

The Rule Of
Thirds
& 2 other
composition
“Rules”

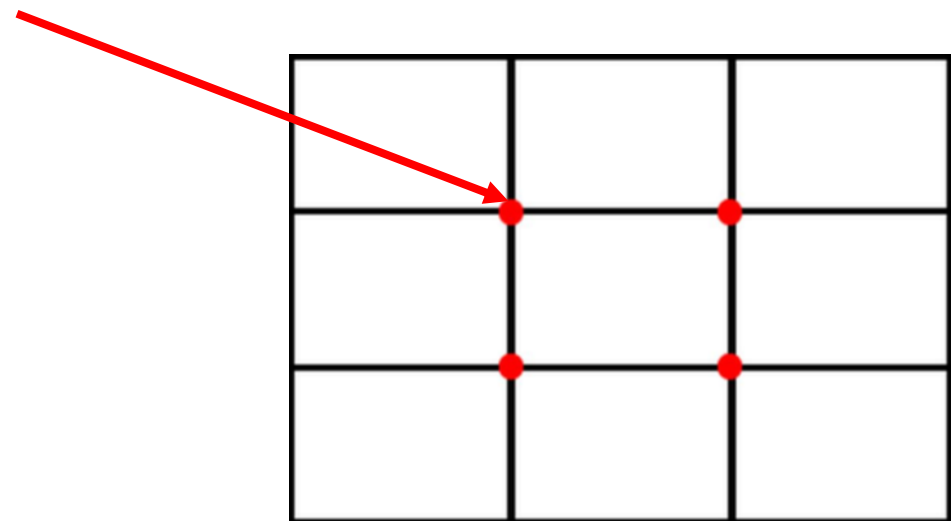
What is the “Rule of Thirds” ?

It is an **idea** to improve compositions

The photographer imagines 2 vertical and 2 horizontal lines dividing the photo into equal thirds

The lines meet at 4 intersections

The intersections are considered the most attractive points to place your subject



What is the “Rule of Thirds” ?

It is similar to using colours and leading lines to guide the viewer.

The idea is our eyes naturally look first at the intersections, instead of the exact centre.

We will also notice and follow the “grid lines”. This helps to draw the viewer into the photo.

