# The Rule of Thirds

By the time you finish reading this book, I hope that you will be sick of hearing about the Rule of Thirds; I also hope that it will be engrained as a way to start framing each and every shot you take. I am not saying that it is the only way to compose a photo or even the best way in every situation, but it is a great way to start looking at your compositions. One factor that works against this technique is that camera manufacturers put most of the focus points in their cameras in the middle of the frame. This tends to make people place their main subject directly in the middle of the frame. I hope that this chapter will make you look at the scenes in front of you in a new, controlled, and off-centered way.
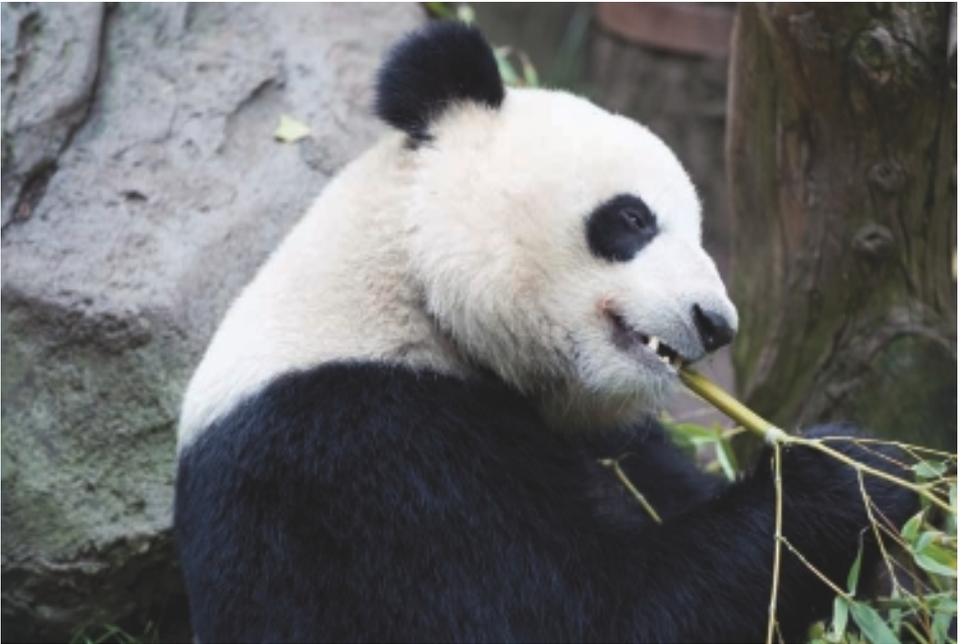
Giant pandas make great photo subjects with their unique coloring and docile behavior. When photographing this panda, I made sure that the eye of the panda was on one of the intersecting points that make up the Rule of Thirds. As a bonus, the bamboo that the panda is eating creates a leading line into the image. Taken at ISO 500, f/2.8, and 1/250 second.

What It Is

The Rule of Thirds is a method of dividing the scene into thirds with imaginary horizontal and vertical lines. Then you place one of the four spots where the lines intersect over the main subject of your image (see Figure 3.1). This technique seems really basic and simple but it works well. You can apply it to landscapes, portraits, horizontal images, vertical images, and everything in between.
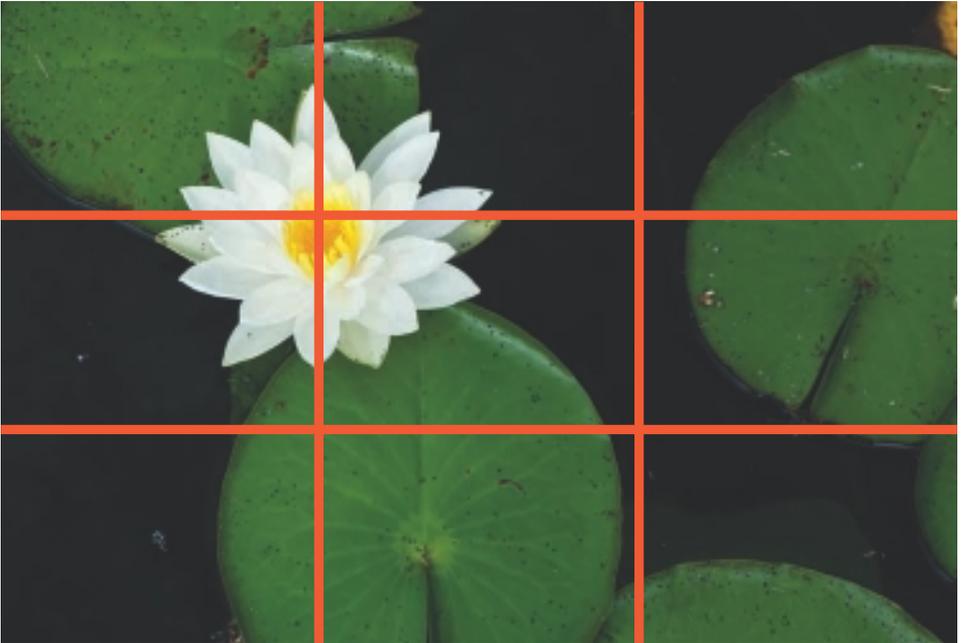
3.1 As you can see, I placed the subject of the image where the lines of the grid intersect. The idea is to keep the grid in mind when composing your images. Taken at ISO 200, f/4, and 1/4000 second.

Although this rule is really simple, it makes a huge difference in composition. If you study the history of the Rule of Thirds, you will learn concepts such as *the golden mean* and the *golden ratio*, even the *golden rectangle*. These all explain why certain compositions are pleasing to the eye. Let's look at some examples.

3.2 This flower was originally centered in the image. By zooming in a little and moving off to the right, the composition improves and feels more balanced. Taken at ISO 100, f/10, and 1/200 second.

I saw the flower shown in Figure 3.2 and liked the way it looked against the backdrop of the wooden fence. The problem was that when the flower was in the center of the frame, the image was frankly a little boring.

All I did was move very slightly to the right and zoom in slightly to isolate the flower. The stem of the flower works as a leading line into the image and helps to create a more balanced composition.

When shooting a portrait, the best way to use the Rule of Thirds is to place one of the points directly on the subject's eyes (see Figure 3.3). Because the eye is the most important part of a portrait, it should be the one element in your image that gets the most attention.

There are times when it feels like there is too much space above the subject; in these situations, just take a few extra photographs so that you can see the difference.

Walk into any bookstore and take a look at the magazine rack; you will see a lot of great examples of portraits, most taken using the Rule of Thirds. Many times the name of the magazine has plenty of space to appear above the portrait.

3.3 When photographing Tim, I first placed him in the middle of the frame, then I moved so that his eyes were one-third of the way down into the frame and his right eye was directly on the intersecting point. Taken at ISO 200, f/5.6, and 1/200 second.

It is not always as simple as looking at the scene and just picking a random line or point to place your subject on. There can be other factors that influence your decision and help you make up your mind. For example, when photographing the tiger in Figure 3.4, I placed her on the right vertical because I wanted to eliminate the brighter area that was on the tiger's left.

Pay attention to the surroundings when you place a subject using the Rule of Thirds; it will not help if you align your main subject correctly but in doing so you introduce a conflicting element.

3.4 One of my favorite subjects is animals, and none are more beautiful to shoot than the big cats. With the tiger in the middle of the frame, there just seemed to be something lacking and my eye kept being pulled to the brighter area on the right. Recomposed with the tiger placed one-third in from the right, the image seems more balanced. Taken at ISO 400, f/2.8, and 1/1000 second.

When to Use

The short answer as to when to use the Rule of Thirds is always! Well, not really, but it is a great place to start with every shot. If you don't believe me, take two photos, one with the subject directly in the middle and one using the Rule of Thirds. After a while, you will find that you take the one using the Rule of Thirds first and start to see the world through your camera viewfinder a little differently (see Figure 3.5).

3.5 When shooting action, you can use the Rule of Thirds easily. This surfer is not only placed on one of the points, but the composition also allows space in front of him to move, and by placing that action on the lower horizontal, you make the action seem closer to the viewer. Taken at ISO 100, f/9, and 1/320 second.

There are times when it is best to use the actual lines instead of the points of intersection. This really comes into play with the horizon line.

The horizon line

The placement of the horizon line in your image is really important. Even if you cannot actually see a true horizon, you know where it should be. For example, check out the horizon in Figure 3.9; the horizon is hidden by trees, but you can imagine where it is. Here are a few tips for dealing with the horizon line and how it relates to the Rule of Thirds:

▶ **Keep the horizon straight.** Unless you have a good reason for tilting the horizon, make sure that it is straight (see Figure 3.6). A slightly tilted horizon just looks sloppy and can be very distracting. When you see a tilted horizon line, your brain wants to straighten it because it seems to be wrong.


3.6 The horizon line and the cloudbank lines are both straight, which is important in this image. Had either line been tilted, the image would have seemed unbalanced and wrong. Following the Rule of Thirds, the horizon line is one-third of the way in from the bottom of the image, to show more of the dramatic sky. The glowing sun is placed on one of the four intersecting points. Taken at ISO 400, f/17, and 1/400 second.

3.7 I placed the horizon line toward the bottom of the image, but I placed the subject, the Celtic cross, on the bottom third. The empty space in the sky helps to draw the eye back to the cross. Taken at ISO 125, f/10, and 1/400 second.

▶ **Place the horizon one-third in from the bottom.** When you place the horizon on the bottom horizontal, the top two-thirds of the frame becomes the subject of the image (see Figure 3.7). You will see this arrangement often, especially when it comes to photographing landscapes.

Whichever part of the image has more space dedicated to it will be the subject of your image. The exception to this is when you want something on the horizon to stand out. Filling the area above it with a clear sky can make the object stand out.

▶ **Place the horizon one-third in from the top.** This makes the ground or foreground more interesting than the sky, giving the bottom area more weight in your image than the top area or sky (see Figure 3.8).
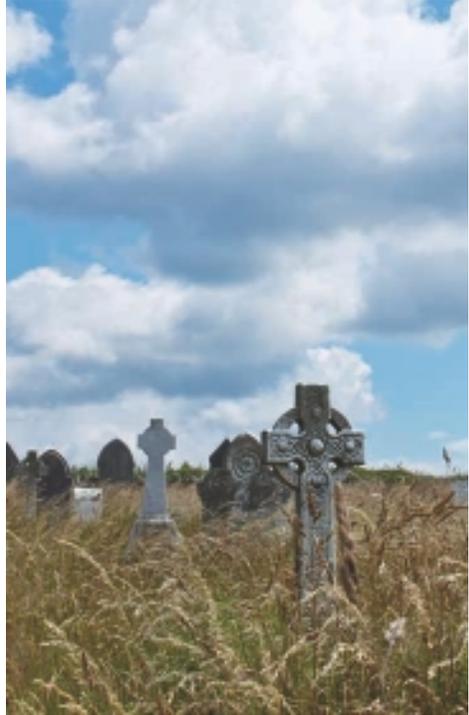
CROSS REF I cover foreground, middle ground, and background in Chapter 8.

