

Cropping Photos

“Cropping - trimming or masking unwanted edges or areas of a negative or print”

Cropping Photos: A Simple Way to Strengthen an Image

A crop can do more than make a photo smaller.

It can

- remove distractions,
- bring attention to a subject
- change the mood
- help an image fit a particular format.

In this presentation, we'll look at how to make those choices deliberately.



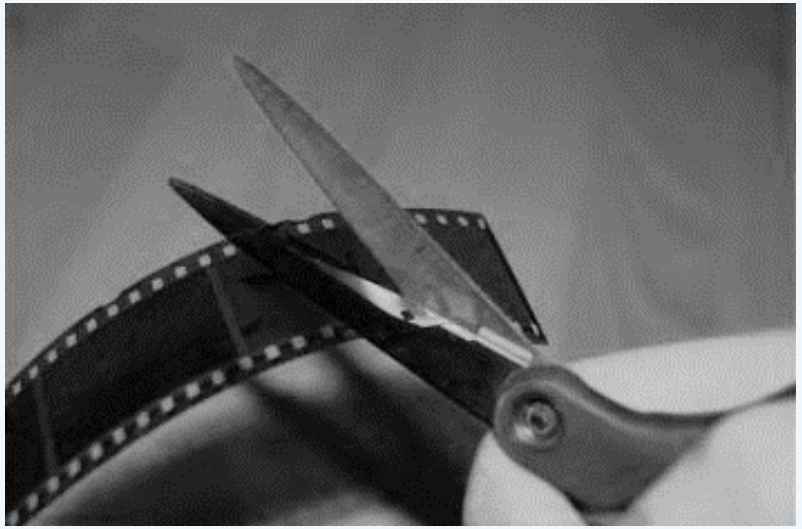
Why Is It Called “Cropping”?

In the early years of photography, photographic paper and negatives were trimmed by hand, much like trimming a plant. Nowadays, we have digital images, but the same term is still used.

In photography, cropping means removing parts of the edges of the frame, to change what the frame includes (i.e. what the viewer ultimately sees).

You can crop in-camera with careful framing, or later using an editing app.





Cropping to Remove Errors and Distractions

A small crop can clean up the edges of a picture - a stray branch, a bright patch, a bin, or a cut-off object may pull attention away from the subject.

When cropping, check around the whole frame, especially the corners.

Lose the distractions, but keep anything that helps explain the scene.



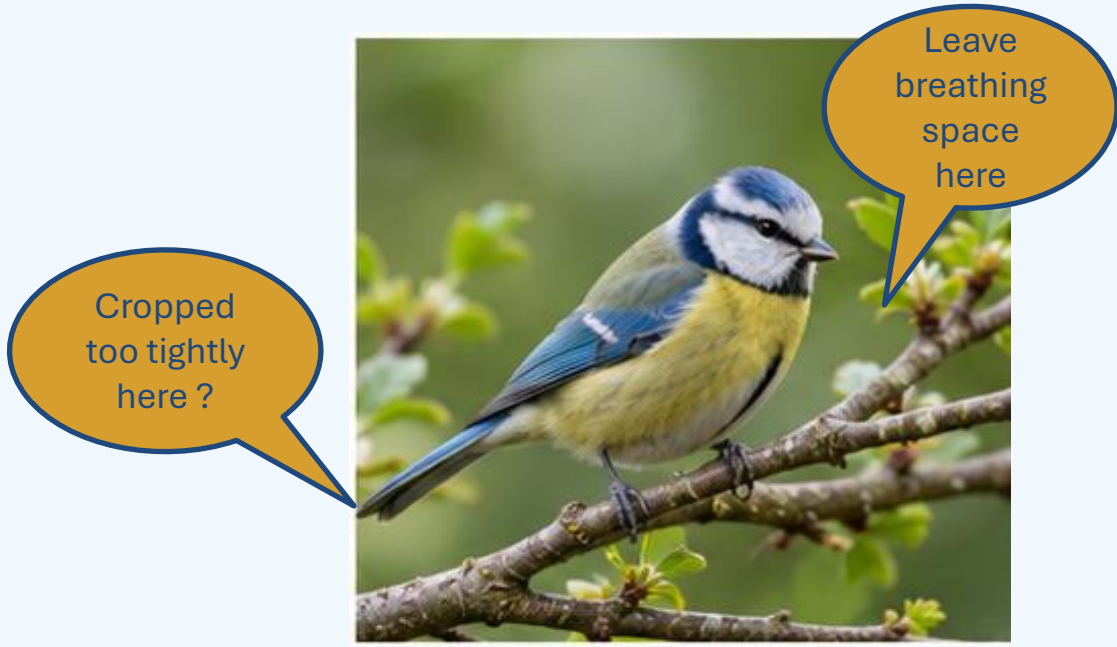


Finding the Main Subject

Ask yourself: What should the viewer notice first?