“Rule of Thirds” example

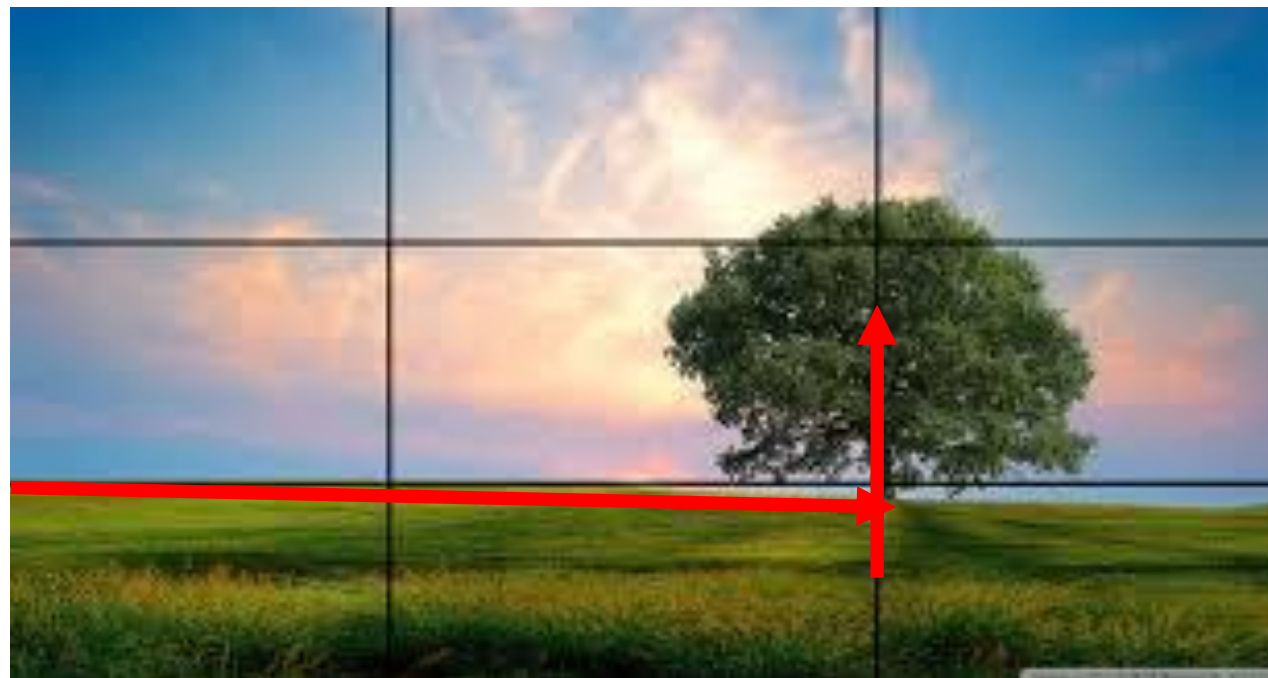
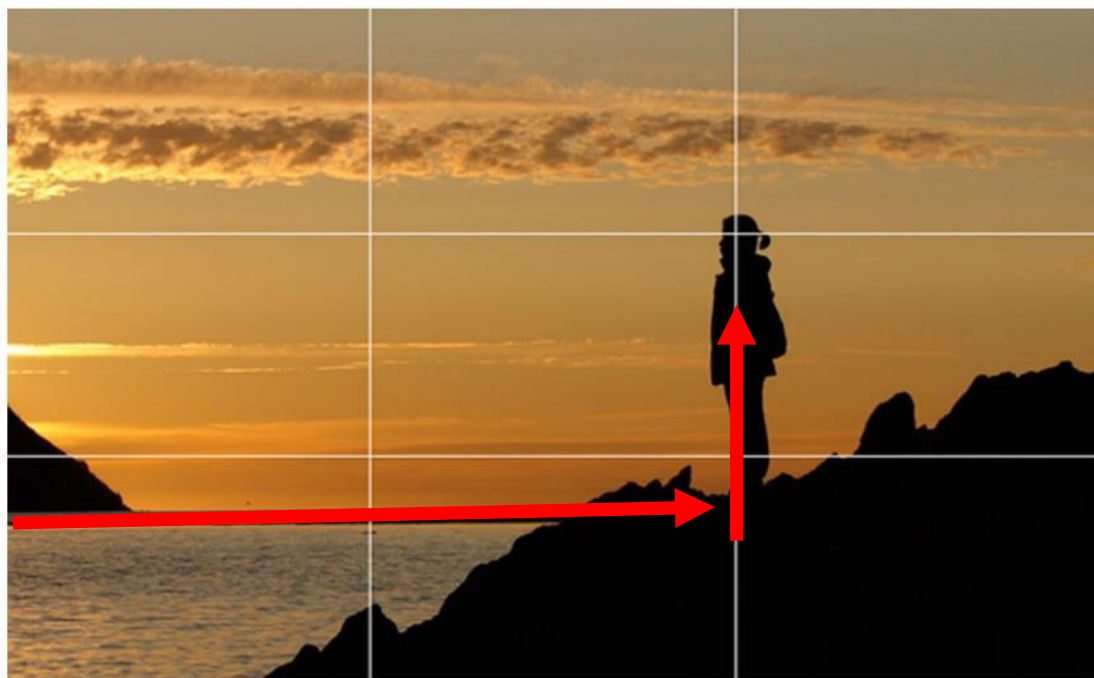
The beacon has been aligned with the right-hand vertical.

Our eyes move from the left to right, following the horizon lines (arrows). We notice there is nothing particular in the left 2 intersection points, so our eyes keep moving to the right. We reach the beacon and as this is aligned with the grid and the 2 right intersection points, we find the image pleasing.

.....In theory !



Example images



The History of the Rule of Thirds

First mentioned by John Thomas Smith in 1797, building on earlier work by Joshua Reynolds, talking about light and dark in paintings

Thomas Smith decides painting design can be simplified into a 1:2 proportion (thirds)

A simple method, easily understood, increases in popularity amongst 19th Century landscape artists

Kodak encourages early photographers to use centred compositions. Rule of Thirds creates different images

Included in photography textbooks from 1940s onwards

Early Photos

Kodak encouraged centre positioning of subjects because...

Lenses were brighter and sharpest in the centre

Originally, images were developed at home and photo paper was cut by hand, so edges of images could accidentally be cut off !

Note, even then, the subjects didn't have to look straight at the camera !



How do I use it ?

The 2 questions to be asking of yourself are:

What are the points of interest in this image ?

