get the composition into balance is to *change the locations of the circles* — without altering their relative size. If we move the small circle farther from the center of the picture, and the big one closer to it, we reach a point where they seem to balance each other.



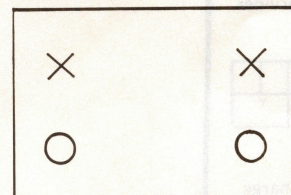
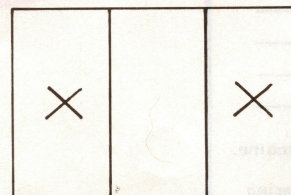
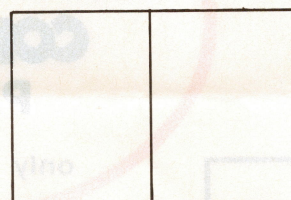
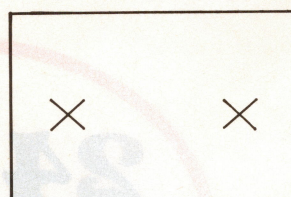
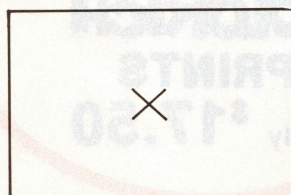
This is *dynamic* or *asymmetrical balance*. It tends to be more varied and interesting than the formal, static kind demonstrated before. It's the kind of balance you'll probably find the most

appropriate and natural in most of the photographs you make. Informal balance, you'll find, works well when you want to show a subject in the foreground along with identifying background detail.

Formal or Symmetrical Balance is an outgrowth of painting prior to contemporary movements. It can consist of: (1) a single object centered, (2) objects or images that mirror one another, or (3) two or three sections that are similar to one another.

Informal or Asymmetrical Balance is a weight and tensions system has been in effect since 1885. It derived from the Bauhaus in Germany and is a more effective system for the photographer. Tensions are built up in the photograph by directions and weight. These tensions are achieved by directional movement, effects, weight, tone, and color in a given area. (Direction depends upon the axis and secondary directions or movements within the picture.)

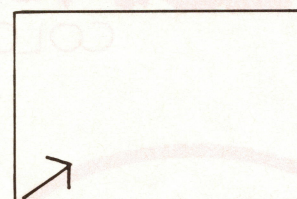
Intuitive or Occult Balance is subtle and indicates the movement of unlike parts around a balancing point which hold the total structure in equilibrium by their pull.



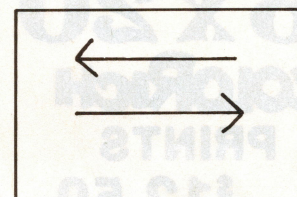
Some examples of Symmetrical Balance: (1) single object centered, (2) mir-

ror objects or images, (3) two section, (4) three section, (5) two mirror images.

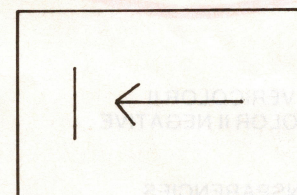
Some examples of Informal Balance:



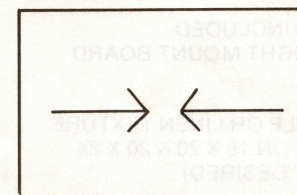
(absorption by space)



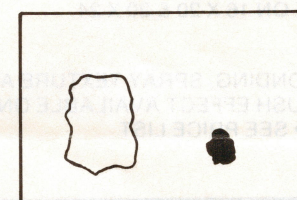
(counter-direction)



(right angle direction)

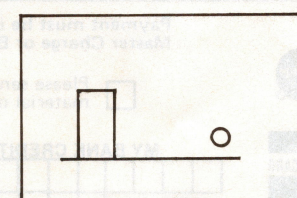


(directions which meet or play of directions)



(weight)

An example of steel yard balance — where fulcrum distance influences the balance:



(steel yard balance)

This type of balance is common to photography.

(To be continued next month)

COMPOSITION

— the vocabulary of photography

Conclusion

by Stuart A. Oring

(continued from last month)

When we speak about planes in a photograph, it is important to remember that planes are not always solid. Planes can be perforated, as is the case with screen doors, fences, and windows. Some planes are implied, as with a row of objects going over a hill. A plane can be nothing more than a thin row of trees on the edge of a pond.