3.8 By placing the horizon line toward the top of the image, I focused the attention on the rocks in the river. Taken at ISO 200, f/9, and 1/250 second.

Verticals

It is really easy to compose using the vertical lines created by the Rule of Thirds when there is an obvious vertical element in your image.

For example, look at Figure 3.9, where I placed the statue on the right vertical line.

3.9 When photographing the statue of Juan Rodriguez Cabrillo at the Cabrillo monument in San Diego, I started by having the statue in the middle of the frame, but as I moved to the left I found the composition more pleasing with the statue on the right vertical. Taken at ISO 200, f/10, and 1/400 second.

When Not to Use

There are times when you want to break the Rule of Thirds. This could mean that you either place the subject in the very center or push it way off to the side.

Not every photo you take is going to be able to use the Rule of Thirds and that is fine. Composition is a personal choice after all, and this book is simply trying to help you make those choices. Every photographic situation is unique, and while the Rule of Thirds can help, you always have the choice to ignore it.

When it came to the bear in Figure 3.10, I started by placing the bear on the left vertical, but there was too much background in the image, including fencing and other zoo patrons. So I started to zoom in, which pushed the bear's face into the middle of the screen, but because the size and weight of the bear was still off to the left and the bear looked like he had a place to move, I took the photo with this composition.
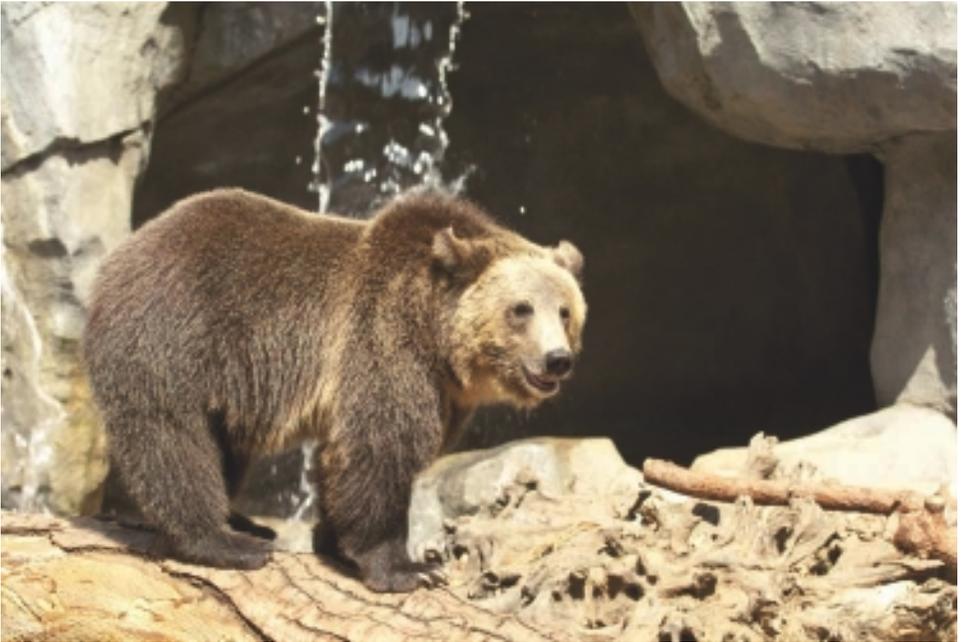
3.10 A bear checks out the onlookers at the zoo before going back inside for a morning nap. Taken at ISO 100, f/4.5, and 1/250 second.

The same holds true for portraits. For example, in Figure 3.11, I wanted a lot of empty space in the frame with the model all the way off to the left. I started with Nicole on the left vertical but I moved her as far over to the left as possible while still keeping her in the frame.

3.11 I wanted to leave as much space as possible on the right side of Nicole, so I pushed her right up against the left edge of the frame. I also had her look off to the left, which created more tension in the image. Taken at ISO 200, f/10, and 1/20 second.

One other time not to use the Rule of Thirds is when taking images using a fisheye lens. Theses lenses have a tremendous amount of distortion, especially towards the edge of the lens, and anything that is placed just one-third into the frame from any direction is going to be distorted (see Figure 3.12). This is especially true when taking photographs of people.

3.12 As you can see from this concert shot that while the effect is a lot of fun, the musicians at the edges of the frame are really distorted. Taken at ISO 1600, f/2.8, and 1/160 of a second with a 16mm fisheye lens.

Leading Lines

There are lines everywhere, both subtle and obvious, in both nature and man-made environments. Your eyes pick up on them even if you're not aware of it. By using these leading lines in your images, you can control where and how the viewer's eye travels. Unlike the Rule of Thirds, which you can use easily in just about every situation, composing an image using leading lines usually means a close study of the surrounding scene before pressing the Shutter Release button. This chapter will look at what leading lines are, how they work, where to use them, when to use them, and when not to use them.

One of my favorite spots to photograph is the Ocean Beach pier in San Diego. I picked this image because it contains multiple lines, from the pier heading out to sea, to the way the clouds are lined up in the sky, and even the way the reflections in the foreground seem to point out to the horizon line. Taken at ISO 100, f/16, and 0.8 second.

What Are Leading Lines?

There are many different types of lines that you can use to draw a viewer's eye into and around an image. Many times these lines start on the edge of the frame and lead inward, which leads the eye from the edge into the image. This works especially well when it comes to diagonals.

Diagonals

These can be the strongest lines, leading the viewer from the outside edge, especially close to the corners of the image, toward the main subject. These can be really obvious, such as the neck of the giraffe in Figure 4.1, or less obvious, such as the branches coming in from the top-right corner of the same image. When you look at the photo, you can't help but be drawn to the face of the young giraffe.

For Figure 4.2, I was watching the interaction between the spectator and the horse at a local park. Focusing on the hand, I realized that the ropes and chain created lines leading to the nose. When the hand was placed on the nose, everything fell into place. Even without the hand, the composition would still be strong with the existing leading lines.
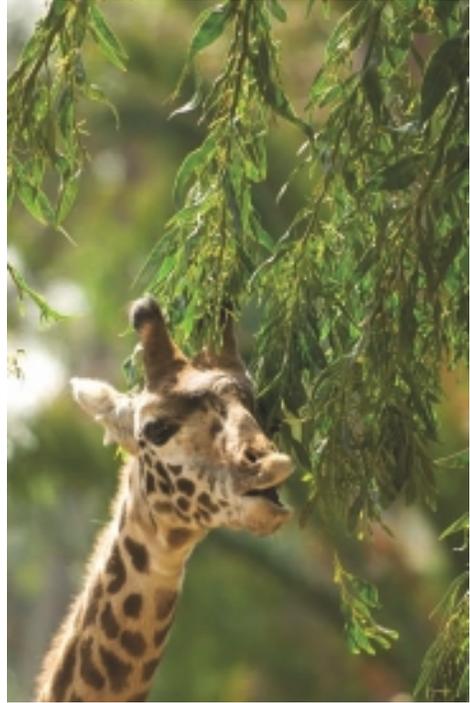
4.1 I used the line of the giraffe's neck to draw the eye up from the bottom-left corner, while at the same time I used the direction of the branches to draw the eye inwards from the top-right corner. Taken at ISO 100, f/3.2, and 1/250 second.

Straight lines

Straight lines in your image run either horizontal or vertical, as in Figure 4.3.

CROSS REF A horizon line is one type of horizontal line, and you can find an example of this in Chapter 3. Also, check out Chapter 9 for more information about shooting from below.

4.2 This image has three different diagonals, all meeting at the same point. Between the red rope from the top left, the chains from the bottom left, and the hand from the bottom right, the eye is immediately drawn to the nose of the horse. Taken at ISO 200, f/4.5, and 1/160 second.

When you have lines that are standing straight up, such as a tall tree or the telephone pole in Figure 4.4, it denotes a feeling of power and strength, especially when photographed from below.

The lines coming in from the edges support the feeling of strength and power and lead the eye straight to the main subject.

4.3 I really liked this candid shot of a local painter. It makes a great example of the combination of diagonal lines and straight lines. Taken at ISO 100, f/9, and 1/160 second.

4.4 This entire image is made up of vertical, horizontal, and diagonal lines. Taken at ISO 320, f/22, and 1/250 second with –1 exposure compensation.

When photographing people, there are many opportunities to use straight lines. For example, arms, legs, and body can all be used in your composition. However, you need to resist the temptation to pose your subjects in unnatural ways just to create a usable line.

Look at Figure 4.5: There are two different sets of lines in the same image, but they are both doing the same thing. There is the edge to the pool on both sides of the model; these straight lines run in from the edge toward the model. Another set of lines created by the model's legs draw the eye up toward her face.
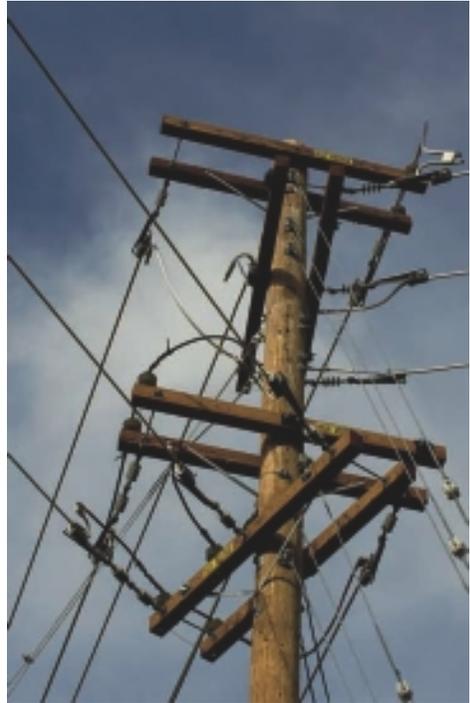
4.5 I photographed Mia on the edge of the pool and used her pose to help draw the eye into the frame. This was lit by two strobes placed camera left, one to light the background was gelled blue and other was used to light the model. Taken at ISO 100, f/5, and 1/200 second.

4.6 The curved lines in this image are made from the shape of the rocks. See how the line leads in from the bottom right, curves towards the center of the image, and then ends in the pool of water. Taken at ISO 200, f/3.3, and 1/250 second.

Curving lines

Not all lines in images are straight; sometimes they curve and this can be a really good thing. Curving lines can add a feeling of motion and help keep the viewer's eye inside the photo. Because these lines move around inside the frame (see Figure 4.6), your eyes do the same.

Most of the time, lines in nature are curved. The more gentle the curve in the line, the more calming the image is (see Figure 4.7), while the more the line zigs and zags, the more energy it seems to have.