Where should I place them ?

To help you, some cameras have a setting which overlays a **rule of thirds grid** onto your viewfinder/display. This removes all guesswork and helps you get your positioning accurate.

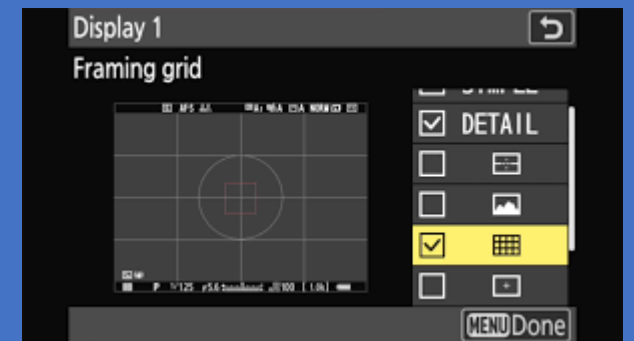
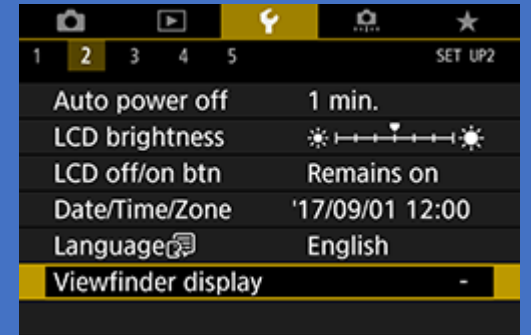
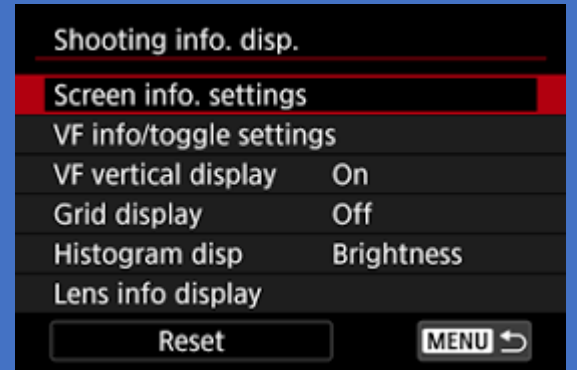


Turning on the grid display

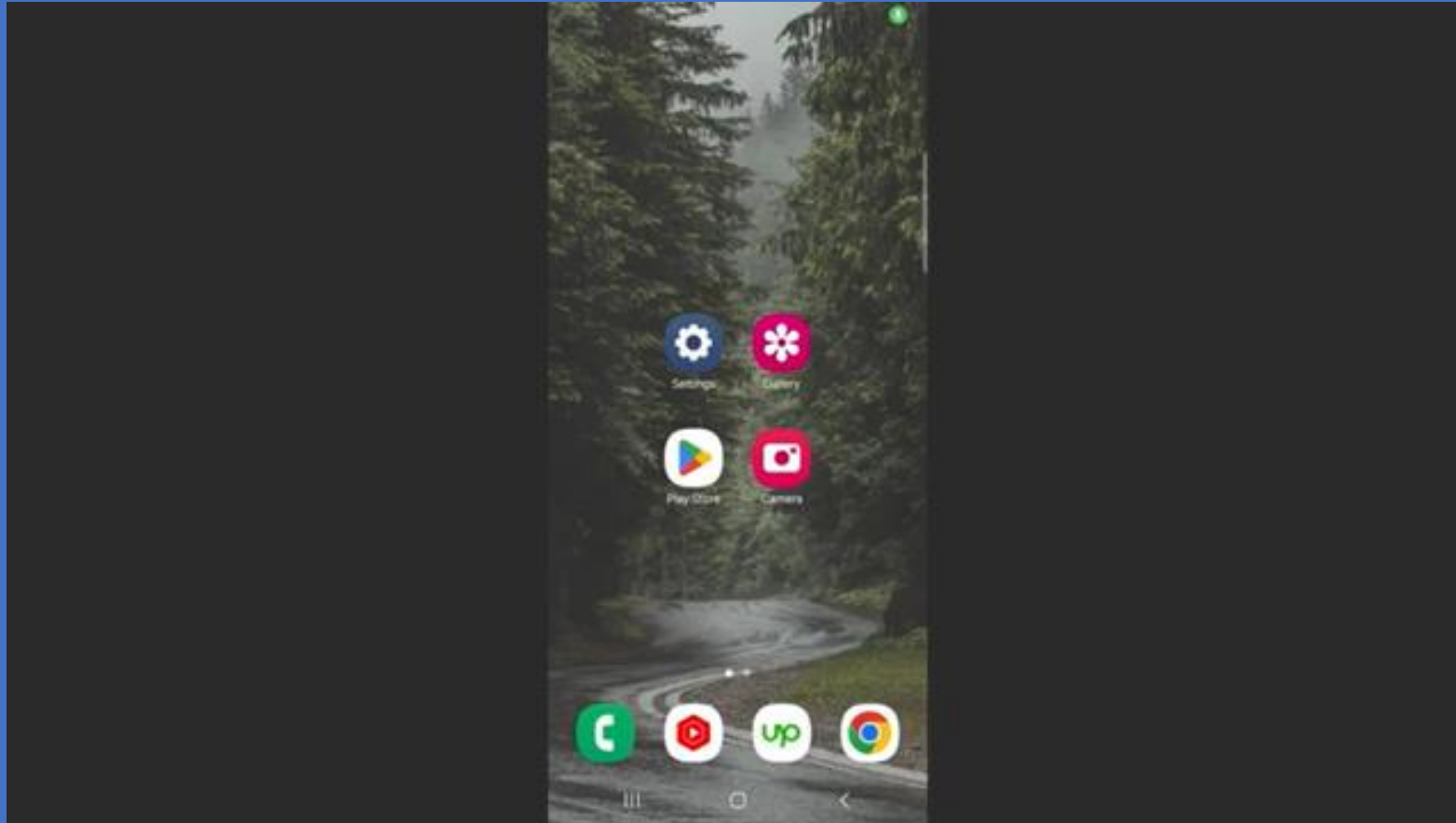
Unfortunately, as every camera is different, you will have to look in your camera manual to find the menu options for your camera !