There are occasions when the monocular vision of the camera affects the rendering of depth. Space can be collapsed or telescoped. When space is telescoped, the various planes within the photograph come together even though in reality they are apart.

If there is no way of telling the size of the area shown in a photograph, and if a part of the subject is not oriented to the rest of the subject, the subject may appear to shift in space from near to far. Parts pop in and out, or fluctuate within space.

Fluctuating space lacks both the intimate feeling of Limited Space and the nostalgia of Deep Space. It produces a kind of strange, shifting, insecure feeling in the viewer.

CONTROLLING THE ILLUSION OF DEPTH

There are several important ways to control the illusion of depth in your pictures other than those we've already mentioned. They are based on visual cues that our eyes and brains use to help us judge depth and distance in the physical world. Except in the case of stereo "3-D" photography, we don't actually see depth in a picture—we only think we do.

Lighting, overlapping of objects, perspective, sharpness of detail and tonal value are among these visual cues. See the accompanying chart which lists ways that you can increase or decrease the illusion of depth in pictures.

The picture space you deal with has a peculiar property—it can be squeezed together or pulled apart. You can, with simple means we'll discuss in a moment, compress picture space so that things seem pushed together. Perspective—the familiar effect of near things looking relatively larger than faraway things—will be eliminated or weakened.

HOW TO CONTROL THE ILLUSION OF DEPTH IN YOUR PICTURES

To Increase the Illusion of Depth	To Decrease the Illusion of Depth
Use strongly directional lighting (bright sunlight, direct flash, flood, spot, or bare electric light bulb, etc.)	Use diffused, flat lighting — the illumination of an overcast day, diffused or bounced flash or flood, etc.
Locate main source of light at the side or in back of the subject to create shadows that model the subject — bring out its roundness.	Position the main source of light in front of the subject so it illuminates the front planes.
Use weak fill-in light or none.	Use strong fill-in light.
Use a wide-angle lens and move close to foreground object.	Use a long lens and position yourself at a distance from nearest foreground object.
Have objects overlap; that is, have part of a near object block off part of one that's farther away.	Don't have objects overlap.
Find and emphasize diagonal lines that seem to lead back into picture space.	Find and emphasize lines that lead across or up and down the surface of the picture.
Separate a foreground subject from its background with selective focus.	(Having everything sharp may or may not decrease the illusion of depth, depending on other factors.)
Find a camera angle or arrange objects so they extend in space away from your camera, diminishing size and converging lines will emphasize perspective.	Find a camera angle or arrange objects all in the same plane — at the same distance from your camera.

Note: Any one of these visual cues may be counterbalanced by other ones. For example, a picture taken in hazy light may have a strong feeling of depth because of selective focus, close camera position, and overlapping objects, or a brightly sidelighted scene can look flat because it was taken from a great distance with a telephoto lens. However, a combination of several cues that all say "flatness" or "depth" can produce a powerful effect in your picture.

On the other hand, you can expand space—making the apparent distance between objects much greater than normal, and causing nearby objects to loom disproportionately huge in relation to more distant ones.

You can do this by your choice of shooting distance. If you move in very close to a foreground object, it will appear outlandishly big in comparison with more distant objects, and the distance between subject and background will seem abnormally great. For example, in a close-up portrait, a person's face might seem much larger than a house in the background. A wide-angle lens is a useful photographic tool for this space-expanding effect.

If you choose a distant camera viewpoint, one that is a relatively long way from the nearest object, you'll get the opposite effect. The same person and house, photographed from a greater distance, will seem to be closer together, and the house will look relatively large in comparison with the human being. A long or telephoto lens helps you get this effect because it gives a large image of your subject even if you're a long way off.

In both these cases, it is not the wide-angle or telephoto lens in itself that has any effect on depth and perspective. They simply make it practical for you to shoot from a very close or very distant camera position. Shooting distance, rather than focal length, controls photographic perspective.

From this discussion, you can appreciate that depth is still another quality to be aware of when you study your viewfinder. Consider how things are arranged in space in front of your camera—and how they will look when translated into a flat, two-dimensional image. The feelings that you wish to evoke in the viewer will help you decide whether it will serve your purpose better to emphasize the illusion of space or to flatten things out and treat them as a two-dimensional design.

