

CREATIVITY

becoming intentional with color, composition, and light



Becoming Intentional with Color, Composition, and Light

This e-book was created for the photographer who loves to take photos but feels that their images are lacking impact, emotion, or something special. We want to help you create images that make people feel something when they look at them. How do we spark emotion? How can we be more intentional? This e-book will get you moving in the right direction!

It helps to pull away from the technical side of photography for a minute and think about the art of our craft. The practice of shooting in Manual Mode can be overwhelming at first, and sometimes our worries about getting the exposure, lighting, focus, stability and settings just right can distract us from creating an impactful photograph. For this reason, at RMSP we emphasize technical competency first in each class. We want our students to eventually stop stressing about the technical aspects of photography and instead practice creating art. The goal is that we become competent both technically and creatively - but it takes practice!

Most people who have shown any interest in photography or maybe have an art background have heard about the most common rules of composition: rule of thirds, leading lines, negative space, etc. But just because we know what the rules of composition are, doesn't mean we know when and how to use them. Once we know how to use these artistic techniques, the people who view our photographs can see them as they were seen by us - through thoughtful, intentional composition and lighting.

let's dive in!

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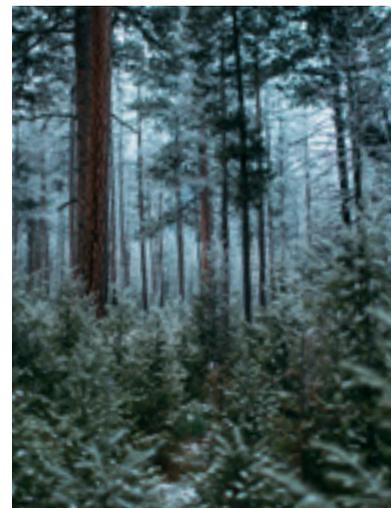
The first step in being intentional with your work is changing the way you take a photograph. Your days of seeing something beautiful, pointing your camera at it, and just snapping a simple photo of it are over. There is a greater process involved and we want you to open your eyes to the beauty of intentionality!

The process of taking a photo:

Intentionality begins with thinking about what you're doing before you click the shutter button. Here is our recommended workflow:

1. **CHOOSE.** Decide what you want to take a photograph of. (This is that moment when you see something and think "That's interesting," or you conceptualize a photo in your head.)
2. **CONSIDER.** Think about what you want viewers to notice and feel when they look at your photo. Or if you aren't sure, reflect on how what you're seeing makes YOU feel and try to pinpoint why you have that response.
3. **COMPOSE.** Utilize artistic techniques of lighting and composition to achieve the mood you have in your mind.
4. **CAPTURE.** Take the photo.

It's your thought process as a photographer that creates an impactful image, so if you apply this process when you are photographing, it will help you become much more intentional and methodical with your image-making. And this process is how we create something unique to who we are as photographers!



Composition:

Let's talk about those important rules of composition that we often use in images. Teaching these guidelines could easily take up an entire art class, but we've included a quick overview on the basics below.

1. Compose so that your subject is positioned on an imaginary one-third line of the frame rather than the center. Or for even greater impact, imagine a tic tac toe board grid of 9 squares over your photo and place your subject where the lines intersect. This encourages the viewer's eyes to travel through the frame rather than to stay static on the subject. This is a simple way to make your photographs look more intentional.



2. Using existing lines in nature, architecture, and the other environments you're shooting in will help direct the viewer's eyes to the subject. Position your subject intentionally so that any existing lines in your frame help point toward the subject. This is a direct and strong way to lead the viewer's eyes.



3. Curves are applied essentially the same way as leading lines. Practice using curves that you find in your scene that lead the viewer's eyes to your subject, through the frame, and back again. Using curves is more soothing and calming than straight lines.



4. This compositional technique provides breathing room and drama to an image. The technique involves eliminating strong elements from a significant part of the image to create a dramatic simplicity.



5. A great way to create a sense of motion in an image is to use the implied movement provided by the direction that the subject is looking or gesturing.



6. When you intentionally compose tightly with little-to-no negative space in the frame you emphasize the subject in a more assertive way.



7. Color can affect our emotions in a big way. (More on this topic below.) Vibrant colors demand attention, while pastels are more soothing. Colors that are opposite each other on the color wheel create contrast, while colors that are adjacent to each other create harmony.



8. Choose the edges of your frame by walking closer or farther from your subject, making sure to leave in what's essential and leave out what's unnecessary. Later, in the editing process, choose the dimensions of the image to better complement or emphasize the subject.



9. Circles and triangles are two strong shapes in all art forms. Triangles create three strong points, while circles create a smooth shape to draw our eye. We can alter our own position or position the objects in our images in order to create these shapes and add emphasis.