Try looking in the display section.

In some cameras, you can have different options for the viewfinder and the LCD screen, so you may need to turn it on in both of these.



How to turn on the grid on an Android phone



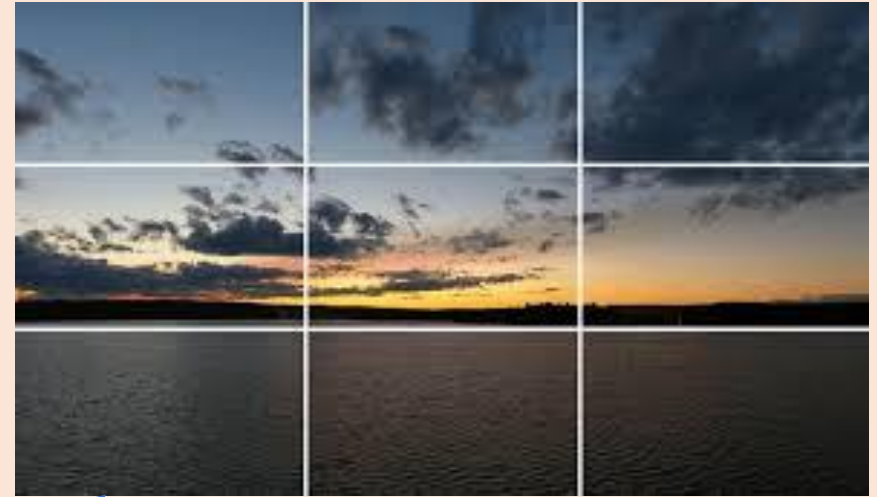
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VBCNI-FjsQQ&list=WL&index=9>