SOME BASICS ABOUT COMPOSITION

Make full use of the picture area. This doesn't mean you must fill every square inch with busy detail. Areas of white space can give the eye a rest and make important objects stand out clearly. But avoid meaningless expanses of vacant space—especially at the edges or bottom of your photograph.

Decide what are the most important elements in your picture and emphasize them by compositional means—value contrast, placement, leading the eye to them with lines of movement, making them large and clear, etc. Even though your picture may have more than one center of interest, it should be instantly

(Continued on page 56)

clear to a viewer what the most important things are.

Don't crowd everything toward the top, bottom, or just one side of the picture.

Avoid an arrangement that looks too scattered. Relate important objects to each other by grouping them or overlapping, or tying them together with lines of movement.

It's generally not a good idea to have a large empty hole near the center of the picture.

It's best not to split your picture into two exactly equal parts—either horizontally with a horizon line or vertically by placing the subject exactly in the middle. A more varied, dynamic use of picture area usually is more interesting.

Don't have shapes touch or almost touch unless you want to create tension and attract a viewer's eyes to this part of the picture. Done carelessly, the effect can be irritating and distracting.

Do be decisive. If you want objects to overlap, have them overlap distinctly. If you show a curve, emphasize its curved quality—don't show a slightly bent straight line. A firm, positive, clear-cut quality gives your composition greater strength, beauty, and effectiveness.

Avoid undesirable tone mergers—the blending of one object with another of similar tone. If you want your subject to stand out clearly, choose a viewpoint or instant of shooting that places it against a background of contrasting value. The more you want to emphasize something, the greater the tonal contrast you should use.

THE IMPORTANCE OF SEEING

Composition is achieved by the eye and mind of the photographer. Although

we've covered many aspects of composition separately to focus attention on them one at a time, you must not feel that composing is necessarily a logical, fully conscious process. Depending upon your skill and personality and the nature of the subject, you might work slowly and deliberately—or you might compose as swiftly as a blink by choosing a moment when an effective arrangement of moving shapes forms in your viewfinder.

We are all creatures of habit, and our eyes tend to be dulled by the unobservant, humdrum use to which we customarily put them.

In learning to compose your photographs better, you may at first need to make a deliberate, conscious effort to see lines, depth, tonal values, the balance of shapes, and the other aspects of composition we've looked at here. You can develop skill in compositional seeing by practice. But eventually, it should become part of your unconscious mental equipment—something you do automatically everytime you photograph.

Devote time simply to looking and observing. Do this not only when you have a camera, but in any spare moment. When you see something that makes a good picture, take an imaginary exposure of it with your mind's eye. You can get ideas and learn things that will help when you actually do have a camera in your hand. □

DEVELOPING THE NEW PROFESSIONAL

(Continued from page 52)

a true professional. Correct exposure, development and technique are thoroughly controlled. Negative and Print Retouching instruction begins early as do

Speech and Public Relations. Phase I has been categorized as the "Hitler" period by instructor Paul Turnbull, meaning that no deviation from the pattern is allowed. There is no room for bad habits such as sloppiness and neglect.

Operations begin to open up in Phase II. The student is encouraged to take the basics and test them a bit. Doing so cautiously while closely guided, develops ideas as to what the medium of photography is all about and offers growth of confidence in freedom to experiment and discover.

Phase III awakens the student to life on the outside. Color photography enters the scene. Besides the normal work load, students operate a training studio dealing with real people and actual jobs, but on a non-profit basis. Spectrum Studio, as it is called, is managed by a student elected to the office. Students are involved in actual work situations from conception to finished product just as they will later in their own careers.

Every professional needs to be able to present himself and his work in such a manner that distinguishes him from the crowd. Phase IV is devoted almost entirely to the preparation of a professional portfolio, personal resumes and written goals. Portfolios are reviewed by members of the staff and guiding faculty and must represent technical excellence for approval. If the portfolio is not accepted, the student does not graduate. This may seem abrupt for an educational institution today, but this is the way businesses operate.

The new professional is one who is competent in his craft, aware of his artistic ability and prepared to create a place for himself in the industry. □

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