Give that subject enough space to stand out and look for background details that compete with it.

Sometimes a tighter crop helps; other times, leaving more context makes the image more meaningful.





Or



Choosing a Crop That Fits the Image

It’s better to start with the image, not a preset ratio.

A portrait may need to leave some room above the subject’s head; a landscape may rely on the sweep of the scene.

Try a few crop shapes and compare how each one changes the balance, movement and feeling of the picture.



Using Crop Sizes for Artistic Effect

A wide crop can feel cinematic; a square crop can feel balanced and contained; a tall crop can emphasise height or a single subject.

These are tendencies, not rules.

Choose a shape that supports the image's mood and the way you want it to be seen.

You can adjust the mood of the image by changing its shape (the Aspect Ratio).



Aspect Ratio

The **Aspect Ratio** of an image is the proportional relationship between its width and height, written as **width:height** (such as 16:9).

It describes the shape of an image, not its actual size or pixel count.

Common Aspect Ratios
3:2 (Classic Photo): Standard for 35mm film, DSLRs, and mirrorless cameras (matches standard 6×4 inch prints).
4:3 (Standard Digital): Common on smartphones, tablets, Micro Four Thirds cameras, and medium-format systems.
16:9 (Widescreen): Standard for HDTVs, computer monitors, YouTube videos, and modern displays.
1:1 (Square): Used for square feeds, profile pictures, and product grids (popularized by Instagram



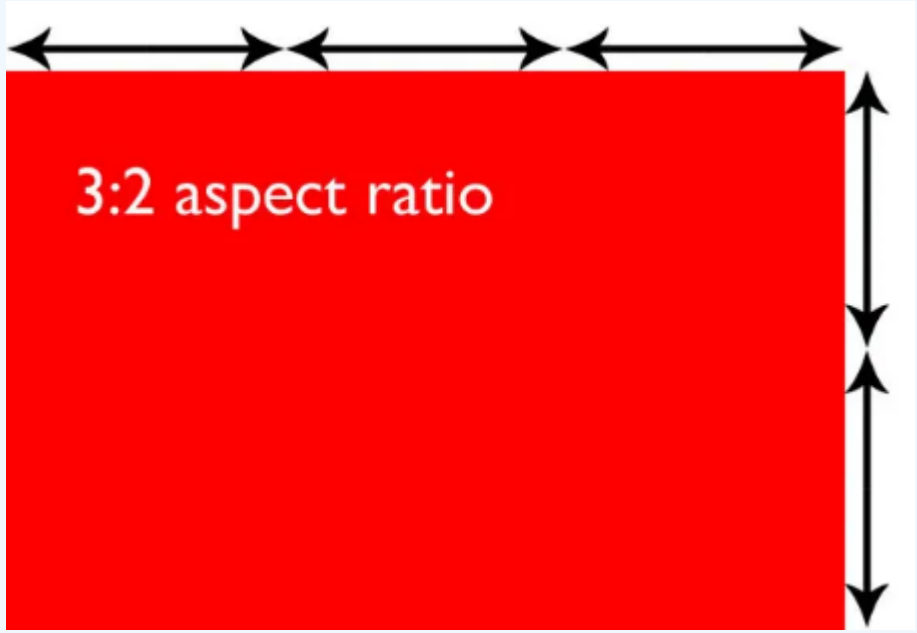
3:2 Aspect Ratio

The 3:2 ratio is probably the most common aspect ratio in photography.

It's used by 35mm DSLRs, most mirrorless cameras, high-end compact cameras and most 35mm film cameras.

This aspect ratio has been with us ever since the first 35mm film cameras were produced in the early 20th century, but is has also been used by artists for centuries.

This Aspect Ratio is suitable for all types of Photography and is often considered the "default view".



4:3 Aspect Ratio

The 4:3 ratio is a classic format that has its roots in digital point and shoot cameras, which were developed to basically match the proportions of the PC monitors of the time.

You'll find the 4:3 aspect ratio in Four Thirds cameras, many compact cameras and in some medium format digital and film cameras.