Curved lines are also present when you photograph people. Many times the curved line is the shape of the person's face or body. Look to see how the curve of a hip or the positioning of a shoulder can change the flow in an image, as in Figure 4.8.

4.7 The roots all curve and snake as the main subject of this image. Taken at ISO 200, f/7.1, and 1/25 second.

4.8 This image is a great example of people and lines; there are the curved lines created by the dancer's body, as well as the lines of the wings she is dancing with. Taken at ISO 200, f/4, and 1/640 second.

This implied line can control the viewer's gaze as easily as if it were an actual physical line in the image. For example, in Figure 4.9, Dhanie is looking off to the right, and so the viewer wants to look off to the right to see what she is looking at.

Consider that the classic definition of a woman's figure is an hourglass, which consists of just two basic curves. Men too have curving lines (of course these usually are much more subtle than a woman's), but photographs tend to show men standing straight up, denoting power.

When to Use

As with the Rule of Thirds, the best time to use leading lines is whenever you can. What is different is that many times there are obvious lines in the image, and so it is up to the photographer to either find some lines or create some implied lines. If you have the subject of your image looking in a certain direction, then the viewer's eye almost always looks to see what the subject is looking at.

4.9 I posed Dhanie off to the side of the light, and then she turned and looked toward the light. Taken at ISO 200, f/4, and 1/125 second.

There are times when your subject actually contains lines itself. These sometimes can conflict, drawing the eye away from the main subject, luckily that isn't the case, with the zebra in Figure 4.10.

I tried to use the lines created by the shape of the neck to draw the viewer's eye up into the image, while the lines on the neck keep the viewer's eye in the image. What is interesting about this image is that with all the straight lines visible, the notch in the ear in the upper-right corner really stands out.

I could have zoomed in closer to the hawk in Figure 4.11, but I wanted to give the image some perspective and I liked the starkness of the branches the bird had chosen as a vantage point.

The idea is that the branches lead the eye into the frame because they are the only things that touch the edge,

4.10 There are many different types of lines in this image, from the line of the zebra's neck to the lines on the zebra's face. Taken at ISO 640, f/5.6, and 1/800 second.

but you need to be careful because it is just as easy to guide the eye out of the image.

When you look at the hawk, does your eye stay with the bird or does it travel down and out of the image?

Remember that the viewer of your image needs to have something to look at; the main subject needs to be compelling or it won't matter how the lines are used. The image will still be boring.

4.11 Branches make excellent lines in an image, drawing the eye in. Taken at ISO 200, f/9, and 1/640 second.

What to Look For

As the photographer, it is your job to see and use the lines in the best way possible. This is easier to do when shooting a static subject, such as a landscape or portrait, because you can take your time, as opposed to a moving subject such as when shooting sports or wildlife.

Many times I look out over a scene and close my eyes, then slowly open them and see where my eyes end up. Once I understand where the natural focus point is, I look to see why my eye was drawn to that point and use those same lines to compose my scene.

In Figure 4.12, my eyes kept being drawn back to the hands and how they were so tightly gripped around the balloon strings. I could have just focused on the hands and captured the grip, but I wanted to make sure that the viewer's eyes went where I wanted them to go, right to the clutching hands.

The multicolored strings draw the eyes from the top-left corner to the hands, and just for good measure, I made sure that the angle I used would show the same strings leaving his hand and going off to the left. This helps to bring the eye into the image as it travels around the outside of the frame.

Once you start looking for the lines in an image, you will find them every-where. Still looking at Figure 4.12, there are other lines that draw the viewer's attention to the hands in the image. There are the two stripes of color (one dark blue, the other white) on the right side that both point upward to the hands. The sleeve of the jacket also creates lines that point to the hands.

In Figure 4.13, I had seen that the spotlights at this concert venue were placed on either side of the crowd at the back of the venue. I went all the

4.12 Check out the lines created by the balloon strings as they are clutched in the birthday boy's hand. Taken at ISO 200, f/4.5, and 1/640 second.

way to the back row and waited until both lights were on at the same time before tak-ing the photo. The twin beams of solid white draw the eye in not only because of the placement and direction, but also because of the symmetry and color.

CROSS REF Symmetry and color are covered in Chapters 5 and 6, respectively.

Consider this last section a little bit of a warning. Sometimes it is easy to get carried away with the idea of lines in an image, and you can actually harm your compositions by plac-ing elements that distract instead of help. I repeatedly talk about filling the frame; make sure that items in the background don't distract from the main subject of your image.

In Figure 4.14, I believed that by waiting until the jaguar was in this position, the branches in the background would help to lead the eye to the big cat; instead, what has happened is that the branches look like they are poking the subject in the eye — not the image I was looking for. I should have paid more attention to the overall com-position than just trying to force a leading line situation.

4.13 I waited until the two spotlights were both on and aimed at the stage before pressing the Shutter Release button, creating matching diagonals that draw the eye towards the bright stage. Taken at ISO 400, f/2.8, and 0.8 second.

4.14 The sticks off to the right help to bring the eye into the image, but are they too distracting? Taken at ISO 800, f/4.5, and 1/160 second.

Symmetry and Balance

Not every rule can apply to every situation, and there are times when an evenly balanced image with good symmetry works really well. So when do you choose symmetry and balance over tension and the Rule of Thirds, and how can you use it to improve your compositions? What design elements should you look for and what shapes work best? In addition to these points, I'll also talk about reflections and how they can add balance to your images, especially when shooting landscape scenes.

I centered the vents in the frame, as they were centered in the wall of the building. The symmetry of the building strengthens the composition. Taken at ISO 800, f/13, and 1/60 second.

What Symmetry and Balance Mean

To understand how and when to use symmetry and balance effectively in your images, you first need to know what *symmetry* and *balance* mean.

When you place the main subject of your image in the exact middle of the frame, the image seems to be symmetrical; it is balanced with the same amount of space on each side (see Figure 5.1).

The same holds true if there are two objects placed an equal distance from the center of the frame. These two objects seem to balance each other out as if the center of the frame is a pivot point and the two objects are on a balance beam (see Figure 5.2).

The symmetrical composition has the same elements on both sides of the image — either left and right or top and bottom — and can also be divided on the diagonal.
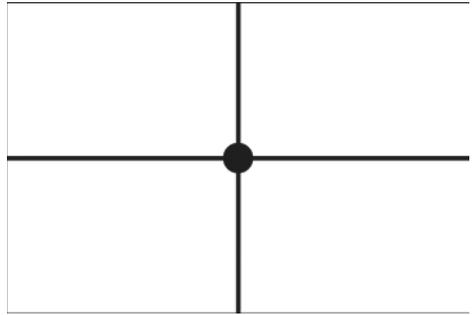
5.1 If you look at the grid produced when you have a vertical and horizontal line bisecting the image, you see that any subject placed alone in the center can create a symmetrical and balanced composition, as is the case with the flower shown here. Taken at ISO 800, f/13, and 1/60 second.

Opposites

The opposite of a symmetrical composition is an *asymmetrical composition*, which occurs when there is an imbalance because the same elements are not on both sides of the dividing line.

When an image has symmetrical composition, it also has symmetrical balance. This is the opposite of the *dynamic balance* produced when you put the subject on one of the intersection points created by using the Rule of Thirds, as shown in Chapter 3. Symmetrical balance is based on the center point of the image.

When photographing people, there are times when a symmetrical composition works well. I set up the image of Dhanie in Figure 5.2 to take advantage of the symmetry in the composition. She was posed carefully so that her arms both came up to the same spot and were held in the same way. Her gaze is directed upward, and the camera was set up directly in front of her.

Even with all the preparations, I still needed to edit the final image in postproduction to create the look I wanted. I took parts of the image from the left side and matched it to the right side of the image so that the two halves were perfectly symmetrical. This involved quite a lot of Photoshop work to line up the two sides to have it look natural.

5.2 I shot this image in the studio and set it up so that each side of the image was exactly the same. I lit the model with the same lights placed in the same position on either side. I edited certain elements in postproduction to make sure that the composition was as symmetrical as possible. Taken at ISO 100, f/9, and 1/320 second.

When it comes to shooting buildings and other static objects, try centering the composition right in the middle of your frame. This is easy because every camera has a focus point right in the center.

When I wanted a different view of my favorite pier in Figure 5.3, I opted to go under the pier and use a symmetrical composition to show the sturdiness of the structure. I focused on the exact center of the image, which was the tiny speck of light seen at

the end of the pier. The symmetry is enhanced by the repeating columns that are the same distance from the center point, and the triangle created by the bottom of the pier helps to draw the eye in as it goes overhead out to the vanishing point.

5.3 A very different view of the Ocean Beach pier. Taken at ISO 100, f/16, and 1.5 seconds.

One thing to notice is that even though I am not using the Rule of Thirds in the traditional sense, the pillars that are farthest away from the center are roughly one-third of the way in from each edge of the frame.

TIP When it comes to creating images that have symmetrical composition, the symmetry needs to be precise because an image with just a slight symmetrical composition can look sloppy and wrong.

When to Use

Your brain likes to see order, but things that are considered orderly don't always hold your attention. So in what circumstances would you use an orderly, symmetrical composition so that it won't be perceived as boring?

Remember that composition, while it has guidelines, is a subjective choice. If you like the way a certain image looks and it seems to break the rules, then that's just fine. Many of the images in this chapter break other rules of composition, but I still like them.

There are two specific situations where I tend to create symmetrically balanced images: when I am shooting scenes that have reflections, and when I am shooting nature scenes.

Reflections

When you shoot reflections, you usually want to break one of the main rules of composition by placing the horizon line in the center of the image. This allows you to balance the image by having the scene evenly visible on both sides of the dividing line.

The most common use of this technique is the classic reflection shot of mountains and clouds cleanly reflecting back in a pristine lake as in Figure 5.4. I know the image is a cliché, but it works really well. The key to the image is the symmetrical composition.

5.4 This is not a pristine lake but it is the closest I have ever come. Photographed on the way to a wedding outside of Boulder in Colorado. Taken at ISO 125, f/8, and 1/320 second.

As the sun came up, there was a brief moment when the reflection of the sky and mountains looked great in the lake. I set the shot up to get a mirror image of the scene. This works best if the top and bottom of the image seem to perfectly reflect each other. The most important part of the composition is to make sure that the space above the centerline is the same as the space below it.

Nature

There is a lot of symmetry in nature — in flowers, leaves, feathers, and even our features. Sometimes, all you have to do is look close enough and you can see the patterns that are there.

There is more than one pattern going on in the leaf in Figure 5.5. One pattern consists of the small lines coming off the main vein and giving the image some flow and motion, while the other is the pattern of different colors as the leaf changes between light and dark green.

Both of these patterns are symmetrical in their own way, and I made sure to place the main stem of the leaf in the exact middle of the frame so that each of the patterns could have space to develop.