Using the rule in landscapes

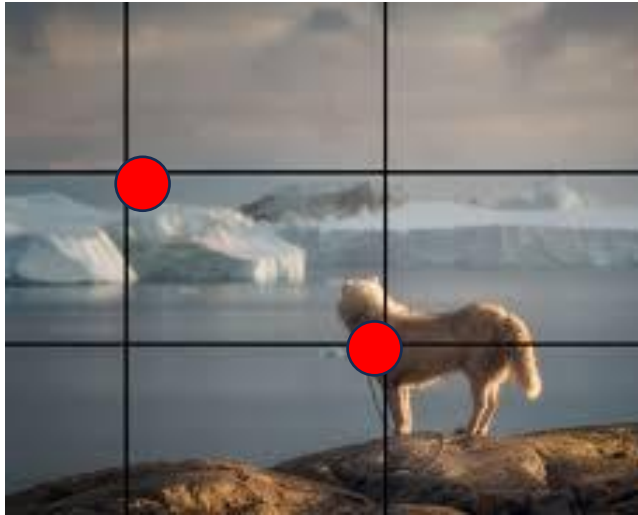
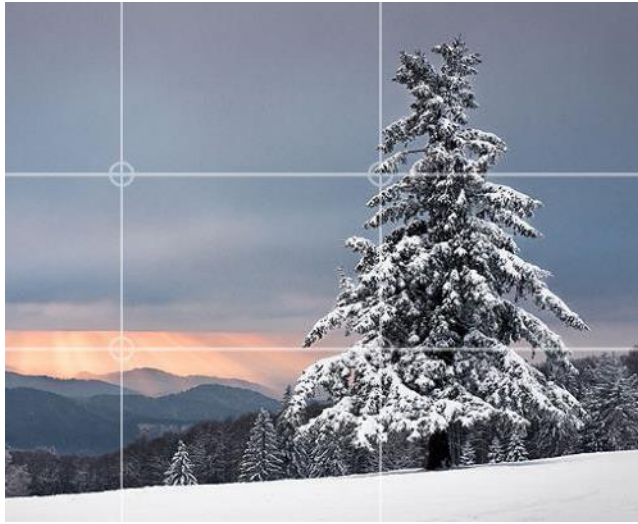
Putting the horizon line in the centre of the image cuts the picture in half, which can stop the eye from moving naturally around the entire image.

Aligning the horizon with the lower horizontal line will make the sky the primary focus.

Aligning the horizon with the upper line will put the emphasis on sea, land or structures.

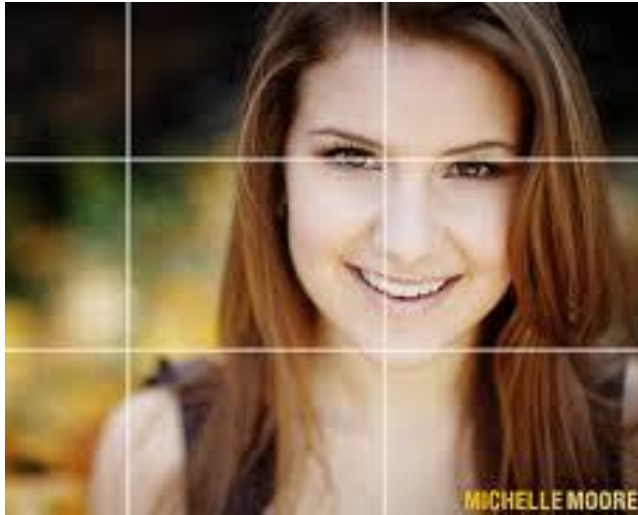


Using it in landscapes..



Including another interesting object, such as the tree, and positioning it according to the rule of thirds will provide an "anchor", a natural focal point for the scene.

If possible, try to include another point of interest at the diagonally opposite intersection from the subject.



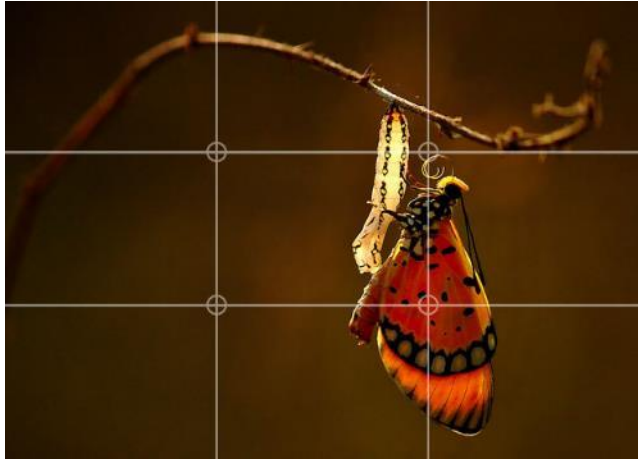
In portraits

If we position people off to one side of the frame it provides some **"breathing space"**, can show the subject's environment and stops the photo from looking like a "mugshot".

more on using space later....

We are naturally drawn to other people's eyes. Placing them at one of the intersections on the rule of thirds grid gives the shot a clear focal point.