Compared to the 3:2 ratio, the 4:3 ratio trims a little of the landscape (you lose some of your horizontal scene).

This ratio is a good choice when you want to include/focus on vertical elements of a scene.



16:9 Aspect Ratio

The 16:9 ratio is more commonly known as the “widescreen” format.

It was developed as a replacement for the old 4:3 ratio during the implementation of HDTVs. Most TV’s and monitors now have this format.

This ratio is great for displaying landscapes and other vistas. It creates a cinematic look and feel when used in photography.

When used in Portrait Orientation (turn your camera vertically), it allows you to have long verticals, for skyscrapers and dramatic skies.





1:1 Aspect Ratio

The 1:1 ratio, or square format, might be mistaken as a newer format, as it is well-known for its use on the Instagram platform.

However, square images are also the usual ratio for expensive medium-format cameras, as well as a few toy cameras.

This format is a good choice for cropping close and isolating a subject, or for a scene that doesn’t an interesting landscape.



Same image, different aspect ratios

Look at how the image changes using different aspect ratios. You can achieve this by cropping.

NB – your original image must be large enough to support the crop !
Remember, cropping removes parts of the frame !









Aspect Ratios and Print sizes

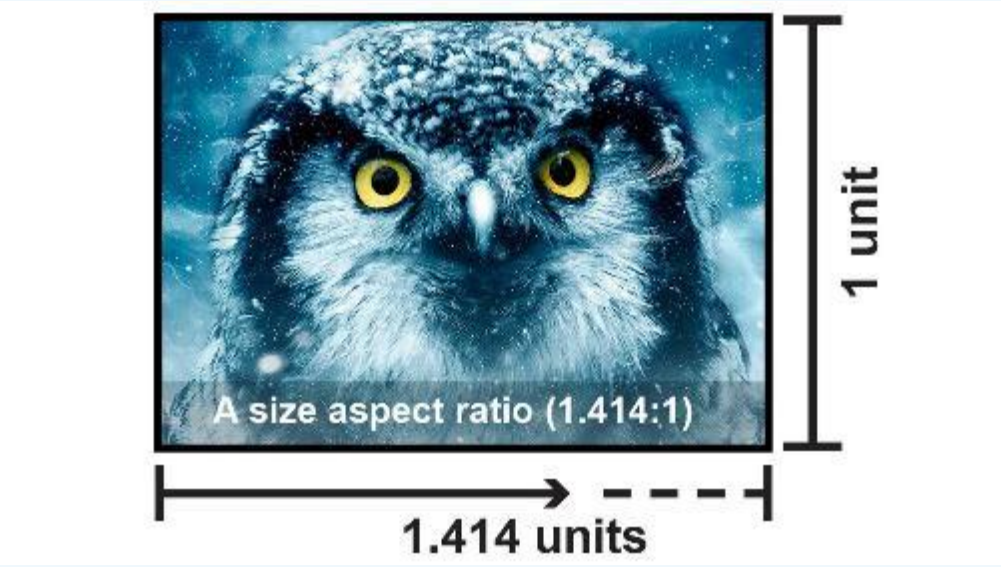
The common 6” x 4” print we all use is directly equivalent to the 3:2 aspect ratio.

A4 is a ratio of 1.4:1, so 3:2 is a close equivalent, as is 4:3.
With 3:2 shots you would have to crop a bit off the width.
With 4:3 you would have to crop a bit off the height.

If you shoot 4:3 (e.g. on your phone), consider printing on 8”x6” paper, as this is directly equivalent.

Other popular sizes include
7”x 5” (18x13cm) – ratio 3.5:2.5 – cropping needed !
10”x8” – ratio 5:4 – cropping needed !
A3 is also a ratio of 1.4:1, so the same as A4.





Cropping to Add Emphasis

Moving the crop edges closer to the subject will make it more prominent.

In a portrait, this might mean focusing on the face; in a sports photo, it might mean highlighting a decisive moment.

Leave enough space for the subject to feel natural and unconfined.



How the Frame Changes the Story

The edges of a photo tell the viewer what matters—and what doesn’t.

Including a person’s surroundings can tell a story about place; cropping tightly can focus attention on expression or detail.

Try alternative crops and notice how the meaning shifts.







Straightening and Adjusting the Frame

A small rotation can level a horizon or correct a slanted building, but straightening trims the corners, so check what gets cut off.