When photographing the symmetrical pattern, I wanted to make it the subject of the image, so I made sure that the pattern was not interrupted and didn't end.


5.5 I photographed this leaf to show its symmetrical pattern. Taken at ISO 800, f/20, and 1/13 second.

CROSS REF For more information on photographing patterns, see Chapter 14.

I knew I wanted to show the symmetry of the peacock feather in Figure 5.6, but I also wanted to do something different than the typical straight up-and-down or side-to-side composition. By shooting at a 45-degree angle, I was still able to show the symmetry but I added a little more for the eye to examine.
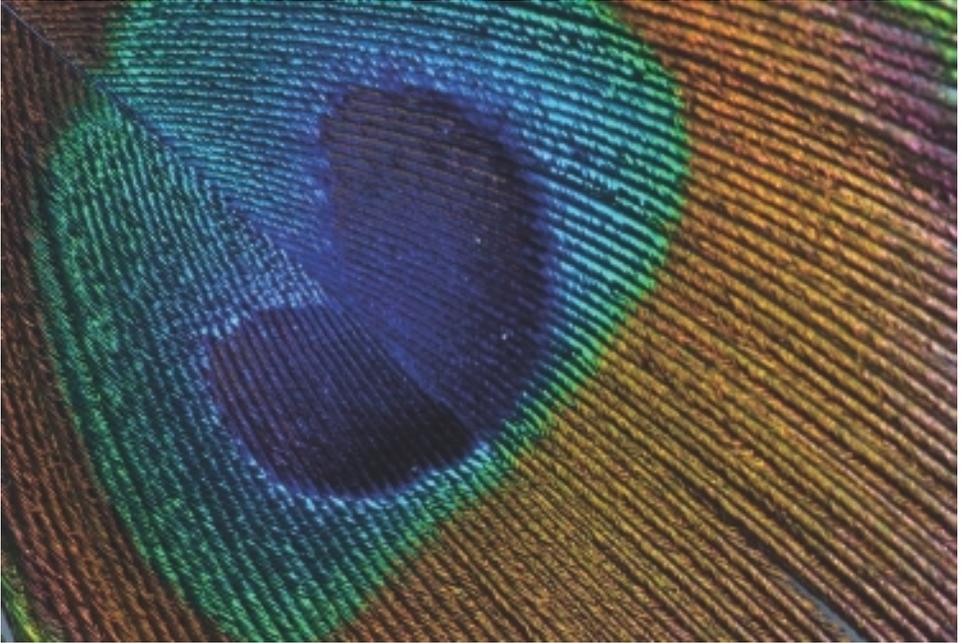
5.6 I composed the peacock feather to show the symmetry in the design. Taken at ISO 800, f/16, and 1/250 second.

There is nothing wrong with using parts of each composition rule, but you need to understand why you are doing what you are doing. In this case, the coloring was slightly uneven so I needed to balance the image in a different way. Do you see the touch of green on the upper-right and the lower-left corners? These pieces of color help to emphasize the symmetry of the image.

What to Look For

It is not always clear exactly what to look for when creating a balanced and symmetrical composition. Some things I look for are strong design elements that will help to anchor the composition of my image, as well as repeating lines, which can help to add a sense of symmetry.

One thing to always keep in mind is that there can be unexpected opportunities for symmetrical compositions. The more you practice the more you will be able to see these opportunities when they present themselves.

Strong design elements

When shooting a symmetrical composition, it helps if there is a strong design element that will immediately be evident in the image.

The shot of New York City in Figure 5.7 works because of the symmetrical composition created by the two buildings on either side and how they relate to the skyscraper in the center of the image.

Even though the buildings on the sides are not exactly the same, they are close enough to work as a balanced composition. The building in the center holds the entire composition together and could stand by itself because it is architecturally symmetrical.

There are times when the subject of your image just seems to work better in the center, as is the case in Figure 5.8, which shows the cross at the veterans' memorial on Mount Soledad.

The whole structure is built with the cross as its center point, and that's where I felt it belonged in the image.

5.7 Shot in New York City, this image of the skyscraper is balanced by the buildings on either side. Taken at ISO 200, f/5.6, and 1/125 second.

I also worked to get the stairs and the stair rails as balanced as possible, to maintain the symmetry of the image. There is a sense of power and stability in the image because of this, and the placement and angle make you look up to the cross, adding to that feeling of majesty and power.

5.8 The cross at the veterans' memorial in La Jolla, California. Taken at ISO 400, f/13, and 1/640 second.

Repeating lines

Let's talk about the repeating lines of symmetry that you can use to create pleasing compositions. For the image of the daisy in Figure 5.9, I used the symmetry in the petals, the middle part of the flower, and the center. Each of the three sections of the flower has been bisected right through the middle, creating three concentric semicircles.

This repeating pattern, along with the placement of the flower at the bottom edge of the frame, creates an interesting composition that is both pleasing to the eye and symmetrically balanced.

5.9 This half-flower shows the use of both a symmetrical composition and the flower's shape. Taken at ISO 800, f/8, and 1/200 second.

Unexpected opportunities

Figure 5.10 was shot in the studio, and while it was not set up to be a symmetrical composition to begin with, I noticed how the chains were hanging and decided to create a symmetrical composition. I took a few extra photographs with the symmetrical composition to see how they compared to what I was originally trying.

I recommend that you take two photographs of each scene, one using a symmetrical composition and one using an asymmetrical composition, to see the difference. This is the only way that you will be able to see for yourself which composition works best in each circumstance.

CROSS REF Try using the Rule of Thirds, described in Chapter 3, to compose a shot and then compare it to your symmetrical composition.

5.10 Dhanie photographed in the studio. Taken at ISO 100, f/2.5, and 1/200 second.

The key here is to notice when elements in your image are already in a symmetrical pattern and to use them. It won't work all the time — nothing ever does — but as you keep looking and photographing, these different compositional "rules" will begin to seem more obvious.

Color

When you understand how color works in an image, you can use it to draw the viewer's eye in and focus their attention on specific elements. Colors often evoke meaning to people, and you can bring this significance out in your images by picking the right color or color combinations.

This chapter will help you to understand how color makes a photo look cool or warm, and which color combinations can make people feel great about the image. You will also learn when you should use color and what to look for when composing your image, including the use of complementary and clashing colors.

These hammocks were for sale but when photographed hanging on top of each other, they become a mix of lines and colors. Taken at ISO 200, f/4, and 1/60 second.

What Color Means

Painters and artists have always been using colors to evoke feelings in the viewer and to enhance the subject of their work; photographers, on the other hand, have been limited because photography is usually about capturing the world in a realistic way.

Early in my photography development, I concentrated on accurately recording the world as I saw it through the viewfinder; I didn't spend much time worrying about the colors and how they affected the feel of the photograph until I realized that some images just worked better and had a better feel to them than others. That is because certain colors have meanings that can add emotional resonance to your images.

I'm sure that at some point when using a computer or reading your camera manual you have come across the acronym *RGB*. This stands for Red, Green, and Blue, which are the primary colors (also called hues) used in every TV screen, computer monitor, and camera screen. When these colors are all added together, the result is white.

But individually, these three colors each carry certain connotations:

▶ **Red.** Red is the universal color for danger (see Figure 6.1). It is used in streetlights to tell people to stop, in warning lights and caution signs, and as the color of the brake lights on the back of a car.

When you see red, your eyes are drawn to it immediately. In your images, using a little red can go a long way. Red also means warmth and energy; the redder an image is, the warmer it feels.

▶ **Green.** Green is the color of plants, trees, and grass, as you can see with Figure 6.2. It is the opposite of red in Western culture, because it is used to indicate that everything is working

6.1 Nothing grabs your attention quite like a red warning sign. Taken at ISO 200, f/5.6, and 1/400 second.

well. Green in your images will not usually stop anyone's eye as there is little that is alarming or arresting about it.

Green also has a growing connotation as being environmentally friendly. Think of recycling and keeping the planet green. It imparts a good feeling.

TIP When shooting leaves, grass, and other foliage, a polarizing filter can often make the colors pop because it can reduce the light reflecting off the smooth surfaces.

6.2 Green means spring and plants coming back after winter. This image captures the whole spring feel, from the vibrant green to the single red flower and a bee gathering pollen. Notice how the red of the flower and the green of the plants seem to go so well together? That's because they are complementary colors. Taken at ISO 200, f/5.6, and 1/1000 second.

▶ **Blue.** Blue is the color of the sky and water. When seen from space, the earth is just a blue, spinning ball. When you see blue, it has a calming effect and can convey a feeling of peace and quiet, such as you may feel from Figure 6.3.

And while blue is not the direct opposite of red on the color wheel, it does have the opposite effect on the color temperature of an image in that the more blue there is in an image, the colder it feels.

6.3 Photographed out the window of the small commuter plane, all the different soothing blues of the Tahitian waters are easily seen. Taken at ISO 100, f/5.6, 1/250 second.

Try photographing colors just to see how they interplay with each other. Look for primary colors and see what was placed around them and how your eye is drawn to the colors. Also pay attention to how the different colors make you feel; being aware of your own emotions when viewing certain colors will help you to create that same feeling in the people who view your images.

How to Use Color

People make use of color all the time even if they don't know it; for example, the choice to photograph or print in black and white is a decision about color. So you need to think more about what colors you can add or remove from the frame to make a better composition.

Black and white

In Figure 6.4, you see the same image in both color and black and white. I took the image because I really liked the colors and the vibrant look of the sunflowers. When the image is converted to black and white, you can see the form and pattern but the impact and the intent of the original image are lost.

6.4 These sunflowers were in a bucket at a local farmer's market; the colors were vibrant under the white awning, which acted like a giant softbox. Taken at ISO 200, f/3.5, and 1/90 second.

Color combinations

Certain color combinations have built-in meanings that could change, depending on your location. For example, in the United States, the red, white, and blue combination evokes an image of the American flag and can elicit a very strong emotional response. It is one of the reasons why Superman and Wonder Woman are dressed the way they are. Wonder Woman even went so far as to have the white stars against a blue background as part of her costume.

For Figure 6.5, I could have used any color of lipstick, but it wouldn't have had the same impact. I carefully chose the colors and the placement so that the blue and white were in the background, but the red was in the foreground. They work together to tie the whole image together.

A viewer's eye always goes to the brightest area or color of a scene.

6.5 Dhanie was shot in the studio against a backdrop of a flag. You can see how the blue and white in the flag and the red in her shirt and lipstick complete the look. Taken at ISO 100, f/5.6, and 1/250 second.

Bold and bright

There are times when the colors of a scene dictate the whole look of the image; sometimes this is when there are very few colors and the scene looks monochromatic, and other times the sheer amount of color becomes the focus of the image, as in Figure 6.6.

Both styles can work, but if you are going to have a busy scene with bold, bright colors, then you need to know that it can overwhelm any subtle subjects.