Combining horizontal & vertical lines



Here the main subject has been placed at one of the intersections and also along one of the vertical lines. The twig roughly follows the top horizontal line.



Similarly the actor's head, body and hand have been placed vertically, with his eyes on the intersection. There is an implied leading line from his arm to his eyes and then to what he is looking at.

Problems with using Rule of Thirds...

It creates uneven space or an uneven balance in the composition.

It can't be used with diagonal lines.



When **not** to use it

When we want to emphasise symmetry –
centre positions work best here !

If there is a strong central point of
interest



When **not** to use it

When you want a close up portrait

If using it would leave too much empty space





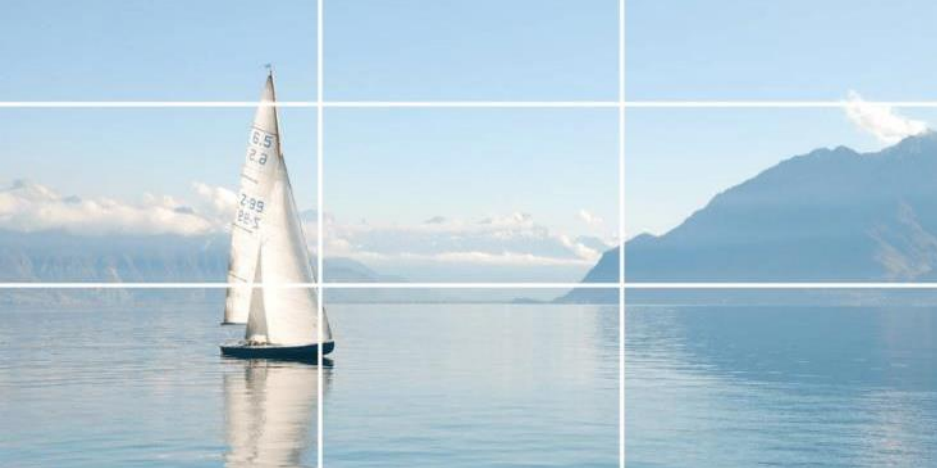
“Rule of Space”

Rule of space is simply the act of **adding visual (empty) space**

in front of the direction that an object is moving, looking or pointing

to imply motion and direction

and to lead the eye of the viewer



Using Rule of Space correctly

When photographing **moving** subjects, pay attention to the direction they're moving.



According to the “rule” you should leave more space **in front of them** than behind, to show where they're going.



For portraits leave space **in the direction the subject is looking**.

Rule of Space Examples



Rule of Space Examples

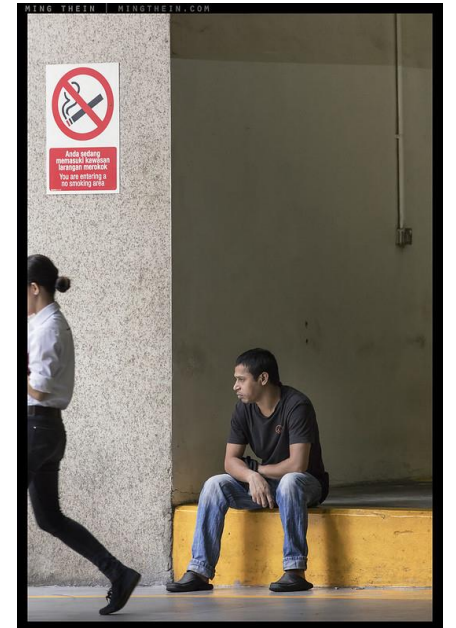


Ignoring the Rule of space

If you ignore the rule, it can add interest and tension to your composition.

For example, put the space behind the subject.

Fill the space with something else to hem in the subject.



Ignoring the Rule of space

Where we place the space can convey different emotions.

Do we want to show where we are going ?

Or where we have been ?