Some editing apps offer perspective tools to correct converging lines. Use them with care: strong corrections can make shapes look unnatural and/or you will lose a lot from the corners.





Cropping to enlarge the subject

Cropping an image to enlarge a subject involves cutting away the outer edges of a photo to make the main subject appear closer and fill more of the frame.

Cutting away background areas concentrates the viewer's attention on the central subject, giving a similar visual result to using a longer lens.

Cropping permanently deletes outer pixels from the file. If you crop too aggressively, the image loses total resolution and can look blurry or pixelated when printed or viewed closely.

Composition Guides: Use tools like the Rule of Thirds grid overlay to place your subject's key features (like eyes or a horizon) along the intersecting lines.





Common Cropping Mistakes to Avoid

Watch for awkward cuts at joints, cramped space around a moving subject, and horizons that tilt unintentionally.

Avoid cropping so tightly that the subject loses important context.

If you’re unsure, keep a little extra space; you can always make a tighter version later.





How to Crop a Photo on iPhone

Open the photo in Photos and tap Edit, then select the crop tool.

Drag the corners or edges to adjust the frame; use the ratio options if you want a standard shape.

Straighten or rotate if needed, then tap Done.

NB – the Menu names can vary slightly by iOS version.



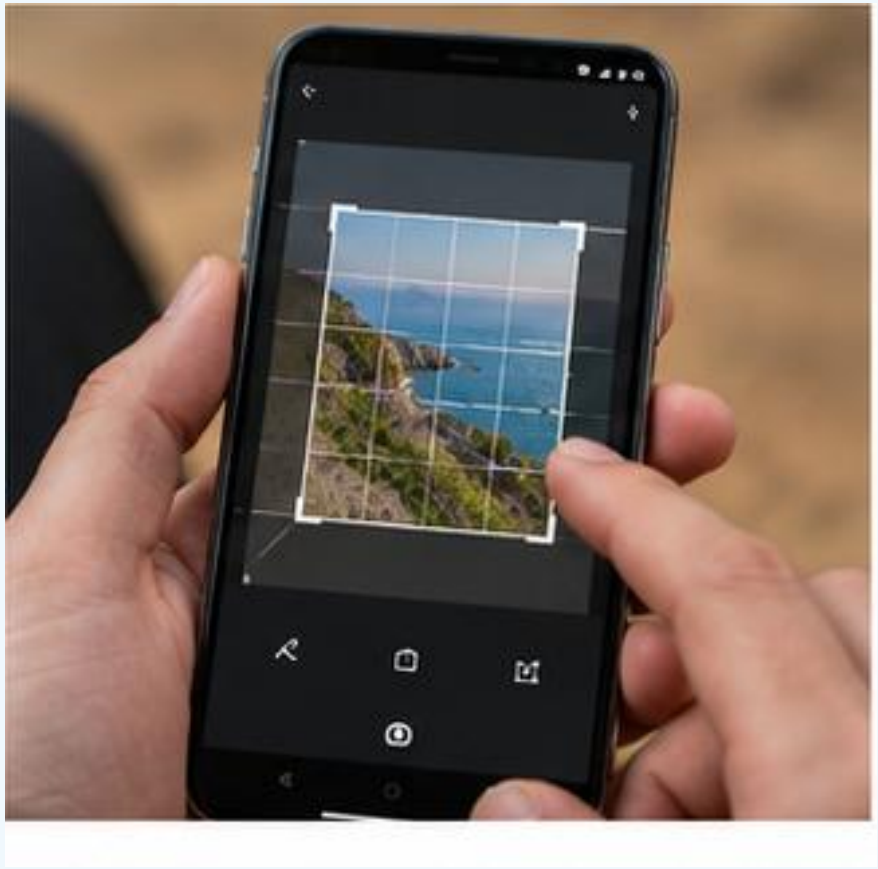
How to Crop a Photo on Android

Open the photo in Google Photos or your phone’s gallery app, then tap Edit and choose Crop.

Drag the edges to reframe, and use the aspect-ratio or straighten controls, if available.

Tap Save, or Save copy.

NB – the menu options vary by phone and app.



A Quick Checklist for Better Crops

Before you finish, ask:-

- Is the subject clear ?
- Do the edges contain distractions or awkward cuts ?
- Is there enough space around the subject ?
- Does the crop suit the image's purpose and format ? Have I compared it with the original ?

Tip - save your image as a copy when you want to preserve the original image.