6.6 These Mexican blankets were hanging in a shop wall and the sheer number of colors and patterns made for an interesting photo. Taken at ISO 200, f/6.7, and 1/180 second.

Understanding White Balance

I want to briefly talk about white balance here, and reiterate that the color of the light can play a huge role in your images; at times, it is better to leave the warmer or cooler colorcast, depending on the mood you want to achieve.

CROSS REF   For more information on white balance, see Chapter 2.

The two images in Figure 6.7 show the same photo, with the only difference being the white balance of the image.

The first shot was taken using the daylight white balance setting, causing the photo to have a slightly warm colorcast, which is right because it was taken close to sunset.

With the second image, the white balance was set to fluorescent, giving the image a decidedly blue cast. Adjusting the white balance in postproduction can be used to change the image color after you have taken it, but be careful that you don't introduce a color that negatively impacts your image.

![CROSS REF] For more information on white balance, see Chapter 2.

What to Look For

Color is everywhere, but to use it in your composition effectively, you need to understand how the different colors work with each other and how at times they work against each other. You can use color to create a mood, evoke an emotional response, and lead the viewer around your image.

6.7 The Ocean Beach pier at sunset. Taken at ISO 200, f/3.5, and 1/640 second.

The first thing I look for in my images is the brightest color in the scene because your eyes are drawn to the brightest area of an image and after that, they are drawn to the brightest color, especially red or white (see Figure 6.8).

Because your eyes are drawn to those areas first, if they are not part of the subject, then they will be distracting for the viewer.

When you want to use colors in your composition, or even as your composition, think about the following color uses:

▶ **Complementary colors.** Two colors are complementary when they are opposite from each other on the color wheel; when used together, they balance out an image. Some of the most commonly used complementary color combinations are blue and orange, red and green, and yellow and violet.

Now, this doesn't mean that you need to have equal amounts of each color in the image; even a little dab of a complementary color can cause both colors to seem more intense.

▶ **Single color.** You can use a single color in the image or a single overwhelming color that overshadows everything else (see Figure 6.9). This allows you to convey a feeling or mood.

Note that this is not the same as when the whole image has the same colorcast.

▶ **Stand-out colors.** Having one color different from the rest of the colors in the image draw's the viewer's attention to the subject you want.

The human eye cannot focus on two colors at the same time because each color is a slightly different wavelength. So when two colors that are farther apart on the wavelength spectrum are right next to each other, the brain translates the signal from the optic nerve as color vibrance, which produces a feeling of discord. This is why certain colors don't seem to go well together.

6.8 There are at least three different blues in this image, but it is the white lettering that the viewer's eye is drawn to. Taken at ISO 100, f/9, and 1/50 second.
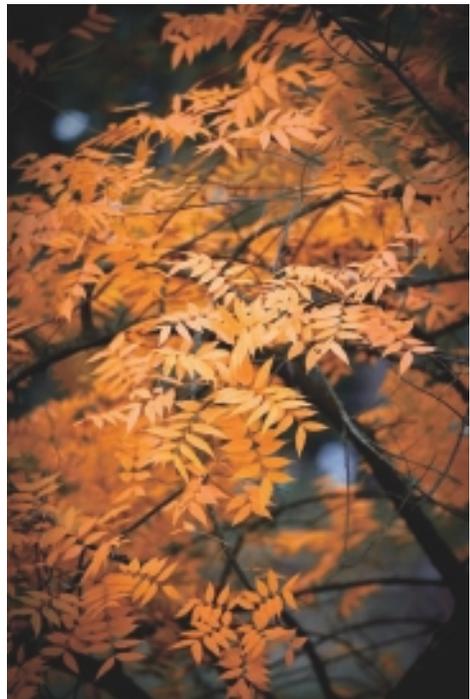
6.9 Fall colors are easy to identify and to photograph, especially when the scene has some fill light from a flash. These leaves were photographed in the fall in Northern California. Taken at ISO 200, f/2.8, and 1/250 second.

▶ **Color repetition.** Using the same color repeatedly in your image can add cohesiveness to the composition. This can be as simple as matching the color of an element in the background to something in the foreground.

▶ **Color frames.** You can frame your main subject by a color as opposed to an actual object. This could just be the change in wall color or the way the clouds are lined up in the sky. Framing a subject properly draws attention to the subject and not away from it, and so one of the things to watch out for is using a brighter color on the frame than the subject. Because you tend to be drawn to brighter objects, a bright frame can draw your eye away from the main subject.

▶ **Colorcast.** Color can set a mood, with reds and oranges being warm and inviting (as in Figure 6.10), while blues are cold and uninviting. You can control the whole mood just by controlling the main color.

NOTE Color wheels come in a variety of sizes and specialties, I have one from The Color Wheel Company http://www.colorwheelco.com.

6.10 The color at sunset adds a warm glow to the mountain range. Taken at ISO 100, f/3.3, and 1/35 second.

Event Photography

Event photography covers a wide range of different situations, from concerts to birthday parties and just about everything in between. It is very difficult to be ready for all the different situations that can arise at an event, but this chapter deals with some things that hold true for all events. For example, you will learn how to make the subject stand out from the rest of the scene, and what to look for in the surroundings and the background. You will also read about the gear involved in shooting events, as taking the right lenses can really increase your chances of getting the best shot in every situation. Researching the event you are shooting will also really improve your odds of successfully photographing it.

Shooting at an air show yields a great set of images; look for the aircraft on the ground, not just in the air. I used the rule of thirds here by placing the aircraft one-third of the way up from the bottom of the frame. Taken at ISO 200, f/5.6, and 1/1000 second.

Composition Considerations

There are many different ways to compose images, but here I discuss some of the ones that you will find particularly useful when shooting events.

Fill the frame

Many times events are crowded places where there are performers, spectators, vendors, and just a lot of people. The real question becomes how to make sure your images make the main subject of your photograph stand out. The most effective way to do this is to fill the frame with the subject as in Figure 7.1.

I'm going to sneak two extra composition tips in here, both of which you will see repeated throughout this book. The first is that when photographing people, you should keep the focus on the eyes. The second is to utilize the rule of thirds, which states that you should put the most important part of the image at the intersection points of an imaginary grid that divides the scene into thirds both horizontally and vertically.

If you look at all the images in this chapter, you will see that they follow the rule of thirds and when it comes to the images of people, their eyes are always in focus.

7.1 Nothing is quite like the joy of a birthday cupcake. Even when filling the frame, I made sure that the focus was on the eyes and that the eyes were placed one-third of the way in from the top of the frame. Taken at ISO 250, f/2.2, and 1/400 of a second.

CROSS REF The rule of thirds and the rule about focusing on the eyes also apply when it comes to shooting portraits, as you see in Chapter 9.

7.2 Blowing out birthday candles is much more dramatic when you do it in a darkened room and use the candles to light the scene. I made sure I was in position and ready to take the shot when the birthday boy started to blow. Taken at ISO 1000, f/5, and 1/100 of second.

Figure 7.2 was a real challenge for me, as I wanted to capture that moment where the candles were blown out on the cake but I also wanted it to be timeless and not have any of the background in the image. I made sure that I was sitting directly across from the birthday boy and filled the frame with the cake and the subject.

I also had to make sure that I had picked the best focal point, because as the subject went to blow out the candles, he leaned in toward me and the camera needed to quickly refocus.
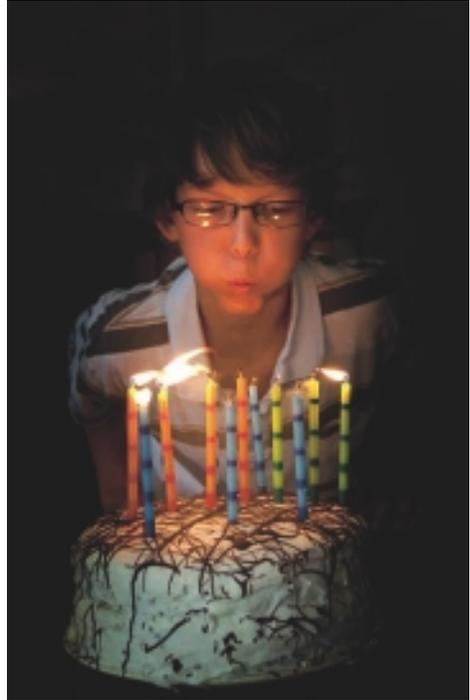
Watch the surroundings and background

I shoot a lot of concerts, which is both huge fun and quite difficult. One of the hard parts is paying attention to the surroundings and the background while still capturing the action on stage (see Figure 7.3).

Watching the background is not just important in concert photography but in all kinds of event photography. Notice the rest of the images in this chapter; in each one, I carefully looked at and dealt with the background. One of the easiest ways to fix a bad background is to move your position so that the background changes. This could be side to side but it could also mean crouching down or trying to get a higher viewpoint.

Another way to pick the background is to use an aperture that provides a very shallow depth of field, which throws the background out of focus, making your subject stay the center of attention. You do this by shooting in Aperture priority mode and setting the aperture as wide open as the lens allows.

7.3 These two images were taken moments apart at the exact same settings, but they are worlds apart when it comes to the composition. Both have the main subject, guitarist Michael Paget from Bullet for My Valentine, in the same part of the frame but the background is vastly different. The second image was taken as he walked toward the drummer and suddenly the background was filled with amplifiers, not road crew. Taken at ISO 640, f/2.8, and 1/400 second.

Pick the right lens

You can shoot events with any lens, but you will get better results if you know what it is you are shooting and use the best lens for each situation. I choose my lenses based on what I want to capture, the area I will be shooting from, and the available light. I also take into consideration how long I will be shooting and how the final images will be used.

What I want to capture

If the event is a concert or press conference, or some other public event where I need to get in close and fill the frame, I always take the 70-200mm f/2.8 lens. This lens works really well in most circumstances as it allows you to get in close and can be used in relativity low light as it has a maximum aperture of f/2.8 (see Figure 7.4). On the downside, this lens is big, heavy, and expensive, and it takes a commitment to want to carry it around all day.

7.4 When shooting a press conference for the TV show *24,* **I needed to use a long lens with a wide aperture so that I could fill the frame with Katee Sackhoff and get a good exposure shooting in the darkened room without using a flash. I used the Nikon 70-200mm f/2.8 for this shot since it gave me the zoom and the wide aperture. Taken at ISO 800, f/4.5, and 1/160 second.**

When I am shooting an event that takes place outdoors during the day, I generally pack a smaller zoom, something like the 18-200mm lens. While it doesn't have the same low-light capability, it allows you to get in just as close and it weighs and costs a lot less.

If I plan on shooting a birthday party or family gathering, then I use the 24-70mm lens as it is great for shooting in close and can go wide enough to get those all-important family group shots.