More on COLOR:

The psychological impact of colors is both symbolic and emotional. Colors are closely associated with human emotions and moods. Following is a list of colors and what they commonly symbolize to interpretive viewers:

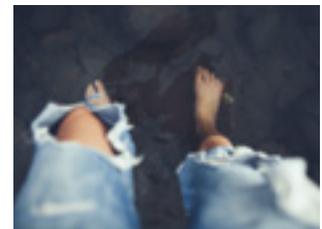
1. **Red:** birth, death, blood, sex, passion, anger, cruelty, aggression, rage, danger and heat.
2. **Orange:** fire, heat, ambition, warmth, happiness, dryness, festivity, and comfort.
3. **Yellow:** the sun, goodwill, health, enlightenment, imagination and cheerfulness.
4. **Blue:** the sky, sea, wisdom, tranquility, eternity, heaven, dignity, sadness, truth, space and introversion.
5. **Green:** the earth, nature, life, hope, growth, youth, money, moisture, envy, prosperity and fertility.
6. **Violet:** nostalgia, mystic wisdom and royalty.
7. **Pink:** innocence, fragility, protection, submission, softness, and femininity.
8. **Brown:** durability, duty, peace, earthiness, middle age and balance.
9. **White:** cleanliness, divinity, holiness, purity, power, decency and simplicity.
10. **Black:** death, mystery, emptiness, depression, doom and conflict.

Colors that signify wealth consist of a powerful hue with its darkened complement, such as burgundy and deep forest green (suggestive of fine wine and affluence).

Colors that signify elegance consist of the palest of tints, such as ivory, eggshell and cream. They give the impression of ease and opulence.

Classic colors can be indicative of strength and authority. For example, intense royal blue implies truth, responsibility, trust, stability and strength.

Color psychology is a huge topic that we encourage you to look further into if you are interested, but this is a good starting place for you to consider.

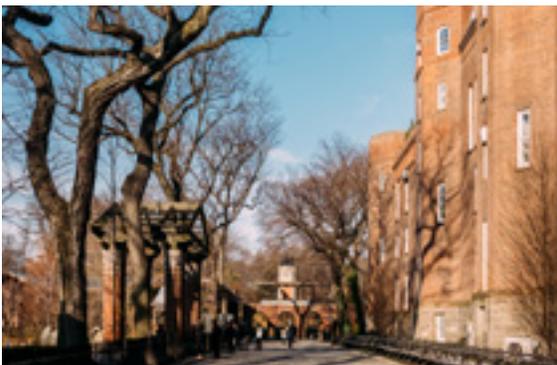


Light:

It is important to pay attention to the intensity and the direction of light in our photographs. This means paying attention to the ambient or natural light within your scene. Most of the following lighting scenarios can be created with natural light shining through a window plus a reflector (which can be as simple as a piece of white poster board). If you have artificial light sources (speed light, studio strobes, etc.) all the better! Use them!

Hard Light

Hard light comes from a small light source relatively close to the subject. Bright, direct sunlight is a hard light source. Hard light creates dark shadows and bright highlights with minimal gradation between them. You'll notice obvious lines where highlights end and shadows begin. Hard light emphasizes texture and creates contrast and drama in a scene.



Soft Light

Soft light comes from a large, diffused light source. An overcast sky is a soft light source. Soft light sources create much more even lighting on a subject. The shadows and highlights are subtle and objects are evenly illuminated. Soft lighting is generally more soothing.

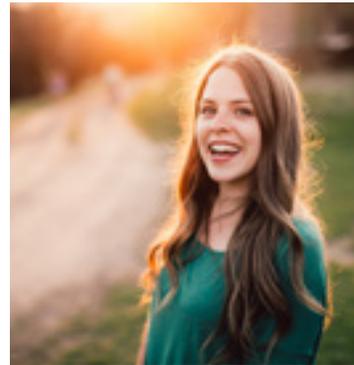


Direction of Light

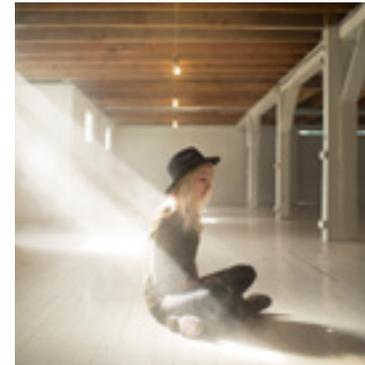
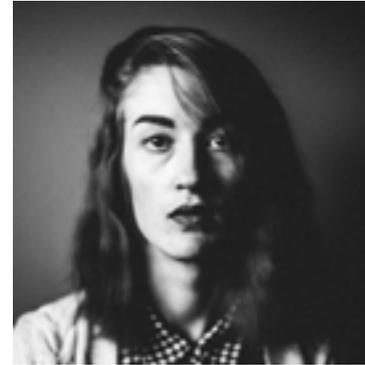
Front light is when the light is placed directly in front of the subject (or maybe slightly off to one side). This lighting setup causes shadows to fall to either side of the subject's face (or the front of the object). The lighting appears smooth across the surface.