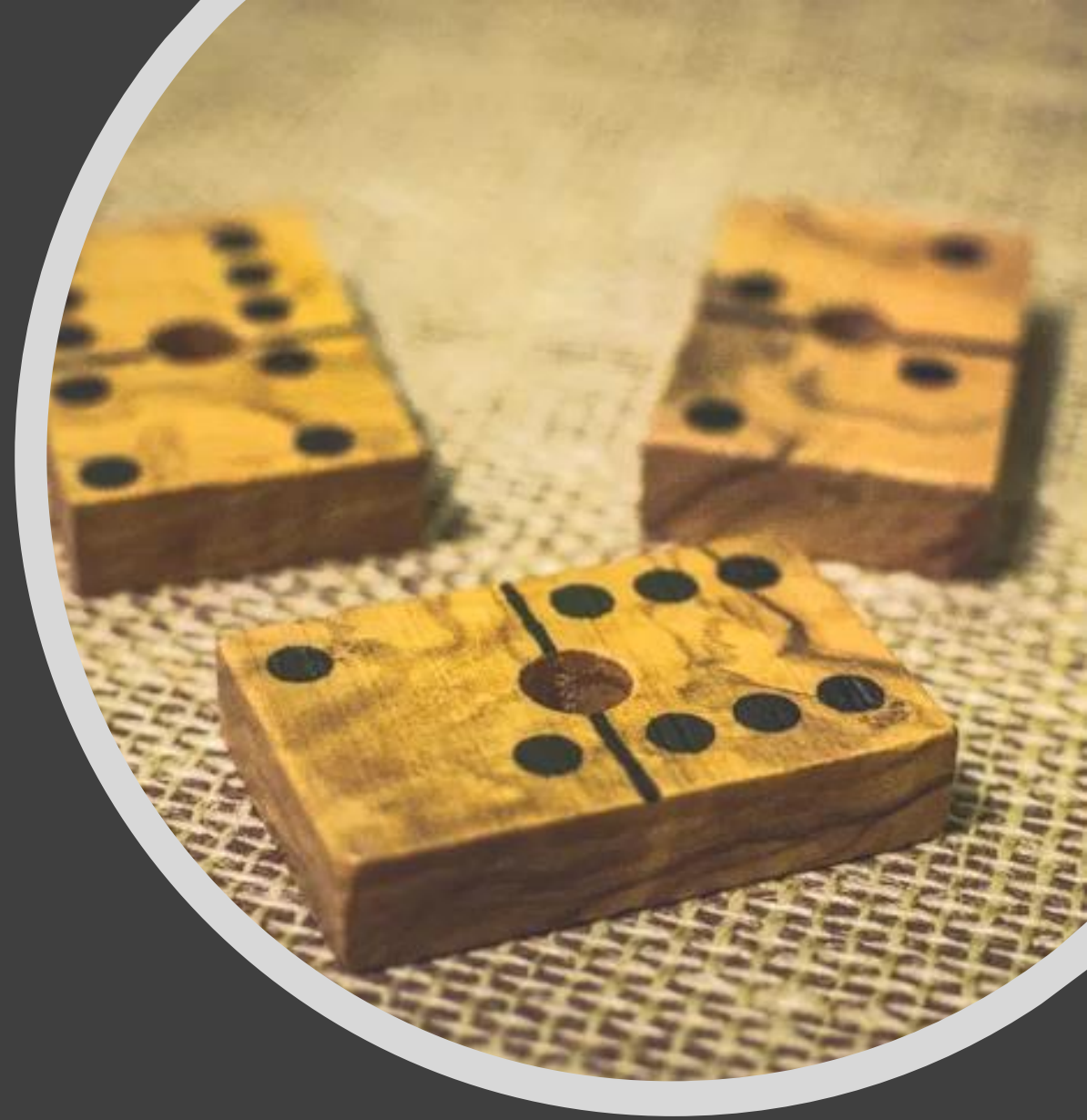
The “Rule of Odds”

The rule of odds states that images are more visually appealing when there is an odd number of subjects.

When we need to process an even number of elements, our brain tries to pair them up. We divide the whole image into pieces.

But when the image is made up of an odd number of them, our brain can't pair them all together.

It is said we keep looking at the image, trying to find a partner for the odd item. So this makes the image more interesting.



Rule of Odds works best
with small numbers



Ideally choose 1, 3 or 5 subjects

We see larger numbers as clusters within groups.

With a large number of subjects, there is a risk we
can overwhelm the viewer !



Ideas for placing odd numbers of subjects

Put them in a line...

Or as a triangle



Rule of Odds Examples

Photographing Nature



Rule of Odds Examples

Street Photography



When not to use it

When photographing couples



Or items that belong together



Summary....

Today we have covered 3 different composition ideas.

They are not “rules”, but guidelines to help your image compositions.

Try adding a grid to your viewfinder/screen.

Think about using the grids when taking and cropping photos.

Think about using space in your images.

Keep odds & evens in mind too !