If I am working where I think I will need a huge range of focal lengths and low-light capability, then I carry both the 24-70mm and the 70-200mm lens. This is my basic concert shooting kit.

The area I am shooting from

If the event has strict rules about where I can and can't shoot from, then I make sure I take the lenses that will give me the best shots from those spots. Usually this is a longer lens, as the designated photo spot is rarely close to the action. For example, when shooting a concert recently, I was informed that all the photos would be shot from the soundboard at the back of the room so I made sure to take an extra-long 300mm lens for the job.

Available light

Knowing the amount of light that will be present also helps you determine which lenses to bring. If there is plenty of light, then any lens can work, but in those situations where there is little light, you need to use lenses with a wide maximum aperture. These are the f/2.8 lens or even wider. I have been known to add an 85mm f/1.4

lens to my camera bag if I know there is going to be low light or if the shoot is going to go into the evening.

Those extra stops of light at the widest aperture can sometimes mean the difference between a nice, sharp image and one that is blurry because the shutter speed was too low for the situation.

Tell a story

Event photography is a great time to practice telling a story with your images. While it is possible to tell a story with one image as in Figure 7.5, I'm talking more about using a series of images to let the viewer participate in the event. One of the best ways to do this is to start with an overall view, move in for a medium view, and then zoom in on one of the details.

When shooting at a local air show, I wanted to be able to do more than just capture a jet flying overhead. I wanted to be able to show more of the story, including the jets getting ready for launch with the ground crew (see Figure 7.5) and the jets flying overhead. Instead of trying to just get the newest jet, I worked on getting more than one type of aircraft into the shot (see Figure 7.6).

7.5 When shooting an air show, it helps to shoot the planes not only as they are flying overhead but also on the ground as they prepare for their moment in the spotlight. Taken at ISO 400, f/5.6, and 1/1250 second.

7.6 It was an air show, and no air show story would be complete without a shot of the planes in flight. Taken at ISO 400, f/5.6, and 1/4000 of a second.

I was also able to take some close-ups of the aircrafts as they were sitting on the tarmac giving yet another view of the same event (see Figure 7.7). Each of these shots might be able to stand alone, but as a series they tell a better story.

Telling a Story without Moving

Even when shooting a concert and not being able to physically change my position, I can tell the same type of story by using a variety of focal lengths. Wide-angle stage shots can set the scene, while a shot of the lead singer, guitar player, or even drummer will identify the lead character followed by a hand on the guitar or a close-up of the singer's face showing the emotion as he sings out to the crowd.

7.7 For the final shot at the air show, I wanted to focus in on one of the planes that were on display. I framed the image in tight to have the front of the aircraft stand out. Taken at ISO 200, f/10, and 1/400.

Photographing Fireworks

Many special events have fireworks displays, and photographing them can create great images (see Figure 7.8).

The secret to taking good fireworks photos is to use a slow enough shutter speed that the individual lights can move while the shutter is open, thus creating trails. Because fireworks displays are made of light, they are usually shown at night to be seen clearly against a dark background.

Your first step is to find a vantage point where you can see the fireworks with no obstruction. Using a tripod, set your camera up as follows:

1. **Set the camera on the tripod.** You need to make sure that the camera isn't going to move during the exposure.

2. **Compose the scene as best you can.** Because you can't see the fireworks until they go off, you need to compose where you think they will be and be ready to adjust the framing when the fireworks actually go off.

3. **Set the ISO.** The lower the ISO, the lower the noise, and because you can and want to use longer shutter speeds, the lowest ISO works best.

4. **Set the focus.** You need to set the focus mode on your camera to Manual and set the focus to infinity. You don't want the camera trying to focus when the fireworks are going off.

5. **Set exposure mode.** You need to set the exposure mode to manual so that you can set the shutter speed and aperture.

6. **Set the aperture.** Set the aperture to f/9, f/11, or f/16. These apertures are available on every lens and will give you a good depth of field for the images of the fireworks.

7. **Set the shutter speed.** I start with a 2-second exposure and increase or decrease the shutter speed, depending on the results.

7.8 **This fireworks display during the Fourth of July celebration was photographed in the portrait orientation to get the lights from the pier where the fireworks were launched from. Taken at ISO 200, f/16, and 5 seconds.**

8. **Take the photo.** The best bet is to watch the fireworks and trigger the shutter release as you see the trail from the fireworks go skywards.

9. **Check the LCD.** Check the image on the back of the camera using the LCD. If the image is too bright, then use a faster shutter speed; if the image is too dark, then use a slower shutter speed, this also allows you to see if you need to adjust the zoom or positioning of the camera. Are you too low, or maybe too high. Check to see if the tops or bottoms of the light trails are being cut off and adjust accordingly.

10. **Check the composition.** Make sure that you are getting all of the fireworks in the scene and haven't aimed either too low or too high.

Remember that the grand fireworks finale will be much brighter than the rest, so you need to increase the shutter speed to allow less light to reach the sensor.

Shooting Events

There are great event photo opportunities all the time. Some events are just made for photographers with photo opportunities everywhere. Other times you have to wait to be able to get the shots you want. Knowing when things are going to happen makes this waiting a lot more productive (see Figure 7.9).

Knowledge is power

All events follow a schedule (see Figure 7.10). If you know what the schedule is, then you can be ready to capture all the best moments. If the event is a parade, then knowing where and when it starts and ends and where the judges' tables are (if any) will allow you to set up to get the best shots.

If you know that the event is going to take place in the evening, then you will know to pack those lenses that have wide apertures and are better for use in low light, or make sure you pack a flash or two.

7.9 Many times there are great photo opportunities at events such as comic conventions. David Tennant was discussing the wildly popular *Dr. Who* TV show and his role as the tenth Doctor. Waiting till he turned toward where I was sitting and using a long lens both helped achieve this photograph. Taken at ISO 1250, f/4, and 1/250.

Some events do not allow you to use a flash, so be prepared for the worst.

You may need to find out if you are allowed to photograph the event, especially a concert. Many times there are restrictions placed on who can and can't shoot certain events and what types of cameras are allowed inside the venue (see Figure 7.11). It is very disappointing to go to a show with camera in hand only to be turned away at the door.

7.10 All-day music festivals often post a time schedule of what is going to happen when. Sometimes, this will be a glossy, well-produced schedule, while at other times it will be more casual. At the Green Apple Music Festival, the schedule was written up by the soundman on a handy piece of cardboard and posted up for the public. Taken at ISO 100, f/7.1, and 1/250.

7.11 Knowing when Juliette and the Licks were going to play allowed me to be in position to get this shot. Having found out that a photo pass was needed to shoot with a dSLR, I made sure that I had applied for credentials before arriving at the festival. Taken at ISO 200, f/8, and 1/320 second.

Pack properly

Once you know what you are shooting and what lenses you plan on taking, the next step is to pack your gear. This might seem obvious but when you have a lot to photograph and little time to do it, you need to make sure you have packed your bag properly. When shooting concerts, I need to be able to find and change my lenses in the dark, and the longer it takes me to do that, the greater the chance that I will miss a shot.

Some events call for more gear than others and that is especially true when you are shooting events for the first time. When it came to photographing the Cinco de Mayo festival (see Figure 7.12) for the first time I packed a huge variety of lens, cameras, and flashes, not knowing what to expect. After returning from the festival, I saw which gear I used and which gear I didn't. This made it much easier to pack for the next time I was shooting an event of this type. Since the event took place during the day and was over by the time the sun started to set, I could use the smaller, lighter lenses and not have to carry all my low light prime lenses, which made for a smaller, lighter camera bag.

7.12 I made sure that I packed a 24-270mm lens that would allow me to get a wide angle on the horse demonstration at a local Cinco de Mayo celebration. Taken at ISO 200, f/4, and 1/1000 second.

There is a wide range of camera bags on the market, and not every situation calls for the same bag. I try to use the smallest bag possible for the job but I would rather take a bigger bag with a few extra items in it (see Figure 7.13) than need something while shooting and have left it at home.

7.13 I wanted to be able to zoom in close on the faces of the participants, so I packed a 70-200mm lens, allowing me to get close without intruding as this young rider gets ready to perform. Taken at ISO 200, f/2.8, and 1/1250 second.

One of the newer types of bags on the market is a *dedicated lens bag*. These are not meant to carry your camera, but just some extra lenses and other small gear. These have one thing going for them that traditional camera bags don't: They don't carry your camera, so you are more likely to actually shoot photographs than simply carry your camera in a bag.

TIP I make sure that I pack my camera bag the same way every time. This makes it easier to find the right lens, battery, or memory card, especially in the middle of a job.

Composition Tips

Events can be tough, fast-moving, photographic challenges. Just keep the following in mind and the shoot should go well:

▶ **Fill the frame.** There is no better way to make your subject clear to the viewer than to fill the frame with the subject.

▶ **Focus on the eyes.** When shooting people, make sure you focus on their eyes. Out-of-focus eyes can ruin a good image.

▶ **Watch the background.** Try to minimize distractions in the background. If you can't move and your subject can't move, then use a shallow depth of field to make the background blurry.

▶ **Practice without a flash.** This is key when shooting live music events, as most bands, venues, and promoters do not allow flash photography, even if you have credentials to shoot the show.

▶ **Know your gear and where it is packed.** Many events are fast-paced and you need to be able to find and use your gear quickly. You need to be able to change settings, lenses, and memory cards without fumbling around. Knowing where you put the extra batteries and memory cards in your bag can save you precious minutes.

▶ **Pay attention to your surroundings.** If you are given special access to shoot an event, make sure you don't get in the way of the people running the event. That would be a sure-fire way of not getting permission the next time.

▶ **Arrive early and do your homework.** Find out if any special displays or presentations are at the event. If you are shooting a parade, find out where the judges, if any, are going to be and try to set up close to them. Each float tries to impress the crowd at that location.

▶ **Plan for the changing light.** When shooting outdoor events, the light will change as the day progresses. Knowing how long the event will last and what time the sun starts to go down will allow you to plan ahead and capture the shots you need.

▶ **Change angles.** Try to move around and shoot from a variety of positions and angles. For example, shooting from low angles is great for parades; it makes the whole event seem larger than life.

Landscape Photography

You can photograph landscapes in any environment, from the mountains to the deserts and any place in between. When shooting landscapes, there is usually plenty of time to set up the shot; after all, you do not have to worry about the subject moving. In landscape photography, there is no reason not to have everything composed exactly the way you want it. Landscape photography is about patience and waiting for the light to be just right. The positioning of each element in the landscape, using the rule of thirds, using leading lines to control the viewer's eye, and even changing your viewpoint are all covered here.


This image was photographed from the deck of a boat in Cabo San Lucas. I had the boat moved so that I could capture the light striking the rocks in the way I chose, and the clouds would act as leading lines into the image from the top left. Taken at ISO 200, f/11, and 1/500 second.

