

Livermore Valley Camera Club

Established 1958

Composition Checklist

by Lon Overacker

1. **Isolate, Simplify and take out the garbage!** Make it a habit to take your eye off the main subject and look around the whole frame for unwanted distractions (garbage.) Think border patrol.
 2. **Fill the frame.** When appropriate and possible, get closer to your subject by using a zoom lens or physically moving closer. Use the framing technique if it will improve the scene.
 3. **Watch those horizons!** Make sure your horizons are straight, whether its vertical or horizontal. Avoid splitting the frame in half.
 4. **Rule of Thirds.** In general, avoid centering your main subject. Apply the rule of thirds and imagine a tic-tac-toe grid in the viewfinder. In other words, divide the photograph into imaginary thirds, both vertically and horizontally. Place your subject near one of the intersecting lines. These are the points of emphasis. Balance: Pay attention to foreground, middleground, and background.
 5. **Check the lines.** Avoid unbroken circles. Avoid dominating lines going completely through the frame and lines leading you out of the photograph. Use lines that emphasize your subject or draw you into the photo. Try using Lead-in Lines.
 6. **Is the lighting appropriate?** Harsh, direct sun can cast heavy, unbecoming shadows on people. Use the direction of light to your advantage by trying different angles. Pay attention to the time of day; is it over-cast, morning, or mid-day? How does the light affect your subject?
 7. **Focus and depth of field.** Make sure your main subject is sharply focused. Then decide whether you want the foreground and/or background in focus. Try experimenting with different aperture and use depth of field to your advantage.
 8. **Format.** Ask yourself if the scene would be better presented in a vertical format. Try both, don't be afraid to turn the camera!
 9. **Negative Space.** This relates to filling your frame and isolating your subject. Too much empty space may detract from your photograph. Conversely, negative space can add mood or the sense of scale.
 10. **Visualize, Think, Compose And Shoot!!** The single most important thing you can do to improve your photography is to slow down and think before you shoot. Practice, take lots of pictures and soon this will all be second-nature to you.
- Good Luck & Happy Shooting!**