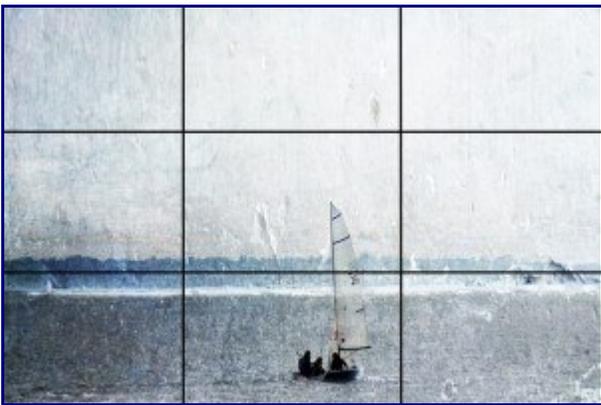


## Composition - The Very First Rules

Before I took my first photographs on my own camera (a Coronet 44, I think), at the age of 12, I hadn't ever considered or learned about composition. I thought it only had something to do with painting... and it was certainly something our Art teacher kept rattling on about. I disregarded composition entirely. Then there came a point where I began intuitively arranging my subject into what seemed 'better balanced' places. There again, I had no idea about shutter speeds and apertures - and I'm not sure I could have done anything about it even if I did.

So if you haven't yet considered composition, here are a few 'rules' to get you going. Naturally, rules are made to be broken. But you can't break the rules until you have mastered them. So here are a few that can, automatically, improve your pictures:



**Thirds** - This may be the most widely known rule of composition among photographers. There's even an option in some DSLRs to switch on a visual grid in your viewfinder, and there's almost certainly an alternative viewfinder for your camera that incorporates this. This rule states that for an image to be visually interesting, the main focus of the image needs to lie along one of the lines marked in thirds. For example, according to this rule, a horizon shouldn't be smack bang in the middle of a photo, but on the bottom

third. A single tree in a field should be aligned with one of the two vertical lines. The example actually has the boat more in the middle than on the third - it's probably not a great example.



**Rule of odds** - The rule of odds states that images are more visually appealing when there is an odd number of subjects. For example, if you are going to place more than one person in a photograph, don't use two, use 3 or 5 or 7, etc. Of course this is a pretty silly notion for an engagement shoot, right? Or a wedding shoot. Or a family with only two kids. But when possible, when you are not just shooting real life but composing images (still life, family groups, flowers) remember the rule of odds. Studies have shown that people are actually more at ease and comfort

when viewing imagery with an odd number of subjects.



**Rule of space** - I used to get this rule mixed up with the rule of thirds. The rule of space probably comes naturally to you and you don't even know it's a rule of composition. The rule of space says that in order to portray movement, context and the idea that the photo is bigger than just the part that you're seeing, you need to leave clutter free 'white' spaces. For example if you're photographing a runner, give him a space to run into. Don't photograph him with all the space in the world behind him because this doesn't help

the viewer picture the forward motion & the space he has yet to run. If you're making a portrait of a woman laughing at something not in the photo, leave space in the direction where she is laughing. This leads the viewer to wonder what's just beyond the boundaries of the photo. What is she laughing at? The reason for confusing this with the rule of thirds is that naturally, when giving your subjects space, they will be placed in a third of the photo.



**Viewpoint** - Often referred to as POV, the most basic of composition rules. And it's as simple as clicking the shutter. You are your viewer. Your camera is the eye. If you photograph a dog at eye level, your viewer will see the dog at eye level (which gives the feeling of equality). If you photograph a dog from below, your viewer will see the dog from below (giving the dog the notion of dominance). If you photograph a dog from above, you are projecting a feeling of your viewer's superiority in relation to the dog.