Composition Considerations

There are times when you can get away with sloppy composition; for example, when shooting your kids playing in the yard, the subject can make a poorly composed image a favorite. However, when it comes to shooting landscapes, the composition is the most important thing.

Rule of thirds

The rule of thirds works wonders for landscape photographs by organizing the elements in your scene and helping to create a balanced composition. The rule of thirds works by dividing the scene into thirds both vertically and horizontally with imaginary lines. If you have a single object as your focal point for the scene, then it works best if you place the object at the intersection of two of the lines as in Figure 8.1.
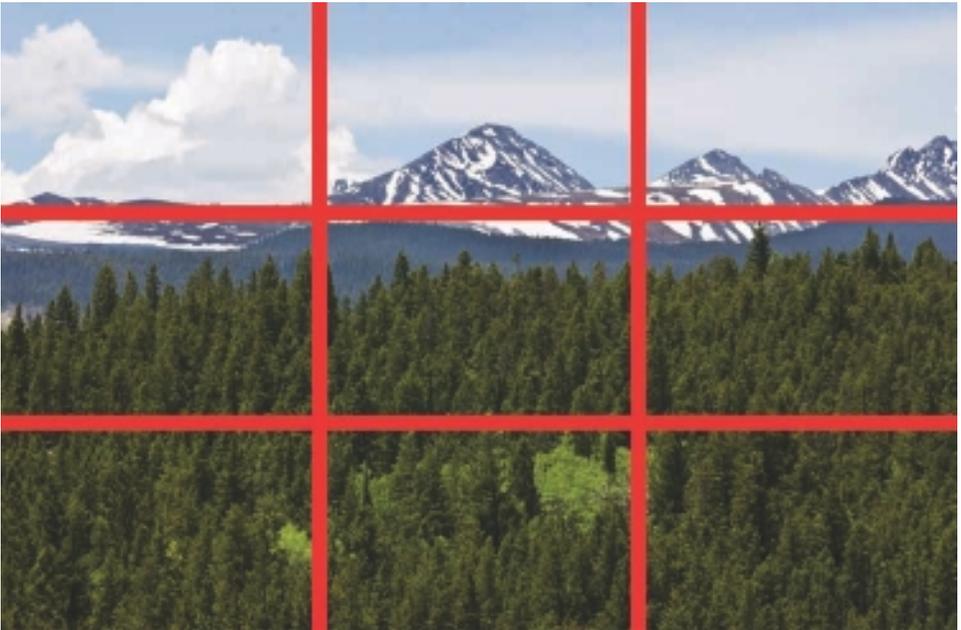
8.1 Before I took this photograph in Colorado, I needed to make a decision on where to put the line between the trees and the mountains. Because I wanted the image to show more trees than mountain, I composed the photo with the break one-third of the way in from the top of the image. Taken at ISO 125, f/7.6, and 1/125 second.

This is a compositional rule that you will see over and over in this book and in all kinds of photography. When it comes to landscapes there is one other way to use the rule of thirds: Place the horizon line of your image one-third of the way in from the top or the bottom but not in the very middle.

When you place the subject in the middle of your image, you tend to have a very boring image with neither the land nor the sky being dominant, and they actually fight for the viewer's attention.

If you want the sky to be the focus of the image, then the horizon needs to be one-third of the way up from the bottom of the frame with two-thirds of the frame filled with the sky. When the ground is the subject of the image, place the horizon one-third of the way down from the top and fill the bottom two-thirds with the land.

When composing a landscape, the natural tendency is to put the horizon line in the center of the image. Instead, take a few seconds to decide what you want to focus on, and then either angle the camera up to get more sky and move the horizon down, or angle the camera down and incorporate less sky.

If you are not sure which way is better, try both; actually, try all three (including the horizon in the center of the photo) and look at the results later. This also works with vertical compositions.

Don't be fooled into thinking that because you are shooting landscapes you have to shoot in landscape orientation; portrait orientation works as well (see Figure 8.2).
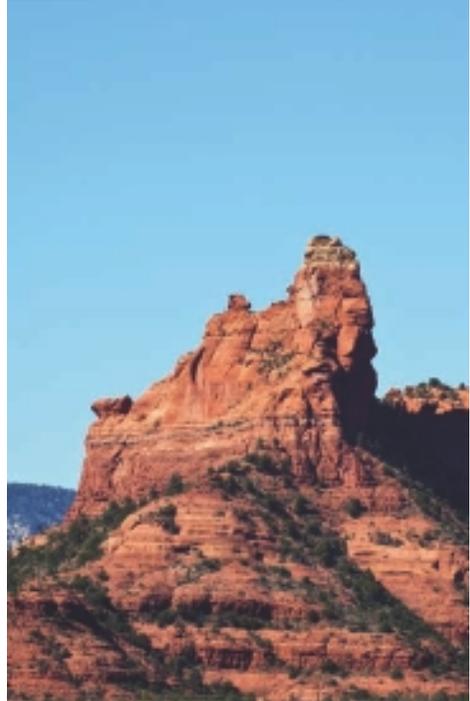
8.2 When I took this photograph in Sedona, Arizona, I placed the peak of the formation at the intersection of the lines one-third in from the right and one-third in from the top. I also noticed that the lines created by the formation start at the bottom corners and lead the eye up into the image. This is also a good example that all landscapes don't have to be in landscape orientation. Taken at ISO 100, f/8.5, and 1/320 second.

Foreground and background

To keep your landscape images from looking flat, add elements in the foreground that give the scene depth. This could be a flower, a rock, or any element that gives your eye something to look at in the foreground of your image. When you use a wide-angle lens, the distance between the foreground elements and those in the middle ground and background will seem to be really far apart due to the optical properties of wide-angle lenses.

When you place items in the foreground and have a subject in the background, there can be a problem with the middle ground of your images seeming to be very empty and having a lack of any interest. A great trick in dealing with this problem is to shoot from a lower angle, which naturally compresses the middle ground (see Figure 8.3).

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8.3 This image shows great compositional use of the dead tree in the foreground with the mountain range in the background. Also, because of the angle, the middle ground is hidden. Taken at ISO 400, f/16, and 1/125 second.

When you have subjects that are in both the foreground and background, it is important to control the depth of field. You want to use a depth of field that is deep enough to get everything in focus, which usually means an f-stop of f/16 or smaller. When you

use these f-stops, very little light is allowed through the lens, meaning you need to use a longer shutter speed or a higher ISO, or both. When using a longer shutter speed, you need to make sure the camera does not move during the exposure. For this, you can use a tripod. You might see that statement a lot in this chapter, because to shoot landscapes like the professionals, you need a tripod.

Leading lines and S curves

You can use lines in an image to move the viewer's eye to where you want it to go; it is a little like a magic trick that gives you control of how your image is viewed. Fortunately, there are lines everywhere, both natural and man-made, and you can use both types in your images.

Straight lines help to lead your eye into the image, but you want the viewer to look at the image, and then spend some time examining all the details that you have captured. While the straight lines lead them in, a more gentle curved line, especially one shaped like an "S," works best to keep their attention within the image.

There are three different sets of leading lines in Figure 8.4. The way they all combine leads our eye into the image and then to the curve.

The first set is the actual path that starts in the lower left and travels

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8.4 Another great image photographed by Jeremy Pollack. Taken at ISO 200, f/5.6, and 1/60 second.

towards the top right, but this line is not straight; it begins to twist and turn towards the end, starting to make a gentle "S" curve.

The second set of leading lines is created by the fallen leaves on the ground and the slight wall on the right. The pattern formed here helps to draw the eye towards that curve in the path.

The third set of lines is created by the tree branches. The darker branch comes in from the top right and leads your eye into the image, then the line follows the branches and tree trunks down toward the path.

Frames

In addition to portrait photography, frames can also work really well when you are shooting landscapes. You can use anything as a frame: a window, a door, or even a tree branch that over-hangs the scene. The frame will help to lead the viewer's eye to your main subject, as in Figure 8.5.

Figure 8.5 shows one compositional trick that needs to be used sparingly because the frame can be more dis-tracting than helpful. If the frame is brighter than the scene, then the eye will go toward the frame and not the subject. The same thing can also hap-pen if the frame is in sharper focus than the subject.

Look for frames that enhance a scene and not detract from it. If you can't make up your mind, shoot the scene both ways and look at the results later.
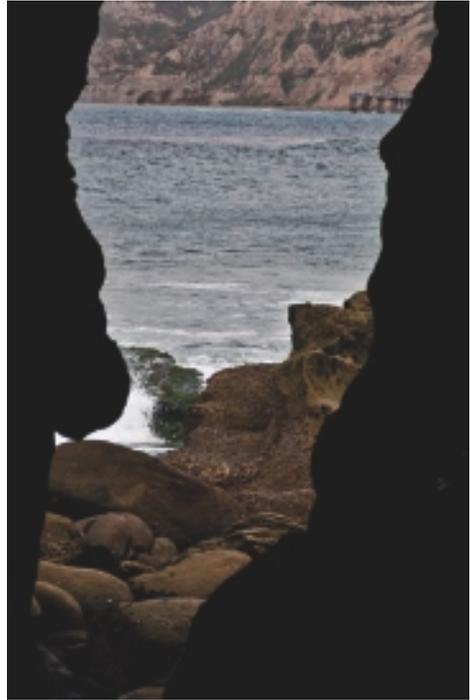
8.5 Using the natural cliffs to frame the scene helps to draw attention to the far cliffs. Taken at ISO 100, f/8, and 1/125 second.

Viewpoint

Shooting everything from the same height can be quite boring after a while. When you change the viewpoint, you change the relationship between the viewer and the scene. Looking down at a scene from a higher angle opens the whole scene up (see Figure 8.6), while using a low angle makes items in the foreground that much more impor-tant to the whole scene.

The viewpoint can also change how the light interacts with the scene. Things that were hidden are suddenly lit while other items that may have been in full sun are now streaked with shadows. This can be particularly true when it comes to shooting well-known subjects such as in Figure 8.7.

8.6 I wanted to make sure I got the whole sweep of the bay in my image so I stood on a low wall and looked slightly down on the scene. Taken at ISO 200, f/11, and 1/250 second.

8.7 Photographing the Cliffs of Moher in Ireland was a real challenge. I needed to practically lie on the ground to get a view where I could expose for the cliffs and block out the sun. Taken at ISO 125, f/11, and 1/250 second.

Panorama Photography

Panoramic images have recently become more popular. This is partly because it is now easier to capture great panoramic views than ever before, and also because software such as Adobe Photoshop CS5 and Adobe Photoshop Lightroom makes it simple to stitch together multiple exposures into a single panoramic image. These panoramic images have an exceptionally wide view and are used in all types of photography, but especially in landscapes for the way they portray wide-open spaces.

There are two ways to create panoramic images: the first is to crop a single image (see Figure 8.8), and the second is to stitch together a series of images into a single photograph. It is easier to just crop a single image in Photoshop or just about any photo-editing software.