Back light is when the light source is coming from directly behind the subject, creating an ethereal look by essentially creating "shade" on the front of the subject. Back light emphasizes silhouettes and creates "rim" or "hair" lighting.



Side/split light is when the light source is coming from the side of the subject, creating a dramatic/moody/mysterious feeling that emphasizes the texture on the surface of the subject.



A practiced and intentional photographer considers both the type of light they're shooting in as well as the direction from which the light is illuminating their subject. Once both of these things have been acknowledged, the photographer can make informed decisions about how to position themselves as well as how to position their subject (if possible). Remember that even a millimeter of movement on the part of the photographer can sometimes make a world of difference!

Bringing It All Together to Create Mood

Now, let's talk about how the techniques we've discussed with composition, color, and light affect the way people feel when they view our images. There are hundreds of diverse human emotions, but let's talk about just a few of those that photographers tend to try to evoke in their images. We've chosen the following four categories:

1. Sad, lonely, longing
2. Cheerful, upbeat, happy
3. Uneasy, anxious, uncomfortable
4. Invigorated, inspired, motivated

So, what photographic elements spark these emotions in viewers?

Sad, lonely, longing can be achieved by using:

- Negative space: A large amount of negative space around the subject can give a sense of stillness and emptiness.
- Gesture: Leaving a lot of negative space in the direction the subject is gesturing suggests that they are thinking, looking or longing for something/someone.
- Lack of color: Color brings life to our photographs. Desaturated photos or black and white photos often lack the energy that color can give and are classically nostalgic or somber. Cooler blue and green tones can carry a more desolate or lonely feeling, too.



Cheerful, pleasing, happy can be achieved by using:

- S-curve: Following an S-curve is slow and soothing to our eyes and minds.
- Color: Bright, airy colors such as orange, yellow, sky blue, green, and pink can make people feel happy.
- Lighting: Front light is inviting and back light is ethereal and warm.



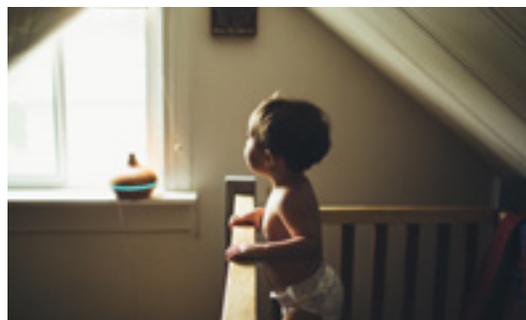
Uneasy, anxious, uncomfortable can be achieved by using:

- Just breaking the rules of composition can make people feel uneasy.
- Diagonal lines: A line that moves diagonally across the frame or that leads somewhere unexpected causes our eyes and minds to go somewhere surprising and perhaps unstable.
- Gesture: You can break the rule of gesture to create mystery. When the subject gestures with eyes or body to where there is less space, the viewer is unsure of what is happening outside of the frame.
- Lighting: Side/split light illuminates only half of the subject, creating mystery on the darker, hidden side.



Invigorated, inspired, motivated can be achieved by using:

- Fill the frame: By allowing no space for eyes to wander, the viewer has no choice but to look at the subject.
- Color: Red creates energy and life. Red demands attention.
- Leading lines: Leading directly to the subject is a direct and sometimes aggressive way to lead the viewer's eyes to the subject.
- Lighting: Hard light creates harsh lines and contrast between the highlights and the shadows making the subject stand out and therefore draw more of the viewer's attention.



Conclusion:

When we create images from the perspective of intentionality and thoughtfulness, we can more easily guide viewers within our vision for the work, and we begin to create more impactful images. Inevitably, viewers will apply their own perspectives to the imagery as well, but we do ourselves a disservice when we don't utilize our own creativity to the best of our ability.

Do keep in mind that even if your image is strong and beautiful, not everyone will like it. Not everyone reacts the way you intend and not everyone likes the way an image makes them feel, even if it's a perfectly good image. You should welcome criticism and invite response, but remember that you ultimately get to decide what you want an image to say.

So, keep practicing these tips and help your vision come through more clearly!

And if you have any photo questions throughout the process, reach out to RMSP on Instagram, Facebook, phone, email, carrier pigeon, etc. We love to help!

Want more help?

We teach all the nitty gritty intricacies of launching, marketing and running your own photography business in our 8-month *Professional Intensive* program.

Or, if you just want to keep learning as much as you can about photography, check out our *Summer Intensive* program as a deep dive into the craft.

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