However, you lose information from the image, you are limited in how big it can be blown up. Most importantly, you are limited as to how wide the image can be by the widest lens you have. When you take a series of images and stitch them together, the final image can be much wider than the widest-angle lens you have, but it does take a little more work.

8.8 This image was a great candidate for cropping using software because I wanted the birds in the scene. Because they were moving, there was a good chance the position of the birds would have moved had I tried to stitch a panorama together using several photos. The composition still uses the rule of thirds with the bridge placed one-third of the way up from the bottom of the frame. Taken at ISO 100, f/6.3, and 1/180 second, and then cropped in Photoshop CS5.

The key to shooting good panoramic photographs is to set up the shot correctly before making the first exposure. Although you can shoot a panoramic image without using a tripod, stitching the images together later is much easier if you take them all from the same level.

To make it easier to stitch your images together in postproduction, it's best to do the following:

1. **Set your camera in the tripod in portrait orientation.** This means that you will need more frames to cover the whole scene, but it also means that you have more information to work with later as well as some area that you can crop if needed.

2. **Use a white balance to match the scene, but not auto white balance.** Auto white balance allows the camera to make small adjustments to the white balance with every shot and can cause problems if there are any adjustments between images that you need to stitch together.

3. **Take a meter reading of the main subject of your panorama.** Set the metering mode to spot metering, and the exposure mode to program auto, and then aim the camera at the subject of your image.

4. **Use the camera's built-in meter to get an exposure reading by pressing the Shutter Release button halfway down.** Make a note of the exposure settings that the camera picks for the scene; you will be using them in the next step.

5. **Using manual mode, input the setting from step 4.** This ensures that the exposure is the same for all the frames used in the panorama.

6. **Use manual focus.** Pick the most important spot and focus on it using manual focus so that the focus is the same for all the images used in the panorama.

7. **Take a series of images.** Start on one side and slowly move towards the other, making sure that each frame overlaps the one next to it by 25 percent, giving the software enough information to help it stitch the images together.

> **TIP** This is a tip I got from photographer and author Scott Kelby: When you are about to take the first frame of the panorama, hold one finger in front of the camera and take a photo; when you are done with the last photo in the sequence, hold two fingers in front of the camera and take a shot; this will let you find all the images that belong in the same panorama easily when in an editing program.

Once you have a series of images, it is pretty easy to stitch them together into a panorama using software (see Figure 8.9). In addition to Adobe Photoshop and Photoshop Elements, it is even possible that the software that was bundled with your camera can do this; just check the user's manual.

8.9 A regular panorama stitched together using 8 images taken in the Anzo Borrego desert using Photoshop CS5. Taken at ISO 200, f/8.0, and 1/800 second.

Shooting Landscapes

Landscape photographers are usually up and out the door before the rest of us are even contemplating getting out of bed in the morning. They go out into the wilderness, set up tripods, and patiently watch the light as it moves across the landscape till they finally press the Shutter Release button. This is the type of photography where patience rules and preparation is key. You have to be in the right place at the right time, waiting for the right light just to get a single great image (see Figure 8.10).

The golden hour

A magical time for photographers occurs twice a day. The first is that precious time right before the sun comes over the horizon, and it lasts for about an hour. The second time is that hour right before the sun sets (see Figure 8.11).

These two hours of the day produce a light that is beautiful for photographers. It is softer and has a much warmer look. Just about everything looks better when photographed under this type of light.

The light during the golden hour is warmer in color because, with the sun near the horizon, the light has to travel through more of the atmosphere. The atmosphere reduces the light's intensity and makes the sun appear redder.

Today, it is pretty easy to find out the sunrise and sunset times for just about anywhere in the world using the Internet. The Web site www.timeanddate.com has a very handy sunrise and sunset calculator that gives you an accurate date and time for both the sunrise and sunset for just about any location. If you are planning to shoot landscapes, then I suggest doing it during those two hours of the day.

8.10 I shot this Irish landscape in the early morning hours. I would have liked to return to this spot when the light was better, but that is one of the risks you take when it comes to relying on natural light. Taken at ISO 125, f/8.5, and 1/320 second.

8.11 The sun had barely dropped behind the mountains when this was taken. Taken at ISO 200, f/4, and 1/250 second.

Be patient and watch the light

Photography is about capturing a moment in time. Because landscape doesn't move, what makes one moment better or worse than the next? I have already mentioned that the light during the first hour and the last hour is the best light, but when during this time should you press that Shutter Release button?

Watching the light as it moves across the landscape will give you your answer. As the light moves, it reveals parts of the landscape as it hides other parts (see Figure 8.12), and it is this play of the light that you need to study.

8.12 I waited until the shadows were long enough to give definition to the rocks but still short enough to show off the red color. Taken at ISO 100, f/7.1, and 1/180 second.

As you practice, you can take an image every few minutes. Watch how the morning light changes and how as the sun rises in the sky the shadows start to get shorter and shorter; when shooting in the evening, watch as the sun sets and the shadows get longer and longer.

These shadows define the shape of the landscape, so it pays to be ready and then be patient, only pressing that Shutter Release button when the scene is exactly as you want it. If it doesn't work out the first time, the landscape will be there tomorrow. Because the light is never exactly the same twice, you will have another unique opportunity to capture the scene.

Use a tripod

One of the most important pieces of equipment that you can have as a landscape photographer is a good tripod. When you are shooting landscapes, most of the time you will be using small apertures so that you are getting a very wide depth of field. This means that the whole image will be in focus from the foreground to the background.

When you use an aperture that gets you this very wide depth of field, it usually means that you need to use a slower shutter speed to get a proper exposure. The problem with using slower shutter speeds is that it becomes very difficult to handhold a camera absolutely steady while the shutter is open, and any movement, no matter how slight, can cause your image to be slightly blurry.

A good tripod locks your camera into place and allows you to use much longer shutter speeds than you ever could when holding the camera. There are many different types of tripods available, and it really is a matter of personal choice and budget when picking the right one. Just keep in mind that if you are going to get serious about landscape photography, a tripod is a must.

Some things to consider when purchasing a tripod are:

- ▶ **Size.** Tripods come in all sizes, with some small enough to fit in a backpack. If you are planning on hiking into the wilderness, then you want to get a tripod that is big enough to hold your gear but small enough to be portable.

- ▶ **Weight.** This goes hand in hand with size. You want to buy a tripod that is light enough to carry the distances that you travel with your gear. I carry a tripod in my car that is fine for carrying a mile or two, but I wouldn't want to hike with it all day; it's just too heavy.

▶ **Height.** If you are tall, make sure that the tripod can extend to a height that is comfortable for you to use and still stable enough to hold your camera gear rock solid.

▶ **Materials.** Tripods are made out of a huge variety of materials, from metal to wood, as well as a variety of different fibers. Each of the materials comes with its own set of strengths and weaknesses for the weight, stability, and cost.

▶ **Stability.** This is the most important factor when picking your tripod because if the tripod doesn't hold your camera gear steady, then it is no good to you. When looking for a tripod, take the camera and lenses that you plan on using with you or make sure that the store you are visiting allows you to test the stability with a loaner camera that is the same weight as yours. If you are planning on using a motor drive or a really big lens, make sure you take that into account.

It is important to note that the *tripod head*, the part that actually holds and adjusts the camera, can be purchased separately from the tripod legs. Look at the different types of heads and determine which is the one that matches your style of shooting. The most common types of tripod heads are:

▶ **Ball head.** The ball head is basically a ball that can move in any direction, with a locking mechanism that will lock the ball exactly where you want it locked. The bigger the camera-and-lens combination, the bigger the ball you need to support the weight.

▶ **Three-way pan head.** This is a more traditional tripod head, with separate controls for each of the three axes (see Figure 8.13). You can usually adjust the horizontal and the vertical, and switch between landscape and portrait orientation, with each of the adjustments having its own controls.

▶ **Smooth panning head.** This is generally used more for video than still photography, but with many of the top-selling dSLRs now shooting video, it might be the tripod you want — that is, if you do more video shooting than still shooting.

TIP Many times it is a good idea to weigh the tripod down to add to its stability. A couple of small sandbags do a great job.

8.13 My Nikon D700 is locked into a Manfrotto 3030 tripod head, which is a three-pan head that allows me to finely tune the position of the camera. This head also features a quick-release plate which allows me to remove the camera from the tripod easily. I can photograph handheld and then quickly reattach the camera to the tripod. The tripod stand Manfrotto 055MF3 has carbon fiber for the legs and an aluminum and nylon polymer center column.

Composition Tips

As you can see, there is more to landscape photography than just setting your camera on a tripod and aiming it out in the distance. I hope that these tips will help you when shooting landscapes.

▶ **Pick your subject.** Make sure that the main subject of your photo isn't competing with other distracting elements in the image.

▶ **Pick your focal length.** Remember that telephoto focal lengths cause elements in the background to appear closer to elements in the foreground, while wide-angle focal lengths cause elements in the background to appear much farther away than elements in the foreground.

▶ **Add a person.** When you include a person in your landscape images, you add a sense of scale and perspective. It can be difficult to determine the true size of a landscape without a recognizable object to give a point of reference.

▶ **Look around before shooting.** The best image may not be the first one you see. Take a moment to look around before setting up your photograph.

▶ **Follow the rule of thirds.** Place the important elements at the intersection of the rule-of-thirds lines and make sure any horizon line is one-third in from either the top or bottom but not dead center in the frame.

▶ **Look for the leading lines.** Lines lead your viewer's eyes into the image and to your main subject. Use them to control where and what the viewer looks at.

▶ **Check for distractions.** When shooting landscapes, check not only the background but the foreground as well. Any feature that draws the viewer's eye away from what you want to be the focal point needs to be removed from the composition.

▶ **Watch the light.** As the sun moves across the sky, the light changes constantly. Watch where the shadows fall and how different areas are lit over time. The same landscape photo taken at dawn will look very different even one hour later.

▶ **Use a tripod.** This is the most important thing you can do for your landscape. Nothing in this chapter is as important as using a tripod. It is the only way to get the slow shutter releases needed with very deep depth of field and a tack-sharp image.

Portrait Photography

The basic goal of portrait photography is to capture the likeness of the person being photographed in the most flattering way. To get a great portrait of someone, a piece of their personality needs to come through. It is up to you as the photographer to get the subject to pose in the best way and to make sure that you understand the basic concepts of portrait photography.

This chapter covers the importance of focusing on the eyes and where in the frame to place the eyes, choosing the best focal length for portraits, filling the frame, and framing the subject. It also covers shooting indoors and outdoors, working with groups and with children, and common posing and troubleshooting tips.

You can take portraits on location as well as in a studio setting. This was shot on a local beach around sunset, which produced a great golden, natural light. Taken at ISO 200, f/5, and 1/30 second.